

# UC Berkeley

## Newsletters

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## POLICY REPORT

**The Redesignation Dilemma:****Challenges and Choices in Fostering Meaningful Accountability for English Learners**

As the number of English Learners in the nation's schools continues to increase, so too have the demands to include them in both local and state assessment and accountability systems. Thus, monitoring the progress of English Learners has never been more important. The most common milestone of educational progress is their redesignation or reclassification from an official status of English Learner (EL) or limited English proficient (LEP) to one of fluent English proficient (FEP).

This change in status can have important consequences for students and for the education programs that serve them. For students, their classification as EL or FEP affects what instructional services they receive, the curriculum to which they have access, how they are assessed, and the academic performance standards to which they are held. For programs, classifications affect resource allocation, and reclassification rates influence how they are judged.

However, the concept of reclassification, *as currently defined and implemented*, cannot credibly carry this responsibility. In fact, it may actually be contributing to educational inequity, lack of accountability, and student failure. Why?

First, what it means to be "fluent English proficient" is complex and not widely understood. Proficiency depends on the context of the particular language tasks to be performed, the subject matter or topic, the audience, and the setting. In school contexts, FEP is expected to connote: 1) sufficient linguistic skills to comprehend and communicate effectively at the given age or grade level; 2) sufficient academic language skills to engage in cognitively demanding, grade-level work without modifications or accommodations; and 3) readiness to meet grade-level performance expectations, as demonstrated by academic achievement in grade-level subject matter using English.

The inclusion of academic achievement criteria reflects an equity and accountability requirement rooted in civil rights legislation and case law. The intent is to ensure that EL students receive high-quality instruction in academic subject matter even as they develop language skills for school. Without it, the likelihood of their falling behind academically increases greatly. Also, since reclassification results in a withdrawal of specialized services, readiness to perform academically is essential.

The complex nature of what ELs must demonstrate in order to be reclassified FEP is often poorly understood by policymakers, by educators not trained to serve this population, and by much of the

general public. The common notion is that students only need to learn English and their academic achievement will naturally follow. This misconception can hamper appropriate and timely support for EL students.

Second, reclassification procedures in many schools and districts are problematic. Though all of the above dimensions of proficiency are critical, the multiple measures used to assess their attainment are typically not administered, recorded, or reviewed regularly. Many of these measures are labor intensive, and those that are not standards-based yield little to inform instruction. Also, district databases are seldom set up to store and track these data.

So, many districts rely on a single measure – performance on a standardized, norm-referenced achievement test (NRT) in English – as the "trigger" to initiate a reclassification review. The appeal of the NRT is that it is given annually anyway, and ranks among the most difficult criteria for EL students to meet. Using an NRT in this way, however, is inappropriate. Although NRTs are intended to indicate grade-level academic achievement, an EL's low performance could be caused by weak language skills, test bias, inadequate access to curriculum, curricular misalignment, or poor instruction. Therefore, using a single "trigger" assessment while ignoring possible progress in the other key dimensions can lead to confusion about the causes of low performance, resulting in neglect of students' needs.

Third, the rate of reclassification from EL to FEP – one of the most commonly referenced statistics in assessing effectiveness of a district or school in serving English Learners – greatly distorts the reality of student progress and program effectiveness, thereby diminishing accountability. Districts and states currently calculate reclassification rates by placing the number of ELs reclassified in the numerator, while placing all English Learners in the denominator, regardless of whether all of these students can be realistically expected to meet the criteria. This calculation method effectively renders the reclassification rate meaningless, because it ignores critical factors—such as age, grade, literacy level, prior schooling, mobility, time in the U.S. or district—that indicate a student's likelihood of reclassification as well as administrative procedures and parental input that can significantly influence the timing of reclassification. This practice distorts the reality of achievement by needlessly deflating the ratio of students meeting FEP status. It also focuses attention on only a small part of the performance picture (those exiting EL status), largely ignoring the entire trajectory of

progress that leads toward that “exit” point and the subsequent academic performance of reclassified students as they continue in the educational system. Finally, because California districts can tailor their own reclassification standards, cross-district comparisons and statewide aggregate rates may be unreliable despite current state guidelines on minimum performance criteria.

A number of things can be done to improve the current situation:

- Situate reclassification within a much broader framework of both short- and long-term educational goals for English Learners;
- Review current policies and procedures to ensure that EL progress is monitored regularly, both in English Language Development (ELD) and academic subjects, by time in program;
- Evaluate the academic performance of redesignated FEP students by time since reclassification, and by grade level, in order to identify premature reclassifications or emerging needs and target appropriate support in language development and academics;
- Ensure that measures used to monitor students’ progress are standards-based and reflect high expectations;
- Statewide, monitor progress of ELs on California’s new ELD Test by time in district, and academic performance on standards-based assessments by ELD proficiency level.

Reclassification is neither the whole story, nor the end of story—though it is often seen as both. There is a much larger trajectory of EL progress in academic language development and achievement in the academic core that must be monitored, reported, and acted on. This trajectory begins long before reclassification and continues long after it. True accountability for English Learners must address this full trajectory.

—Robert Linquanti, WestEd

*NOTE: A copy of this report is available on the UC LMRI website at: (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/resdiss/tocresdiss/htm>)*

### Ongoing Research Studies on the English Development of Language Minority Students

How language minority children learn English and how to best teach English as a second language is not well understood despite decades of research. Two recent reports from the National Research Council, “*Educating Language Minority Children*” (1998) and “*Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*” (1998), point out the paucity of research on how best to teach English to English learners: “Researchers and educators possess scant empirical guidance on how best to design literacy instruction for such [limited-English-speaking] children in either their primary language or English, much less both.” (*Preventing...p. 339*)

Because of the importance of this issue, UC LMRI is developing a database of ongoing research studies focusing on the schooling of language minority students and particularly their English language development. In this issue of the newsletter, we list a number of studies. Researchers who wish to have their studies listed should contact LMRI. Ongoing research studies can be viewed on our website at: (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/resact/tocresact.htm>)

**TITLE:** Language Acquisition and Mastery of Content for English Learners in Heterogeneous Classrooms  
**INVESTIGATORS:** Rachel A. Lotan, Elizabeth G. Cohen, Guadalupe Valdés (Stanford University)  
**FUNDING AGENCY:** Spencer Foundation  
**DESCRIPTION:** A three-year study, collecting data in eight middle school classrooms with approx. 9-11 English-learners each, studying the relationship between the students’ initial language proficiency, their classroom experiences, and the linguistic and academic outcomes of these experiences, and conducting in-depth, systematic analyses of classroom discourse.

**TITLE:** Family-Home Literacy Practices: Mediating Factors for Preliterate English Learners at Risk (**Project La Patera**)  
**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:** Michael M. Gerber, Judith English, Maria Denney, Jill Leafstedt & Monica Ruz (UC Santa Barbara)

**FUNDING AGENCY:** OBEMLA/USDOE  
**DESCRIPTION:** Project La Patera (*Literacy and Phonemic Awareness Training for English Reading Achievement*) is a three-year longitudinal project to implement and investigate phonological skills training to accelerate English reading crossover by Spanish-speaking kindergartners. Project design includes a home component as adjunct to the intervention. Initial efforts included a large scale family survey of family demographics, language use, and home literacy practices. For more information visit: (<http://www.caselink.education.ucsb.edu/lapatera/index.htm>)

**TITLE:** Evaluating the Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12  
**INVESTIGATORS:** Thomas B. Parrish, Project Director; Marian Eaton, Beverly Farr, Deborah Montgomery, (AIR) and Robert Linquanti (WestEd)  
**FUNDING AGENCY:** California Department of Education  
**DESCRIPTION:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of the implementation of Proposition 227 on the education of pupils attending kindergarten and grades 1 through 12 in California public schools, including the Community Based English Tutoring Program (CBETP) established by Proposition 227, and the English Language Acquisition Program (ELAP). For more information visit: (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/resact/2/ongoing.htm>)

**TITLE:** Developing and Implementing Responsive Learning Communities: The Development Program and Supporting Functions (**Responsive Learning Communities**)  
**INVESTIGATORS:** Eugene E. Garcia., Lily Wong Fillmore, Maryl Gearhart (Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley)  
**FUNDING AGENCY:** Various school districts, the University of California, the US Department of Education, and the National Science Foundation.

**DESCRIPTION:** The express purpose of this work, is to explore the link between new educational environments and local, state and federal educational policy in schools where linguistic and cultural diversity exists. The key principles are local flexibility with accountability and comprehensive services. The emphasis will be on school change and issues of diversity around (1)

Pedagogy/students learning; (2) Professional development; and (3) School culture. For more information visit: (<http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/research/rlc/index.html>)

### **NICHD-OERI Bi-literacy Research Initiative**

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education have launched a new research program on the development of English literacy in Spanish speakers that addresses three questions:

1. How do children whose first language is Spanish learn to read and write in English?
2. Why do some Spanish-speaking children have difficulties acquiring English-language reading and writing skills?
3. For which children whose first language is Spanish are which instructional approaches and strategies most beneficial, at which stages of reading and writing development, and under what conditions?

To date, the following studies have been funded:

**TITLE:** Oracy/Literacy Development in Spanish-Speaking Children

**INVESTIGATOR:** David J. Francis (University of Houston, Dept. of Psychology)

**DESCRIPTION:** The objective of the program is to identify the factors and conditions under which children who speak Spanish develop proficient literacy skills in English and Spanish. The investigators propose a core longitudinal study from K-G3 of children in urban Texas, border Texas and urban California. These children will be from classrooms representative of one of four language program models: (1) English language immersion; (2) early exit; (3) late exit; and (4) dual language.

**TITLE:** Acquiring Literacy in English

**INVESTIGATOR:** Diane August (Center for Applied Linguistics, Dept. of Applied Linguistics)

**DESCRIPTION:** This research program will investigate the ways in which cross-linguistic, intralinguistic, and developmental factors affect the acquisition of English literacy skills by native Spanish-speaking children. The investigators will describe the ways in which specific aspects of early experience at school and, to some degree, at home predict development of literacy skills in English for bilingual children whose first language is Spanish.

**TITLE:** Predicting English Literacy in Spanish-Speaking Children

**INVESTIGATOR:** Franklin Manis (University of Southern California)

**DESCRIPTION:** A two-year longitudinal study of literacy development in Spanish-speaking children. The primary aim is to determine whether literacy difficulties in English among Spanish-speaking children in the second and third grades can be predicted from a cognitive test battery given in Spanish at the beginning of kindergarten and in English at the end of first grade.

**TITLE:** Bilingual Preschoolers: Precursors to Literacy

**INVESTIGATOR:** Carol S. Hammer (Pennsylvania State University, Dept. of Communication Disorders)

**DESCRIPTION:** This study examines the language acquisition, literacy development, and home environment of 100 children of Puerto Rican descent who attend Head Start. Fifty children acquiring Spanish and English sequentially and 50 acquiring the two languages simultaneously will be studied from the ages of four to six years. The results of the investigation will inform us of (a) the patterns of bilingual language acquisition that result in better literacy abilities; and (b) specific factors that should be targeted in interventions to facilitate better outcomes.

**TITLE:** Bilingual Early Language and Literacy Support (BELLS)

**INVESTIGATOR:** Mark S. Innocenti (Utah State University, Center for Persons w/Disabilities)

**DESCRIPTION:** This project will test language and emergent literacy outcomes of a Bilingual Early Language and Literacy Support (BELLS) Program which will include both early English immersion and home language literacy support. The multi-site, naturalistic, longitudinal study will be conducted in Utah, where the Hispanic population is increasing at a rate that stands far above Florida, Texas, New York and California.

**TITLE:** Predictors of Reading In Spanish-Speaking Children

**INVESTIGATOR:** Alexandra Gottardo (Grand Valley State University, Dept. of Psychology)

**DESCRIPTION:** This study proposes to examine longitudinal predictors of English reading skill in children who speak Spanish (L1). An extensive battery of standardized and experimental tasks will be administered to the children in Spanish and in English. The children will be tested as prereaders and then followed through the process of initial reading acquisition. (K-G2)

**TITLE:** Latino Children as Family Translators: Links to Literacy

**INVESTIGATOR:** Marjorie F. Orellana (Northwestern University)

**DESCRIPTION:** This project explores how a key experience in the lives of many bilingual immigrant children—their work as “language brokers” or translators between their families and the English-speaking world—relates to their English literacy development and success in school.

Remember to visit our web site at:

<http://lmri.ucsb.edu>

for:



\* PUBLICATIONS \*  
\* RESOURCE LINKS \*  
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### UCSB RESEARCH GRANT

The UC LMRI/UCSB faculty advisory committee awarded Arturo Hernandez a UCSB Small Research Grant in the amount of \$5,000 for 2001-02. The working title is: "Predicting English Language Reading Skill Development Among English Language Learners."

This study will address the following questions: 1) Do linguistic minority children's native and second language phonological awareness skills comprise a single cognitive factor or two distinct factors - separated across the two languages? 2) What are the specific, lower-level language skills involved in the development of second language reading comprehension ability?

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### UC LMRI 2001 CALL FOR GRANT PROPOSALS

- Small Research Grants  
Due **October 1, 2001** for UC Researchers
- Dissertation Research Grants  
Due **October 1, 2001** for UC Graduate Students

Complete grant information and applications can be found on the UC LMRI website at: <http://lmri.ucsb.edu>

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