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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from a state-sponsored study of the adult education needs of limited-English-proficient (LEP) adults in California. The findings relate primarily to the situation of the over 2.3-million Spanish-speaking LEP adults, and within this population, to Mexican immigrants. Data were gathered in household surveys in three geographically diverse immigrant communities. The focus here is on the study's implications for social policy and planning. Key findings are outlined in these areas: community diversity and its relationship to educational program design; the need for "survival English" vs. development of high-performance communication skills; instructional strategies for building English language skills; the need to explicitly teach learning strategies; the need for customized, community- and labor market-responsive program designs; patterns of participation in formal adult learning programs; and attention to functional context in adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction. The report also presents details on selected findings concerning language skills and their assessment, and examines Spanish-speaking LEP adults' skill development needs in four major functional domains: workplace; family life; community life; and lifelong learning. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

From Immigrant Enclave to Main Street, USA:

The Social Policy Implications of Real-World Language Acquisition

By

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Introduction and Overview

It is, of course, no news that language is not acquired in isolation. Nonetheless, despite the insights and skill of individual English-language instructors, occasional innovative program designers, and an increasingly rich literature on language acquisition, migration theory, migration to the United States, and immigrants' lives in the United States, ESL instruction in the adult education system still gives minimal attention to the dynamics of adults' second-language acquisition or to language use as part of a complex and constantly-changing set of social interactions.

The diverse inventory of language-based social interactions which so commonly falls out of the policy and planning picture includes, for example, immigrants' participation in social interactions in formal and informal settings, economic transactions in quite diverse formal and informal systems, constructing implicit models for interpreting the connotative implications of discourse, and structuring discourse to initiate problem-solving increase the degree of interactive communication, conduct negotiations, or to persuade hostile listeners. Thus, the "official" dialogue on ESL policy and instructional practice, while replete with superficially appealing concepts such as "life skills orientation", "competency-based instruction", "whole-language learning" appears to incorporate little attention to how or why immigrants with little schooling use English and how or why serious attention to their aspirations, to the challenges they face, or to the texture of their lives might make a difference in any of a number of dimensions of language-related services to adults -- resource deployment, program planning, or instructional methodology.

The current paper presents some of the findings from a study of the adult education needs of limited-English adults in California sponsored by the California

Department of Education conducted in 1996.[1] These findings relate primarily to the situation of the more than 2.3 million Spanish-speaking limited-English adults (who constitute slightly more than 80% of California's limited-English adult population) and, within this population, to Mexican immigrants who make up the majority of California's Latino immigrants.

The analyses reported here are based primarily on data collected in household surveys of representative cross-sections of limited-English Spanish-speaking households in three case study immigrant communities -- Long Beach (in urban Southern California), Sanger (in rural Fresno County), and Redwood City. This survey is referred to as the Spanish-speaking Household Survey (SSHS). The study design was, however, multi-stranded and, thus, it included collection of data from focus groups with Cambodians in Long Beach and Hmong in Fresno urban San Francisco Bay Area) and the general conclusions have broader implications as there are many parallels between the distinctly diverse experiences of different language minorities.

The strengths of this study are that the literature review, SSHS and focus groups presented a unique opportunity to examine key issues with the specific goal of examining how the K-12 adult school system of services to LEP adults could be systemically improved. Thus, we were able to address key questions such as the proportions of LEP adults within the "universe of need" who do actually enroll in an adult education program, what the perceived needs of a representative cross section of California's largest language minority (speakers of Spanish) might be, and how needs, available programs, and population characteristics might vary from community to community.

The limitations of this study are that the primary data collection methodology was survey research which was designed to look in a very broad way at learners' needs and skills in different functional domains (all of which involve communication as an element of social interaction) but which, at the same time, relied entirely on respondents' own perceptions of their needs and competencies and captured only a single "snapshot" of these limited-English adults' lives. I would propose that the study has important implications, nonetheless, for framing hypotheses for further

[1] Ed Kissam and Stephen Reder, "Responding to Diversity: Strategies and Initiatives to Support Lifelong Learning for Limited-English Adults in California", Report by Aguirre International to Adult Education and Planning Unit, California Department of Education, April, 1997.

applied research and for highlighting some pressing policy and program planning priorities.

Overview of Findings and their Policy and Planning Implications

The findings from the California Statewide Assessment of Special Needs of Limited English-Proficient Adults have a wide range of implications for adult education policy and programs in states such as California, Florida, Illinois, Oregon, and Washington where there are large populations of Mexican immigrants. Key findings and their implications include the following:

1. Community Diversity and Program Design

Because Mexican and Central American migration takes place via extended family and village networks, there are significant differences in the social context, educational background, English-language learning objectives and challenges, and skills development demands of adult learners in different communities. Immigrant enclaves' nature as transnational communities and migration history (which contribute significantly to labor market characteristics and occupational strategies) must be taken into account in order to adequately understand characteristic adult learning objectives and needs in these communities.

Regression analyses of SSHS respondents self-assessed language competencies showed that community of residence, as well as factors such as educational attainment and length of time in the United States enter into self-assessed competencies and related skills development objectives. These variations strongly suggest the need for multi-tiered planning, at the community, state, and national level. Efforts to "replicate" successful programs, duplicate "best practices", and transfer "successful models" will need to be extremely sensitive to community context.

Given the extent to which family and village network affiliation determine labor market experience, social interactions, economic status, and housing arrangements, particular attention might be given in ESL program design to re-interpreting "family

literacy" in the context of the society of immigrant social life.[2] At a minimum, the positive impacts of program designs which extend informal learning into family life, must be conceptualized within immigrant communities to consider who other social networks of house mates, co-workers, and *paisanos* (people from the same sending village or region) might best be mobilized to enhance sustained English-language skills development.

2. "Survival English" vs. "High Performance" Communication Skills

Because Latino (and most other) immigrants congregate in communities and neighborhoods which are immigrant enclaves, there are few immediate needs for "survival English" programs. Community life in our case study communities takes place primarily in Spanish. In the short run, demands for English-language skills are minimal. However, in the long-run, English-language skills must be developed to achieve upward and outward occupational mobility, to successfully manage family life, and to participate effectively in civic life or achieve political equity.

This implies that ESL curriculum must be re-oriented to foster development of "high-performance" English-language skills to confront immigrants' specific needs to function effectively in multiple domains. Analyses of language policy which assume that second-language acquisition is linear must be refined to better reflect that various factors which tend to accelerate or constrain second-language acquisition. From a theoretical perspective, it will be crucial to contextualize consideration of language acquisition in relation to other dimensions of social life.

Our analyses of variance of SSHS data which sought to relate length of U.S. residence to increases in perceived functional skills suggested skills development is non-linear. SSHS respondents who had lived longer in the U.S. did not generally feel their ability to respond to the communication demands of the workplace and family life had improved over the years. The only statistically significant difference between more recent (0-9 years in U.S.) and longer-term immigrants self-reports of skills

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[2] We found that even within a single immigrant enclave, village/network affiliation gave rise to strikingly different lifestyles. These analyses of 1989-1990 data collected in California as part of the national Farm Labor Supply Study are reported in David Runsten, Ed Kissam, and Jo Ann Intili, "Parlier: The Farmworker Economy", paper presented to the Conference on Immigration and the Changing Face of Rural California", U.C. Davis/Urban Institute, Asilomar, 1996.

ability was that long-term residents felt themselves less able to deal with civic and political life than did more recent immigrants (who we believe were less strongly oriented toward these communication and other basic skills demands).

Without aggressive re-design, ESL and other adult learning programs in California and the nation will not be able to make an optimal contribution to overcoming the economic and political segregation experienced by limited-English families living in immigrant enclaves. Implicit assumptions that programmatic emphasis on ESL/citizenship programs designed to assist permanent residents pass the INS examination make a valuable contribution to immigrants' ability to function as effective citizens must be seriously questioned.[3]

3. Instructional Strategies for Building English-language Skills

Life in immigrant enclaves, while facilitating immigrants' ability to survive without English, presents adult English-language learners with formidable challenges in finding opportunities to use English outside of class. This serves to emphasize the need for program designs which systematically seek to maximize language-learners' "time on task" by extending active learning beyond the classroom. While the classroom can be seen as an important sheltered learning environment, there is a critical need for a series of "concentric" learning environments to practice and test English-language abilities.

4. The Need to Explicitly Build Learning to Learn Skills

Because the educational attainment of Mexican (and possibly Central American) immigrants continues to increase, language acquisition trajectories are likely to be different for different cohorts of immigrants. Levels of educational attainment vary greatly within each cohort of Mexican immigrants, depending on the characteristics of sending community, including degree of *nortenizacion* (structural adaptation to binational life), and urban/rural differences in labor market and educational institutions. This implies the need for developing distinct program designs to optimally serve two distinct groups of adult ESL learners: a) older, long-term U.S.

[3] The practical planning implications of the patterns of immigrant settlement in the United States are sketched out in more detail in Ed Kissam, "Reinventing Citizenship Instruction", Inter-American Institute on Migration and Labor, Mt. Vernon College, Washington, D.C., 1993.

residents with very low levels of schooling, b) younger, more recent immigrants with slightly higher levels of schooling.

The SSHS data strongly support previous research which indicates that prior educational experience has a large effect on perceived ability to function as an adult learner. This serves to underscore the need for instructional designs which specifically and explicitly seek to build adult learners' learning skills, i.e. in the area of learning to learn. The SSHS data, furthermore, suggests but does not definitively demonstrate that gender and current labor market status play a role in these dimensions of self-esteem. Further research in this area would be very desirable, although, from a practical perspectives, immediate steps could be taken to systematically address this issue.

5. The Need for Customized, Responsive Program Designs

There appear to be complex interactions between gender, educational attainment, life stage, and community labor market which serve to modulate specific learners' skills development objectives, perceived ability to deal with functional demands, and, probably, individual perceptions of ability to successfully learn English and/or develop other basic skills. These have profound implications for student assessment practices, suggesting that it will be crucial to use holistic assessment techniques to meaningfully link program design to individual needs rather than existing reductionistic measures of "language ability". SSHS survey data, together with focus group discussions (with Latinos, Hmong, and Cambodians) suggest that standard ESL ability/skill groups fall very short of assuring responsiveness to adult learners' aspirations, abilities, and concerns.

6. Patterns of Participation in Formal Programs of Adult Learning

Limited-English students' participation in adult school learning programs is extensive. More than half (52%) of the SSHS respondents had attended an adult school program; almost all (88%) had begun in an ESL course. Adult schools were well-known in their communities and easily accessible physically. However, program participants' satisfaction with service quality varied greatly.

SSHS respondents were by no means "life long learners" but, rather, transient "birds of passage" in terms of their participation in structured programs of adult

instruction. Almost half (45%) of SSHS respondents who had participated in a program had gone to school for 3 months or less; another quarter (25%) had attended a program for 4-6 months; the remaining 30% had been in a class, usually ESL, for 6 months or more.

Given this pattern of program participation it would appear critical to focus not on "teaching" adult learners to speak English but, rather, on how a relatively short-term intervention might be optimized to "jump start" or otherwise support ongoing self-directed English-language acquisition, ideally in conjunction with improvements in a range of other SCANS-linked competencies. Simultaneously, attention might be given to systemic improvements designed to improve adult learners' transition from one course to another. This is a pressing need because my experience in reviewing adult education programs suggests that very few programs systematically follow up on students who have left class--either when the student ceases to attend class or when they have successfully completed a course. Clearly, a system genuinely designed to support lifelong learning would need to incorporate some strategies to actually provide a continuum of learning.

7. The Need for Attention to Functional Context in Adult ESL

The SSHS findings serve to highlight across the board, the reality that limited-English adults ability to successfully respond to the communication demands they face vary greatly from context to context.

Despite the widespread acceptance of principles of whole language learning, use of instructional strategies designed to enhance functional literacy, and recognition of the exigencies of lifelong learning, there appears to be little attention in current adult ESL programs to the specific communications demands faced by immigrants in functioning in a broad range of functional contexts in the domains of managing family life, workplace functioning and occupational advancement, civic and political participation in community life, and lifelong learning.

One case in point is the almost absolute absence of attention to mathematical reasoning and quantitative literacy in the adult education curriculum in a society which poses increasing demands for such skills--in reading or producing written material, in the workplace, in managing family life, and in participating in debate and discussion of community affairs. Another case in point, is the striking inattention to "voice" in

language, or the many characteristic variants of discourse structure -- in both oral and print-based English.

Details on Selected Findings from the SSHS-Overall English Language Proficiency in Case Study Communities

Here I focus on presenting the overall analyses of SSHS data on limited-English Latino's functioning in different domains of social interaction which require communication skills. The full California Adult LEP Needs Study includes, in addition to these findings, a) analyses of the different skill profiles of sub-populations of Spanish-speaking LEP adults, and b) analyses of different factors which enter into the observed skills patterns.

The SSHS survey specifically included several alternative measures of English-language ability. These include a rating of English-language ability comparable to that used in the Census of Population and in the National Adult Literacy Survey. This provides a basis for linking findings regarding SSHS respondents to standard datasets used in discussions of language policy. The indices of English-language ability also include the questions used in the multi-agency federal study of the legalized immigrant population conducted by Westat, Inc. for HHS/DOL.[4]

The profile of SSHS respondents' English-language ability varies slightly in relation to the specific measure of English-language ability used as a basis for assessment. The variability of self-assessment clearly shows the difficulty of assessing language proficiency -- either in the context of ESL placement or in the context of assessing program outcomes. As in the case of other literacy competencies, each individual's profile is somewhat jagged -- a unique "fingerprint" of information-handling and communication of each.

Table 1-A on the next page reports SSHS respondents' self-assessed English-language ability in general, using the same categories used in the Census Bureau reporting of English-language ability which are the basis for the analyses in Chapter 1. **Table 1-B** provides a comparable, but slightly different measure of self-

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[4], Shirley Smith, Roger G. Kramer, and Audrey Singer, **Characteristics and Labor Market Behavior of the Legalized Population Five Years Following Legalization**, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, September, 1996.

assessed English-language ability in specific communication contexts. This measure of English-language ability is the same one used by Westat for the DOL/HHS/INS survey of the legalized population, thereby permitting comparison to the findings of that study.

Table 1-A
Self-Assessment of English-Language Ability:
Overall

In General	Well or Very Well	Not well	Not at all
Speak English	5%	53%	42%
Read English	9%	38%	53%
Write English	5%	24%	71%

Table 1-B
Self-Assessment of English-Language Ability:

Specific Tasks-Oral English				
How well could perform task	**Easily or with only slight difficulty**	**With some difficulty**	**With great difficulty**	**Could not do at all**
Speak with a store clerk	7%	22%	34%	37%
Speak with a doctor, nurse, or teacher	5%	19%	36%	40%
Speak on the telephone	7%	13%	35%	45%
Specific Tasks-Written English				
Read a newspaper	5%	18%	25%	52%
Read a magazine	6%	18%	24%	52%
Read instructions or recipes	10%	18%	27%	45%

Tables 1-A and **1-B** show that SSHS respondents' self-assessed proficiency in speaking and reading English agree well with measures anchored in relation to specific, but fairly broadly defined, oral tasks or literacy competencies. It is useful to note that, in oral-aural English, telephone conversations are somewhat more demanding because speech is removed from its physical context. Similarly, the demands of using English in a health-care environment are somewhat more

challenging than "street English" as benchmarked to talking with a store clerk. The SSHS survey sample is slightly less proficient than Westat's multi-ethnic legalized immigrant (LPR) sample was in 1992; this is as expected since the LPR survey sample had all resided in the U.S. for at least 10 years.[5]

In a real sense, ESL adult education students residing in the U.S. are all already de facto "lifelong" learners who have begun, to some degree, the process of English-language acquisition. This underscores the desirability of further consideration of adult education providers' diverse roles in accelerating and fostering increased English-language proficiency. Clearly, newly-arrived immigrants or refugees are, in a straightforward sense, "beginning" learners but their experience (and instructional needs) must be distinguished from those of an older immigrant who may have lived in California for one or two decades without learning much English.

Spanish-speaking LEP Adults' Skills Development Needs in Four Major Functional Domains

Successful functioning in contemporary society demands of virtually all individuals, limited English or not, a broad repertoire of "high-performance" skills in communication, teamwork and collaboration, acquisition, interpretation, and evaluation of novel information, and problem-solving. Over the past decade, a solid analytic framework for describing and responding to these skills development needs has emerged. This framework is based on the work of Anthony Carnevale regarding employment-related skills and subsequently on a federal inter-agency initiative, the Secretary's Commission for Achieving the Necessary Skills (SCANS) which formulated a simple but powerful schematism for displaying the relationship among these distinct but interrelated competencies.

In the context of adult education policy, this thrust has given rise to a new conceptual paradigm to guide adult education policy and practice, a commitment to develop adult learners' competencies in four major domains of adult functioning -- workplace, family life, community life, and life-long learning. Each of these domains is interrelated but, in general, the domain of lifelong learning competencies (in the SCANS framework "learning to learn") can be seen as a foundation for building

[5] The LPR sample included immigrants from a number of English-speaking countries-in the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America (Canada).

intellectual agility in responding to the demanding and constantly-changing challenges of workplace, family, and community life.

The key recognition is that a "world-class" adult education system must, within the concrete social environment in which learners now function, seek to develop, a solid foundation of skills which, eventually, can be deployed or "transferred" into a broader range of functional contexts. While the SCANS framework was developed in an environment of policy concerns about skills deficits affecting workers' ability to function in the "high-performance" workplace, there are important ways in which contemporary family life, community life, and lifelong learning challenges demand the same competencies that employers told researchers they wanted in the workforce.[6] For example, teamwork and negotiating skills developed in one context --e.g. dealing with family and friends --can (and must) be transferred into relations with co-workers at a team-based business establishment and with political allies in addressing common community concerns.

In order to provide guidance on Spanish-speaking adults' skills development needs in each of these major domains, we asked SSHS respondents to rate their ability to deal with characteristic demands in each. In order to assess needs in these distinct domains we constructed an index of self-assessed ability to function in each skills domain. The index for each domain, i.e., workplace, family life, community, lifelong learning, consisted of four sub-areas (a total of 16 distinct areas of functioning) of SCANS-linked competencies. We asked SSHS survey respondents to rate how confident they were that they could successfully cope with the demands they faced in each of these domains -- in the context in which they were currently working and living and, hypothetically, if they needed to function in English (as they would, for example, in any Midwestern state or, in fact, in many communities or workplace settings in California).

Table Series 2-A through **2-D** show that Spanish-speaking LEP adults are relatively functional in their current context but that they would be would be severely constrained if they had to function in an English-speaking context to which they were not adapted. Within the social ecology of immigrant enclaves, many of the Spanish-

[6] Arnold Packer, whose work formed the basis of the SCANS report, argued cogently for recognition of the implications of this analytic framework in a cogent article, "What Democracy Requires of Our Schools", Education Week, March, 1996.

speaking LEP adults we talked to were able to function relatively well (although current competencies varied significantly among sub-groups. However, as they moved out of the protected "core" of their social universe, they felt less and less confident of success.[7]

From this perspective, then, a major theme to be addressed in responding to LEP adults' needs is skills development oriented specifically toward building a foundation for the personal, social, and economic agility and mobility, needed to "push the envelope" in contemporary America -- to do what one wants, live where one wants, and have the opinions one wants to have.

Table Series 2-A through **2-D** below, then shows current competencies, self-assessed competencies for functioning in a "standard" (i.e., English-speaking environment). The mean difference computed for functioning in the current context and the English-speaking context, then provides a measure of: a) relative need for skills development in each of the 16 areas and b) expected benefits from targeted skills development in each domain.

Workplace Domain

The question of workplace competencies is particularly crucial because a leading public policy concern relates to whether immigrants are (and will continue to be) economically self-sufficient.[8] The extensive research on immigrants' labor market experience shows that they have extremely high labor force participation and low reliance on public services. However, many researchers are concerned because immigrants' earning power increases less rapidly with age than native-born English-proficient workers. Moreover, current cohorts of immigrants may not experience the modest earning gains of previous immigrant cohorts because skills demands for entry into and career advancement in the "primary" labor market continue to escalate, while

[7] In sociolinguistic terms, movement out of a core universe of social interactions can be associated with ability to use a variety of socially distinct dialects, i.e., code-switching. Versatility and flexibility in communication are, of course, closely but not perfectly linked to competencies in broader areas identified in the SCANS framework such as teamwork which rest on communications.

[8] Refugees' labor market participation is lower than that of other groups of immigrants, making employability even more of a public concern but this should not be taken as evidence that investments in building workplace competencies are not worthwhile, rather that programs should be structured to respond to each service population's needs. Hmong and Cambodian participants in our focus groups provided valuable insight into the labor market problems they faced.

the extent of segmentation dividing primary, secondary, and "tertiary" labor market sectors increases.

The employment patterns of SSHS respondents were broadly representative of California's limited English-proficient Latino immigrant population with limited schooling in that virtually all were clustered in low-wage occupations in immigrant-dominated industries. Among those employed, leading occupations were packing shed/cannery work (18%), farmwork (12%), restaurant work (13%), housecleaning (10%), construction and carpentry (8%), unskilled factory work (7%), child care (5%), auto repair and auto body (5%), gardening (4%) and child care/babysitting (4%). Within the context of this secondary labor market, the remaining "premium" jobs held by SSHS respondents are those commonly thought of as semi-skilled blue-collar work -- warehouse work, butcher, florist, machinist, janitor, cashier, and hotel employee.

More than one-third of the SSHS were not working at the time of our interview. Of these non-working respondents, 28% were unemployed but apparently in the labor force, 7% said they were housewives, and 1% were not working because of age or disability. It is not possible to tell exactly which proportion of these were discouraged workers, temporarily unemployed workers, and casual workers. The boundaries among these standard labor force distinctions are quite fuzzy in this population because employment is typically so unstable and employment is so often contingent on personal networks rather than effort in "looking for work" via standard channels such as reading the want ads.

Table 2-A on the next page shows SSHS respondents' own assessment of their abilities (and consequently skills development needs) in this domain.

Table 2-A
Self-Assessment of Workplace Competencies

Workplace Domain: *How confident are you that you can do what it takes to meet your own and others' expectations*	**In current environment**			**In English-only environment**		
	Very or extremely	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**	**Very or extremely**	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**
a) in the work you're doing now? *	66%	22%	12%	8%	15%	77%
b) for getting a better position in the kind of work you're doing now?	40%	15%	45%	5%	9%	86%
c) for getting a job in some new kind of work (occupation)?	43%	17%	40%	7%	11%	82%
d) for communicating with your supervisor, boss, or the company owner	47%	21%	32%	7%	11%	82%

**Q. A-5a was coded "not applicable" for persons not currently in the labor force, i.e., neither employed or looking for work. 69% of those who answered this question (174) were, in fact, in the labor force.*

Table 2-A shows that SSHS respondents who do work feel relatively well-prepared to do their current jobs but much less prepared for career mobility, either upward mobility within the occupation they are now in or horizontal movement to deal with changing employment. Interestingly, many report themselves quite able to communicate with their supervisors. This is because the workplace language in many of the industries and occupations where respondents work is Spanish (e.g. packing sheds, auto mechanic shops, restaurants). In cases such as housework where the workplace language was English, some respondents who were very limited in English felt they could communicate adequately with the person they worked for (the lady of the house) specifically because the communication demands were minimal -- e.g., "Clean here!" Only a very small minority (5-8%) felt they could function outside this distinctive workplace environment.

Table 2-A highlights the degree to which LEP adults are "at risk" workers, constantly threatened by the possibility that the establishment where they work will go broke, leave town, or force workers to leave work as a result of on-the-job conflicts, poor working conditions, or job demands which can only be met by workers with

excellent health. In terms of workplace competencies, then, LEP adults' needs cluster around the need to build the foundation of SCANS-linked skills which will provide them the same occupational mobility and freedom to negotiate with employers enjoyed by English-proficient workers.

Family Life Domain

LEP adults' family lives are, typically, poised at a place in social space between the "sheltered" domain of informal family and village networks which govern many interactions and the external formal institutions such as schools, health care providers, and social service agencies which, also, play an important role in their lives and, perhaps more importantly, their children's future well being. **Table 2-B** reports SSHS respondents' assessment of their ability to function in this broad area of social interaction.

Table 2-B
Self-Assessment of ability
to deal with demands of Family Life

Family Life Domain: *How confident are you that you can do what it takes to meet your own and others' expectations*	**In current environment**			**In English-only environment**		
	Very or extremely	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**	**Very or extremely**	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**
a) in dealing with money management issues	49%	24%	27%	7%	8%	85%
b) in getting help to deal with health, housing, or similar issues?	35%	26%	39%	6%	6%	88%
c) for advising family members in the decisions they face	58%	19%	23%	5%	8%	87%
d) for communicating with the people you talk to in daily life--stores, teachers, neighbors	55%	22%	23%	7%	9%	84%

Table 2-B shows that, in their current environment, SSHS respondents feel relatively well prepared to engage in the routine social demands of their family lives and day-to-day transactions but much less prepared to deal with outside institutions, including those meant to help them with the problems they face. There are, however

significant differences among sub-groups in terms of their assessment of their ability to function effectively in the domain of family life.

It deserves special note, perhaps, that the issue of advising family members in the decisions they face in an English-speaking context is not hypothetical but one commonly faced in connection with parenting since most U.S.-born children of LEP parents grow up to be English-dominant while their parents retain their native language. **Table 2-B** shows that few feel well-qualified to function effectively in this domain. Taken in the context of the research on the problems faced by immigrant children (and their parents) in juggling two languages and value systems which, at times, conflict the issue of building "high-performance" skills in the domain of family life may merit special attention, particularly in light of the constraints SSHS respondents describe in communicating with "outside" institutions in English.

In general while SSHS respondents feel as minimally qualified to deal with family life as with workplace issues in English, they do feel somewhat more qualified to cope with these issues in their current (Spanish-speaking) social environment.

Community Life Domain

The often rhetorical issue of civic involvement is for Californians living in communities which are deeply divided by race, ethnicity, language, and economic class, a practical real-life concern. Ideally, community involvement might include not only activities related to pursuing one's own personal goals and objectives but, also, efforts to make a contribution to overall community well-being. "Productive" involvement in community life involves a wide-range of skills in acquiring and evaluating information, problem-solving, negotiating and teamwork, particularly for low-income persons who cannot afford to isolate themselves from overall issues of community life.

Table 2-C on the next page shows that the community life domain is a particularly problematic one for SSHS respondents as they do not feel particularly well qualified to deal with the community life demands they face in either Spanish or English.

Table 2-C
Self-Assessment of Ability
to Participate in Community Life

Community Life Domain: *To what extent do you feel you're able to deal with or contribute to community responses to the following issues you face :*	**In current environment**			**In English-only environment**		
	Great extent	**Some extent**	**Not very well not at all**	**Great extent**	**Some extent**	**Not very well not at all**
a) dealing with ongoing community problems -- e.g. help from police to decrease crime, better housing	42%	28%	30%	2%	10%	88%
b) joining with friends and neighbors to have a say about how organizations respond to your needs	34%	20%	46%	2%	7%	91%
c) for understanding the community issues you hear about, see in the newspaper or which people vote on?	25%	27%	48%	3%	4%	93%
d) for communicating your opinion or viewpoint to local leaders, your state representatives or Congressional representatives	26%	18%	55%	3%	5%	92%

Table 2-C shows that SSHS respondents feel they are less able to cope with the tasks of understanding the community issues they hear about in newspapers or which people vote on and their ability to communicate their opinion to their local leaders and elected representatives than with any of the other 16 tasks inventoried in our analysis of competencies in different domains.

The effective functioning of the democratic process under such conditions is only barely conceivable. While current policy priorities place little value on the existence of a broadly-based process of democratic involvement, this is a concern

which cannot safely be ignored.[9] While it might be argued that many LEP adults will never leave their communities and others may never leave their jobs, the idea that all should be regularly involved in the public decisions which will affect their lives and those of their children. The community life domain is a priority area for skills development.

The Domain of Lifelong Learning

Having a solid foundation for continued learning and personal skills development is a necessary condition for achieving social and economic equity in an information-based society. This is a domain where adult basic skills programs have a particular contribution to make. Even if there are not adequate financial or organizational resources to prepare LEP adult learners to bridge the very substantial skills gap they face, the prospect of establishing a foundation for learning is an important part of the adult education mission. In very practical terms, the metaphor of "learning English", while relating to many dimensions of acculturation, relates most directly to establishing a foothold for continued learning about U.S. society. Here, as in the other domains, SSHS respondents feel somewhat prepared to function in their current environment but only minimally prepared to function in a English-language environment. Thus, **Table 2-D** below serves, in part to emphasize the fairly obvious set of needs related to learning English.

The most striking pattern observable in SSHS respondents' answers to this set of questions is the recognition that building skills in the area of computer-based and library-based access to information (a subset of reference skills in general) is an important area for development. Certainly, by way of commitment to the principle of ongoing learning, efforts to build LEP adult learners' ability to acquire and analyze the information they need to navigate an information-based economy and society would seem to deserve very high priority. LEP adults' own sense of their skills development needs in this area is congruent with that of "third party" stakeholders such as employers and programs such as health education, consumer education and other special-purpose agencies which regularly seek ways to improve their ability to communicate to "hard to reach" groups.

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[9] Surely, native-born English-proficient adults with compromised literacy skills might report similar difficulties, though possibly slightly less severe. The effective disenfrancisment of all such socially marginalized groups is of immediate and practical, as well as theoretical, concern.

Table 2-D
Self-Assessment of Ability
To Develop New Skills, Learn New Information

Lifelong Learning Domain: *How confident are you that you can do what it takes to develop new skills or get the information you need to get ahead in life, how about?*	**In current environment**			**In English-only environment**		
	Very or extremely	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**	**Very or extremely**	**Somewhat**	**Not very not at all**
a) participating and succeeding in a program to learn a new trade or occupation?	51%	18%	31%	7%	9%	84%
b) using magazines, manuals, or books to find out information you want or need (at work or in your daily life)	45%	18%	37%	5%	11%	84%
c) using other resources to get the information you need, for example, computers or libraries	24%	13%	63%	4%	7%	89%
d) deciding whether or not you want to improve your educational skills and how you might best go about doing that	44%	20%	36%	5%	9%	86%

As is the case in the other domains, there are, within the overall population of LEP adults, sub-groups which differ distinctly from each other in terms of self-assessed competencies and, presumably, foundation skills needed to successfully engage in lifelong learning.

SSHS Findings Emphasize the Need to Build on the Foundations of Available Research

These findings from the SSHS serve, in part, to highlight the importance of achieving and closer and more productive linkage between language theory and design

of instructional programs.[10] While new research is needed, there are, nonetheless, solid theoretical foundations which provide at least a conceptual framework for improving current practice and for comprehensively profiling second-language acquisition in immigrant enclaves. These insights, commonplace to linguists and even to language policy analysts and planners such as myself, are conspicuously overlooked in virtually all current discussion of social policy options, program design, resource allocation, technical assistance, and staff development.

Because human social interactions are complex, the processes and dynamics of language acquisition are complex. Running through the entire literature in sociolinguistics is attention to the fact that second-language use and learning is both context-sensitive and multi-dimensional. The work of Fishman (Fishman and Ma, 1962) is crucial as a milestone in looking at the diverse contexts in which language is used. My sense is that the SSHS findings should be understood to strongly support the need for greater attention to the very interesting issues of discourse analysis and communication context as considerations in effective system planning and curriculum design.

Researchers such as Hymes have stressed the idea of "communicative competence" as entailing dimensions of social meaning which go well beyond syntactic, semantic, and phonemic competencies. The idea of language use as a set of skills acquired and deployed within a social context is a powerful one and has been extended in many ways which both reflect on LEP adult learners' needs and hold promise for creative program design and effective instructional practice. Gumperz points to the process of "conversational inferencing" as a factor both in cross-cultural communication and in interpreting spoken language.

The SSHS findings regarding the exigencies faced by immigrants, as they continue to live in the United States, to move outward from life in immigrant enclaves to more broadly "surf" the occupational and social ocean of America seem to underscore the importance of these aspects of "high performance" communication skills. Presumably, targeted attention to development of this sort of meta-skills might

[10] However, it is possible that the much more basic step of developing awareness among current adult education administrators that effective adult learning programs should be systematically structured to support effective learning is necessary first. In actual practice, most adult school administration consists of scheduling and technical operations related to securing and allocating funding, not to instructional design or support for effective instruction.

play a crucial role in facilitating continued use of English outside the "sheltered" (sometimes sterile) context of the ESL classroom. Our study shows little evidence that the implications of such profoundly important research has been fulfilled in actual ESL practice.

Stephen Reder has expanded the general idea of language acquisition within a social context to explore how the literacy history of a specific community may affect language use and interactions between oral language and literacy. Within Reder's practice-engagement theory framework, different individuals may have different modes of engagement with language use (i.e., technological, functional, and social engagement) and, in fact, may collaborate by combining each individual's competencies to communicate effectively, e.g. to write a letter to a newspaper editor.

Reder's work has particular relevance, both because it describes actual patterns of linguistic collaboration in immigrant communities and because it provides a basis for formulating effective strategies for collaborative ESL instruction. Reder and Green have used the metaphor of "giving literacy away" to describe an instructional approach which, as they put it, "is meant to suggest the delivery of literacy training to adults in the context of their own settings, peer networks and value systems rather than in those of the service provider" (Reder and Green, 1985). There is little evidence from my case studies that these suggestions and recommendations have been widely adopted. Interestingly, it appears that the adult education program designs which have addressed learner collaboration in the most explicit and focused way are those which use the Internet as a basis for building literacy via collaborative interaction with "virtual communities" of on-line learners.

Gail Weinstein-Shr highlights an extremely important dimension of the English-language acquisition process by emphasizing the implications of inter-generational language shift (Weinstein-Shr, 1994). By focusing on language-use within the family context, Weinstein-Shr explores the different dimensions of intra-family language use; she emphasizes, in particular, LEP adults' expressed needs to communicate with their children and their grandchildren while retaining power/authority within the family structure. Her work opens up the very interesting issue of how family literacy approaches might be adapted to better serve immigrant communities. SSHS respondents and focus group participants in our study had a variety of valuable insights into the constraints on family literacy program designs in meeting their needs, as well as suggestions for enhancing such designs. There has

been some progress in this area but the piecemeal process of current program design efforts (both within districts and across the state and nation) detracts from advances in this area.

The most immediately important practical implications of recent research for understanding the adult learning needs of California's LEP adults is that "learning English" is a metaphor for a huge spectrum of personal and linguistic transformations. Efforts to enhance LEP adults' language acquisition should, ideally, take into account the personal, family, and community context in which this process takes place. In principle, instructional effectiveness can be tremendously increased by program creativity in responding to the particular "needs profile" of each community and each sub-group of learners. In practice, even if the adult education system has no immediate way to fully understand the complex mix of personal resources, perspectives, and aspirations LEP learners bring to an ESL program, all programs must give careful attention for ways to extend learning beyond the classroom in recognition of the degree to which English-language acquisition involves conscious formal and unconscious informal collaboration in acquiring and enhancing language skills.

Promising Directions for Applied Research in Second-Language Acquisition as a Basis for Formulating Social Policy

An inevitable question, is where next? We designed the California Adult LEP Study within the constraints of a tight timeline (9 months for research design, field research, data analysis, and reporting since the study was a legislatively-mandated one). I believe it represents a valuable but quite modest beginning to systematically address the key questions of designing an effective system of adult education services for America's immigrants.

The effort which I believe must be undertaken, I must stress again, is different from research about what "works" in ESL, what "best practices" are, what "models" are promising, etc. The mere fact of defining the research agenda in such terms subtly sidesteps the central issue of designing a system which will reliably deliver effective social interventions, in this case providing affordable opportunities for immigrant adults to develop the communication skills they need to achieve social and economic equity in America.

Current preoccupation, for example, with "performance-driven" adult education reform assumes that there already exist effective mechanisms to actually design and manage K-12 adult learning programs so that, with the proper incentives, adult education administrators could actually provide reliable quality services with "guarantees" to learners.

There is not actually much evidence that such mechanisms exist. One of the things we have discovered in our strategic planning work for California and for local school districts is that there are is seldom a structured a systematic process for translating "needs assessments" into high-impact interventions. What do exist are isolated insights, promising practices, and idiosyncratic moments of awareness of certain dimensions of the problem; my colleague Heide Wrigley refers to these as "sparks of excellence". Whether or not, the mixed metaphor is appropriate, it is clear that these have not kindled a "prairie fire" of system reform.

I would like to conclude this paper with an exhortation to adult education administrators to approach the policy and program planning tasks deliberately and systematically, but with an eye to the possibility that the rhetoric of responsive "anytime any place" services to "life long learners might actually be feasible and serve to inform program design.

In the context of the current conference's focus on the role of applied linguistics, I think it would be valuable to acknowledge that further research might make valuable contributions if there were to be serious attention to coming up with a "clean sheet" design of an effective and affordable sub-system oriented toward the goal of assisting immigrant adult learners to build the skills they need to function effectively and achieve social equity in the workplace and in the communities in which they live. There are no studies which I am familiar with which provide detailed descriptions of the longitudinal process of adults' second language acquisition in a real-world context in U.S. immigrant communities The ideal study would be one which:

a) presents a multi-dimensional framework for analyzing limited-English adults' English-language use, not simply in gross terms such as "oral" and "written" proficiency but in terms of syntactic, semantic, and phonemic characteristics and, most importantly, in terms of discourse structure, social context, and communication style/effectiveness in diverse settings. Such a framework might contribute

significantly toward impetus for responsive, customized program designs for different sub-groups of learners.

b) provides a longitudinal profile of both oral and print language use in behavioral terms over a substantial period of time (e.g. 20 years). A key element in such profiling would be incorporation of a sociolinguistic framework with network analyses of who immigrants communicated with in which contexts. Such an effort could contribute significantly to harness the powerful dynamics of immigrant social networks as a force for sustaining self-directed, lifelong learning.

c) fully documents and characterizes, immigrants' language-learning strategies and behavior, including efforts to build proficiency in both formal settings (e.g. the ESL classroom) and informal exchanges (e.g. with children, storekeepers, employers, friends). Such an effort could lead to better materials design, better individualized services, and further insights into collaborative learning as an element in cost-effective social interventions

d) interprets research findings in terms of implications for language policy and program planning for increasingly cost-effective programs designed not to magically "bootstrap" second-language learners from a state of not knowing English to "knowing English" but, rather, to nudge, sustain, and accelerate natural language learning within the existing social ecology of immigrant communities. Such research, taken in conjunction with newly-emerging insights from chaos theory about the nature of self-propagating systems, has the possibility of sparking new innovation.

Why Further Applied Research is Crucial

The process of formulating social policy is a complex one, in which several different dynamic processes interact. Because a substantial portion of policy formulation is based not on rational systematic analysis of social dynamics but, rather, on tactical political objectives, it is particularly crucial that the applied policy research be effectively deployed in such debates. In order to accomplish this it is necessary not only to present the findings from sound research but, also, develop and test hypotheses which will provide practical guidance for policy.

In the current of current policy debate, immigrant populations are particularly vulnerable to misunderstanding and inferior quality service even from ostensibly

caring and well-meaning service providers, not only because politicians can deliberately scapegoat immigrants for a wide range of social difficulties ranging from environmental degradation to falling test scores in science but, also, because "folk theories" of social dynamics tend to take hold and determine the shape and regulatory framework of the programs nominally designed to serve them.

A case in point which demonstrates the need for sound empirical foundations for policy formation and program design is the current implementation of over-arching efforts in the arena of welfare-to-work. Policy analysts and politicians based major programmatic and legislative decisions on extremely limited data and even less incisive analyses as a basis for planning. Even the high-profile work of William Julius Wilson on the structural characteristics of inner-city communities, Isabel Sawyer's very early research on longitudinal labor market experience of welfare recipients, and the work of sociologists such as David Gottlieb on inner-city teenagers' career perspectives, have been disregarded in constructing a "welfare reform" program which emphasizes inappropriate outcomes (i.e. moving from public assistance into entry-level jobs instead of achieving employment stability) based on a folklore stereotype (i.e. welfare recipients as lazy mothers).

More directly, in terms of immigrant social policy, the "model" of welfare reform disregarded even the data which were available on the diversity of immigrant experience, implicitly and, sometimes, as Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel have pointed out, explicitly modeling the debate on immigrant social policy on a sub-group of immigrants -- the cohort of Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in the early 1970's.

Sound applied research can make a valuable contribution to "win-win" immigrant social policy and to effective program design by focusing on the heterogeneity of immigrant adult learner populations, developing frameworks to support "rich" rather than reductionistic constructs of communication skills and program outcomes, and pointing toward innovative approaches to system design, curriculum development, and instructional methodology. Limited-English immigrants, who make up the largest single group of adult education "customers" in the country, deserve this sort of investment in quality service.

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