

The Intersection of Accountability and Language: Can Reading Intervention Replace English Language Development?

Rebecca M. Callahan
University of Texas, Austin

Abstract

The language in recent education policy equates academic achievement with reading proficiency for English language learners (ELLs). In response to federal and state accountability efforts focused on reading, California high schools began to substitute reading intervention programs for English language development (ELD) curricula and instruction. This study compared the effect of a reading intervention program to that of a comprehensive ELD program on ELLs' achievement at one California high school. Ultimately, the comparison cohort earned higher achievement test scores than the reading intervention program cohort. Perhaps most striking, however, was the sheer proportion of ELLs excluded from services due to reading levels beyond the program exit level. As educators work to improve ELL achievement, the importance of curricula that meet students at their linguistic and academic level cannot be understated.

Introduction

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), literacy has emerged as a primary measure of achievement for all students. The importance of literacy development is twofold for English language learners (ELLs) whose progress is measured by both English proficiency under Title III of NCLB, and grade-level language arts achievement under Title I. Equating literacy to academic achievement has instructional implications for all students, but especially for ELLs. Teachers of ELLs have traditionally provided instruction in the four domains of literacy: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Well-developed programs encompass language development across

the content areas as well as through discrete English as a second language (ESL)/English language development (ELD)¹ instruction (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). The interpretation of literacy as reading alone divorces language from its interactive and communicative functions. It is this shift in policy that prompted this study, which investigates the effects of one reading intervention program as opposed to traditional reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction on secondary-level ELL achievement.

Accountability: Language Measures and Program Pressures

The language regarding literacy development in Title I of NCLB (2002) focuses on reading, with little attention paid to listening, speaking, and writing. This is a critical omission for students acquiring English as a second language (August & Hakuta, 1997). Balanced literacy instruction incorporates background information, vocabulary development and strategies for constructing meaning through listening, writing, and speaking, as well as reading (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). When literacy instruction focuses primarily, if not solely, on reading, fewer content area connections are possible and fewer opportunities occur to develop written and oral proficiency.

For ELLs, the distinction between academic competence and linguistic proficiency is not uncomplicated (Abedi, 2002; Lam, 1993). Title I of NCLB (2002) blurs the line between these two competencies: equating academic achievement to performance on English Language Arts assessments. Titles I and III of NCLB require the closure of existing achievement gaps, both academic and linguistic, in order to ensure federal funding. Fiscal pressure can prompt educators to adopt quick fixes to boost the achievement of students performing below grade level (Glatthorn & Fontana, 2000), subjecting ELLs and other at-risk students to reactionary, rather than proactive changes in instructional programs.

Language: Proficiency, Development, and Achievement

Adolescent Language and Literacy Development

Adolescent ELLs face two key tasks during secondary school: to develop the English literacy skills necessary to navigate the secondary curriculum, and to demonstrate content area mastery. Literacy instruction must not only engage students' interest, but also prepare them to meet the demands of their content area classes (Alvermann, 2002). Literacy research has traditionally focused on helping students meet academic requirements in order to fully participate in society (Hinchman, 1998). The instruction on which the bulk of literacy research focuses includes an array of reading, writing, listening, and speaking instructional processes.

In a recent review of the literature, Meltzer and Hamann (2004) outline the intersection of adolescent literacy development and the language learning needs of ELLs. The authors show that the best practices in adolescent literacy development encompass an integration of all four language domains and content area learning; these best practices are also the most effective for adolescent ELLs. Research has shown that the most effective language instruction for ELLs includes strategy instruction, content area language, and conceptual frameworks for understanding new learning (Crandall, Jaramillo, Olsen, & Peyton, 2002; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). All of these instructional and pedagogical models value and emphasize the integration of the different language domains with content area cognitive development.

Learning English does not occur in isolation, rather it is highly context dependent. Content-based ESL instruction is most effective when language is introduced, developed, and applied in a natural learning situation (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). In particular, strategy instruction in reading increases content area comprehension (Jiménez & Gámez, 1996). The integration of skill and strategy instruction is meant to meet both the linguistic and academic needs of adolescent ELLs (Jiménez & Gámez, 1996; Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 2000). Teachers in high school ELD classrooms are faced with a complex task; they must develop both language fluency and literacy skills in their students (Harklau, 1999; Olsen, 1997). One way to ensure that language fluency and literacy skills develop simultaneously is to expose ELLs to high levels of academic language instruction embedded in content area learning activities (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). This delicate balance of content and language instruction is easily disturbed when changes in educational policy force a shift in instructional practices.

Multiple Domains

While recent education policy equates literacy with reading, second-language acquisition standards cover instruction and assessment in four domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (TESOL, 1997). The importance of all four language domains is emphasized in the research dealing with academic English instruction. Scarcella (1996) argues that ELLs and other non-native English speakers require exposure to academic registers through reading and listening, as well as ample opportunities to produce the language through speaking and writing.

The interdependence of language domains is especially evident in second-language learning situations; oral skills influence writing development (Schleppegrell, 1996) and writing instruction improves reading comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2003). Instruction integrating the multiple domains of language facilitates ELLs' overall academic development. Moje, Young, Readence, and Moore (2000) warn against narrowly defining adolescent literacy instruction as reading alone, citing the need of struggling readers to experience all facets

of language in order to develop critical literacy skills. To both demonstrate and develop academic competency, ELLs' literacy skills must span all four domains.

The inclusion of content area instruction in the English-reading classroom (Shih, 1992) further develops students' writing, speaking, and listening skills. Genre-specific writing instruction can improve students' ability to meet content area literacy requirements throughout the grade levels (Ferris, 1994). Demonstration of content area understanding requires a certain level of competence across all language domains (Zamel & Spack, 1998). Content area mastery at the secondary level depends on proficiency in not only reading, but also writing, listening, and speaking.

Language, Literacy, and Achievement

While an ELL's academic achievement often reflects his or her level of English proficiency, it is argued that the two are interdependent rather than interchangeable (Cummins, 1984; García-Vázquez, Vázquez, López, & Ward, 1997; Xu, 1991). Lam (1993) warns of the limitations inherent in assessing the academic competency of ELLs in English. Without a clear understanding of the role of language proficiency in testing, any assessment of ELLs may measure language proficiency rather than academic competence. Research has attempted to isolate the effect of language proficiency on achievement. Wang and Goldschmidt (1999) found that the effect of track placement on the achievement of linguistic minority students varied based on the level of English proficiency. In addition, track placement itself has a greater effect on high school ELLs' grades and math test scores than level of English proficiency (Callahan, 2005). While English proficiency clearly influences ELLs' academic performance, it is arguably not equivalent to academic competency.

The instructional content—both academic and linguistic—of ELLs' course offerings will potentially affect both their English-language acquisition and their academic achievement. Literacy instruction and the language learning environment affect how immigrant and linguistic minority students negotiate the academic requirements of a secondary system (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Changes in program offerings affect the quality and quantity of both academic and linguistic content to which ELLs are exposed. Observational studies have documented the detrimental effects of the academic segregation high school ELLs sometimes experience on their academic achievement (Harklau, 1994; Katz, 1999). Isolated from the academic and social mainstream, ELLs often find little opportunity to develop their English-language proficiency skills.

Recent Immigrants and Long-Term ELLs: Length of Residency and Prior Schooling

The structure inherent in comprehensive ELD programs and in the corresponding language acquisition standards anticipates that students advance approximately one level per academic year (Warren, 2004). Recent immigrant adolescents with middle and/or high school experience prior to immigration encounter relatively little difficulty progressing through the levels of English proficiency (Spaulding, Carolino, & Amen, 2004). In addition, these recent immigrants are less likely to struggle academically regardless of their level of English proficiency (Freeman et al., 2002). However, recent immigrants who have missed a year or more of schooling prior to immigration often take longer to acquire English and to meet grade-level standards in math, science, and social science (Freeman et al.). An additional group of ELLs exists for consideration at the high school level. Educated primarily in U.S. schools, long-term ELLs demonstrate considerable oral fluency, yet lack the academic literacy and content area proficiency necessary for mainstream success (Freeman et al.). Each group of ELLs presents a unique set of linguistic and academic needs.

Purpose of the Present Study

Secondary ELLs in California have relatively few ESL curricula options compared to their elementary age counterparts. Statewide textbook adoptions are made in Grades K through 8 only.² The lack of a state sanctioned textbook selection in Grades 9 to 12 results in a disincentive for textbook manufacturers to develop and produce curricula and materials that may be purchased by only a handful of the state's 1,000 districts. In an attempt to ensure that ELLs receive adequate reading instruction, the 2002 Reading/Language Arts/ ELD Adoption³ recommended a reading intervention program for ELLs, who, by definition, read below grade level in English. The ELL population in this study, as well as in the state of California, includes ELLs from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who have been identified by the school system first as linguistic minority, speaking a language other than English in the home, and then as limited English proficient in need of linguistic support services. The combination of limited secondary ELD curricular options and educational policies focused on reading led educators to place ELLs in reading intervention programs meant to improve English literacy skills, but focused primarily on reading.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect on ELL achievement of replacing a comprehensive ELD program that entailed reading, writing,

listening, and speaking with a structured reading intervention program. The effect of each program on high school ELL achievement was measured by ELL performance on the California Standards Test (CST) of Language Arts, as well as semester GPA. In addition, the effectiveness of the reading intervention program with its targeted population would be analyzed with respect to English proficiency level and length of residency.

Site History

In 2002, the Clarksville⁴ school board adopted a reading intervention program for all students scoring in the bottom quartile in reading proficiency; by definition, nearly all ELLs fell into this category. The board chose a state recommended reading intervention program for use in secondary schools. Due to scheduling constraints, the school board decided that the reading intervention would replace the existing ELD program and curriculum. As the intervention program focused primarily on reading, yet purported to integrate writing, listening, and speaking as well, this did not seem entirely unacceptable to the educators involved in the decision-making process.

Prior to the adoption of the reading intervention program, Clarksville High offered a traditional comprehensive ELD program; ELL students received two class periods of language instruction per day. At the early ELD levels (ELD1–ELD3), students enrolled in one class period focused on reading and vocabulary development, and one period focused on writing and grammar instruction. Listening and speaking skills were interwoven throughout both curricula at all levels. In the advanced levels (ELD4–ELD5), ELLs enrolled in one class period of grade-level English instruction (e.g., English 10), and one period of either ELD4 or ELD5, integrated reading and writing instruction for a total of two periods of language instruction as well. The reading intervention program was expected to take up either two or three class periods in ELLs' schedules, relatively comparable to the two periods of the traditional ELD program for all ELLs. Placement into the reading intervention program was based not on students' ELD level, but rather on their reading proficiency scores. While the majority of ELLs placed in the reading intervention program were from the first three ELD levels, a few more advanced ELLs were placed into the program as well.

The advanced ELD classes were designed to develop the literacy skills required in high school content areas. The ELD5 curriculum was unique to each grade level as an ELL could potentially advance to ELD5 and remain at that level without reclassification. In order to continue to provide linguistic services to all ELLs until reclassification, the ELD faculty chose to develop unique ELD5 curriculum for each grade level, allowing a student to take from 1 to 4 years of the course as necessary. The ELD faculty implemented this program to ensure that all ELLs received linguistic services up to the point of reclassification. For the most part, the same ELD faculty members, all

credentialed to teach ELLs, taught both the comprehensive ELD classes in 2002–2003, and proceeded to teach the reading intervention program in 2003–2004.

Due to their limited English proficiency, the ELLs at Clarksville High were the direct recipients of a change in instructional program resulting from shifts in educational policy at the state and federal level. This is not to single out Clarksville High; the priority given to reading intervention extends far beyond the local level. During the period of this study, educators at secondary schools throughout California chose to replace their standing ELD curricula with one of the reading intervention programs recommended by the state under the Reading/Language Arts/ELD Adoption. This study was designed to evaluate the effect of the reading intervention curricula as opposed to the traditional ELD program on ELL achievement.

Research Questions

This study analyzes the effect of replacing comprehensive ELD instruction with a reading intervention program on ELLs' achievement by asking: (a) Which program is more effective in developing high school ELLs' overall language skills, a traditional ELD program or a reading intervention program? (b) Within the treatment (reading intervention) group, were achievement effects correlated with either overall language proficiency level or length of residency in U.S. schools? During the data collection process it became clear that such a large proportion of ELLs would in fact *not* be served by the reading intervention program and that descriptive statistics to define the sample would be necessary to answer the question: (c) Which ELLs were not served by the reading intervention program, and why?

Method

Design and Sample

Site description

Clarksville has historically been the urban center of a primarily agricultural county in California's Sacramento Valley region. During the study period, Clarksville High enrolled 2,024 students; approximately 37% ($n = 754$) were considered linguistic minority, speaking a language other than English in the home. All linguistic minority students were classified as Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), or ELL/LEP. ELLs made up 19% ($n = 389$) of the high school population and other linguistic minority students (IFEP and RFEP) accounted for 18% ($n = 365$). For the most part, ELLs at Clarksville High read below grade level, as reclassification criteria to move to RFEP status required that students test above the 26th percentile

in reading at their grade level. Students reading in the bottom quartile were considered below grade level. The education of ELLs was, and continues to be a pressing issue at Clarksville High; ELLs comprised 97% of the students who failed the language arts section in California High School Exit Exam in the 2002–2003 academic year.

During the fall of 2003, the ELL population consisted of 220 boys and 169 girls distributed across four grades; 91% reported speaking Spanish at home. Nearly half of the ELL population demonstrated advanced English proficiency: 51% demonstrated proficiency at levels 1 through 3 and 49% at levels 4 or 5 as measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). ELLs must demonstrate academic as well as linguistic proficiency to be eligible for reclassification to RFEP and to exit the ESL/ELD program⁵.

Length of residency

Students were determined to be either recent immigrants or long-term ELLs using parameters set forth by Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) and adapted in Freeman et al. (2002). Long-term ELLs are defined as those ELLs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 7 years or more (Olsen & Jaramillo). The use of 5 years or fewer to define recent immigrants also draws from California ELL policy; the state expects ELLs to advance one language proficiency level per year on the CELDT, and gain proficiency within five years (Warren, 2004). Over 60% ($n = 239$) of Clarksville High's ELLs were long-term ELLs enrolled in U.S. schools for 7 years or more.

Analytic sample(s)

The present study adopted a two-tiered approach in analyzing the impact of the reading intervention program in question. First, within-program treatment effects were assessed for those students enrolled in the reading intervention program ($n = 212$). Then, cross-program effects were assessed comparing the performance of those students enrolled in the reading intervention program to the performance of a comparable group of ELL students enrolled in the traditional ELD program ($n = 276$) during the previous school year. The treatment group received language instruction via the adopted reading intervention program. The comparison group received language instruction via the traditional ELD program at Clarksville High during the year prior to reading intervention program implementation.

Data Collection Procedures

Working with the Clarksville High bilingual resource teacher, we ran queries using the school's electronic student database to collect demographic information for all ELLs at the site. In addition, we ran similar queries to collect students' academic performance data. Demographic data collected for treatment and comparison group students include ethnicity, gender, grade level, and years in U.S. schools. English proficiency level was measured using

student performance on the CELDT. Students' CELDT Total scores combine their reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency and provide an essential control for overall English proficiency. While knowledge of students' primary language proficiency would have aided greatly in assessing prior literacy level, that information was unavailable for the present study.

For students in the treatment group only, program based on reading comprehension scores were collected at the end of each semester from the classroom teachers. For both treatment and comparison group students, semester GPA, and CST Language Arts scores were collected.

Analytic Approach

To begin, descriptive statistics were run to answer the final research question, which is who was served by the reading intervention program? These results address the fit of the chosen program to the target population of Clarksville High ELLs. Second, within-treatment group analyses were run to assess the effectiveness of the reading intervention program on the participant population when controlling for the length of residency and English proficiency level. Linear regression models were developed to predict the following outcomes: GPA, CST Language Arts performance and reading comprehension performance within the treatment group. The Clarksville High ELD teachers questioned whether the reading intervention program would prove more effective for either recent immigrants or for long-term ELLs due to their different academic and linguistic needs. As such, analyses by the length of residency contrasted the performance of recent immigrants and long-term ELLs. Lastly, a final analytic model was developed to compare the achievement of reading intervention program and comprehensive ELD program participants as measured by CST Language Arts performance and GPA. The model controlled on instructional program placement, gender, ethnicity, grade level, length of residency as measured by years in U.S. schools, and overall English proficiency level.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the percentage of ELL placement and distribution during fall and spring semesters of the treatment year (2003–2004). At the start of academic year, 53% ($n = 205$) of the ELL population placed into the reading intervention program; by the start of spring semester, the distribution of students served and not served by the reading intervention program had reversed. At the start of the spring semester, only 36% ($n = 138$) of Clarksville High ELLs remained in the program; 74 of the ELLs placed in the reading

Table 1

English Language Learner Placement and Distribution (N = 389)

Placement		Fall	Spring
Reading intervention program	Level 1	11%	7%
	Level 2	16%	6%
	Level 3	15%	16%
	Level 4	11%	7%
	Subtotal	53%	36%
	<i>n</i>	205	138
Non-program placement	Mainstream	37%	54%
	Special education	10%	10%
	Subtotal	47%	64%
	<i>n</i>	184	251

intervention program tested out at the end of the fall semester and 7 new ELLs entered the school. During the spring semester, a full 64% of Clarksville High ELLs did not receive discrete language instruction services.

Within-Group Analyses

The second research question refers to the effectiveness of the reading intervention program within the treatment group. For those students placed in the reading intervention program, a within-group model was developed to control on gender, ethnicity, and grade level while measuring the effectiveness of the program by overall English proficiency level (CELDT Total) and the length of residency, comparing long-term ELLs with recent immigrants. Academic outcomes included fall and spring reading scores, fall and spring GPA, and CST Language Arts performance. Student variables were fit to the following regression equation to predict each of the above five academic outcomes: $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Ethnicity} + \beta_3 \text{ Long-term ELL status} + \beta_4 \text{ Grade level} + \beta_5 \text{ CELDT Total} + e$ (where e refers to the unobserved error). Table 2 shows the standardized coefficients and standard errors of each of the independent variables in predicting the five academic outcome measures listed above.

Table 2

Treatment Group Analysis: Regression Estimates for Reading Scores, GPA, and California Standards Test (CST) Language Arts

Measure	Fall reading score	Spring reading score	Fall GPA	Spring GPA	CST Language Arts
Female	.176* (1.478)	.275* (1.857)	.165*** (0.137)	.263*** (0.102)	.103 (4.712)
Latino	.150 (2.282)	-.250* (2.901)	-.030 (0.213)	-.063 (0.156)	.001 (8.552)
Long-term ELL	-.366*** (1.690)	-.365** (2.146)	-.636*** (0.155)	-.682*** (0.112)	-.158 (4.996)
Grade level	.197** (0.715)	.054 (0.974)	.044 (0.068)	.093 (0.074)	-.226** (2.670)
CELDT Total	.441*** (0.782)	.371** (0.971)	.215** (0.074)	.176* (0.072)	.461*** (2.431)

Note. Values are standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Among treatment group participants, Table 2 shows that the effectiveness of the reading intervention program varied greatly by gender, length of residency or long-term ELL status, grade level, and overall English proficiency. Girls scored significantly higher semester GPAs and in-class reading scores, reflective of overall differences in classroom performance by gender. There were no differences in performance on the CST Language Arts exam by gender within the treatment group. Grade level proved of mixed significance, positively predicting fall reading scores and negatively predicting CST Language Arts scores.

Long-term ELLs enrolled in the reading intervention program earned significantly lower fall and spring reading scores and GPAs than their recent immigrant peers did, even when controlling for gender, ethnicity, and language proficiency level. This finding with respect to the length of residency reflects the low levels of academic achievement observed among long-term ELLs school wide.

Perhaps the most important finding within the treatment group deals with the program effect via overall English proficiency level. Students with higher levels of English proficiency as measured by the CELDT Total earned higher in-class reading scores and higher GPAs both semesters, as well as higher CST Language Arts scores at the end of the academic year. The significant effect of overall English proficiency indicates that the reading intervention program is more effective with students already at the higher levels of English proficiency than it is with less English-proficient students.

Cross-Group Analyses: The Effects of Reading Intervention vs. ELD on Achievement

Ideally, half of the population of interest would receive the treatment (reading intervention) and half would receive the control (traditional ELD); however, program implementation required that all eligible ELLs be placed in the reading intervention program during the period of the study, 2003–2004 academic year. Between 48% and 65% of the Clarksville High ELLs scored above the reading intervention program exit levels on the program placement materials, and subsequently were not placed into the treatment group. Table 3 demonstrates the equivalent composition of the two groups (e.g., no significant differences in composition on key indicator variables). However, while these students did not receive the reading intervention program, nor could they serve as a control group as their reading proficiency in English was significantly higher than that of the treatment group. In addition, these students did not receive ELD instruction during the period of the study, making them dually inappropriate as a comparison group.

Thus, performance of ELLs in the treatment group ($n = 212$) during the 2003–2004 academic year was compared to performance of ELLs in the comparison group ($n = 276$) drawn from students enrolled in Clarksville High ELD levels 1 through 3 during the prior academic year (2002–2003). Students placed in the beginning three ELD levels in the 2002–2003 school year proved to be the rough equivalent of students who were placed in the reading intervention program the following year (2003–2004). The comparison group received language instruction via the traditional ELD program, and the treatment group received language instruction via the reading intervention program.

Results of an analysis of variance comparing the composition of the treatment and comparison groups on gender, ethnicity, length of residency (years in the United States), grade level, and overall English proficiency level (CELDT Total) can be viewed in Table 3. Means and standard deviations are listed for both the treatment and comparison groups; there were no significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups on any of the independent variables listed above.

Student variables were fit to the following regression equation to predict CST Language Arts performance and spring GPA: $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ Treatment cohort +

Table 3

Treatment and Comparison Group Composition: Means and Standard Deviations for Key Background Variables and Overall English Language Proficiency (CELDT) Scores

Variable	Treatment ^a n = 212		Comparison n = 276	
	M	SD	M	SD
Female	0.429	0.496	0.478	0.500
Latino	0.882	0.320	0.862	0.350
Years in the United States	5.820	4.010	5.833	3.860
Grade level	10.632	1.04	10.699	0.77
CELDT Total	3.035	1.041	3.065	1.237

^aThe treatment group includes ELLs who were ever placed in the reading intervention program—fall or spring semester.

Table 4

Cross-Group Analysis: Regression Estimates for California Standards Test (CST) Language Arts and GPA

Measure	CST Language Arts	Spring GPA
Treatment Group	-.128** (2.956)	.068 (0.080)
Female	.095 (2.971)	.180*** (0.078)
Latino	.043 (4.903)	-.065 (0.120)
Years in the United States	-.074 (0.456)	-.431*** (0.012)
Grade Level	-.206*** (2.146)	.194*** (0.046)
CELDT Total	.369*** (1.552)	.185*** (0.038)

Note. Values are standardized coefficients with standards errors in parentheses.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

β_2 Gender + β_3 Ethnicity + β_4 Years in the United States + β_5 Grade level + β_6 CELDT Total + e (where e refers to the unobserved error). Table 4 shows the standardized coefficients and standard errors of each of the independent variables in predicting CST Language Arts performance and spring GPA.

As illustrated in Table 4, placement in the treatment group, the reading intervention program, was a significant negative predictor of ELL performance on the CST Language Arts exam. In addition, grade level was also a significant negative predictor of performance on the CST Language Arts exam, with student performance declining as grade level increased. Overall English proficiency level as measured by the CELDT Total was a significant positive predictor, with ELL performance improving on the exam as their language proficiency level increased. Placement in the treatment group had no effect on student GPA.

The effect of the reading intervention program on ELL achievement is perhaps best explained using the example of an *average* ELL; means for both the treatment and comparison cohorts are presented in Table 3. The *average* ELL enrolled in either the treatment or the comparison cohort at Clarksville High would be a 10th-grade Latino male who has been in U.S. schools for 5.8 years, and earned a CELDT Total score of 3. When placed in the reading intervention program, we would expect the student to earn a CST Language Arts score of 267 points. Conversely, if the same student were placed in the traditional ELD program, we would expect him to earn a CST Language Arts score of 273 points; approximately 6 points more. The difference, although small, proves statistically significant (see Table 4).

For girls, program placement carries higher stakes; potential eligibility for reclassification and movement out of the ELD program. For a 10th-grade Latina female at the highest level of English proficiency (CELDT 5), program placement means the difference between reclassification to RFEP or remaining as an ELL. Placed in the reading intervention program, she would earn a CST score of 292, below the minimum threshold for reclassification required by the California Department of Education. However, in the comprehensive ELD program, the same girl would earn over 300, thereby meeting the minimum score of Basic on the CST Language Arts exam required for reclassification to RFEP.

Discussion

A Reading Intervention Program for Whom?

Analyses presented in this study suggest that several factors ultimately impacted the effect of the reading intervention program on ELL achievement at Clarksville High, at both the individual and school administrative levels. Perhaps the greatest impact was felt on a school organization level; ELLs who tested out of the reading intervention program were mainstreamed into grade-

level appropriate English classes. This happened not because their literacy skills were at par with those of their native English-speaking peers, but rather because they read above the sixth-grade exit level designated by the adopted reading intervention program. Although they remained classified as ELL, these students no longer received discrete ELD/ESL instruction. Over half of the mainstreamed students received grades of “D” or “F” in their content area classes.

The ELD faculty at Clarksville quickly recognized the problem and during the spring semester implemented a study skills course for those ELLs testing out of the reading intervention program, yet unable to succeed in the mainstream curriculum. The Clarksville ELD faculty felt and student performance suggested that reading above the sixth-grade level was not sufficient to ensure success in the mainstream high school curriculum. While the reading intervention program may or may not be effective for high school ELLs reading below the sixth-grade level, the consequences for those ELLs it *does not* serve warrant serious consideration.

In response to NCLB (2002) and other accountability efforts focused on reading, educators will likely continue to replace comprehensive ELD programs with reading intervention curricula. As educators move to adopt curricula to improve the literacy skills of all students and ELLs in particular, grade-level linguistic and academic standards must be taken into account. The program in question was designed to align with elementary, *not* secondary, level English Language Arts and ELD standards as defined by the California Department of Education. A more appropriate program would carefully align to the grade-level linguistic and academic requirements of its target population, in this case 9th- to 12th-grade ELLs.

Program Effectiveness Within the Treatment Population

Language proficiency

The consistent effects of English proficiency level on all five academic outcomes suggest that the reading intervention program is more effective with students who demonstrate higher levels of English proficiency than it is for students at the lower levels of English proficiency. These results suggest that the reading intervention program may be least effective with the least English proficient students, a serious concern if the program is to replace a comprehensive ELD curriculum.

In addition, the constraints placed on enrollment in the reading intervention program must be considered. Enrollment in the reading intervention program was limited to secondary students reading at elementary school levels. The restrictions placed on program participation results in a limited range of potential growth and achievement for high school students. Despite the need for further linguistic and academic services for secondary

ELLs, the reading intervention program chosen is simply not designed to exit students at secondary reading levels with the literacy skills necessary to navigate high school curriculum. The program was designed neither to serve students at the secondary level nor to align with secondary ELD or English Language Arts standards.

Length of residency: Recent immigrants and long-term ELLs

Although recent immigrants in the treatment group earned significantly higher GPAs than their long-term ELL counterparts in the same program, this cannot be attributed solely to the reading intervention program. This achievement disparity occurs outside the program as well. School-wide, recent immigrants outperformed long-term ELLs, and larger studies confirm this pattern (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). This may be due to the fact that many recent immigrants at the high school level enter U.S. schools with already well developed literacy skills, something long-term ELLs often lack (Freeman et al., 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Of course, differences in the reading scores and grades also undoubtedly reflect classroom attitude and behavior, which vary by length of residency.

Program Effectiveness: Comparing Reading Intervention With Comprehensive ELD

While the difference in GPA between the comparison and treatment groups is insignificant, the real story lies elsewhere. The comparison group receiving ELD instruction earned significantly higher CST Language Arts scores than the reading intervention program treatment group did. As this sample is relatively small, and by no means the result of random assignment, further exploration is necessary to determine the causality of this relationship. If this pattern holds across other trials, replacing a comprehensive ELD program with a reading intervention program would appear ill-advised at best and pedagogical malpractice at worst. The effect of the reading intervention program on CST Language Arts scores is especially significant as exit from ELL programs in California is based in part on ELLs' CST performance⁶.

Any program effects must also be taken within the appropriate context. The fact that nearly two thirds of Clarksville High's ELL population was not served by this particular reading intervention program illustrates the negative consequences of reactionary educational policy. In attempting to comply with both federal and state policy focused on reading instruction, educators at the district level chose a new curriculum from limited offerings without necessarily the time or the ability to first assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing curriculum. A program that fails to meet the linguistic and possibly academic needs of the students for whom it was chosen seems a poor match for any school or program.

Policy Implications

The program and policy lessons learned from these data are twofold: program fit (grade and age appropriate) and program content (reading vs. reading, writing, listening, and speaking). First, the reading intervention program did not meet the grade-level language requirements of high school ELLs. By the second semester, nearly two thirds of Clarksville High's ELLs demonstrated language proficiency levels beyond that of the program adopted and were not being served by the reading intervention placement. The sheer number of students *not* served by the reading intervention program provides more than sufficient cause for concern. Despite approval for use in Grades K–8, the program did not meet 9th- to 12th-grade standards.

The lack of alignment to the grade-level English Language Arts and ELD standards sheds light on the need to align curriculum to the educational and linguistic needs of the target population. Currently, the California State Board of Education does not explicitly approve ELD curricula for Grades 9–12; districts are left to adopt programs designed for the middle and late elementary grades. From both a policy standpoint and an educator's perspective, this practice severely limits the curricular options available for adoption in secondary ESL/ELD programs. ESL/ELD is a much smaller curricular market than math and science. Without the lure of statewide secondary ELD adoptions, publishers understand that their programs may only be selected by a few districts, and thus have little incentive to develop secondary level standards-based instructional programs that align with new literacy and reading policies as well.

Second, with respect to the effectiveness of the program content, the program did not significantly help ELLs to meet local and statewide ELL exit criteria. The program is a *reading* intervention program; while it does integrate some writing, listening and speaking instruction, nowhere do its authors claim to provide a comprehensive language program with thorough written and oral literacy components. In the process of ensuring compliance with a new policy meant to improve adolescent literacy, educators inadvertently adopted a program that may be less well suited to the actual literacy and language needs of the target population than the preexisting curriculum. The narrow focus on reading appears to have negatively affected overall ELL linguistic achievement, as evidenced by the drop in students' CST scores. Program content included little development of the writing, listening and speaking skills outlined in secondary English Language Arts and ELD standards. If educators hope to help ELLs meet accountability requirements such as those outlined in NCLB (2002), a more holistic approach to language seems necessary.

References

- Abedi, J. (2002). Standardized achievement tests and English language learners: Psychometric issues. *Educational Assessment*, 8(3), 231–257.
- Alvermann, D. (2002). Effective literacy instruction for adolescents. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(2), 189–208.
- August, D., & Hakuta, K. (1997). *Improving schooling for language minority children: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: National Research Council, Institute of Medicine.
- Callahan, R. M. (2005). Tracking and high school English learners: Limiting opportunity to learn. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 305–328.
- Chamot, A. U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1996). The cognitive academic language learning approach: A model for linguistically diverse classrooms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 96(3), 259–273.
- Crandall, J., Jaramillo, A., Olsen, L., & Peyton, J. K. (2002). *Using cognitive strategies to develop English language and literacy*. Washington, DC: ERIC Digest.
- Cummins, J. (1984). Wanted: A theoretical framework for relating language proficiency to academic achievement among bilingual students. In C. Rivera (Ed.), *Language proficiency and academic achievement* (pp. 2–19). Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters Limited.
- Echevarria, J., & Graves, A. W. (1998). *Sheltered content instruction: Teaching English-language learners with diverse abilities*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers.
- Ferris, D. R. (1994). Lexical and syntactic features of ESL writing by students at different levels of L2 proficiency. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 414–420.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2003). Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 46(5), 396–405.
- Freeman, Y. S., Freeman, D. E., & Mercuri, S. (2002). *Closing the achievement gap: How to reach limited-formal-schooling and long-term English learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- García-Vázquez, E., Vázquez, L. A., López, I. C., & Ward, W. (1997). Language proficiency and academic success: Relationships between proficiency in two languages and achievement among Mexican American students. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 21(4), 334–347.
- Glatthorn, A. A., & Fontana, J. (2000). *Coping with standards, tests and accountability: Voices from the classroom*. National Education Association

- Harklau, L. (1994). ESL versus mainstream classes: Contrasting L2 learning environments. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(2), 241–272.
- Harklau, L. (1999). The ESL learning environment in secondary school. In C. J. Faltis & P. Wolfe (Eds.), *So much to say: Adolescents, bilingualism and ESL in the secondary school* (pp. 42–60). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hinchman, K. A., & Moje E. B. (1998). Conversations: Locating the social and political in secondary school literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33(1), 117–128.
- Jiménez, R. T., & Gámez, A. (1996). Literature-based cognitive strategy instruction for middle school Latina/o students. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 40(2), 84–91.
- Katz, S. R. (1999). Teaching in tensions: Latino immigrant youth, their teachers and the structures of schooling. *Teachers College Record*, 100(4), 809–840.
- Lam, T. C. (1993). Testability: A critical issue in testing language minority students with standardized achievement tests. *Measurement & Evaluation in Counseling & Development*, 26(3), 179–191.
- Meltzer, J., & Hamann, E. T. (2004). *Meeting the literacy development needs of adolescent English language learners through content area learning. Part one: Focus on motivation and engagement*. Providence, RI: Education Alliance at Brown University.
- Moje, E. B., Young, J. P., Readence, J. E., & Moore, D. W. (2000). Re-inventing adolescent literacy for new times: Perennial and millennial issues. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 400–410.
- No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. No. 107–110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).
- Olsen, L. (1997). *Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools*. New York: New Press, Distributed by W. W. Norton.
- Olsen, L., & Jaramillo, A. (1999). *Turning the tides of exclusion: A guide for educators and advocates for immigrant students*. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.
- Reese, L., Garnier, H., Gallimore, R., & Goldenberg, C. (2000). Longitudinal analysis of the antecedents of emergent Spanish literacy and middle school English-reading achievement of Spanish-speaking students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 633–662.
- Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., & Fix, M. (2000). *Overlooked and underserved: Immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

- Scarcella, R. (1996). Secondary education in California and second language research: Instructing ESL students in the 1990s. *CATESOL Journal*, 9, 129–152.
- Schleppegrell, M. (1996). Conjunction in spoken English and ESL writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 17(3), 271–285.
- Shih, M. (1992). Beyond comprehension exercises in the ESL academic reading class. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(2), 289–318.
- Spaulding, S., Carolino, B., & Amen, K. (2004). *Immigrant students and secondary school reform: Compendium of best practices*. Washington, DC: The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). (1997). *The ESL standards for pre-K–12 students*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Wang, J., & Goldschmidt, P. (1999). Opportunity to learn, language proficiency, and immigrant status effects on mathematics achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 93(2), 101–111.
- Warren, P. (2004). *A look at the progress of English learner students*. Sacramento, CA: California Legislative Analyst's Office.
- Xu, M. (1991). The impact of English language proficiency on international graduate students perceived academic difficulty. *Research in Higher Education*, 32(5), 557–570.
- Zamel, V., & Spack, R. E. (1998). *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Endnotes

- ¹ For the purposes of this study, ESL and ELD will be used interchangeably. California public schools use the term ELD; however, much of the literature reviewed uses the term ESL.
- ² California Education Code sections 60200–60206. Retrieved February 2, 2006, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/documents/instmatoverview.pdf>
- ³ CDE (2002) Reading/ Language Arts/ English Language Development Adoption (Adopted January 9, 2002). Retrieved February 2, 2006, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/im/rlaeld2002adoption.asp>
- ⁴ A pseudonym.
- ⁵ California Education Code 313.
- ⁶ California English Language Development Test (CELDT) Section IV: Reclassification of English Learners to Fluent English Proficient (FEP). Retrieved April 6, 2006, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/documents/section4astpkt.pdf>

Acknowledgements

This paper was made possible through the support of a grant from the University of California, Linguistic Minority Research Institute (03-03CY-02TG-D, PI: Richard A. Figueroa) and an American Educational Research Association/ Institute of Educational Sciences (AERA-IES) post-doctoral fellowship. The author would like to thank Dr. Chandra Muller and Dr. Catherine Riegler-Crumb for their statistical support and feedback in the development of this study. The author would also like to thank the ELD teachers at Clarksville High for their invitation to collaborate and to analyze the effects of this change in policy and curriculum. In addition, I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Richard Figueroa for his support in implementing this research initiative. Opinions expressed in this article reflect those of the author and not necessarily those of the granting agencies.