



Teaching Language Minority Students in Los Angeles and Oslo -A Metropolitan Perspective nr 1

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Abstract

Receiving, accommodation and education of children with immigrant background is one of the challenging issues in almost all the metropolitan areas in many countries. In our study we are exploring the impact of demographic changes on political agendas, legal frames, educational approaches, research findings and student achievement in the field of education of linguistic minorities in Los Angeles, USA and Oslo, Norway. Although there are significant historical and socio economical differences between Los Angeles and Oslo, many of the educational challenges facing the educational policy makers and the linguistic minority students are quite similar.

Keywords: Linguistic Diversity in Education, Education in Metropolitan Areas, Los Angeles, Oslo

Introduction

Although different in many respects, both Los Angeles and Oslo are ports of immigration in their respective countries. The public school systems in each city are charged with educating large numbers of immigrant children whose home language differs from the national language of the country. In both cities, the academic achievement of the largest immigrant group lags in national and local measures. In both cities, the education of immigrants and the strategies to be used have become politically controversial, and policies for learning the national language have been buffeted by ideological winds. In both cities, the economic and social future depends on the successful education of immigrant children. Thus, an exploration of immigrants and their progress as learners of the national language may be profitable to educators in both countries, and such an exploration may serve as a basis for future research. In

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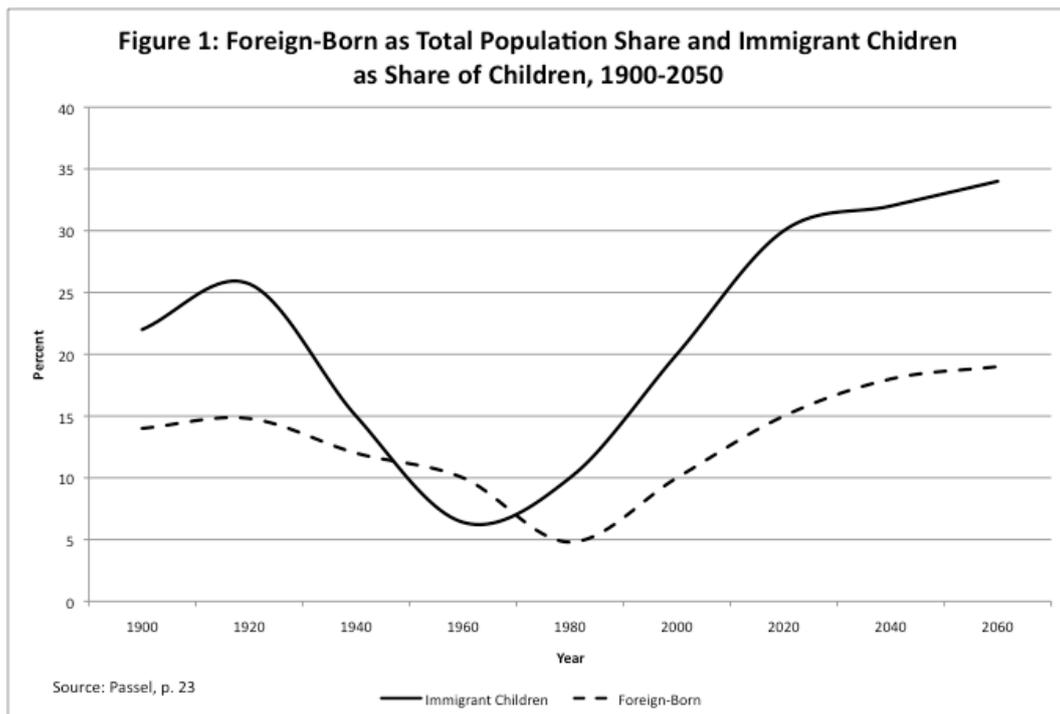
this first paper we are focusing on the situation in Los Angeles. In the second paper, which will be appear in this journal, we'll be focusing on Oslo.

Immigration in the U.S.

Immigrant children are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. Nearly 25 percent of youth under age 17 live with an immigrant parent, and among younger children immigrants account for nearly all the recent population growth (Tienda and Ron, 2011, p.3).

At the same time, the U.S. population is aging. Although the number of children is at an all-time high, their share of the total population is decreasing, reflecting decreasing fertility rates and the aging of the post-World War II baby boom (Passel, 2011, p.22).

These children are part of a wave of immigration that began in earnest in 1965 after passage of legislation that allowed immigration to expand. In the 1980s more than 10,000,000 persons immigrated to the United States, the greatest absolute rise in the nation's history. In some ways it repeats the "Ellis Island" wave of immigration in the early 20th century, although the port of immigration differs. According to Jeffrey Passel's calculations, "By 2009 almost 40 million residents, or 12.8 percent of a U.S. population of more than 300 million, were foreign-born. This share was only slightly below the twentieth-century peak of 14.8 percent attained in 1910, when 13.5 million residents, of a total population of 92 million, were foreign-born." (Passel, 2011, p.25).



However, this new wave of immigrants differs substantially from the older, largely European migration that first settled largely on the East Coast and in the Midwest, the upper Midwest in the case of Norwegians who immigrated heavily in the late 19th Century. The 1965 legislation placed immigrants from Asia and Latin America on an equal footing with those from Europe, and this has changed the composition of the U.S. population. "By the late 1990s annual inflows of unauthorized immigrants began to exceed inflows of legal immigrants and continued to do so for about a decade." (Passel, 2011, p.25). Since 1980 more immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, have

come from Mexico than from any other country. By 2007 more than 12.5 million Mexican immigrants were living in the United States; about 55 percent of them were unauthorized. Other leading sources of immigrants: India, the Philippines, China, El Salvador, Cuba, Vietnam, and Korea (Passel, 2011, p.25).

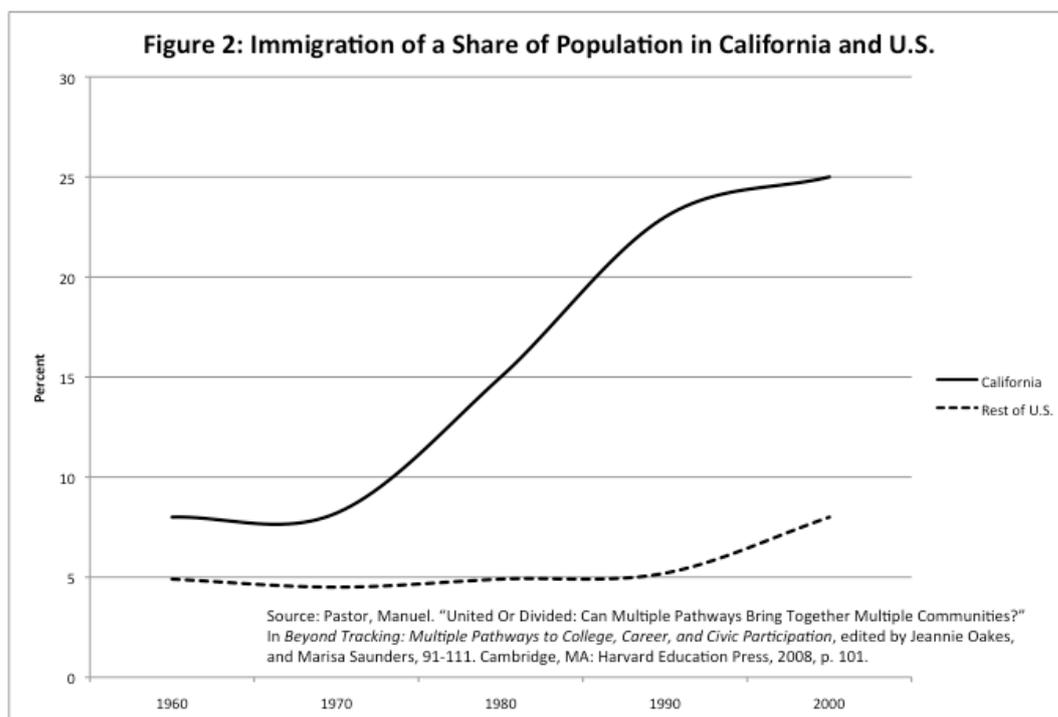
One of the consequence of a flood of immigration from rural Mexico, where families were fleeing from that country's economic collapse, was to substantially lower the education level of immigrant adults coming to the U.S. For example, the average immigrant arriving from Mexico between 1960 and 1964 had more than eight years of schooling. Immigrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s averaged less than six years of schooling (Luschei, 1995, p.13).

Immigration and the Public Schools

As Gándara and Rumberger write, "The ideal of the public school in the United States has historically been one of a great equalizer, the place where a common culture was inculcated in students, regardless of the culture they brought to school. As such, immigrant incorporation into the society has been viewed primarily as a job of the schools." (Gándara and Rumberger, 2009). In addition to skills and literacy, schools were expected to socialize newcomers. This practice was well understood by school leaders early in the 20th Century, when the idea of America as a "melting pot" was unabashedly advanced (Raftery, 1992). The meaning of socialization is more difficult, and more controversial, in a pluralistic society where maintaining a cultural identity is a strong value and where one's home country is little more than two hour's drive away.

Immigration Has Profoundly Affected California and Los Angeles

Almost half the youth in California, which offers immigrants relatively generous access to social services, are children of immigrants. It is joined by Nevada, Arizona, Texas, Florida, New York and New Jersey in having an immigration youth fraction that exceeds 30 percent. In terms of total population, by 2000, immigrants made up more than 25 percent of the state's population. While other states considered together have seen a rise from 4.7 to 8.1 percent, the increase in California has been much steeper and larger (Figure 2).



This concentration of immigrants is important socially and also politically. As the wave of Latino immigrants has achieved citizenship and begun to vote, its political influence is beginning to be felt. The Latino vote was decisive in electing Barack Obama as President in 2012. Los Angeles has a Latino mayor, sheriff, and substantial representation on the city council, county commission, and school board. The president of the state senate is a Latino, and the son of an immigrant has been the speaker of the state assembly. Latino political influence will soon be strongly felt in the U.S. House of Representatives, which unlike the Senate reflects a state's population. Four large states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—will have a near majority in the House, and each of those has a rapidly increasing number of Latino voters.

Immigration and the Los Angeles Schools

With more than 671,000 students in 2009-2010, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the nation's second largest trailing New York City, which has about 1.25 million students (Table 1). The student enrollment in Los Angeles is larger than the entire population of three U.S. states: Wyoming, Vermont, or North Dakota.

Table 1. *Los Angeles Unified School District Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2010*

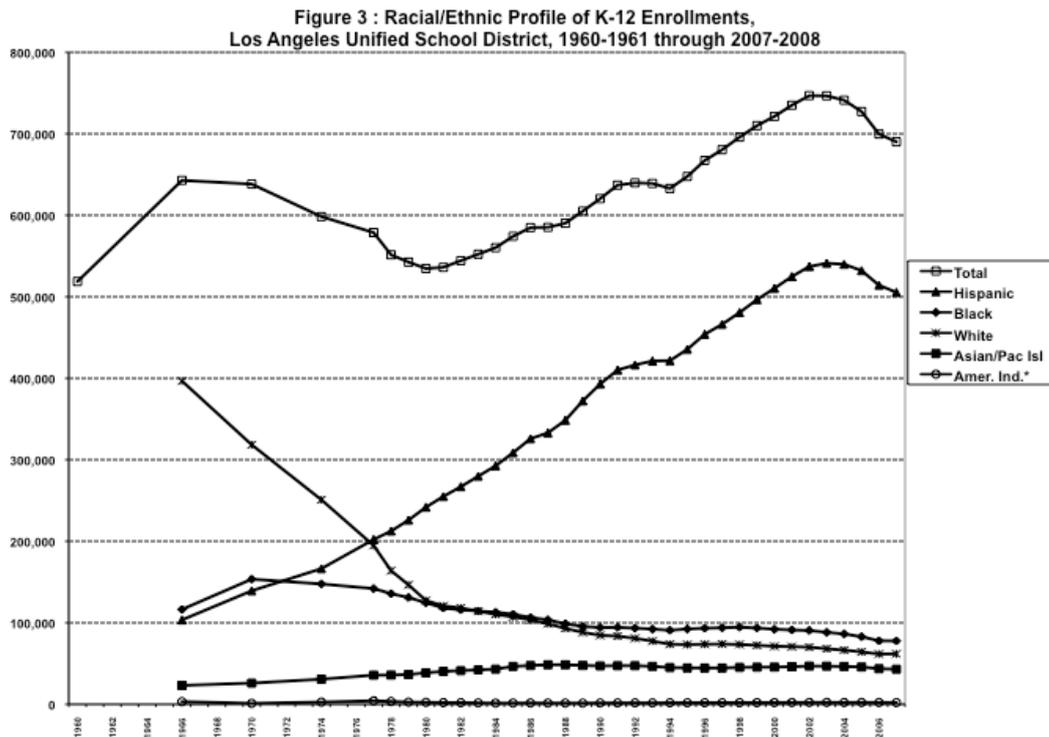
	Los Angeles District		L.A. County
	Enrollment	Percent of Total	Percent of Total
Hispanic or Latino	493,713	73.6%	63.5%
African American	68,972	10.3%	8.8%
White	60,014	8.9%	15.1%
Asian	25,308	3.8%	7.9%
Filipino	11,618	1.7%	2.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2,192	.3%	.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2,192	.3%	.4%
Two or more races	1,887	.3%	.8%
None reported	5,193	.8%	1.0%
Total	671,088		

Source: California Department of Education, Education Demographics Office (CBEDS, sifb0910 10/22/10)

The student population is 74 percent Latino, about 10 percent African-American, about 9 percent white, and 4 percent Asian. Thus, the vast majority of immigrants are from Latin America, predominantly Mexico, and 93 percent of the English Language Learners come from households where Spanish is the first language.

For LAUSD, the changes in demographics are best seen in the long sweep of history. As the top line in Figure 3 shows, enrollments in the city's schools continued to rise in the post World War II baby boom, and then as was the case with nearly every city in the country, they started to decline in the mid 1970s. But then, starting in the 1980s enrollments increased rapidly, as the new wave of immigrants arrived. Thus, Los Angeles, unlike most central city American school districts did not experience massive enrollment declines. Detroit and Milwaukee, for example now enroll fewer than half the students they did at their peak.

The next two lines in Figure 3 show the population exchange between Latino and White students. The rapidly declining line (+) illustrates the decline in White students as the baby boom generation passed through the schools. The rapidly rising line (*) shows the effect of immigration and the rise of Hispanic or Latino students. Note that African-American students declined slightly in number and Asian/Pacific students increased slightly, but the fundamental demographic story is the switch of enrollments from White European background students to Latinos.



Source: Kerchner, Charles Taylor, David J. Menefee-Libey, Laura Steen Mulfinger, and Stephanie E. Clayton. *Learning From L.A.: Institutional Change in American Public Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008, p. 59.

English Language Learners in Los Angeles

Educating English Language Learners is the most significant educational challenge facing the Los Angeles public schools, LAUSD.

About 210,000 students, 31 percent of the total enrollment, are classified as English Learners, meaning that they have been determined to lack the comprehension, reading, or writing skills to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs. In addition, about 222,000 students, whose native language was other than English have met the qualifications to be classified as Fluent-English-Proficient. During the last school year, more than 33,000 met the qualifications for reclassification.

As massive as these numbers are, the number of English Language Learners has decreased by nearly one-third over the last six years, from 326,893 in 2004. The decline in English learners reflects both an emphasis on achieving English fluency on the part of the district and a dramatic slowing of both legal and illegal immigration (DATAQuest, ?).

As Table 2 shows, the presence of English Language Learners is not confined to LAUSD. In the County of Los Angeles, which includes most of the suburban communities surrounding the central city and is served by 79 school districts, more than a quarter of the students are classified as English learners, and statewide the figure is nearly 24 percent.

Table 2. *English Learners in Los Angeles Unified, L.A. County, and California, 2009-2010*

District	Enrollment	English Learners	Fluent-English Proficient Students	Students Redesignated in Past Year
Los Angeles Unified	670,745	209,501 (31.2%)	221,718 (33.1%)	33,224 (15.1%)
Los Angeles County	1,574,150	409,777 (26.0%)	424,416 (27%)	59,451 (13.4%)
California	6,190,425	1,468,771 (23.7%)	1,155,116 (18.7%)	175,417 (11.6%)

Source: www.cde.ca.gov Educational Demographics Unit (DATAQuest)

The Importance of English Fluency in the U.S.

There have been sustained, ideologically charged debates over the value of bilingual instruction, and these will be addressed in a later section, but there is no question that early English fluency is associated with academic success.

English Language Learners typically perform much worse academically than their English-fluent peers. One of the most comprehensive studies, involving more than 28,000 LAUSD students, Flores, et al found that moving from English learning instruction to mainstream classes resulted in improved academic performance (Flores, Painter, Harlow-Nash and Pachon, 2009).

Reclassified students scored significantly higher on standardized reading and math tests, were much more likely to pass the high school exit exam or take an Advanced Placement course. These students also performed better than their peers who were initially classified as English Fluent and who received no special English-learner instruction. (Some parents resist placing their students in English learner classes because they feel that there is a stigma attached.)

A smaller study, followed students in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, historically home to immigrant families. It found that English language achievement in the 5th grade was the single greatest predictor of scores on nationally normed tests and on the California high school exit exam (Kerchner and Mulfinger, 2006).

But a substantial number of students are not reclassified as English-fluent by 8th grade. In the Flores, et al, study, 29 percent of the students in English learner classes had not been reclassified by grade 8. Three-quarters of these students had been in Los Angeles schools since the first grade. Most of them were not recent immigrants, but born in the United States (Flores, Painter, Harlow-Nash and Pachon, 2009, p.1).

Particularly with Latino students, whose families often live in neighborhoods where Spanish is spoken at home, on the streets, and in stores, there can be little environmental pressure to adopt English, but the workforce and educational consequences for students are very high. Such students are very unlikely to obtain

either a college or university education or specialized technical training. They are much more likely to leave school before completing secondary education.

The problem of long-term English Learners is not restricted to California. Nationwide studies also reveal that some students remain in the English-Learner category for 10 years or more (Olsen, 2010).

Learning English in the early grades carries high stakes for children. If a student is not classified as English-fluent by the time they enter the 7th grade, they are unlikely to be placed in the higher-level classes that qualify them to attend college, or a selective occupational program. They are much less likely to complete high school, and dropping out of high school is a chronic problem in schools with a large Latino population.

One of the most troubling comparisons is between Latino immigrant students, who often lag behind in school, and Asians, who often excel. Indeed, when Achievement Gap statistics are calculated, Asian students are grouped with Whites, and they often exceed them in test scores. Part of the relative success can be attributed to parental situation. Asian immigrants tend to be more highly educated, but that is not always the case, and there appear to be strong differences in family expectations.

Hector Becerra, talked with students at Lincoln High School, located in a working class area of the city. There, Asian students make up about 15 percent of the student body, but they account for more than 50 percent of the enrollment in advanced placement courses. Students there reported acculturated expectations. Carlos Garcia, who has a knack for math said, "My friends, most of them say, 'You're more Asian than Hispanic.'" Asian students report relentless parental pressure for academic success. "They only start paying attention if I don't do well," said Karen Chu, 15, whose parents emigrated from Vietnam (Becerra, 2008).

While part of the differences between Latinos and Asian students may be a function of cultural expectation, part is behavioral. A proven approach to systemically increasing the capacity for students to work in groups is to make it easy to create and operate them. We know that students who study together learn more and are more highly motivated than those who study alone. In a well-known example, Uri Treisman, who was a teaching assistant at UC Berkeley, became aware of the high rate at which Black students were failing freshman calculus. As a part of his research about the causes of failure, Treisman found that African-American students almost always studied alone while Chinese students studied together, and they studied longer. The Chinese students averaged 14 hours of study a week, and they went beyond the problem sets. They "critiqued one another's work, correcting errors and suggesting innovative solutions," as David Drew has written (Drew, 1996). In a practice that has been repeated many times with similar results, Treisman created a workshop for African-American students to study together and within a year the students who were getting Ds were getting Cs or better. Treisman's work at Berkeley later included a study group of Latino students, with similar results.

The Political and Policy Dimensions of Immigration and English Language Learning the U.S.

Politics drives the education of immigrants in California, what they are taught, and how. There are at least six powerful political issues that continue in legislatures, the courts, and before the electorate in general.

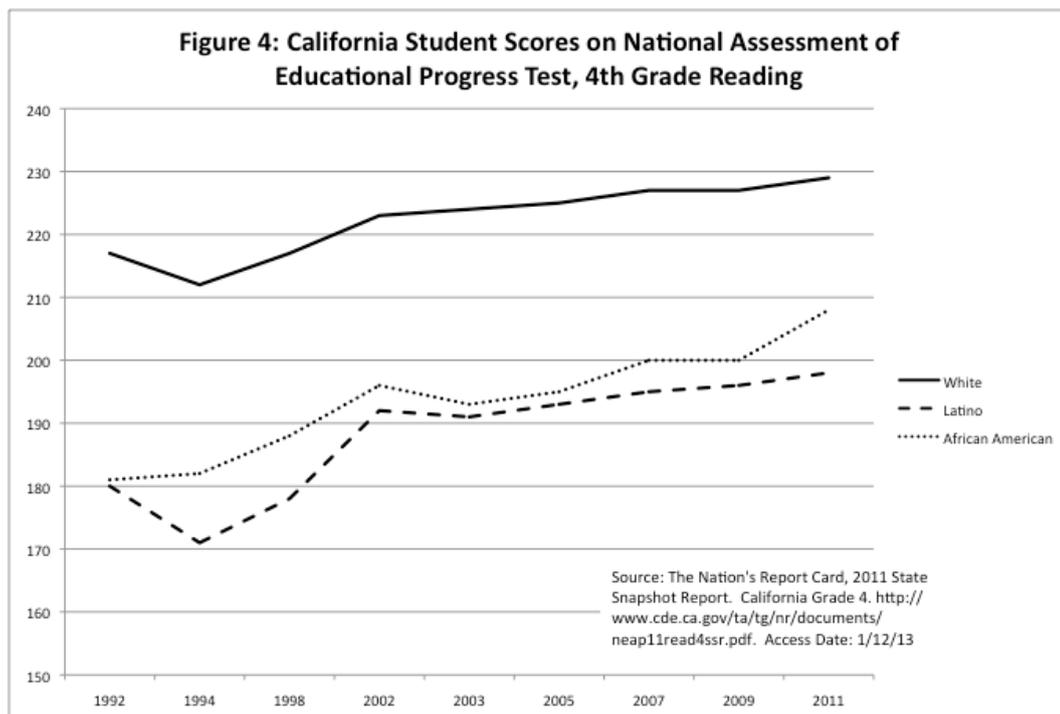
- 1) First, language acquisition and achievement have been raised to the level of a civil right, both in the courts and in policy rhetoric surrounding education.

- 2) Second, the teaching of immigrants has been subject to waves of nativism, seeking to restrict the access of immigrants to education and other social services and counter forces seeking to expand opportunities for immigrants.
- 3) Third, these political issues have been joined with both pedagogical and ideological contests over whether immigrant students (and others) benefit more from bilingual education or through what is known as English-only instruction.
- 4) Fourth, immigrant literacy instruction has been joined with what is known as “the language wars,” with one side favoring a phonics-based approach to teaching reading and the other a contextual literature-based approach.
- 5) Fifth, English Language Learners have become a part of an increasingly shrill debate over testing, particularly the use of standardized tests to measure achievement and to determine how teachers and students are ranked and whether students gain access to higher education.
- 6) Sixth, immigrant students, like all other Californians, are caught in the gridlock of California politics that has rendered the state incapable of raising necessary revenue or governing itself effectively. Although at first these gross political issues seem far removed from the classroom, they have highly detrimental effects.

The Achievement Gap and its Civil Rights Dimension

The continuing of low achievement among “long term” English language learners is reflected in the persistent achievement gap between Latino and African-American students and Whites.

Achievement for all racial and ethnic groups is improving, and as Figure 5 shows the gap is narrowing, but slowly. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, administered by the U.S. government show similar trends. Over the period 2000 to 2011, the achievement levels of White and Latino students rose, but the gap between them did not change significantly. In 2011, the gap was 31 points, not different statistically from the 37 point gap in 1992.

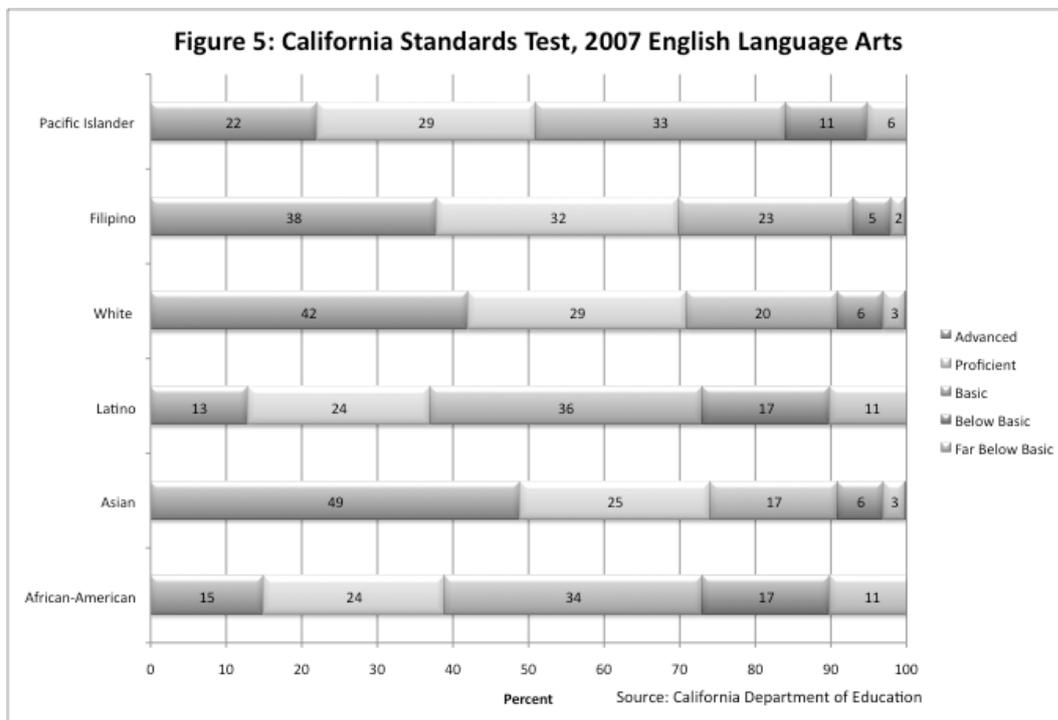


When compared to the nation, the gaps between Latino and White students in California were larger in both reading and math (Cadelle Hemphill and Vanneman, 2011).

Although the achievement gap in California is confounded by the presence of large numbers of English Language Learners, its roots are much more wide spread. The performance of African-American students in California is substantially lower than those of White students, and Asian students tend, including a growing immigrant population, perform at a par or above white students.

In 4th Grade Language Arts, as shown in Figure 5, some 73 percent of Asian, and 71 percent of White students scored in the Proficient or Advanced categories, while only 37 percent of Latinos and 39 percent of African-Americans scored in the highest two ranks. (The California Standards Test is given to all students each year, and the results are reported to parents along with teachers' grades. The CST is also used by the state in evaluating schools and sanctioning those that do not meet performance targets. Students are frequently given special preparation for taking the test, including practice exams that give students experience with the types of questions asked. In contrast, the National Assessment of Educational Progress is a matrix exam. Not all students take the test, and of those, not all students are given the same questions. Policy analysts use the results on NAEP, but they are not used by the states in ranking schools, nor are results reported for individual students.)

Although the achievement gap has been a longstanding phenomenon, it has taken on political and policy significance in the last decade. This is the case because the most important federal law effecting schools, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which since 2001 has been known as the No Child Left Behind Act, requires schools to track academic disparities by disaggregating data on standardized test performance by various socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.



Also, in the case *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) the U.S. Supreme Court decided unanimously that sameness in curriculum did not constitute equality: “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks teachers and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.” (Olsen, 2010, p.5).

Thus, by law English learners became a legally protected class, and that the schools had an obligation to address their language and curricular needs. In a sense, the *Lau* decision rested on prior action by the U.S. Congress, which in 1968 passed Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that offered capacity-building grants to local districts to develop programs in a student’s native language. Thus, there was both appropriations and advocacy for bilingual instruction. These provisions were later attacked and limited beginning during the Ronald Regan presidency (Hakuta, 2011).

In 2000, what is known as the Williams lawsuit (*Eliezar Williams et. al. vs. State of California*) was filed alleging that the state failed to provide poor, minority, and immigrant children equal access to educational materials, safe and decent schools, and qualified teachers. The suit was settled in 2004, creating both supplemental funds to low performing schools, and additional oversight.

Nativism and Opportunity

In the United States—where everyone, save the 1.2 percent of the population who can rightfully claim to be Native Americans, came from somewhere else—immigration has always fostered a mixture of generosity and cruelty. Throughout U.S. history, waves of nativism have fired fears of cultural identity and economic prosperity being ruined by “hordes” of newcomers. Because the latest wave of immigration has been predominantly Latino, arguments about their threat have largely been directed toward them.

At an academic level, most notably Samuel P. Huntington has articulated these fears:

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril (Huntington, 2004).

Huntington’s assertion has been wildly controversial, not rooted in empirical research, and it does not stand up well to the evidence that Latino/Hispanic children learn English rapidly (Portes and Rivas, 2011). Still, such fears have inflamed the public and been exploited by politicians. Deadlock in the U.S. Congress has prevented any meaningful reforms in immigration policy, even though presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama each supported such legislation. In 2010 and 2011 the political vacuum created by federal inaction, several state legislatures, led by Arizona, have enacted strong anti-immigrant measures. However, after the 2012 election, when Latinos overwhelmingly voted to reelect President Obama, opposition to meaningful immigration reform has dulled, and as this is written there is the prospect that Congress will pass legislation in 2013.

California’s most prominent attempt to legislate against illegal immigrants took place in 1994, with the passage of what is known as Proposition 187, an amendment to the state constitution that would have bared access to public education to children who entered the country illegally or whose parents had. The measure was approved by 59 percent of the voters, only to be declared unconstitutional by the federal courts. Indeed,

in 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case *Plyer v. Doe*, ruled that undocumented children must be provided access to public education.

But the political implications of anti-immigrant measures in California continued. The rapid increase in the seeking of U.S. citizenship by Latino immigrants, and their participation in the political process has drastically curbed the attractiveness of the Republican Party in California. Since Proposition 187, which was supported by the incumbent Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, no Republican has won statewide elected office except for former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (an immigrant himself), who had substantial prior name recognition as a movie actor.

Alongside the nativist reactions to immigration, there has also been a compassionate and enlightened response. The state's duty to provide education does not extend to higher education, and the children of parents who entered this country illegally are frequently put at jeopardy by not having the proper documents to fill out a college application or in not qualifying for the lower tuition rates that legal California residents are entitled to. For years, members of both political parties have attempted to pass a federal law that would be called Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. It would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth who meet certain criteria. In spring 2011, it failed to pass the U.S. House of Representatives by four votes.

William Perez, who has been a tireless advocate of the DREAM Act, writes about the anguish of thousands of hard working students whose pathway to college and jobs are clouded by their status. Many of them have no memory of having lived in another country:

They have grown up "American," their dominant language is English, and they strongly identify as Americans, yet they are unable to pursue higher education despite their remarkable academic qualifications. Despite the numerous social, political, economic, and educational challenges they have faced, the students exhibit the same type of tenacious optimism, drive, and perseverance that fueled their parents desire to pursue a better future in the U.S (Perez, 2009, p.4).

In the face of federal inaction, the California legislature has moved forward with its own version of the act that gives these students access to public colleges and universities. Gov. Jerry Brown has signed the first part of the state's Dream Act legislation making it possible for students who had been brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents, who finished secondary school and otherwise qualify for admission to state colleges and universities to accept private scholarship assistance to pay their tuition. Companion legislation that would allow these students to receive scholarships from state funds is still being debated in the legislature (Baron, 2011). California legislation, of course, cannot deal with the question of citizenship.

Bilingual Education v. English Only

There has always been a paradox to immigration and public schooling. While one of the duties of schooling has been socialization and integration into U.S. society, immigrant families also seek to use schooling as a way of achieving ethnic recognition. In addition to its intellectual and practical value, bilingualism and foreign-language instruction has become a symbol of national identity.

[My own family history of immigration from Germany in the mid 1700s reveals that the family settled in a German-speaking area of Pennsylvania and that church records were kept in that language for a full half-century following the wave of immigration.]

In her history of the early 20th Century Progressive Era in Los Angeles schools, Judith Raftery relates the story of the Molokan Russians, a pious but largely illiterate Protestant sect that had fled persecution and conscription in the Czar's army. "Schools played no part in the Molokan culture," she writes, and compulsory attendance, which was enforced by truant officers, took older girls away from the household and boys away from paid work. The elders also feared assimilation, and in 1908 they decided to write the Board of Education requesting the use of a room at Utah Street School in Boyle Heights to instruct the children in Russian. The request, and a subsequent one for another room, was granted, and three years later the community expressed its thanks to the board. Repeated throughout the city, these small accommodations for Jews, Swedes, French, Croatians, Germans and others "reflected the skill with which newcomers asserted themselves" and also the capacity of the school district to make marginal accommodations and thus create legitimacy for itself (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger and Clayton, 2008).

Researchers disagree about the most effective way to teach English to non-English speakers. Some U.S. schools with large populations of Spanish-speaking English learners have developed a variety of bilingual programs to instruct English learners in both Spanish and English. Programs labeled as "bilingual" vary substantially. Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut distinguish between English-dominant, Spanish-dominant, and fluent bilingualism. The latter is associated with the strongest academic outcomes, followed by English dominance. Spanish-dominant bilingualism is highly problematic for academic achievement (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Other schools have implemented English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in which teachers instruct only in English but use second-language acquisition instructional strategies (sometimes called "Structured English Immersion"). Researchers have fiercely debated the merits of both forms of instruction.

California voters forced the state's schools into ELS instruction. They overwhelmingly passed an initiative, Proposition 63, in 1986 to require English-only instruction. That same year, the governor, vetoed three attempts to reauthorize the state's bilingual education program (Luschei, 1995, p.19). As a result, funds for English Learning education must come from the general funds of each school district. (The initiative process in California allows a group of citizens, or as is most likely an interest group, to write a piece of legislation and place it before the voters. If approved it becomes law with the same standing as a bill passed by the legislature. The initiative process is now generally regarded as dysfunctional (Schrag, 1998)).

Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez assert that the key to achievement is the quality of instruction and programmatic features in a whole-school approach to instructing English learners rather than whether the program is bilingual or not (Calderón, Slavin and Sánchez, 2011). Several organizational characteristics are important, for example, the constant collection of data that allows school staffs to know "which students are succeeding and failing and why." (Calderón, Slavin and Sánchez, 2011, p.109). These schools have intensive professional development, standards of behavior for students, and they are highly predictable as organizations.

Effective programs in these schools build student vocabulary. Children who grow up in poverty in the U.S. hear about 615 words an hour; those who are children of professionals hear about 2,153 words an hour, and a child's vocabulary in the first grade is a good predictor of reading comprehension in the middle grades and secondary school (Calderón, Slavin and Sánchez, 2011, p.110).

Effective programs also integrate reading, writing, and language development, have substantial time for cooperative learning among students, and the schools have the

support of parents, who see that their students attend regularly and on time and that they keep up with assignments.

Many of these same attributes were found by Hakuta in the Sanger (CA) Unified School District, an 11,000-student system that has gained national recognition for the achievement of its mostly low-income Latino students. The district used intensive professional development and a focus on data and instructional strategies (Hakuta, 2011, p.169).

Phonics, Literature and the Language Wars

The “reading wars” about how to teach children to read is at least a century old in California, and it shows no sign of abating (Reyner, ?). Currently, the advocates of phonics instruction as the gateway to reading dominate policy in California.

The story of battle is alternately entertaining and horrifying, centering around former state Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig, who during his term of office strongly endorsed a whole language approach linked to a generally constructivist pedagogy. Honig was a powerful educational leader, but his political ambitions caused him to have equally powerful enemies, who charged him with mismanagement of public funds. He was convicted of a felony and removed from office. Honig, along with the state school board, later became phonics advocates, some would say zealots. Now, only phonics based reading programs can be approved for use in the state (Lemann, 1997).

Since 2000, LAUSD has required schools to use the phonics-heavy Open Court reading program published by McGraw-Hill. While marketed as a “universal” reading program, it has been criticized as ineffective in building the contextual knowledge and vocabulary needed for English learners.

Adoption of Open Court was accompanied by “mainstreaming” ELL students (placing them in the same classes as English proficient students), a reduction in class size to 20 students per teacher in the early grades and a coordinated program of professional development, test feedback, and intervention. LAUSD reported student test score gains in the early grades for five years in a row. But ELL students consistently lagged behind. Achievement scores in the upper grades did not change very much.

Teachers have been critical of the program primarily on the grounds that the scripted nature of the program prevented them from using their professional judgment about strategies for individual students, but also because the universal nature of the program did not appear to match the needs of ELL students. However, teachers perceived that the program did a good job of teaching phonic awareness and skills to both English-proficient and English-learning students (Lee, Lasisi and Rachel, 2007).

Testing and Accountability

The No Child Left Behind Act (which is the major federal education law more generally called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) made student performance on statewide tests critical to student success and school reputation. In addition, California law mandates that students pass a high school exit exam in addition to amassing sufficient course credit to graduate. Both these hurdles have been very controversial, and opposition to them has grown over recent years.

The equity and legitimacy of these tests has come under increasing criticism, from civil rights groups and from educators who believe that the tests are not good measure of what students know and can do, and that they interfere with substantive instruction in schools, and that they are biased against English Language Learners.

Part of the bias against English Language Learners is systemic. Simply holding students learning English to the same standards as students who are already fluent creates a built in bias. Because the national assessment of Annual Yearly Progress requires all subgroups within a school to make progress, including language learners, schools have a tendency to game the system by not reclassifying students as fluent, even though they may be. Thus the scores of these stronger students can be counted along with those who are struggling as language learners. But creating this testing artifact has negative consequences for students, as the earlier discussion about reclassification or redesignation shows. The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing has recommended substantial changes in the way English Language Learners are tested (Wolf, Herman and Dietel, 2010).

Testing for ELL students is also confounded by the movement to create nationwide standards and assessments. Two research and development groups are creating sets of standards and assessments attached to them. Along with 29 other states, California has joined the more innovative of the two consortia called SMARTER Balanced Testing Consortia (Wolf, Herman and Dietel, 2010). One of the two plans is supposed to be a part of the rewritten federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which Congress is expected to consider in 2013.

California and Gridlock

The five political battles over how to educate immigrant children nest inside a larger political context that involves the hollowing out of the political and policy assumptions surrounding public education in Los Angeles, and to a substantial degree elsewhere in the state and nation.

Public education in the United States is the legacy of what is know as the Progressive Era of the early 20th Century, which was in many ways America's answer to European social democracy. Careful design and planning were to be an answer to the failure to address social problems and the assumptions of classical economics.

Public education was built around four policy assumptions. First, school policy and governance would be primarily a local concern. Locally elected school board would raise needed revenues and provide wise guidance. Second, education was removed from partisan politics. Schools, for example, were governed separately from cities, and school board elections were not connected to political parties. Third, operations and substantial influence on education policy was the province of educational professionals. Teaching and school administration became licensed occupations, and a well-run bureaucracy was thought to be the most efficient form of organization. Fourth, the whole system enjoyed what became known as "a logic of confidence" in which the public was assured that schools were well run and teachers, school heads, and superintendents were generally given wide latitude in performing their jobs (Boyd, Kerchner and Blyth, 2008). By the 1920s, an historian of the period noted, Los Angeles had become a paradigm of Progressive reform (Raftery, 1992).

Over the last 40 years, these assumptions have been challenged. The state and national governments, rather than local school boards, initiate most education policy, and in California most of school tax funds are raised by the state, which relies heavily on income and sales taxes. School politics have become explicitly partisan with the Democratic Party, supported by employee unions, promoting expansion of services and the Republican Party taking increasingly strident positions against increases in taxes and for more market-based forms of education. Anti-tax measures, most notably Proposition 13 passed in 1978, severely limited the ability of a school district to raise taxes. Financial support for school and colleges has decreased in California when measured by the percentage of family income. It ranks 49th among the states.

Conservatives argue that the school budgets have increased markedly, even when inflation is considered, and this is the case. But California is also a relatively expensive state in which to live, particularly in the cost of housing, and as a consequence wages, including those of teachers, are relatively high. At the same time, schools have been repeatedly challenged to provide more equal services for students from poor backgrounds and students of color, including immigrants. Professional domination of education policy and trust in professionals has broken down substantially.

Both California and the Los Angeles Unified School District remain in substantial financial peril. However, the state is recovering from the post-2007 recession, in the fall of 2012 voters approved a tax increase that will prevent further cutbacks in services. Still, the education budgets are below their 2007 level.

This story applied to Los Angeles, and parallel chronicles of other cities can be told in much more detail (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger and Clayton, 2008). Of particular importance, it would seem, for a comparison of Los Angeles and Oslo is to understand the mixture of “what works,” what is known about educational techniques and their successes with immigrant children in the context of a great wave of immigration and settlement, and “what can work,” the capacity of the political system to support and advance the education of these students.



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