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STATISTICAL BRIEF

Has Proposition 227 Reduced the English Learner Achievement Gap?

Five years after the passage of Proposition 227, results from California's statewide testing program show that all California students, including English learners (ELs), have made sizeable gains in achievement. Supporters of Proposition 227 have hailed these gains as proof that the near elimination of bilingual education has been a success. Yet recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) suggest that, despite these gains, the achievement gap between ELs and English-background students in California has remained largely unchanged, while the gap has been noticeably reduced in the rest of the country.

How to measure the success of Proposition 227

Gains in test scores are insufficient to gauge the success of Prop. 227 for two reasons. First, test scores in California have improved for all students—ELs and English-only alike. For example, from 1998 to 2002 mean reading scale scores on the SAT9 increased by 14 points (from 594.5 to 608.5) for fourth grade ELs. Yet over the same period scores increased by 11.8 points (from 638.7 to 650.5) for fourth grade English-only students. At best this suggests a slight reduction in the achievement gap. Second, since Prop. 227 was implemented in 1998, California has introduced a series of reforms to improve test scores, including class size reduction and extensive teacher professional development. As such, it's hard to determine the impact of any single reform on student achievement.

But since Prop. 227 only affects the schooling of ELs, a better measure of its success is to examine whether the achievement gap between ELs and English-only students has been reduced. If bilingual education was truly detrimental to ELs, as proponents of Prop. 227 maintained, then curtailing its use should have given an extra boost to the test scores of ELs relative to other students who were not affected by this reform, especially students in the lower grades where bilingual instruction was more common. Indeed, the percentage of ELs in elementary schools receiving primary language instruction declined from 40% in the spring of 1998, just before the passage of Prop. 227, to 10% five years later.

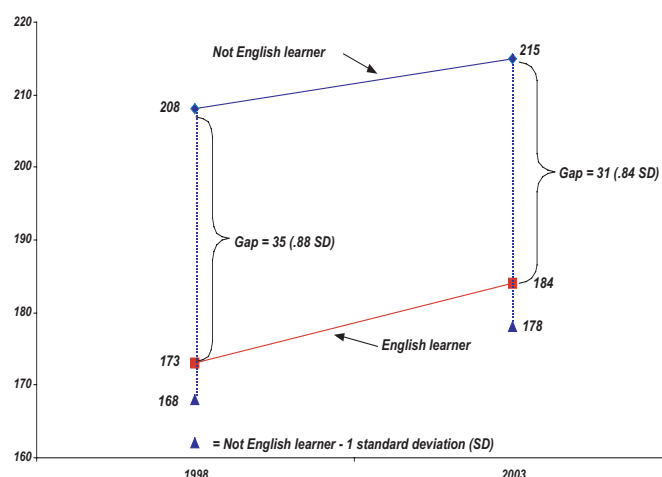
NAEP trends in academic achievement

In order to examine this issue, we analyzed trends in NAEP fourth grade reading scores. Although NAEP was originally designed to measure the educational progress of students nationwide, for the last 10 years it has provided state-level results. We compared California fourth grade reading scores in 1998 and 2003 for two groups of students—those who were identified by their schools as ELs and those who were not. Fourth graders in 1998 could have participated in bilingual education for up to five years. In contrast, fourth graders in 2003 were in school entirely after the passage of

Prop. 227 and thus had much less opportunity to receive primary language instruction. Therefore, we might expect fourth grade ELs in 2003 to show higher reading scores relative to the 1998 cohort because of their additional exposure to English-only instruction.

The results displayed in Figure 1, however, do not show this to be the case. In 1998 ELs had an average reading score of 173, while students who were not identified as ELs had a score of 208, a gap of 35 points. A common method to measure the achievement gap is to express the differences in test scores as a fraction of a standard deviation (SD). Because the distributions of test scores tend to vary symmetrically around the mean, the SD provides a useful metric to capture this variability. In 1998, the SD of test scores for students who were not ELs was 40 points, so the achievement gap of 35 points represents .88 SD (35/40).

Figure 1—NAEP Reading Scale Scores for Grade 4 Students by Language Background, 1998 and 2003



SOURCE: NAEP data, retrieved November 18, 2003 from: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.

Between 1998 and 2003, ELs' reading test scores increased from 173 to 184, an increase of 11 points, while the reading test scores of other students increased from 208 points to 215 points, a seven point increase. While both groups showed significant improvements, ELs actually made somewhat larger gains relative to other students.

What happened to the achievement gap?

In 2003, the achievement gap in California was 31 points or .84 SD (31/37 points), only fractionally smaller than the gap of .88 in 1998. Five years after the passage of Prop. 227, ELs have made hardly any improvement in their test scores relative to other students. It is important to point out that NAEP excludes some students with disabilities and some ELs from testing, and that the exclusion rates have varied over time. Between 1998 and 2002, the percentage of excluded students in California declined, which could have understated the achievement gap in 1998 and subsequently the improvement between 1998 and 2003.

We conducted the same analysis for students nationwide. In 1998, the achievement gap between ELs and other students was 41 points or 1.08 SD, quite a bit higher than the achievement gap in California where ELs were supposedly being hampered by bilingual instruction. In 2003, the national achievement gap declined to 33 points or .92 SD, a reduction of .15 SD. Thus, nationwide, the achievement gap between ELs and other students declined by almost four times as much as in California, although it still remains higher than in California. The achievement gap in Texas—a state that continues to use bilingual education—showed even more dramatic declines, from 1.08 SD in 1998 to .85 SD in 2002.

Conclusions

While proponents of Proposition 227 have been quick to claim that the near abolition of bilingual education in California has had a significant impact on closing the achievement gap for ELs, the data tell a different story. Some achievement gains appear to have been made, and these probably result from the same interventions that have raised scores for all students in the state. However, the evidence suggests that there is almost no closing of the achievement gap between ELs and English speakers since the passage of Prop. 227 in 1998. Comparisons with Texas—a state that faces similar challenges as California, and the rest of the nation—also call into question the wisdom of California's EL policies. Texas, with an EL population, similar to California's and a policy of using bilingual education, has made greater progress in closing the achievement gap.

—Russell W. Rumberger, Rebecca M. Callahan
and Patricia Gándara

UC LMRI's 17TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE CALL FOR PAPERS DUE MARCH 1, 2004



Find out more at: <http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu>

Research Grant Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee agreed to award one research grant in the amount of \$15,000 from the submissions received in the October 2003 Call for Proposals. Several others were given the conditional option to resubmit and may be eligible for future funding. Following is the abstract submitted by the funded grantee.

DISSERTATION GRANT AWARD

“I’ll See You One Spanish Girl, Raise You One Mien Boy”: The sorting mechanisms at work (and at play) in an urban elementary school

KRISTIN HULL CORTES, UC BERKELEY

GRANT #04-03CY-03DG-B

Using a sociocultural framework, this study extends both the tracking literature and the literature examining student lives in English Language Development programs by investigating the formal and informal student placement processes, and subsequent “language tracking” at a large urban elementary school. The study combines quantitative data with ethnographic fieldwork data to illuminate the effects of isolated language programs on the school worlds and academic progress of low-income students of color as well as the effects on their developing school-going identities.

This research hopes to inform both policy and practice by deepening our understandings of the varied and sometimes contradictory sorting processes that help shape students’ identities and school experiences within programs targeted at English Language Learners.

DISSERTATION GRANT - FINAL REPORTS

The following are edited versions of abstracts from final reports filed by UC LMRI grant recipients. The complete abstracts, as well as full copies of the reports, are available through the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database at: <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations>.

Second Language Literacy and Identity Formation on the Internet: The Case of Chinese Immigrant Youth in the U.S.

WAN SHUN EVA LAM, UC BERKELEY

GRANT #02-02CY-01DG-B

This dissertation investigates the nature of second language (L2) literacy in the globalized media of Internet-based communication from a sociocultural perspective.

This study demonstrates that the young immigrants’ L2 literacy practices in various on-line media — Web-page making, e-mail, instant messaging, chat room — involve a process of socialization and identity formation. While they had difficulty interacting with their English-speaking peers at school, they were able to use English on the Internet to create social, cultural, and ethnic identifications with other young people around the globe. The process of socialization through which the youth construct community and identity on-line involves adopting and negotiating the discourses

that structure beliefs and social relations within their peer groups. Hence, through their communicative activities on the Internet, these ESL learners are adopting new norms of use and developing new identities as English speakers.

The study concludes with a discussion on the significance of identity and multiliteracies in global electronic media, and provides suggestions on what role networked computer technology can play in a pedagogy that works with the identity formation of students in second language learning.

Explanatory Models of Mental Health Problems Among Cambodian Children and Parents

TAMARA C. DALEY, *UCLA*

GRANT #02-02CY-07DG-LA

While the distress of Cambodian refugees has been fairly well documented, less research has focused on the way these experiences may impact the next generation. Little is known about the direct transmission of information between Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge and their second-generation children.

This study contrasts descriptions and perceptions of conversations about past parental experiences of both Cambodian parents and their children. This report then answers several basic questions about these conversations, such as what kind of understanding of their parents' experiences is held by second generation children, reactions to learning about it, and whether parents and children feel it is important to transmit this information.

Data are presented from interviews with forty second generation Cambodian children and their parents. Several main themes emerge from the interviews, namely, that children know more than their parents realize, that there is a discrepancy between parent and child reports of children's reactions to their parents' descriptions, and that parents' desires to convey information about the Khmer Rouge for the purpose of appreciating life in the U.S. is a message that is not entirely lost on their children.

2004 CALL FOR PROPOSALS

UC LMRI Research Grants

Deadlines: February 1 and October 1, 2004

UC LMRI encourages University of California researchers to undertake comprehensive and collaborative research that improves the schooling conditions and academic achievement of language minority youth by increasing our understanding of the challenges they face as well as the resources they represent for the state.

UC LMRI plans to fund four grant categories again this year: Individual Research Grants for UC researchers (one year awards of up to \$25,000); Dissertation Research Grants for UC graduate students (one year awards of up to \$15,000); Collaborative Research Grants for teams of UC and CSU researchers (multi-year awards of up to \$50,000); and Teacher Research Grants for teams of UC researchers and California school teachers (one year awards of up to \$25,000). For detailed information and grant applications, visit the UC LMRI web site.

NEW! 2004-05 UC LMRI Postdoc Position

Recent UC graduates: UC LMRI Post-Doctoral Fellowship beginning September 2004 for the 2004-05 academic year. Application deadline is February 1, 2004. Further details and application can be found on the UC LMRI web site.

IN THE NEWS

UC Completes 15-Year Review of UC LMRI

The University of California Office of the President recently completed a 15-year review of UC LMRI. The review, required of all multi-campus research units such as UC LMRI, was conducted by an external committee of scholars and by UC systemwide and campus faculty committees to determine whether UC LMRI should continue to be supported by the university. The review acknowledged the significance and urgency of UC LMRI's work and its beneficial impact on state educational policy. It urged the university to continue funding even under the current tight budget. At the same time, the review suggested that UC LMRI consider the breadth and impact of its research and dissemination activities over the next five-year funding period.

To address these suggestions, the LMRI Faculty Steering Committee held a retreat in late October. The committee decided to continue its competitive grants programs, but also to promote research in the area of biliteracy development. It also decided to collaborate with other UC research units on its research activities and to seek funding from outside agencies. More information will be forthcoming.

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UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee Changes

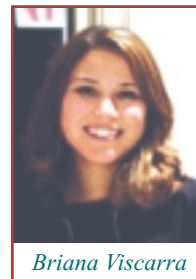
Professor **Kenji Hakuta**, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts at UC Merced, has been appointed to serve on the UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee as the representative from UC's newest campus. In addition, two current members of the Faculty Steering Committee, **Robin Scarcella** (UC Irvine) and **Carolyn Huie Hofstetter** (UC Berkeley), have been reappointed for another three-year term.

INTRODUCING:

Valery Rivera, UC LMRI's Management Services Officer since 1998, has moved on from both UC and California — along with her family — to a new home in Las Vegas, Nevada. We wish her much happiness and success in her future endeavors!

On December 1, 2003 UC LMRI welcomed **Briana Viscarra** as its new Management Services Officer. Briana comes to LMRI from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. She is an alumna of UCSB (B.A. in Spanish and Global & International Studies), and obtained her Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of La Verne.

Briana is proud to include UCSB as part of her definition of "home" and is looking forward to joining the UC LMRI staff.



Briana Viscarra

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.

* * *

The UC LMRI Education Policy Center, in conjunction with **Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)** and the **Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (CFTL)**, is launching a new study on the professional development needs of teachers of English learners. While there has been considerable concern in recent years about the preparation of teachers for English learners, and increased efforts to provide professional development for these teachers, there has been no systematic attempt to understand how these teachers perceive their challenges and needs. In sum, no one has asked teachers what it is that they need to be more effective with their English learner students. We intend to do just this. We will be conducting a survey of teachers across the state in late January 2004. We will examine how teacher needs vary according to their background and preparation and the types of English learners they have, and the composition of their classrooms. This information should allow us to make much better recommendations about the types of professional development that we provide for teachers, and how it can be tailored according to teachers' circumstances. We will be working closely with CFTL to disseminate this information widely.

We welcome the participation of any districts or schools interested in the project. If you would like to join us in this study, please contact **Julie Maxwell Jolly** at jmaxwelljolly@ucdavis.edu.

* * *

Contact Patricia Gándara for more information on the Center:
pcgandara@ucdavis.edu

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