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FINAL GRANT REPORT

Who Decides the Language of Instruction for English Learners with Severe Disabilities in the Public Schools?

With the passage of what is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 the U.S. committed to a national system of educational supports for students with disabilities. Central to the challenges that these students face is impaired development of language and concomitant social skills. These developmental delays are compounded for children who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken when placed in English speaking educational environments.

A recent national study found that English learners in special education are less likely to receive intensive support services and more likely to receive instruction entirely in English than are English learners in general education, despite the fact that parents are given a much larger say in educational decision making for children with disabilities. While the IDEA is silent on the question of the language of instruction for English learners served in special education, it does specify that students must be tested for eligibility in their native language whenever feasible, and parents must approve of all major educational decisions.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers decide on the language of instruction for English learners with severe disabilities. We first interviewed fifteen special education teachers in Southern California. Based upon the teachers' responses to open ended interview questions, we then developed a survey of special education teachers nationally including California.

The interviews revealed that several factors influence teachers in deciding what language should be taught. The majority of teachers in the interview sample did not consult parents about the language of instruction because they mistakenly believed that Proposition 227 outlaws instruction in languages other than English. They had not been informed by their administration about the fact that parents of special education students can apply for a waiver.

In addition to incorrect interpretations of the law, teachers also held implicit theories about language development for their English learner students: half of the teachers believed that the students would require English in their adult lives and believed that education in English should begin at an early age.

Those teachers who had received some formal training in bilingual education believed that their students would acquire English more readily if they were first provided with a foundation in their native language. Two of the fifteen teachers provided instruction in Spanish and another five used some Spanish in a predominantly English environment. Most teachers, however, believed they were unable to provide adequate bilingual instruction because of the

law and because they did not have sufficient resources, including their own lack of proficiency in a second language and the lack of paraprofessionals who were bilingual. The mandated meetings for English learners between parents and teachers, known as Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, did not include discussion of the language of instruction. In the few instances when parents were allowed to be partners in these crucial decisions, administrators specifically encouraged teachers to address the issue in IEP meetings.

Based upon these interview findings, we constructed a questionnaire and mailed it to teachers who were members of a national professional organization for teachers of students with severe disabilities (TASH). We obtained responses from 337 teachers, of whom 80 were from California—a response rate of 50 percent. Of the California teachers, 52 percent were unaware that a waiver of the ban on bilingual instruction is available for parents of special education students. Nationally, 43 percent of teachers did not include parents in the language of instruction decision.

As in the interview study, teachers were more likely to discuss the issue with parents when administrators encouraged them to do so. Half of the respondents believed that their students with severe disabilities should be taught in English in order to prepare them for the future in the majority society. They reported the following teaching practices: English only, 48 percent; English with primary language, 34 percent; and primary language only for 1 percent. The low level of primary language instruction was related to a lack of training, with 63 percent reporting no training in working with the English language learner population.

Taken together these data suggest that English learners with severe cognitive disabilities may be underserved by the public schools. Because these individuals typically need intensive instruction to develop basic pragmatic communication skills, it is likely that they have more intensive needs for language services. There is particular cause for concern in that over 40 percent of parents of these children are not being consulted, a clear violation of the spirit of the IDEA. The results for California indicate that misinformation about Proposition 227 is a serious problem in establishing the kinds of school-home partnerships envisioned in the federal law.

—George H.S. Singer,
Tracy Gershwin-Mueller, Elizabeth Grace

(Please see back cover, "Reports in This Issue" for more information on this story.)

"Most teachers believed they were unable to provide adequate bilingual instruction because of the law and because they did not have sufficient resources."

Additional Research Grants Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee has agreed to fund three additional proposals submitted in the February 2004 Grant Call. This brings total grant funding for 2004 to \$120,000. Total funding for the 2003-04 grant cycle (October 2003 and February 2004 grant calls) was \$135,000. The deadline for the next Grant Call is October 1, 2004, please visit the UC LMRI web site for details.

Following are edited versions of the abstracts submitted by the recently funded grantees.

DISSERTATION GRANT AWARDS

Perceptions of Ghanaian Teachers and Teachers-in-Training of the New Language Policy and its Implications for Linguistic Minority Primary School Students

STEVEN FAISON, *UCLA*

GRANT #04-04CY-02DG-LA

The following is a proposal to conduct a study in Ghana, focusing on primary school teachers and teachers-in-training. In particular, I seek to investigate the challenges and opportunities that will emerge from Ghana's new educational language policy and its potential impact on linguistic minority primary school students through the perspectives of teachers.

Ghana is a linguistically diverse nation that is in the process of transitioning from a language policy on education that promoted the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction during the first three years of primary school, to a new policy promoting the use of English as the sole language of instruction at this level.

This study is qualitative in nature and incorporates class observations and in-depth interviews. Its findings will serve to inform educational reform in Ghana, as well as contribute to the theoretical discourse on language and learning.

Standardizing Language in a Linguistically Diverse California: Teachers' Instantiations of California's Language Arts Standards with Language Minority Students

JAMY STILLMAN, *UCLA*

GRANT #04-04CY-06DG-LA

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how teachers, who have been specially trained to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, interpret and implement California's language arts standards in state-identified under-performing schools, which are largely comprised of Spanish-speaking English Learners.

The study will examine how four specially trained teachers apply their technical and ideological training in a tightly monitored policy context and how community, school, and classroom realities enable or constrain their use of the standards to meet English Learners' needs. Through analyses of classroom observations, teacher and principal interviews and teacher focus groups, I strive to illuminate the "situatedness" of teachers' pedagogical decisions and to

describe the material and ideological "toolkits" these teachers use as they navigate their work in a standards-based context.

When Grades Don't Matter: Schooling and Family Experiences of College-Bound and Non-College-Bound Latinas

MARIA ZARATE, *UCLA*

GRANT #04-04CY-01DG-LA

The proposed study takes advantage of a 15-year study of 85 second-generation, working class, immigrant Latino/a adolescents to explore how school and family factors predict post-secondary college enrollment for Latinas.

This study will use quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the relationships between students, family, and school that impact the schooling experiences of Latinas and their different post-high school educational pathways.

Commonly accepted models of college access and college choice attribute college enrollment status to academic achievement, parent expectations, and family socioeconomic status factors. However, the preliminary and ongoing analyses suggest a different explanation may exist for the differential college enrollment status Latinas.

In this study, the gendered experiences of Latinas gain closer inspection when traditional predictive factors fail to capture the schooling experiences of Latinas. The longitudinal and rich detail offered in this study is an unprecedented opportunity to investigate within group differences in schooling trajectories leading to college enrollment.

FINAL REPORT - TEACHER GRANT

Bridging Cultures Parent Workshops: Developing Cross-Cultural Harmony in Minority School Communities

PATRICIA GREENFIELD, *UCLA*

GRANT #01-04TG-LA

This study reports on phase two of The Bridging Cultures Project, which was established in 1996 with the goal of facilitating cross-cultural communication in multi-cultural educational settings.

Phase one educated teachers serving Latino immigrant families about cultural differences between home and school. Phase two used a randomized experiment that to compare the effectiveness of a parent-teacher workshop that provided parents with a culturally-based understanding of the conflicts they may experience with teachers and their children with a traditional parent-teacher workshop that taught parents to exercise their rights. The experiment was carried out with a small group of parents from a largely Latino elementary school in Southern California.

The study found that although both workshops' conflict resolution strategies can be useful, certain conflict situations are better resolved through a cultural approach.

FINAL REPORT - INDIVIDUAL GRANT

The Role of Student & Parent Perceptions in the Educational Achievement of Language Minority Students: A Qualitative Approach

ROSS PARKE, *UC RIVERSIDE*

GRANT #02-02CY-03IG-R

To better understand the antecedents of educational attainment of Mexican American language minority students, we conducted qualitative interviews with 54 8th grade students and 53 of their mothers and 45 of their fathers. Using transcriptions of the interviews, qualitative analyses were conducted to uncover themes in the narrative responses.

Our analyses indicated that a variety of agents need to be considered in order to better understand achievement in minority populations. First, parental factors, including their hopes and expectations for their children's educational attainment, were important factors in shaping children's expectations and in keeping them on track to achieve academic success. Second, teachers were seen as important players, especially in terms of motivating children to do well in school. Third, peers were seen as an effective strategy for maintaining high levels of academic achievement. Finally, parent's educational aspirations for their children were limited by their own lack of understanding of the educational system beyond high school.

These findings suggest that programs aimed at better informing Mexican American parents and adolescents about their educational options and the intricacies of academic achievement could prove worthwhile.

FINAL REPORT - DISSERTATION GRANT

Doing Bilingualism at School: Public Display of Chinese and Spanish among Minority Bilingual 6th Graders

MYRIAM CASIMIR, *UC BERKELEY*

GRANT #01-01DG-B

This study examines bilingual language uses of ethnolinguistically diverse sixth graders in two institutional settings, with particular attention to their language uses with peers.

Using an interpretive research framework I describe the language practices of two groups of 6th graders: Spanish-English bilingual participants attending a dual immersion program, and Chinese-English bilingual participants attending a monolingual English program.

The findings indicate that there were site-specific definitions of "minority language competence" that were contingent upon the organization of instruction at the two schools. At both sites, English language use predominated in peer communications. However, at the dual immersion site most students used English alongside Spanish, while at the monolingual English site, most used English exclusively.

The conclusion lists a set of recommendations for "culturally and linguistically responsive" (Garcia, 1999) school sites wishing to build on students' minority languages as personal, academic, and community resources.

2004 ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The 17th Annual UC LMRI Conference was held May 7-8, 2004 on the campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara, home of UC LMRI's system headquarters. The location was especially appropriate, as noted by UC LMRI Director Russell Rumberger, since this is also UC LMRI's 20-year anniversary. The conference theme, *Family Literacy and English Learners*, attracted more than 150 participants from as far away as The Netherlands and Alaska.



The campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara

This year's conference was entertaining as well as informative,



l to r: UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang, UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee Member Kenji Hakuta, UC LMRI Assoc. Director Patricia Gándara, Director Russell Rumberger and Faculty Steering Committee Member Barbara Merino

featuring more than 25 presenters in eight different sessions; a play, entitled "The Dropout", presented by the Santa Barbara Theatre Company; and a special Parent Workshop for parents of English Learners. The weather cooperated nicely with Friday evening's outdoor reception and barbeque, and UCSB's Chancellor Henry T. Yang even dropped by for a visit.

On Friday afternoon, keynote speaker Concha Delgado Gaitan spoke on *Family Narratives as Educational Possibilities*, and on Saturday, keynote speaker Marjorie Faulstich Orellana spoke on *Bilingual Ways with Words: Family Interpreting as a Home Literacy Practice in Immigrant Households*.

The Parent Workshop, which took place on Saturday, brought over 30 local parents of English learners to a hands-on workshop conducted in Spanish. Childcare and transportation was provided for this special session with the assistance of volunteers from ENLACE/UCSB Center for Chicano Studies.



Hands-on activities at the Parent Workshop

Plans for next year's conference—May 2005—are underway. Please check our web site for updates, as well as a selection of conference photos and a downloadable conference program.

Education Policy Center News

UC LMRI established an Education Policy Center at UC Davis in 1997 to disseminate research findings to policymakers. The Center sponsors research and colloquia on policy issues in the education of English learners.

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The UC LMRI Education Policy Center has been very active over the last quarter. We are winding down the data collection on our study of teachers of English learners, after collecting about 4500 surveys from teachers in 25 districts across the state. This summer we will be analyzing the data for fall release.

At the same time, we initiated the **North State Consortium on Bilingual** with a meeting at UC Davis on April 21, 2004 that featured **Jan Mayer**, Director of the Office of Professional Development for the State Department of Education, reviewing regulations concerning the education of English learners, and **Francisco Alarcon**, internationally renowned, multilingual poet and author, who shared his work with the group. The consortium is scheduled to meet quarterly and is hosted by the Education Policy Center. If you are within driving distance of UC Davis and would like to join, please contact us at (530) 752-1533.

Sandra Mercuri, a UC Davis doctoral student and former teacher in a dual immersion program, has joined the UC LMRI team to work on the Consortium. We intend to work actively on behalf on bilingual programs and to engage in important longitudinal research on students in these programs.

Finally, over this quarter, the Policy Center spearheaded the development of a set of recommendations for North Carolina's burgeoning English learner population. UC LMRI Director **Russell Rumberger** also contributed significantly to this effort. We are hopeful that other states can learn from California's mistakes.

* * *

Contact *Patricia Gándara* for more information on the Center:
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Reports in This Issue

A complete copy of the **Final Grant Report** featured on this issue's cover—*Research on Planning, Assessment and Instruction of Communication and Language for ESL Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities (Grant #00-01G-SB)*—as well as other LMRI-funded Final Grant Reports featured in this issue, can be found on the UC LMRI web site. Abstracts from these reports have been edited for newsletter space considerations.

Dissertation Grant Reports can be found on the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database at: <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9993004>.

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