

English Language Proficiency and Track Placement: Variable Effects on Academic Achievement

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1. Academic achievement: the missing discourse for ELs

All students who are English Learners have at least two major tasks to accomplish: 1) They must learn English, and 2) they must acquire age-, and grade-level appropriate subject matter knowledge. If they are immigrants, they will most likely also need to adjust to an entirely new culture and learn the cultural and behavioral norms of a new society. However, schools have focused so extensively on the first task of learning English that academic preparation and the transition into a new culture often fall by the wayside. Bilingual education programs legislated both in California and the nation during the 1970's and 1980's attempted to take students' academic preparation into account. Primary language instruction was held forth as a way to prevent students from falling behind academically while learning English. But even bilingual programs used primary language instruction to help students transition into English as quickly as possible (Gándara, 2002; US Dept of Education, 1968). Currently, Proposition 227, California's English-Only initiative passed in 1998, calls for ELs to be placed in a year of English immersion upon entry to the school system¹, focusing again on English rather than content area academics.

1.1 English Learners in K-12 Schools

As linguistic minority students constitute a growing proportion of the K-12 population, the need to improve their elementary and secondary education, and their access to higher education grows with them. The limited English proficient (LEP² or EL) population of the US has grown by 95% since 1991, while the total population has grown by only 12%³. English Learners now make up 9.8% of the K-12 US population. Two out of every five students in California K-12 public schools are linguistic minorities, speaking a language other than English at home. One out of four remains limited in English proficiency: an English Learner (EL). Over the past seven years, the EL population in California has increased by over a quarter of a million. According to the 2002 R-30 language census in California, ELs comprise 25.4% of the state's K-12 population (1,559,248)⁴, while other non-native English speakers make up an additional 14.3% (878,139). Altogether, linguistic minority students account for 2.5 million of California's nearly 6 million students.

1.2 High school ELs: Research and demographics

While the majority of California ELs are in the elementary grades (68.4% in grades K-6)⁵, the most rapidly growing segment of the K-12 English Learner population exists at the secondary level (Waggoner, 1999). Long-term ELs and recent immigrants alike face unique academic challenges at the high school level. For recent immigrants who enter US high schools with limited English proficiency,

¹ Full text of Proposition 227 can be found at:
<http://primary98.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/227text.htm>

² The state of California uses English Learner (EL) to label the students the federal government deems limited English proficient (LEP). The term EL will be used throughout this paper.

³ National language statistics can be found at <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/states/index.htm>

⁴ All California population totals available at <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>

⁵ <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (English Learners)

inconsistent prior schooling can be another barrier to success. High schools operate on the assumption that secondary students will arrive with well-developed literacy skills, and thus are often ill prepared to teach basic literacy skills, in any language (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Adding English language development (ELD) instruction on top of content and literacy instruction complicates secondary program and placement processes. The lecture-based format of most secondary school instruction lacks the flexibility necessary to meet the linguistic and academic needs of ELs (Lucas, 1997; Minicucci & Olsen, 1992). Furthermore, secondary schools rarely recognize the distinct academic profiles of ELs, clustering recent immigrants and long-term ELs together for ease of scheduling (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002). The high dropout rate among ELs may be symptomatic of the academic disconnect experienced by minority and linguistic minority students alike (Secada et al., 1998; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; Valverde, 1987).

Access to the academic skills and knowledge base necessary to succeed in school, do well on assessments, and progress towards graduation is highly dependent on instruction. At the high school level, instruction, in turn, depends upon class or track placement. Schools often use limited English proficient (LEP) or EL status as a signal to simplify content area instruction (Olsen, 1996). Continued placement in less challenging courses has a cumulative effect, leaving the students further behind after each consecutive academic year (Katz, 1999).

In research and in practice, the working stereotype of an English Learner is a recent immigrant in need of instruction in speaking, reading, and writing English. However, there exists a growing population at the secondary level of ELs who have attended US schools 7 years or more: long-term ELs. Long-term ELs do not fit the EL stereotype, and thus pose an instructional dilemma for high school ELD programs. As high schools focus almost solely on ELs' linguistic needs, they 1) neglect their academic development, and 2) fail to include long-term ELs as part of their instructional program and planning.

1.3 Assumptions about English proficiency and high school curriculum

The discourse surrounding ELs as students revolves primarily around their language needs; very little discussion about research, policy or practice focuses on their academic preparation⁶. Based on a belief that limited proficiency in English requires simplified instruction, schools often place ELs in low track classes to compensate for their limited English proficiency (Katz, 1999; Olsen, 1995). As a result schools effectively trade in the academic identity of ELs for a primarily linguistic one. Non-native English speakers in schools are *English language learners*, and their curricular offerings focus on English language acquisition rather than subject matter acquisition.

2. Tracking in secondary schools

The systematic placement of identifiable groups of students in low-track courses has long divided schools along racial, ethnic and social lines; by no means is anemic academic preparation exclusive to ELs (Dreeben & Gamoran, 1986; Mickelson & Heath, 1999; Oakes, 1990; Wraga, 1994). The following section presents a brief history of tracking in US schools, and ultimately, the processing of ELs within a tracked school system.

The theory behind tracking presumes that students who enter school with lower levels of academic preparation need to be taught in a simplified, remedial manner, allowing better prepared students to move ahead unhampered by their slower classmates (Tyack, 1974). Theoretically, remediation would bring low performing students up to par with the rest of the class. In reality, low track placement frequently results in low-level instruction; the pace is slowed and less is covered, students fall further behind, and the achievement gap widens (Chunn, 1989; Dreeben & Gamoran, 1986; Fritzberg, 2001; Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, & White, 1997; Mickelson & Heath, 1999). The existence of high track classes hinges on the belief that challenging academic preparation can only truly benefit those students

⁶ The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Title III, for the first time holds states, districts and schools accountable for the academic attainment of ELs.

who enter high school already equipped with the skills, dispositions and proficiency to excel in rigorous academic work.

2.1 Limited access and low expectations

The basis for placing ELs in low track classes can be found in institutional and educator beliefs about linguistic, as well as academic abilities. In a yearlong ethnographic study of eight immigrant, middle school, English Learners (ELs) and the Northern California school and ESL department in which they were placed, Katz (1999) found tracking to be central to students' limited access to content and low levels of academic performance. Tracking influenced teachers' beliefs about and treatment of the students, the curriculum to which they were exposed, the physically isolated site to which they were assigned⁷, the under-prepared teachers provided to teach their classes, and the limited materials and resources at their disposal. These factors, combined with the school administration's open preference for high track (GATE) students and teachers over all others, "resulted in institutionalized racism against Latino immigrant students" (Katz, 1999, p.823). In the process, EL students' educational needs were left untended. Other studies document the pervasiveness of the academic and social isolation of ELs and other linguistic minority students in high schools (Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Vigil, 1997).

2.2 The interaction between language and academic preparation

Assigned to lower level classes, English Learners exhibit limited academic proficiency as a result of weak instruction. In a study designed to investigate the influence of language proficiency, opportunity to learn and immigrant status on academic achievement, Wang and Goldschmidt (1999) collected course-taking and academic achievement data for 2,443 middle school students in a large urban, California school district over a three-year period. The study specifically compared US born Chinese-, Filipino-, and Mexican-American students with immigrant students from these three countries. The authors found that students placed in minimum standards courses scored below all other students. Most important, the study demonstrated that "the marginal effect of being classified as LEP changed depending upon whether the student was enrolled in a minimum standards mathematics course" (Wang & Goldschmidt, 1999, p.108) or a high level course. The impact of EL status on academic performance was minimized for those students placed in higher track classes, suggesting that academic preparation, more than language proficiency, determines academic performance. Wang and Goldschmidt (1999) also outline how the school uses EL status to determine a student's class placement, access to content and opportunity to learn. The strategies schools use to determine student placement often reflect faculty and staff's expectations for student performance.

2.3 Academic: language and critical thinking

Over the course of a three-year ethnographic study of the second language learning experiences of secondary ELs in a northern California comprehensive high school, Harklau (1994a, 1994b, 1994c) focused on the institutional practices at place that segregated ELs from the mainstream population. Harklau (1994c) found that exposure to oral and written genres varied greatly dependent on track. Students in high-track classes were "given explicit instruction in valued analytical skills simply because as high-track students, they were already assumed to be capable of such skills" (Harklau, 1994c, p. 227). The low-track classes exposed the students to a very rote, scripted language. Immigrant students in lower level classes were, "learning to decode and repeat information", rather than to question, analyze and argue (Harklau, 1994c, p.229). A focus on recitation leaves little room to develop complex reasoning skills either with peers or through class work.

⁷ESL students were placed in trailers, removed from the central campus, and separate from other students, a not uncommon practice.

Harklau (1994c) found that the language experienced in high-track classes required abstract analysis, argument, discussion and debate, while the language variety dominating low-track classes consisted of simplistic, repetitive drills and exercises. Those ELs who negotiated entry into high-track classes became versed in complex discourse skills, while those who remained in low-track classes learned to repeat and respond at a very superficial level. For these students, academic preparation, rather than language proficiency, determined academic performance, demonstrating the need to consider more than just language proficiency when developing EL instructional programs (Harklau, 1994c).

2.4 Assessing ELs: do we accurately measure what ELs know?

Another factor contributing to the placement of ELs in low-track classes may be the fact that ELs tend to score at lower levels on standardized assessments given in English, often as a result of their limited English proficiency (Lam, 1993). Whether we can ever confidently answer the question, “What exactly do these students know?” remains uncertain. Many argue that achievement tests in English measure English language proficiency, not knowledge, for non-native English speakers (Cleary, Humphreys, Kendrick, & Wesman, 1975; Figueroa & Hernandez, 2000; Lam, 1993; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994). To further confound matters, standardized achievement tests generally contain a degree of bias with respect to linguistic, national, regional and ethnic origin (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999; Cleary et al., 1975). As a result of this inherent and persistent bias, the APA cautions against the misinterpretation of test results for linguistic minority populations. A few of the limitations of achievement test results for linguistic minority populations include, but are not limited to: norming bias (Pearson, 1993; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994), predictive validity, linguistic bias, and differences in information processing.

This study investigates the interaction of three key variables: English language proficiency, class placement or instruction, and years in the US, on the academic achievement of high school ELs. The primary purpose is to examine how classroom placement based upon language proficiency influences the academic preparation of ELs. EL academic outcomes are analyzed and compared to those of English-Only students, as well as other non-EL linguistic minority students. If higher levels of English language proficiency were synonymous with greater academic achievement, then the only concern of schools would be to develop effective English Language Development (ELD) programs. If, however, English language proficiency is not the primary factor mediating academic achievement, schools need to address academic preparation as determined by access to curriculum, instruction and course content.

3. Methods

3.1 Study site

River Bend High is a 1,906 student comprehensive high school with approximately 35% identified linguistic minority students (n=708); the remaining 65% are English Only students. Linguistic minority students are defined as any students for whom a language other than English is spoken in the home. Much like River Bend High, 40% of California’s K-12 students are linguistic minority, and 25% are ELs. The city of River Bend has historically served as the urban center of a primarily agricultural county in California’s Central Valley.

3.2 Participants

The River Bend High School site enrolled 356 English Learners (ELs) at the time of the sampling, of a total population of 1,906, accounting for 18% of the student body. In addition, 176 students were former ELs, now reclassified and labeled Reclassified Fluent English proficient (RFEP). Another 176 students were classified fluent English proficient (FEP) upon entry into the US school system. The remaining 1198 10th to 12th grade River Bend High students were native English speakers, for whom no other language was present in the home.

Just over half (55%, n=195) of the River Bend High ELs are male. The majority, 89%, of River Bend High ELs are Spanish speakers (n=317). Another 4.8% speak Punjabi, and another 2% speak Urdu. There are an additional 11 languages represented in the EL population at River Bend High. Like River Bend High, the majority of the ELs in the state of California are Spanish speakers (84%). Unlike River Bend High, however, the next two most frequently spoken home languages are Vietnamese (2.4%) and Hmong (1.7%). Punjabi speakers make up 0.6% of California's ELs, and Urdu speakers make up 0.2%. River Bend valley is host to a large immigrant farming population from both Pakistan and the Punjab region of India, reflected in the language demographics of River Bend High.

Other linguistic minority students, either Redesignated or Fluent English Proficient students (RFEP or FEP) account for an additional 17% of the total high school population, 8.5% each (n=176 and n=176 respectively).

3.3 Definition of terms

English Learners (ELs)

ELs are defined as students deemed *limited* in English language proficiency. These are non-native English speakers who do not yet meet the school district's criteria for reclassification to fluent English proficient, exit from the EL program, and dismissal from services. For all ELs, English language proficiency level is determined by the ELD staff's evaluation of a student's ability to meet exit criteria at each ELD level aligned to the district and state ELD standards. Exit from the EL program altogether constitutes reclassification.

Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP)

RFEP students are former English Learners who, having met the district's reclassification criteria, have exited from the EL program entirely and no longer receive any English language development support services

Initially Fluent English Proficient (FEP)

FEP students are those non-native English speakers who, upon entry into the California school system were assessed to have sufficient English to function without ELD support in a mainstream English classroom.

English Only (EO)

EO students are students who, upon entry into California schools, report no language other than English on the home language survey.

3.4 Definition of independent variables

Track placement

The proportion of a given student's classes meeting the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) college entrance requirements, commonly referred to as A-G requirements, defined track placement (AG) for the purpose of this study. This ratio provides a general estimate of students' exposure to both rigorous academic content and opportunity to learn.

English language proficiency

Originally, this study intended to use CELDT Oral language assessment results as a proxy for EL level. Unfortunately, due to a variety of factors, an uncomfortably large proportion of the most advanced ELs (4s and 5s) failed to attain a passing score on the oral portion (CTB McGraw Hill, Green, Boyer, Hayter, & Kelley, 2003). Thirty-five percent of the advanced ELs scored alongside very recent immigrants with very limited oral skills, despite having passed previous oral language proficiency assessments⁸. I concluded that these early CELDT Oral scores would not be as valid a measure of students' language proficiency as hoped, and as a result, I used the school site's EL levels described below.

⁸ River Bend High used the IPT (Idea Proficiency Test) prior to the implementation of the CELDT, and all advanced ELs would have had to demonstrate mastery or proficiency on the oral portion at minimum to be enrolled in the advanced ELD courses.

At the school site, a student's English language proficiency (EL) level was determined by classroom performance and coursework. Performance included mastery of a combination of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at each ELD level.

EL cohort

Borrowing from the definitions set forth by Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) and adapted in Freeman, et al. (2002), three EL cohorts are identified in this study: long-term ELs (ltEL), recent immigrant with High Prior Schooling (riHPS), and recent immigrants with Limited Prior Schooling (riLPS).

Recent immigrants: EL students who have been in US schools less than five years.

With high prior schooling (riHPS): Those recent immigrants who were continuously enrolled in school, in the home country prior to immigration, and in the US after immigration.

With limited prior schooling (riLPS): Those recent immigrants who missed a year or more of schooling either prior to immigration or during the immigration process.

Long-term ELs: those ELs who have been enrolled in US schools 7 years or more.

3.5 Definition of dependent variables: academic achievement outcomes

Grades:

1. Grade Point Average (GPA): Students' cumulative academic GPA (unweighted) at the end of the 2001-2002 school year. EL GPAs ranged from 0.00 to 4.00, with a mean EL GPA of 1.99, and a standard deviation of 0.88.
2. Grade distribution consists of all students' end of semester grades in all classes for spring semester, 2002. This includes academic and non-academic classes. Any Honors or AP classes used in this analysis are not weighted.

Credit Ratio (CR): A ratio of credits completed to those attempted was taken at the end of the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade for all students. EL credit ratios ranged from 0.00 to 1.00, with a mean EL Credit Ratio of 0.84, and a standard deviation of 0.18.

Standardized test scores:

1. SAT-9 Total Reading (S9TR)⁹: SAT-9 Total Reading EL raw scores ranged from 1 to 61, with a mean score of 30.09, and a standard deviation of 9.01.
2. SAT-9 Total Mathematics (S9TM): SAT-9 Total Math EL raw scores ranged from 2 to 36, with a mean score of 15.52, and a standard deviation of 5.06.
3. California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Language Arts¹⁰: CAHSEE Language Arts EL scale scores ranged from 290 to 385, with a mean score of 331.56, and a standard deviation of 18.81. A score of 350 or above is considered passing for the CAHSEE Language Arts.
4. California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Math: CAHSEE Math EL scale scores ranged from 254 to 378, with a mean score of 320.57, and a standard deviation of 19.11. A score of 350 or above is considered passing for the CAHSEE Math.

3.5 Research Questions

In addressing the issues revolving around the academic achievement patterns for ELs, I was challenged by the following questions.

1. How are ELs distributed by years in the US across locally designated ELD levels?
 - a) Are there marked differences by independent variable?
 - b) To what degree does EL level or track placement determine the academic achievement of high school age ELs?
2. To what degree do EL level and track placement interact for secondary ELs?
3. How do secondary ELs compare on the following six measures of academic achievement: GPA, Credits towards graduation, SAT-9 Reading, SAT-9 Math, CAHSEE Language Arts, CAHSEE Math to:

⁹ 11th grade SAT-9 scores will be used for 12th grade students, as the SAT-9 is not administered in grade 12.

¹⁰ At the time of this study, results from the California CAHSEE were available only for students in grade 10.

- a. Redesignated Fluent English Proficient students (RFEP)
 - b. Fluent English Proficient students (FEP)
 - c. English-Only students (EO)
4. How do each of the four groups compare to one another?

3.6 Data collection and measures

The SPSS program, version 11.5 (SPSS, 2002) was used to analyze the archived English Learner (EL) data collected from the River Bend High study site. Initially, I used step-wise regression, forward and backwards to determine the most important variables associated with the each academic outcome. After identifying the most significant variables, I used linear regression to determine the individual significance and the proportion of variance due to independent variable: Gender (SX), the proportion of classes meeting A-G college entry requirements (AG), English Language Proficiency level as determined by the school site¹¹ (EL), Years in US schools (YUS), Grade level (GR), and EL cohort (COH).

English language proficiency levels, standardized assessment scores (SAT-9), performance on the High School Exit Exam Math and Language Arts portions, GPA, and transcripts were collected and analyzed for all ELs at the high school site. All of these data, with the exception of EL level and high school transcripts, were also collected and analyzed for English Only, FEP and RFEP student populations for comparison. It was not possible to gather transcripts for analysis of the non-EL populations at River Bend High School, however rough proxies of performance can be found through the proportion of ELs, Latino and White students graduating from River Bend High eligible for entry into a four-year California university.

4. Model design

The academic achievement outcome variables listed above are both categorical and continuous, as are the independent variables used in this study. Given the unbalanced design and the mix of categorical and continuous variables, the model believed to be best suited to determine the proportion of variance accounted for by each variable was linear regression.

4.1 Regression: accounting for the variance within the EL population

Linear regression allows for an assessment of the degree of variance accounted for by each independent variable. The linear regression model also allows for the inclusion of main effect and interaction terms in determining the variance in outcomes. Use of linear regression facilitates the determination of the amount of variance in a given academic outcome accounted for by the combination of significant independent variables in a regression equation (George & Mallery, 2001; Ryan & Joiner, 2001; SPSS, 2002). Linear regression also determines the amount of variance in academic outcomes explained by a given variable within the context of the resultant regression equation, as well as the combined variance accounted for by the final equation. The amount of variance accounted for is important in distinguishing the influence of one independent variable over another.

In addressing research questions pertaining to the differences in academic performance within the EL population, all of the independent variables were first entered into a stepwise regression equation to determine which were significant in predicting each academic outcome. Once the significant variables for each outcome were identified, they were then fit into a linear regression equation model¹².

¹¹ EL level is determined by exit criteria in reading, writing, speaking and listening, for each EL level. At the end of each academic year, the ELD staff meets to assess all students' progress and placement. New students are given both the CELDT and a local writing prompt for evaluation and placement.

¹² Please note that only those variables determined to be significant through stepwise regression will be included in the final equation predicting each individual academic outcome.

<u>Influence of independent variables (X):</u>	<u>On Academic outcomes (Y):</u>
English language proficiency (EL)	Grade point average (GPA)
Track Placement (AG)	SAT-9 Reading (SAT-9R)
Years in US (YUS)	SAT-9 Mathematics (SAT-9M)
Gender (SX)	Credits Towards Graduation (CR)
Grade in School (GR)	CAHSEE Language Arts (CAHSEE LA)
EL Cohort (riHPS, riLPS, ltEL)	CAHSEE Mathematics (CAHSEE M)

4.2 General linear model: cross group comparisons (EO, FEP, RFEP, EL)

In order to assess differences in performance across language groups, the General Linear Model (GLM) was chosen as it deals well with uneven data, non-independence, and collinearity, all of which are inherent to the data of this study. As the variables may in fact interact significantly, -for example, years in US schools is expected to have a positive impact on English language proficiency level, the variables lack independence. If a significant interaction does in fact occur, the variables are then defined as collinear. Within the GLM design, the software package allows for the assessment of Type III Sums of Squares (SS), essential in analysis of collinear hypothesis testing terms. The GLM model provides analysis of Type III Adjusted Sums of Squares (AdjSS). Use of Type III accounts for the fact that the data are interrelated, non-orthogonal, non-linear, with threats to homogeneity, and a non-normal distribution. GLM analysis calculates the Type III effect for every term once all of the other effects have been determined (George & Mallery, 2001).

For the comparison of ELs with other non-native English speakers and English Only students, I used GLM, with Scheffé's post-hoc test of pair wise comparisons. GLM determined the significance of language group (English-Only, FEP, RFEP, EL), Grade and Gender for each outcome. Scheffé's post-hoc tests were then performed to determine whether the differences in mean academic achievement performance between each of the subgroups are statistically significant, and if so, at what level.

5. Findings

5.1 EL cohort

ELs fell into one of three distinct cohorts: recent immigrants with high prior schooling, recent immigrants with limited prior schooling, and long-term ELs. The majority, 60%, of ELs were long-term ELs (n=212). Recent immigrants with high prior schooling made up an additional 29% (n=102), and recent immigrants with limited prior schooling comprised the remaining 11% (n=42). The distribution of performance on the various academic achievement outcomes can be found below in Table 1. Long-term ELs perform below recent immigrants with high prior schooling on four of the six academic achievement outcomes: GPA, Credit ratio, SAT-9 Total Mathematics and CAHSEE Mathematics. In addition, they perform below recent immigrants with low prior schooling on GPA, credit ratio, and CAHSEE Math scores, but above recent immigrants with low prior schooling on SAT-9 Math. On the SAT-9 Total Reading test, long-term ELs scored significantly higher than both groups of recent immigrants.

Recent immigrants with high prior schooling scored significantly higher than both long-term ELs and recent immigrants with limited prior schooling on GPA ($p = 0.00$, $p=0.00$), Credit ratio ($p=0.00$, $p=0.04$, respectively), and SAT-9 Total Math ($p=0.01$, $p=0.01$). There were no significant differences in performance on the High School Exit Exam for the different EL cohorts. The lower credit ratio, GPA, and math scores for long-term ELs indicate a performance differential that may contribute to increased likelihood for dropping out. The functioning of years in US schools, as well as EL cohort, offers insight into some of the differences in performance typical of long-term ELs.

Table 1
Mean scores by EL Cohort

	Long-term ELs	Recent immigrants Low prior schooling	Recent immigrants High prior schooling
GPA	1.69	2.01	2.59
Credits	0.80	0.85	0.93
SAT-9 TM	15.15	14.05	17.05
SAT-9 TR	32.19	26.06	26.61
CAHSEE M	318.47	330.00	324.96
CAHSEE LA	334.35	325.43	323.27

5.2 Long-term ELs

The importance of access to challenging curriculum is especially salient when considering the case of long-term ELs. Long-term ELs make up the largest EL subgroup at River Bend High (60% of the larger EL population). Males make up nearly 60% of the long-term EL population, and 55% of the total EL population. As long-term ELs rarely lack oral English fluency, low levels of academic achievement suggest they might benefit from efficient and focused academic preparation in the early grades through the secondary levels, mirroring the call for rigorous content area and advanced literacy instruction for ELs at all levels (Scarcella, 1996, 2002; Schleppegrell, 1996).

Placement, rather than language proficiency, predicts the low grades and the low standardized test scores characteristic of long-term English Learners at River Bend High, illustrating the negative effects of lowered expectations, and tracking, over time (Chunn, 1989; Fritzberg, 2001; Gamoran, 1989; Mickelson & Heath, 1999; Ruiz, 1995a, 1995b; Stevens, 1999). It appears that ELs would benefit from the same basic conditions that benefit the mainstream English-Only population: access to grade level standards, quality teachers and challenging content. As EL reclassification depends upon academic achievement at grade level (Gándara & Merino, 1993; Linqianti, 2000), then it follows that the permanency of long-term ELs may be explained in part by the poor academic preparation received in their lower-track placement.

5.3 EL level and track placement: interaction

Table 2 displays the mean proportion of classes meeting college preparatory (AG) requirements for students at each EL level. The two highest AG ratios are for students at site determined EL levels 1 and 5, and the lowest is for students at EL level 3. Significant differences in means are found only when EL 5 student means are compared to EL 2, and EL 3 student means. There is no significant difference in college preparatory enrollment between EL levels 1, 4 and 5, however, the difference between EL 5 and both EL 2 and EL 3 ($p = 0.000$ for both) is significant, based on Scheffé's post-hoc test. The two independent variables, EL level and proportion of classes meeting A-G requirements interact to some degree at these middle levels, but not at the outer ends of the spectrum. A Pearson's correlation indicates that the two variables correlate at $r = .268$.

While EL 5 students are enrolled in the highest proportion of college preparatory classes, they also receive the highest proportion of D's and F's (51%). Some proportion of the courses meeting AG requirements for EL 5 students are actually 'repeats'. Students will take a course required for graduation a second, third or fourth time after failing it, resulting in an artificial increase in their AG enrollment. As a result of the relatively low correlation ($r=0.268$) between EL level and AG enrollment at the low and high ends of the spectrum, the two variables are treated as independent, with the understanding that they do interact to some degree, in order to address issues of class placement and EL proficiency individually.

Table 2
Mean AG ratios by EL level

EL Level	Mean % AG	N	Std. Deviation
1	30.1%	36	0.1438
2	24.0%	50	0.1485
3	21.7%	45	0.1392
4	28.0%	53	0.1093
5	36.2%	172	0.1542
Total	30.8%	356	0.1547

Recent immigrants with high levels of prior schooling are often prepared to take math and science classes meeting A-G requirements, however they are most likely to be enrolled in the lower levels of ELD (1-3). These classes take up two class periods, or one-third of the EL student's course load and do not meet A-G requirements. Long-term ELs are most likely to be found in the ELD 4 and 5, where ELD takes up only one-sixth of their course load. As such, the one significant pair wise AG ratio comparison to be dealt with is that of EL 4 and EL 5 students. That the proportion of classes meeting AG requirements varies significantly between EL 4 and EL 5 students when both groups only participate in one period of ELD may speak to one of two factors. EL 5 students are required to enroll in ELD 5 year after year, either until reclassification or graduation. At the high school level, EL 4 students are more likely to be recent immigrants having spent the first 2-3 years of high school enrolled in two periods of ELD 1-3, and are more likely than long-term ELs to meet the academic achievement reclassification criteria.

5.4 Track placement (AG)

While learning English is obviously necessary and important for long-term academic success, results from this study show that learning English is neither the sole, nor primary determinant of EL academic performance. As illustrated in Table 3, track placement (AG) proves significant at a level of $p=0.005$ or less) for all six outcomes. In contrast, EL level is significant in predicting only two of the six outcomes. The findings of this study indicate that placement, not language proficiency, is the primary determinant of how well a secondary EL will do academically. That track placement is a better indicator of academic success for ELs than language proficiency reinforces the findings of research in the area of opportunity to learn (Butler & Marinov-Glassman, 1994; Gamoran, 1987; Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1990; Wang & Goldschmidt, 1999). Placement of ELs in low-track classes, combined with patterns of poor performance demonstrates the cyclical effect low rigor of content has on the achievement of marginalized students (Chunn, 1989; Fritzberg, 2001; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001).

At River Bend High, Science classes meeting A-G requirements involve hands-on laboratory work, experiments and active exploration, while non-college preparatory Science classes (in which nearly all of the ELs in this study were enrolled) employ primarily lecture, book, pencil and paper work (River Bend High Course Catalog, 2001-2002). Students enrolled in non-college preparatory curriculum, as are the bulk of the ELs in this study, often find school less interesting, less challenging and less engaging (Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Stevens, 1999). When students find that little is expected of them, they often become bored, and respond in kind by performing at lower levels (Chunn, 1989; Fritzberg, 2001; Gamoran, 1989; Stevens, 1999). River Bend High School teachers commented that they covered much less material in the sections designed for ELs than they did in their mainstream sections, college-preparatory or not. Evidence of these practices is also found in the State 227 evaluation study (American Institutes for Research, 2001).

Track placement proves statistically significant in determining all academic outcomes for ELs, accounting for from 2% to 35% of the variance in scores for the individual outcomes (Table 3). Ultimately, enrollment in college preparatory classes accounts for a significant proportion of the

variance in classroom grades, the pass fail credit ratio (credits), and standardized math and language arts test scores. The overwhelming importance of track placement indicates that instruction and program offerings outweigh language proficiency in academic outcomes.

The prevalence of track placement in determining EL performance suggests that the historical focus on English acquisition overshadows the importance of content area academics. For immigrant and linguistic minority students, schooling acts as a tool for acculturation, not necessarily academic training and preparation (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Rutledge, 2003; Freeman et al., 2002; Gándara & Rumberger, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 2001; Thompson, DiCerbo, Mahoney, & MacSwan, 2002; Vernez, 1999). While ELs are language learners by definition, they must also develop an academic identity.

Table 3
Significance and proportion of variance accounted for by AG and EL

		GPA	Credits	SAT-9 TR	SAT-9 TM	CAHSEE LA	CAHSEE M
A-G	P-value	0.000	0.001	0.005	0.000	0.003	0.000
	βeta	0.278	0.176	0.139	0.349	0.275	0.596
	% var	7.7%	3.1%	1.9%	12.2%	7.6%	35.5%
EL Level	P-value			0.000		0.000	
	βeta			0.479		0.387	
	% var			22.9%		15.0%	

5.5 Language proficiency (EL level)

English language proficiency level is insignificant and accounts for a negligible portion of the variance for four of the six outcomes: GPA, Credits towards graduation, the CAHSEE Math portion, and SAT9 Mathematics. That EL level fails to account for a significant proportion of the variance in these academic measures suggests knowledge of English is not sufficient to guarantee good academic outcomes. These data suggest that schools need to provide access to rigorous academic curricula if we are to expect English Learners to succeed academically.

It could be argued that EL level doesn't really influence classroom grades or GPA as the linguistic demands of ELs' classes are expected to be low. Grades and GPA were collected for all students, for all classes, both those perceived to be linguistically demanding such as grade level English and Social Sciences, and Math and Science courses that could conceivably be less linguistically complex. If the linguistic demands for the classes ELs took were lower than they were for mainstream classes, one would expect that there would be relatively little variation in the proportion of As, Bs, Cs, received by ELs at all levels, or when compared to non-EL populations. However, there is a marked difference in the proportion of As and Bs received by recent immigrant EL 1s and 2s (over 50%) as compared to advanced EL 4s and 5s (less than 30%). EL 1s and 2s perform much like English-Only students; this is not altogether surprising considering that both groups developed content area academics in the primary language prior to entering high school.

Where EL level is significant in determining academic performance is in the measurement of reading and language arts proficiency, both for the SAT9 Total Reading, and for the CAHSEE Language Arts. In either case, EL level would be a logical predictor of a student's Reading or Language Arts score. Both language-based exams focus on many of the same standards covered in the curriculum guides and state and district ELD standards that drive the ELD classes at River Bend High. As both the SAT9 Reading and the CAHSEE carry high stakes for ELs, (reclassification and high school graduation, respectively) advanced academic literacy development within the ELD curriculum and the content area classes should increase EL success rates in both these areas (Scarcella, 1996, 2002; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002).

The proportion of classes meeting A-G requirements, a proxy for track placement, is significant in determining EL performance for all six academic achievement outcomes. English language proficiency, on the other hand, proves significant only in determining performance on language-based assessments, the SAT9 total Reading score and the CAHSEE Language Arts score.

6. Comparing English-only, FEP, RFEP and English learners: outcomes and environment

6.1 Teacher qualifications

Student learning is influenced by a number of factors, one of which is teacher preparation. Teacher quality varies by the rigor of the course being taught. Most often, the most qualified, advanced teachers teach college preparatory classes while relatively novice teachers work with students in the non-college preparatory classes (DeLany, 1991; Finley, 1984). In addition, in the state of California, ELs are nearly four times as likely as the general population to be taught by an uncredentialed teacher (Gándara & Rumberger, 2003). At the time of the study at River Bend High, this was the case, as can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4
Teacher qualifications and experience

	Not Fully Credentialed	2 Years or Less Experience
RBH ELD & SDAIE	20.0%	20.0%
River Bend High	13.0%	16.0%
RBJUSD	7.5%	7.0%
California	13.6%	13.9%

Twenty percent of River Bend High ELD and SDAIE staff did not hold a full credential, nor were they certified to teach ELs. With respect to the general population, 13% of River Bend High, and 7.5% of River Bend Joint Unified School District (RBJUSD), and 13.6% of California teachers lack a full credential¹³. In addition, 20% of the River Bend High ELD and SDAIE staff had been teaching two years or less, as compared to 16% of the total River Bend High staff, 7% of the RBJUSD staff, and 13.9% of the teachers in the state. Overall, River Bend High ELD and SDAIE teachers were less experienced and less likely to be fully credentialed than the mainstream teaching staff.

It is important to remember that River Bend High is not unique in this situation. If anything the proportion of fully credentialed and more experienced teachers teaching EL and SDAIE classes may be higher at River Bend High than at other comparable high schools. Administrators at River Bend High have made a concerted effort to ensure ELs access to EL-trained (CLAD) teachers. Supply does not keep up with demand however, and administrators lack the authority to require tenured teachers to participate in CLAD training.

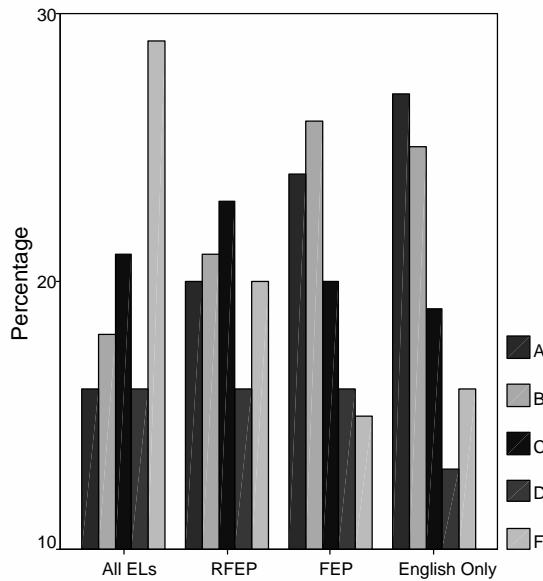
6.2 Classroom grades

Classroom grades are often one of the first factors program evaluators look at in determining instructional success. Figure 1 demonstrates the differential distribution of classroom grades: As, Bs, Cs, Ds and Fs received by students in each language group: English Learner, RFEP, FEP and English-Only. The proportion of Ds and Fs decreases as we travel from the limited English proficient end of the spectrum to the native English speaker end, while the proportion of As and Bs simultaneously increases. English-Only students receive proportionately more As and Bs (52%), while English Learners receive proportionately more Ds and Fs (45%) than the other language groups. English-Only students earn 52% As and Bs, and 30% Ds and Fs. EL 1 & 2 students demonstrate the grade distribution closest to that of English-Only students with 53% As and Bs and 25% Ds and Fs. That the most recent immigrants earn grades most comparable to English-Only students, and least comparable to other ELs suggests that prior academic preparation is a better predictor of academic performance than language proficiency. Eighty-six percent of EL 5s (148 of 172) are long-term ELs and have been schooled alongside the English-Only, FEP and RFEP students in the sample for seven years or more.

¹³ <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (staffing)

The difference in grade distribution for EL 5s (28% As and Bs, 51% Ds and Fs) as compared to RFEP (41% As and Bs, 36% Ds and Fs), FEP (50% As and Bs, 30% Ds and Fs), and English-Only (52% As and Bs, 30% Ds and Fs) is striking.

Figure 1
Classroom Grades by Language Group



6.3 Academic achievement across language groups

For all outcomes, English Learners performed at significantly lower levels than did their English-Only, FEP and RFEP classmates. Analysis of the standardized SAT-9 Reading and Math scores proves especially interesting as English-Only students scored significantly higher than all three non-native English speaking groups (FEP, RFEP and EL). As the difference between English-Only and FEP or RFEP scores is not statistically significant for any of the other four outcomes (grades, credits, performance on either the CAHSEE Language Arts or Math), the functioning of the SAT-9 as a standardized assessment is called into question. The norming group for the SAT-9 may provide insight into the performance differential. English Learners accounted for only 1% of the norming population in the first round, and 1.8% in the second round (Harcourt-Brace, 1997). Nor is it clear if the ELs sampled for norming purposes were actually limited in English proficient (EL or LEP), or simply non-native English speakers (FEP or RFEP by California standards).

Across all measures of achievement, there exists a hierarchy of scoring. English-Only students consistently score at the top, followed by FEP, then RFEP, and lastly, English Learners achieving the lowest scores. The discrepancy in performance by language group across the entire school population suggests that the linguistic designation of student groups accounts for a portion of the variance in academic achievement. However, within the English Learner population track placement and academic preparation play a much larger role than English language proficiency. That few significant differences in academic achievement occur between EO students and non-native FEP or RFEP groups reinforces the importance of exposure and academic preparation. FEP and RFEP students are more likely than ELs to enroll in the same classes and receive the same content area coverage as English-Only students. More precise analysis of enrollment patterns was not possible within the confines of this study, as we did not have access to transcript data for English-Only, FEP and RFEP students at River Bend High, only EL transcripts.

6.4 Preparation for college

If individual interest, not EL status, determined class placement, then the law of averages suggests that ELs would enroll in college preparatory curriculum at the same rate as English-Only students of different ethnic groups. A review of the proportion of California graduates eligible to enroll in a 4-year college proves that this is not the case. According to the CDE website, 21% of Latinos, and 35% of English-Only, Non-Hispanic Whites graduate from River Bend High UC/CSU ready. Analysis of EL transcripts indicates that only 13 of River Bend High's 356 ELs (3.6%) have completed, or are on track to complete, the Math and Science coursework necessary to be eligible for UC/CSU enrollment upon graduation¹⁴. Simply put, Non-Hispanic Whites are nearly nine times more likely, and Latinos five times more likely, than ELs to graduate from River Bend High prepared to enroll in a 4-year college. With 96% of ELs ineligible for entry into a 4-year college and 51% with a GPA below 2.0, the likelihood of dropping out becomes dangerously high for ELs at River Bend High. The disproportionately high Latino dropout rate has been well chronicled (Lillard & DeCicca, 2001; Mehan, 1997; Wehlage & Rutter, 1987) and the danger of dropping out for ELs has been alluded to, but not addressed directly.

7. Discussion

7.1 Academic preparation

Policy makers, practitioners and the public have long recognized that English Learners enter school with an educational disadvantage: that fact remains undisputed. The general assumption, however, is that the primary disadvantage is one of language. The results of this study paint a much more complex picture: ELs face a substantial academic, not just linguistic, disadvantage, whether they entered the schools limited in prior schooling or not. To initiate discussion of academic parity, policy makers and practitioners alike must define the problem—the schooling of ELs—in academic as well as linguistic terms.

Contrary to current policy thrust, proficiency in English did not prove to be the best predictor of academic success. Results from this study show that track placement is significant in determining all six measures of academic achievement for ELs. In fact, findings from this study demonstrate how academic preparation is a much better predictor of EL performance than language proficiency in the majority of cases. This is not to imply that English is not important; but rather, that the quality of English taught—academic English in particular—is critical, and that language instruction must be combined with strong content area curriculum development. Schools' perception of ELs as limited contributes to the focus on language over content.

Further separating ELs from the academic mainstream, the terminology used to discuss ELs hinges on a shared understanding of the importance of the English language and its acquisition. Terms such as English Learner, limited English proficient (LEP), sheltered English, specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE), English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), English Learner Intervention Program (ELIP), English Language Acquisition Program (ELAP), all define ELs by a linguistic deficiency, without acknowledging any type of academic disadvantage. ELs are not viewed as potential biliterate academics, but rather as students who enter schools deficient in English, and for whom the school is responsible to provide English language development. The construction of the linguistic minority student as deficient, the bilingual program as compensatory, the EL learning context as linguistic, not academic, all speak to the marginalization of immigrant and other non-native English speaking students in US schools.

By no means do I argue that English language proficiency and acquisition are not necessary for ELs in US schools, but rather, that schools fall behind in two key areas: 1) the type of English language being taught, and 2) the rigor of the academic preparation of ELs. Both proponents of bilingual education (Scarcella & Rumberger, 2000), and its opponents (Gersten & Baker, 2000)

¹⁴ <http://pathstat1.ucop.edu/ag/a-g/index.html>

recognize the critical need to provide ELs with explicit instruction in the rigorous academic English necessary to develop expertise in content area academics. The issue then becomes academic rigor over language alone. An example of challenging, successful instruction for ELs is International High School in New York (Walqui, 2000). When EL program and placement focuses on language acquisition at the expense of academics preparation, ELs fall behind their EO peers academically, widening, rather than closing the ‘achievement gap’ year after year. The significance of academic placement and preparation in determining almost all academic outcomes suggests that ELs at River Bend High are systematically denied access to rich content area instruction —instruction in classes that meet college-entry requirements. As the EL program model in place at River Bend High is not unlike the program found at other high schools (Harklau, 1999; Katz, 1999; Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999), there is reason to believe that EL course taking patterns contribute to the persistent gap in academic achievement between ELs and English Only students.

7.2 Long-term ELs

The second major finding of this study speaks directly to the identification of long-term ELs, their prevalence in the secondary population, and their achievement patterns. Over 60% of the River Bend High ELs had been in California schools 7 years or more, and anecdotal evidence suggests that long-term ELs may be just as prevalent in other northern California high schools. Accurate identification of this population will allow schools to address their unique academic and linguistic needs, improve their program offerings, and ultimately their academic success. In addition, recognition of the existence of long-term ELs may call attention to the need to improve elementary level EL programs. The phenomenon of long-term ELs is not simply linguistic, it is academic as well (Linguanti, 2001) and speaks directly to the problematic achievement gap between ELs and EOs.

Long-term ELs performed significantly lower than recent immigrants on four of the six outcomes. The only area where long-term ELs performed significantly better than recent immigrants, high and low prior schooling alike, was the SAT-9 Reading assessment —a measure of language proficiency used to exit ELs from the EL program. Not only do long-term ELs earn significantly lower GPAs than their recent immigrant peers, but years in US schools negatively impacts GPA. Poor academic performance reflects the high incidence of academic alienation from the school culture documented among long-term ELs and other Latinos in US schools (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Foley, 1990; Harklau, 1999, 2000; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Rosenbaum, 1976; Valenzuela, 1999; Vigil, 1997). A decline in academic achievement as years of US schooling increases seems counter-intuitive until one takes into account the sociological phenomena addressed in the studies mentioned above. Although the tendency to explain away poor academic performance as a language ‘problem’ persists, the results of this study make clear that access to instruction plays a significant role. Future research can help to qualify and quantify the processes at work in schools perpetuating this phenomenon.

One factor contributing to the phenomenon of long-term ELs may be state and local reclassification criteria dependent upon measures of academic achievement (Gándara & Merino, 1993; Linguanti, 2001). To move out of the EL classification, students must prove academic performance, through reading and writing competency at grade level, grades and standardized test scores. If exit from EL programs depends on academic achievement as well as language proficiency, EL programs would do well to ensure access to rigorous content area instruction. Changing the framework from one of language acquisition alone, to one of training in both academic English and content area curriculum, will require fundamental *procedural* transitions on several levels. Educational policy makers, program developers, schools, teachers and teacher trainers will all need to move beyond English language acquisition to include academic achievement in the academic preparation of ELs.

8. Implications: oversimplification of EL needs

In the process of working to ensure that ELs receive adequate instruction in English as a second language or ELD, educators and policymakers alike have oversimplified the academic needs of ELs. Rather than viewing ELs as scholars, schools and policy makers see ELs as learners of English. This

perspective denies ELs their identity as learners of Math, Science, Literature and History. Labeling ELs as limited in English proficiency defines them as disadvantaged linguistically, inadvertently prompting schools to focus on language, but not academics.

8.1 Quality of English language instruction

The fact that the most ESL and ELD curricula focus on conversational and informal language practices only further separates EL instruction from mainstream instruction. Both Scarcella and Rumberger (2002) and Gersten and Baker (2000) argue that the quality of English language instruction ELs receive greatly influences performance in academic content areas. In addition, Schleppegrell (2002) argues that current ELD curriculum taught in California schools does not adequately address the teaching of the ELD standards as outlined by the California Department of Education. The work of Schleppegrell (2002) reinforces the need to provide adequate research based genre instruction as outlined in Christie (1999). Academic English instruction goes beyond simply conversing and communicating in the English language; it requires that students learn to manipulate the language within the context of content area academics (Scarcella & Rumberger, 2000). Essentially, academic English represents the missing link between English language instruction and success in the content area classroom. While instruction in academic English is necessary to ensure the academic success of ELs, it cannot exist within a vacuum, and must be complimented with rigorous academic preparation.

8.2 Weak academic preparation

Currently, EL programs lack rigorous academic content (Katz, 1999), although research and theory suggest that challenging curriculum can be covered in EL classrooms (Walqui, 2000; Walqui, 2001). Both Walqui's (2000, Chapter 5) and Nadelstern's (1986) descriptions of the successful EL program at New York City's International High School demonstrate the effective integration of rigorous content area curriculum with English language acquisition strategies for recent immigrants. Based on a belief about the need for English fluency prior to academic immersion, schools — secondary schools in particular— tend to process ELs in ways that marginalize them linguistically and academically (Valdés, 1998, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). English language acquisition is emphasized at the expense of academic preparation; secondary EL content area classes tend to cover less content less rigorously (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992; Olsen, 1995). At the elementary level, state policy dictates learning English through instruction in English with no mention of Mathematics, Science or Social Science (Prop. 227, 1998).

The academic result of these practices at the elementary grades is the production of a class of lifelong ELs. Academically unprepared to participate in rigorous curriculum of high school (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999), long-term ELs become caught in a vicious cycle of under-preparation. Denied access to challenging content area instruction, long-term ELs never gain the academic competencies necessary to move out of low-track EL classes and into more rigorous instruction. On the linguistic front, it is not uncommon for schools to interpret the limited English proficiency of recently immigrated students as indicative of a need for lower level remedial instruction (Harklau, 1994; Katz, 1999; Olsen, 1997). Recent immigrants are systematically dismissed from rigorous academic preparation and placed in low-level classes, while they 'catch up' in their English proficiency.

Schools and educators must move away from a framework that defines an English learner as a low-level learner. Admittedly, English Learners need focused academic English instruction, but it must be accompanied by rigorous Math, Science and Social Science coursework. While content area instruction presents a significant challenge to schools, they are not without guidance from important work that has been done in this area (Anstrom, 1997; Lindholm & Aclan, 1991; Saville-Troike, 1991; Walqui, 2000; Walqui, 2001). English Learners need richer instructional experiences within the same instructional environment and within the same time frame as native English speakers. In order to do this, schools must begin to restructure the instructional format as well as the use of time within the

school day and year. The current educational plan for ELs is shortsighted, lacking an emphasis on academic preparation.

With respect to program placement, policy and instruction there are multiple ways in which schools and policy makers alike may address the issues concerning the academic preparation of ELs – especially at the secondary level. Several fundamental issues must be addressed with ELs in mind: class placement, teacher training, school reform, and student assessment.

8.3 Class placement

Policy makers, teachers, administrators and counselors can all do their part to ensure that ELs are not placed in low-track, remedial, or non-college preparatory classes. Access to challenging curriculum appears to be among the largest barriers to academic success for ELs, much more than language proficiency. Policy makers can improve the situation by calling attention to and eliminating the practice of placing ELs in non-college preparatory coursework. School, district, and state oversight can ensure that SDAIE and sheltered class sections cover the same quantity of material and the same standards as mainstream sections of the same class. This might happen first in science and math, then in social science and English as schools begin to adjust their programs, schedules, infrastructure, teacher capacity and training. Entry into challenging coursework alone, however, will not fix the problem. Teachers must be adequately prepared to meet the needs of long-term ELs and recent immigrants alike.

8.4 Teacher qualifications and professional development

The qualifications of teachers who teach ELs and their commitment to that teaching will impact the quality of education ELs receive. Gándara and Rumberger (2002) found that English Learners in California are four times more likely to have an uncredentialed teacher than their English-Only peers. While the state of California collects information on the qualifications of the teachers of EL students, only the number of teachers providing services, not their qualification, is reported to the public¹⁵.

At minimum, teachers must receive training and preparation in teaching ELs. Also reported in Gándara and Rumberger (2002) is the finding that teachers report that less than 7% of the in-service training they receive addresses meeting the needs of the EL population. In a state where one-fourth of the students are English Learners, at minimum one-fourth of the teacher in-service training should be designed to assist teachers in meeting the needs of this population. In addition, those teachers who have received pre-service CLAD training often report that the CLAD certification is just the beginning of the process, rather than the finite response it was meant to be.

The placement of under-prepared teachers in challenging ESL/ELD positions frequently results in a high rate of teacher turnover. Katz documents an annual turnover rate of 75% within an ELD department (1999). Teacher attitudes may also pose a problem, as some “teachers drafted into teaching students may or may not be willing to participate in staff development that will help them serve (the EL) population” (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992, p.13). Placing unqualified and/or unwilling teachers in the position of educating ELs in ESL and content-area SDAIE¹⁶ classes diminishes the quality of educational services offered to ELs.

8.5 School reform: more efficient use of time

Another way to ensure parity of academic and linguistic instruction is through the creative use of time, during the traditional school day and year. In a review of studies of school reform and ELs, Olsen and Jaramillo (2000) point to the success of block scheduling in meeting EL students’ academic needs. The authors outline several of the ways in which moving away from the traditional six-period

¹⁵ http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/lc/staff/St_LC_tea.asp?cChoice=St_LC_tea&cYear=2001-02

¹⁶ SDAIE Specially designed academic instruction in English is a form of sheltered English content area instruction for English Learners.

master schedule enriches EL learning experiences, from academic rigor to mentoring. Assignment of fewer subjects for longer periods of time during the day, but across fewer weeks permits ELs to concentrate more intensely on a few academic areas. Teachers are better able to mentor ELs when they focus on fewer students during the course of a day and form stronger individual relationships: key to ensuring academic success over the long term. Breaking the school year into 6 to 8 week segments prevents migrant students from losing an entire semester's worth of credits when they travel with their families. During traditional down time, schools can provide additional intensive English literacy and content area enrichment for low performing ELs.

Reform efforts, however, must make clear that the needs of ELs are to be met by all, not just a select few teachers, administrators, and schools. Only through raising the expectations for all involved will schools improve the education of ELs. Unfortunately, reform and restructuring often result in "unequal distribution of change-oriented teachers" and "competition for restructuring funds" (Olsen, 1995, p.226), leaving those students not at reform-based schools with even fewer services than before (Gándara, 1994).

Tracking teaches students that learning occurs in isolation, when in reality, learning rarely occurs in a vacuum. Educated apart from the college preparatory discourse, ELs are inadequately informed as to the breadth of their choices, the consequence of taking one class over another (DeLany, 1991; Katz, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). As immigrant parents are often the least familiar with the structure of US high schools, this is especially disadvantageous. The active integration of ELs into extracurricular activities will help to provide them access to the competitive discourse of mainstream American society (Gee, 2000). All students lose out when deprived of intellectual, social and professional input from individuals with diverse perspectives.

8.6 Assessment: little knowledge of what ELs really know

The question of adequate assessment for ELs is two-tiered: assessment for diagnostic purposes, as well as high stakes assessment for accountability measures. Assessment for diagnostic purposes, done correctly can be used to ensure that ELs receive any necessary literacy or content area interventions. High stakes assessments such as graduation exams often penalize the English Learner population at a higher rate than the general population. Limited understanding of what ELs really know is due in part to difficulties in assessing non-native English speakers in English (Lam, 1993; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994). The assessment of non-native English speakers in English is riddled with limitations—norming bias, linguistic bias, limited predictive validity— but, there are options and alternatives to traditional means of assessment in English alone.

For recent immigrants in the state of California, the questions of high stakes assessment is especially relevant as the state implements the High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) as a graduation requirement in the spring of 2004¹⁷. While graduation from high school does, and should, require a minimal level of academic competence; there are numerous ways by which students might demonstrate this competence. For example, alternate forms of the exam might be administered in the student's primary language—a practice adopted by the state of New York with its Regents Exam. If there is concern regarding the reliability and validity of the primary language exam (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994), some combination of the exam and coursework may demonstrate capacity. In order to demonstrate both linguistic and academic competency, recent immigrants might combine proficient performance on the CELDT with demonstration of subject matter competence in the primary language.

Alternative accommodations, however, do not address the academic needs of long-term ELs. Unlike recent immigrants who likely developed high levels of subject matter competence prior to immigration, long-term ELs are likely to enter high school without the minimal level of academic competence necessary to pass a graduation exam. As demonstrated by the significantly lower levels of academic achievement in this study, long-term ELs will require some form of academic intervention in order to demonstrate the subject matter competence necessary to pass a graduation exam.

¹⁷ <http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/cahsee/>

Again, the federal legislation outlined in NCLB¹⁸ requires annual assessment of the academic attainment of all students. These requirements allow enough leeway that such assessment could provide more meaningful results regarding English Learners' progress. For example, a California state Assembly bill (AB 1419, Hancock)¹⁹ has been introduced this year to require the development and implementation of a primary language academic achievement test to improve the assessment of English Learners. One approach might be assessment in the primary language for the first few years of an immigrant student's stay in the US, and later in conjunction with the English language accountability measure. This would provide a more accurate depiction of English Learners' academic competencies.

9. Next steps

For all three secondary EL cohorts, providing appropriately rigorous academic content that is linguistically accessible can be done. Research regarding CALLA strategies, SDAIE strategies and sheltered instruction never intended to water down the academic content, but rather to modify the presentation of material (Chamot, 1995; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). Academic parity and the 'closing of the gap' (Gándara & Rumberger, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 2001; Vernez, 1999) will not occur if schools continue to provide English Learners with a pared down version of content area curriculum (Scarcella, 2002; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002). With increased access to rigorous curriculum, extended instructional time, or a combination of the two, English Learners will have a better chance of exiting high school with the same level of academic preparation as the native English speaking population.

Access to rigorous academic instruction for English Learners at the elementary level remains critical. Testimony to the failure of English Only programs to meet the academic needs of ELs is the fact that 94% of the long-term ELs at River Bend High participated in English-Only (now termed SEI) curriculum for 70% or more of their elementary school experience. Currently high school age, these long-term ELs are critically behind academically; their elementary years were spent struggling to acquire the English necessary to survive in an English Only classroom while their native English speaking peers were developing math, science and literacy skills.

Extended day and year instructional periods for both the acquisition of academic English literacy and the development of content area proficiencies will improve the academic achievement of elementary age ELs as well. Supplemental time and access to core content and academic literacy are necessary so that English Learners in English Only programs do not fall behind academically. With such programs in place, ELs may someday experience full participation in college preparatory curriculum.

In sum, the academic preparation of ELs plays a much larger role than previously believed. An overhaul of the academic opportunities afforded ELs as a result of their limited English proficient status must occur. Limited English proficiency need not mean that ELs receive substandard academic preparation. Rather, EL status should ensure access to the most rigorous academic preparation, as schools begin to address the academic disadvantage of ELs, not just the linguistic one.

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¹⁸ <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pr/nclb/>

¹⁹ AB 1419 would require the SBE to develop and adopt, by 2007, an achievement test in the most common primary language of the pupils enrolled in public schools in the 2001-2002 school year other than English, and would upon adoption of the test authorize pupils with that primary language to take the test in that language in lieu of taking the test in English.

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