If Can, Can: Hawai‘i Creole and Reading Achievement

Kathryn H. Au

I remember the day I learned that Hawai‘i Creole (HC) was a language and not merely a form of broken English. This revelation came during a lecture given by one of my favorite professors, Betty Uehara. As Uehara discussed the wen past tense marker and other features of HC, I sat there in her language arts methods class wondering why I had never known of this perspective before. Having been born and raised in Hawai‘i, I was astonished to think that I had grown up speaking a language so stigmatized that I had never believed it to be a language at all.

Twenty-five years later I would return as a professor to the University of Hawai‘i, College of Education, to teach language arts courses myself. Because I found that most of my students were no better informed about HC than I had been, I often devoted a whole class to tackling the folk beliefs and misconceptions surrounding what most people in Hawai‘i call “pidgin English.” I would review the history of how HC had emerged as a lingua franca in Hawai‘i during the 1890’s, explain how HC had evolved by combining the syntax of the Hawaiian language with a lexicon drawn primarily from English, and draw comparisons to educational controversies surrounding African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Labov, 1982).

It was fascinating to watch students’ faces as they digested this information and to hear the questions they raised. The reaction of most local students paralleled my own reaction so many years earlier: “Why didn’t anyone tell me this before?” One student, a retired military officer who had returned to the university to become a teacher, asked several pointed questions, frowned, and was obviously struggling with the issues. After class he came up to me and extended his hand. “Thank you for the information you shared today,” he said. “I had no idea, I just had no idea.”

I do not believe that HC needs to be taught in the classroom as the basis for promoting reading achievement. Parents in Native Hawaiian communities have always indicated to me that they send their children to school to learn what they cannot easily teach them at home, including the kind of proficiency in Standard English that enables success in the larger society. Many of these parents would adamantly oppose attempts to teach students to read through HC texts, just as parents in African American communities opposed the use of “dialect readers,” or texts for the teaching of reading written in AAVE (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). In African American communities, parents’ opposition centered on concerns that their children would receive an inferior curriculum, with fewer learning opportunities than students in other schools to reach high levels of achievement in the reading of Standard English. I think these are legitimate concerns.

On one hand, I believe that Standard English, the language of power in the United States and in Hawai‘i, is the language that must be emphasized if students are to learn to read well in school, in ways recognized by the larger society. On the other hand, I believe that rejecting students’ home language is tantamount to rejecting the students themselves, as suggested by both research (Au, 2006) and personal experience. Therefore, even as Standard English must be the focus of instruction, students’ home languages, including HC, must be acknowledged and treated with dignity and respect.

In this essay I review what I have come to understand about HC and its relationship to learning to read. My essay is organized around four topics: (1) language, literacy, and power in Hawai‘i, (2) HC and literacy learning, (3) resistance to learning literacy in school, and (4) sustained school change to improve the literacy learning of students who speak HC as their primary language.

Language, Literacy, and Power in Hawai‘i

Every multicultural society has a language of power—the language spoken by members of the dominant group or groups—as well as languages that lack power because they are spoken by members of the subordinate group or groups. The ascension of one language over another has long been a source of controversy in Hawai‘i, as it has in many parts of the world. If we follow the changing landscape of language use in Hawai‘i, beginning with the arrival of the British explorer James Cook in 1778 and the first party of Congregational missionaries from New England in 1820, we can trace how the Hawaiian language was deliberately replaced by English as the language of power (Au & Kaomea, in press; Au, 2007). The use of English literacy was central to colonization efforts, in which Native Hawaiians were positioned as inferior to European Americans through letters, government reports, newspaper articles, and the like.

Because teachers of English were few and far between, the missionaries determined that it would be impractical to begin the schooling of Native Hawaiians in that language (e.g., Armstrong, 1858). Therefore, efforts to teach Native Hawaiians to read and write proceeded in two stages. First, beginning in the 1840s, thousands of Hawaiians gained literacy in the Hawaiian language through the common, or government, schools, staffed entirely by Native Hawaiian teachers. In 1880, as more English-speaking teachers were becoming available, the Board of Education began a determined effort to replace the common schools with government English schools. Through the systematic closing of the common schools, sometimes upon the retirement of elderly Native Hawaiian teachers, English replaced Hawaiian as the language of instruction. In 1895 Henry S. Townsend, inspector-general of schools, wrote, “As predicted in the last report, the schools taught in the Hawaiian language are dead” with only three remaining, enrolling just fifty-nine students (Townsend, 1895, p. 21). The infamous law of 1896 passed by the provisional government, banning the use of Hawaiian in schools, appears to have been largely a symbolic gesture, as the linguistic battle had already been won.

History reminds us that efforts to educate students and provide them with literacy in the language of power are not necessarily beneficial or even benign (Willis, 2002). Schooling in the language of power, including literacy learning, may be tied to dominant group efforts to reinforce control over the society. Because of the present dominance of Standard English in Hawai‘i, it is easy to forget that through the nineteenth century Hawaiian, not English, remained the most widely spoken language in these islands. By the 1860s, Native Hawaiian writers were fighting to preserve the culture and political and social standing of their people, for example, through newspaper articles and petitions in the Hawaiian language (Au & Kaomea, in press). Native Hawaiians were able to take ownership of literacy and resist colonization by appropriating literacy for their own purposes.

In the nineteenth century the Hawaiian language had its place even in many non-Hawaiian families. My great-grandfather, Chun Lin Hung, ran a rice mill in Hulē‘ia, Kaua‘i, and grew rice on land leased from George N. Wilcox. Because my great-grandfather could not speak English, and Wilcox could not speak Cantonese, they conversed in the one language they had in common—Hawaiian. In the Chinese fashion, Chun Lin Hung was called Ah Hung, and he was known to Native Hawaiian acquaintances as Ahana. As a result, the family surname was changed to Chun Ahana and then simply to Ahana. The very names of many of our local families reflect the widespread influence of the Hawaiian language in the nineteenth century.

Despite the banning of Hawaiian in schools, English did not replace Hawaiian as the lingua franca in plantation communities in the 1890s. Instead, the Hawai‘i-born children of plantation workers grew up speaking HC to communicate with one another (Sato, 1985). As mentioned, while HC uses a largely English lexicon, its syntax is that of the Hawaiian language. For example, a speaker of HC might compliment a friend by saying “nice, your shoes” rather than “your shoes are nice.” Because of its divergence from the Standard English spoken by members of the dominant groups in Hawai‘i, HC was seen as a form of “broken English” in the popular press and in folk beliefs, rather than as a valid language in its own right. Through the twentieth century, HC and its speakers were stigmatized, reinforcing their position as members of subordinate groups, just as the Hawaiian

language and its native speakers had been stigmatized in earlier generations. A further irony in the twentieth century was that the stigmatization of HC was at times carried out by Hawai'i-born legislators and educators who had themselves grown up as speakers of HC (Kua, 1999).

HC is one of the heritage languages of the people of these islands, along with Hawaiian, Ilokano, Japanese, Portuguese, and other languages. HC differs from other heritage languages in Hawai'i in that, as a lingua franca, it did not originate with any single ethnic group. HC is first and foremost a spoken language and does not have a standard orthography, although there is a steadily growing literature in HC, with writers such as Darrell Lum (1990), Lee Tonouchi (2001), and Lois-Ann Yamanaka (1996). In common with other heritage languages, HC connects its speakers to the history of their families and others who share a common cultural bond, in this case the Hawai'i plantation experience.

HC and Learning to Read

Speaking HC as a primary language does not prevent students from becoming excellent readers and writers of Standard English. The evidence for this assertion is seen in the many Hawai'i-born individuals who have grown up as speakers of HC and gone on to successful careers in a wide variety of fields, including academics and the law, that require extensive use of Standard English and essayist literacy. All of these individuals, at some time in their lives, likely had the opportunity to learn essayist literacy, and to learn it well, perhaps at school or on the job. Essayist literacy, also known as autonomous literacy (Au, 2006; Street, 1995) is the kind of literacy valued in Western academic circles and evaluated on large-scale tests, the kind that gets students good grades in their high school English classes and that allows them to write convincing essays when applying to college. In other words it is the kind of literacy that gives an individual the appearance of being an intelligent and educated person, according to the cultural norms of the society's dominant groups.

As implied earlier, what gives a language prestige and power is neither its linguistic code nor its expressive potential but the socioeconomic status of its speakers. Gee (1990) reminds us that it is not the linguistic code alone we must master when we seek to learn a language well, but an entire discourse. His oft quoted definition of a discourse is as follows: "A discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network,' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'" (p. 143, italics in the original).

From the perspective of critical theory, one of the reasons it is important for the dominant groups in the society to elevate the prestige of their own language, and to denigrate the language of the subordinate groups, is to maintain their position of power. A command of the language of power—mastery of the discourse, in Gee's terms, and not just the linguistic code—is often a prerequisite for entry into the elite circles that control the society's major institutions, such as business, government, and education. In other words, to advance in society, individuals must usually speak, write, and otherwise present themselves in ways that signal their identity as dominant group members and their familiarity with the culture of power. A discourse allows those within its purview to distinguish between "us" and "them." In keeping with a critical analysis, it follows that access to the language of power must necessarily be carefully controlled, readily available to children of the dominant groups yet difficult to obtain for children of the subordinate groups. Schooling in the language of power is treated as a precious resource, to be carefully distributed for the benefit of the few.

In the history of Hawai'i, a well known example of the rationing of schooling in the language of power and essayist literacy is seen in the English standard schools, which had their beginnings in 1920. These schools were opened at the behest of European American parents who wanted their children educated in a Standard English environment, apart from the HC-speaking children of working class families. These schools provided an attractive option for parents unable or unwilling to pay for a private school education. Ostensibly, public schools with this designation were to provide the opportunity for any qualified student to receive a rigorous education. In practice, students were admitted on the basis of their proficiency in Standard English, at a time in Hawai'i's history when most students grew up speaking HC as their first language. Thus, especially in the early years, students from European American families could pass the test of English proficiency required for admission, while others could not.

Today, inequality in reading achievement serves as just one sign of how effectively the channeling of access to the

language of power and essayist literacy continues to work in the United States. Elsewhere, I have described in detail the layering of reading test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which show that the mean scale scores for African American and Latino students at grade twelve are almost exactly the same as the mean scale scores of White and Asian Pacific American students at grade eight (Au, 2006). In other words, students in the former groups have fallen about four years behind students in the latter groups by the time they finish high school.

I have not seen a comparable analysis of results on the Hawai‘i state reading tests, introduced in 2001–02, but past standardized reading test results reported in the Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment Program (NHEAP) (Kamehameha Schools Office of Program Evaluation and Planning, 1993) showed a layering of scores on standardized reading tests, with European American and Japanese American students scoring above the national average and students of Native Hawaiian and Filipino ancestry scoring below the national average. These results suggest that access to essayist literacy is selectively distributed in our state, just as it is in the rest of the nation. My view is that it is the lack of opportunity to learn essayist literacy well, rather than the fact that they speak HC as a primary language, that accounts for some Hawai‘i-born students’ poor showing on tests of reading achievement.

While I was drafting this essay, an article appeared in the *Honolulu Advertiser* with the following lead: “Fifty years after graduating from Maui’s only English-standard school, half of the members of Kaunoa School’s class of 1957 returned to the site of their former campus this month to install a commemorative plaque” (Wilson, 2007). This class, the last to complete grade eight at Kaunoa, included Maui Mayor Charmaine Tavares; Shirley Kodani Cavanaugh, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel; Gaylord Kubota, director of the Alexander and Baldwin Sugar Museum; and Warren Shibuya, a former instructor in aerospace management at the University of Hawai‘i. In their comments, the graduates expressed their appreciation for the education they had received at Kaunoa. Cavanaugh noted that, while they learned at school to communicate well in Standard English, the students still spoke “pidgin” (HC) when they went home and had the ability to switch between the two codes.

One of the lessons to be learned from these graduates’ experience at Kaunoa is that it was perfectly possible for public schools in Hawai‘i to teach students who grow up speaking HC to master essayist literacy and speak Standard English well. One of the features distinguishing the English standard schools appears to be that teachers held high expectations for their students and, as a result, may have been following a more academically rigorous curriculum than in other public schools. Research continues to verify the hypothesis of the self-fulfilling prophecy, demonstrating the role of teachers’ perceptions of students. These perceptions predict changes in student achievement beyond differences accounted for by students’ prior achievement and motivation (Jussim & Eccles, 1992).

In common with all members of a society, educators are subject to the influence of dominant group discourse, and this discourse can be used to keep those who do not speak the language of power in a position of inferiority (e.g., Au & Kaomea, in press). Such is the case, for example, when an Associated Press article refers to “pidgin English” as “an amalgamation of Hawaiian and foreign words spoken with a cadence that is almost impenetrable to the malihini” (Dunford, 1999). It is not surprising, then, that listeners judge a speaker of Standard English as superior to a speaker of HC, even when the two are presenting the same ideas (Ohama, Gotay, Pagano, Boles, & Craven, 1999). Consciously or subconsciously, many still seem to assume that sound reasoning can only be expressed in the language of power, a myth debunked by sociolinguistic research dating back over thirty years. Labov’s (1973) classic research on the logic of nonstandard English, specifically, AAVE, included a striking transcript of skillfully constructed, spontaneous arguments about the existence and nature of God proposed by Larry, a young African American from the inner city. Labov observed that Larry’s arguments, stated entirely in AAVE, were entirely understandable and convincing, leaving no doubt that he could use the English language effectively for a wide range of purposes.

In analyzing the black-white test score gap, Ferguson (2003) argued that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students’ beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to perpetuate educational inequities. A parallel set of circumstances may well be affecting many HC-speaking students, particularly those attending schools in low-income communities. While I do not believe that teacher perceptions are the only reason for below-average reading achievement results, many Hawai‘i educators will have witnessed the phe-

nomenon of low teacher expectations at work. Low teacher expectations for students' performance have been identified as a key issue in accreditation and other external evaluation reports for more than one high school in our state. I saw the phenomenon of low expectations several years ago, when I was working with a team of teacher-leaders from a rural high school in which the vast majority of students spoke HC as their primary language. The task I had presented to the team was to draft a vision statement of the excellent writer who graduated from their school, a task that has not posed a problem to any group of teachers before or since. This particular team of teachers insisted that they could not develop a vision statement describing the excellent writer who graduated from their school. The reason, they asserted, was that their school did not have any students who could become excellent writers.

A vicious cycle may be at work in some schools with high numbers of students who speak HC as their primary language. Some teachers may hold low expectations for students' academic performance, believing that students are poor language users because they speak a form of "broken English." Low expectations may contribute to what has bluntly been termed a "dumbing down" of the curriculum, in which students may not have the opportunity to learn essayist literacy well. Under these circumstances, it would not be surprising to see students, as a group, performing below state targets or national norms on large-scale tests of reading achievement.

Schools where teachers hold low expectations for students tend to move toward packaged programs that emphasize lower level, basic reading skills, thus depriving students of lessons focusing on reading comprehension, reasoning with text, and the literary content (classic and contemporary literature) that contribute to proficiency in essayist literacy. Taylor and her colleagues have verified in study after study that an emphasis on phonics is positively related to reading achievement in first grade, but negatively related to achievement in second and third grade (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003, 2004). At all grades studied, teachers' use of higher level questioning contributes significantly to stronger reaching achievement. These findings resonate with those of research conducted at the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (Tharp, 1982). Students' difficulties may be compounded when educators think the solution to poor reading test scores is to extend lower-level skill instruction to higher and higher grades. Amazingly, I have even heard intensive phonics instruction proposed as a solution for the reading difficulties of high school students in Hawai'i. While I am a proponent of phonics instruction (Au, 1998, 2006), I am convinced by the research of Taylor and others that phonics instruction should be systematically taught and completed in the early primary grades, leaving time for teachers to address the much more challenging task of promoting reading comprehension.

Resistance to Literacy Learning in School

I turn now to issues of students' resistance to literacy learning in school, another important way that HC is related to reading achievement. Proponents of resistance theory (e.g., Erickson, 1993) contend that subordinate group students (which would include many students who speak HC as their primary language) consciously and subconsciously oppose school actions that threaten their cultural identities. For example, students may show resistance by ignoring the teacher, refusing to participate, turning in incomplete assignments, or acting out in class, and fail to make strong academic progress as a result. Student resistance can develop quickly if teachers signal their low regard for students' culture (Larson & Irvine, 1999) or cast aspersions upon their primary language (Erickson, 1993; Piestrup, 1973).

D'Amato (1993) points out that all children resist school to some extent. However, resistance does not persist in the case of dominant group students, who understand the importance of cooperating with teachers and doing well in school and know the relationship between schooling and life opportunities: complete high school, graduate from college, and qualify for a high-paying job. For many students from affluent families, these connections are reinforced by family history. The situation is different for subordinate group students, with the connections typically being much weaker. For example, in African American communities, discrimination may prevent even a well educated, highly qualified individual from obtaining a desirable job (Ogbu, 1981).

D'Amato's (1988) research shows that resistance can be shown even in early elementary grades classrooms. He suggests that teachers do not hold the cards in classrooms where their students are unfamiliar with the long-term rewards of schooling. This situation arises because students are not concerned about the consequences of offending teachers or do-

ing poorly in school. D'Amato argues that teachers must win students over by making school a rewarding and enjoyable experience in an immediate sense. One means of capturing students' interest is through culturally responsive instruction, instruction that builds on the strengths that students bring from the home, including their cultural and linguistic knowledge (Au, 2007). My research at KEEP showed that interactive discussions of literature using talk-story-like participation structures kept students highly engaged in learning to read (Au & Mason, 1981). Students paid closer attention, discussed more text ideas, and made more logical inferences when lessons used culturally familiar talk-story-like participation structures than when lessons followed the traditional format for classroom recitation, a pattern that involves teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation (Cazden, 1988). We found at KEEP that Native Hawaiian students achieved at higher levels in learning to read when their teachers took the approach of making lessons personally meaningful to them. Teachers could accomplish this by making connections between students background experiences and the theme of the story (Au, 1992) and by emphasizing reading comprehension or meaning making with text and not just word identification skills (Tharp, 1982).

A newer option, not available in the 1980s, is to increase students' motivation to read through the use of local literature reflecting experiences of growing up in Hawai'i. These works range all the way from concept books for preschool and kindergarten, such as *Whose Slippers Are These?* (Kahalewai, 2005) to teen novels such as *The Tattoo* (McKinney, 2007). Works written in HC might be included in the curriculum, along with the canonical works of literature typically taught in middle and high schools, as long as teachers and the community feel comfortable with this decision.

Students' ownership of literacy may be defined as their valuing of reading and writing as part of their lives and using literacy for purposes they set for themselves (Au, 1997). Ownership of literacy must be foundational to attempts to improve reading achievement in schools serving high numbers of students who speak HC as their primary language, and ownership may be improved if students read works of literature they find meaningful.

Teachers can and should take steps to make ownership of literacy the overarching goal of classroom reading instruction. However, while ownership plays an important role, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improving reading achievement in classrooms with students who are growing up outside the culture of power, such as those who grow up speaking HC as their primary language. If young students have the motivation to read, this is an important first step that will boost their learning of word identification skills. However, it will not automatically improve their performance in reading comprehension (Au, 1994). To improve students' comprehension, instruction specifically targeting strategies of reading comprehension must be provided. Just because students know all the words in a text does not mean that they will automatically comprehend it. Rather, research shows that instruction in comprehension is required if improvements in students' ability to derive meaning from text is to improve (Anderson, Mason, & Shirey, 1984). In addition, research indicates which comprehension strategies are most valuable to teach students (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Raphael, Highfield, & Au, 2006).

Instruction focused on higher level thinking with text can be highly motivating to students and thus serve an important function in overcoming students' resistance to schooling. My colleague Alice Kawakami, a former KEEP teacher who is now a professor in the College of Education, once described how she attempted, during reading comprehension discussions, to make her third-grade students "feel smart." Indeed, observers who have studied reading comprehension lessons taught by KEEP teachers agree that these discussions cause elementary students to engage with text ideas as deeply and actively as graduate students in a seminar. Students who come away from a lesson feeling smart are likely to think of school as a worthwhile place to be, because they have engaged with interesting ideas, argued and justified their points of view, and had their teacher confirm their potential as good thinkers.

Sustained School Change

All students can benefit from rigorous instruction in reading comprehension to prepare them to use essayist literacy in the ways demanded by the higher academic standards now in place in Hawai'i and across the United States. However, such rigorous instruction is particularly important to the academic futures of students who speak HC as their primary language and grow up outside the culture of power. These students will be largely dependent on school for access to dominant group discourse and essayist literacy.

Furthermore, research suggests that it will take six years or more for students who speak HC as a primary language to gain the proficiency in Standard English foundational for essayist literacy. This is why school change efforts that focus only on grades K–3 or only on beginning reading frequently do not show significant effects on students' long-term achievement. While certain early interventions do have a positive effect on children's reading in the primary grades, these interventions show diminishing effects and do not provide a sufficient basis for success with the more demanding reading tasks at the third and fourth grades and above (Hiebert & Taylor, 2000).

It is important to understand why a period of six years or more of well coordinated, rigorous instruction may well be required to make a difference in the overall reading achievement of many HC speaking students. Let us begin by referring to Cummins' (2003) distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Teachers are often amazed that children who enter the classroom speaking Spanish or another language are, within months, communicating with other children in English. Part of the reason for this rapid learning is undoubtedly the need and desire to join peer groups and participate in activities on the playground and in other settings and to meet the needs of everyday life, for example, shopping for groceries. The rapid learning of BICS is supported by the fact that interactions are embedded in meaningful contexts, with referents right at hand.

Due to television as well as home and community experiences, some students who speak HC as a primary language may come to school with BICS in Standard English. We had a favorite videotape at KEEP that captured the language proficiency of one of our first-grade students from Kalihi. (Pseudonyms have been used for the student and teacher in this anecdote.) The tape showed Branden working on a seatwork assignment while at the same time speaking HC to threaten another boy at his table, waving his fist in front of his peer's face and declaring that they would be fighting at recess. As the teacher, newly arrived from the mainland, approached his table, Branden looked up and asked sweetly, in clearly enunciated Standard English, "Miss Moran, may I sharpen my pencil?" When the teacher nodded, Branden left the table, returning after a moment to resume his threatening in HC.

As this anecdote suggests, many HC speaking students can easily switch between HC and Standard English, suggesting that they have BICS in Standard English and could advance to CALP and attain proficiency in essayist literacy. However, two caveats must be considered. The first, discussed earlier, is the prediction of resistance theory that subordinate group students may decide that they do not want to attain essayist literacy. Any teacher who has taught in a Title I school in Hawai'i has struggled to reach any number of students with such an attitude. Ogbu (1993) described how subordinate group students might well show resistance because of the need to maintain their cultural identities in the face of what they perceive to be an unfamiliar and threatening school environment, one that does not seem to value their talents, language, or culture. Students might choose to express themselves only in HC and not in Standard English as a means of maintaining their cultural identity and expressing solidarity with peers.

Second, it should be noted that CALP and essayist literacy are not easy targets, making six years a conservative estimate of the amount of instructional time required (Collier, 1989). For example, consider the cognitive demands of a typical fourth grade science lesson about the origin of the Hawaiian Islands. (I have observed several effective lessons along exactly these lines and know that the teachers considered their expectations to be perfectly reasonable for Hawai'i fourth graders.) During such a lesson the teacher will teach abstract concepts (plate tectonics) and use specialized vocabulary unlikely to be heard in everyday life (terms such as *magma* and *caldera*). Students will usually be unfamiliar with these concepts and terms, unless they have already visited an area such as Volcanoes National Park, and the teacher will need to refer to models, diagrams, and photographs to get these points across. At the end of the lesson, the teacher will ask students to read a short newspaper article on the island of Lō'ihi, growing underwater near the Big Island, and to write a summary of the article, making connections to ideas covered in the lesson. Obviously, to perform well in the classroom, even in elementary school, students need CALP and essayist literacy; BICS are insufficient for the learning of the academic content routinely being taught in elementary schools, as well as middle and high schools.

Fortunately, there is a tremendous amount of research on how students who grow up speaking HC or other non-mainstream varieties of English can be taught to become

excellent readers and writers, as judged by the standards of essayist literacy (Au, 1993, 2006; Guthrie et al., 1996; Morrow, 1992; Raphael & Au, 2005). Unfortunately, my research and experience in schools point to the distinct possibility that many HC speaking students, particularly in schools in low-income communities, do not receive enough high quality, coordinated instruction over the period of time—six years or more—required for them to gain a solid grasp of CALP in Standard English and of essayist literacy. Unlike students from affluent families, HC speaking students from low-income families may have little contact with the discourse of the culture of power, at home or in community settings. Thus, these students are highly dependent on school to gain familiarity with this discourse and to develop CALP.

Up to now I have discussed steps that teachers can take in classrooms. However, it is obviously important to consider the school, and not just the actions of individual teachers, if the goal is to provide students with six years or more of effective, coordinated instruction to build proficiency in essayist literacy. To achieve this goal, teachers in a school must collaborate to build a staircase or coherent curriculum across the grades (Au, 2005).

The approach my colleagues and I use to guide teachers through the process of creating a staircase curriculum is called the Standards Based Change (SBC) Process (Au, Hirata, & Raphael, 2005). The SBC Process has been successfully used in some Title I schools with high proportions of students who speak HC as a primary language, including Kīpapa, Makakilo, and Helemano elementary schools. These three schools received awards from the Castle Foundation for increasing the number of students meeting and exceeding proficiency on the grade three state reading test by 20 percent or more between 2003 and 2006. The SBC Process has also been effective in improving reading achievement in Chicago schools enrolling high proportions of students who speak either AAVE or Spanish as their primary language (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, in press).

Over time, this approach has come to center on a Seven Level Developmental Model that describes the stages of growth of schools successful in improving student achievement through the SBC Process (Au et al., in press). When a school reaches Level 6, scores on state reading tests rise and teachers have taken ownership of the change process. In short, the developmental model has given us a roadmap for school change that improves students' reading achievement. Teachers at schools working with the SBC Process are guided through a nine-step to do list (Au et al., 2005; Au & Raphael, 2007); these nine components must be in place for a school to have a complete system for improving student achievement through standards. Teachers at public schools in Hawai'i and the rest of the country have been working with standards for about two decades. Thus, every school is likely to have strengths as well as weaknesses in terms of the components on the to do list. We ask teachers to keep in place all the components they think are working well to foster student learning, and to use their time with the to do list to address any weaknesses.

Unlike most approaches to school improvement, the SBC Process is based on the premise that teachers at each school can and should create the school's own staircase curriculum in reading. The staircase curriculum is contrasted with the fragmented curriculum, which is the situation we have observed at all schools new to the SBC Process. The fragmented curriculum results because, although teachers at the various grade levels have good ideas for curriculum and instruction, they have not had sufficient time and guidance to coordinate their ideas across the grade levels.

One of the most common and insidious misconceptions we see in schools is the belief that purchasing a packaged reading program will automatically provide the school with a staircase or coherent curriculum. Research conducted in schools in Chicago showed that purchasing a packaged program did not lead to curriculum coherence because teachers could interpret and teach a program in many different ways (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). Our research suggests that a staircase curriculum cannot be bought off the shelf; it must be created through close collaboration within and across grade levels and departments. We guide teachers at each school in the SBC Process through the equivalent of four professional development courses to help them build the staircase curriculum (Au et al., in press). In elementary schools, a staircase curriculum must be built for every major content area: reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. It often takes a school two to three years to learn the SBC Process and complete work in the first content area. My colleagues and I describe the SBC Process as the "slow and steady fix." As research shows, there is no such thing as a "quick fix" (Allington & Walmsley, 1995), despite the claims of promoters of some packaged programs.

We can empathize with the difficulties faced by complex area superintendents, principals, and other administrators responsible for leading schools with a history of low reading test scores. These leaders are under tremendous pressure to show marked improvement in results. It is all too tempting under these circumstances to look for ready-made external solutions for improving test results. Our experience has been that external solutions, such as packaged programs, often do not yield the kinds of lasting improvement necessary to provide HC speaking students in low-income communities with excellent opportunities to gain essayist literacy. One of the reasons is variability in teachers' interpretations and ways of implementing the external program. Another reason is gaps in the external program in relationship to state standards. Still another reason is that the external program does not cover all the curriculum areas students need. For example, teachers using basal reading programs typically see weaknesses in provisions for reading comprehension strategy instruction.

Nevertheless, the fatal flaw in the implementation of external programs may lie less in their design than in the fact that teachers do not feel ownership over them. When their schools rely on external programs, teachers may tend to attribute students' progress (or lack of progress) to the program rather than to their own efforts. Yet, as the saying goes, programs don't teach—teachers teach. In SBC Process schools successful in improving student achievement, teachers take ownership of change efforts and feel a sense of efficacy and personal responsibility for their students' achievement. At successful schools administrators trust teachers to make good decisions within the framework of the SBC Process, and the whole school pulls together as a professional learning community to create and implement a staircase curriculum, covering all grades, to promote student achievement. Teachers believe that their students can and will become excellent readers, and teachers provide instruction focused on higher level thinking as well as basic skills. Students sense that their language and culture are respected by teachers and find lessons engaging and challenging. Rather than showing resistance, students willingly cooperate with teachers to learn essayist literacy.

As students move through the grades and up the staircase curriculum, they receive instruction that builds on what they learned the year before. Due to the well coordinated instruction fostered by the staircase curriculum, cohorts of students begin to enter each successive grade at higher levels of achievement than did earlier cohorts. In schools with a low rate of student transiency, this effect is particularly noticeable in grades four and above. When teachers notice students' higher entering achievement levels, they know that they can move students farther ahead as readers, and they create more ambitious end-of-year grade level benchmarks. The staircase curriculum exerts its positive effect through teachers' steadily rising expectations for students' learning, which lead to improved results on large-scale achievement tests (Au et al., in press).

Conclusion

In common with most local people of my generation, I did not grow up valuing HC. I spoke it, I heard others speak it, and I knew that the use of "pidgin" was considered inappropriate in certain settings, but I did not give these matters much thought. Today I can appreciate my good fortune in having grown up speaking HC and having the continued opportunity to use the language. Being a speaker of HC is a treasured marker of local identity, a connection to my family's plantation roots.

As recently as 1999, local politicians—notably, former governor Ben Cayetano—were sometimes criticized in the newspapers for "lapsing" into HC. Rest assured that when skillful local politicians such as Cayetano incorporate HC in their public pronouncements, they are doing so intentionally, for rhetorical effect. Prosodic and phonological shifts in particular, toward HC and back again toward Standard English, can be observed in the speech of many successful Hawai'i-born individuals. Those with an ear for the cadences of local speech enjoy the banter and linguistic feats of radio personalities such as Sam Kapu, who mix HC and Standard English with wit and skill. We do not need to teach HC in the classroom, but we do need to respect and appreciate it as one of the heritage languages of our islands, and this respect needs to be conveyed to students who speak HC as their primary language.

I have shown in this essay that, since Western contact, Hawai'i has been a multilingual environment, with language serving to separate the dominant groups from the subordinate groups, as is typical in ethnically and culturally diverse societies. English became the language of power and was effectively used to place the Hawaiian language and its speakers, and then HC and its speakers, in subordinate posi-

tions. Historically, HC speaking students in low-income communities have had limited access to CALP in Standard English and essayist literacy, as required to perform well on large-scale tests of reading achievement. The problem of increasing students' access is not a simple one, with students' resistance to school literacy learning posing a potential problem. Resistance by students may develop when their home language and culture are not respected in school, when they sense that teachers have low expectations for their academic learning, when instruction overemphasizes basic skills to the exclusion of higher level thinking, and when lessons cease to be engaging and meaningful. I proposed use of the SBC Process to guide schools' development of staircase curricula as an effective approach for improving the reading achievement of students who speak HC as a primary language. A staircase curriculum is necessary to provide students with the coordinated, high quality instruction they need across a period of six years or more to gain proficiency in essayist literacy. This approach to schoolwide change is a sure and steady fix, not a quick one, that has worked to raise reading achievement in schools in Hawai'i and Chicago.

A student in one of my undergraduate courses came to class one day wearing a t-shirt with the following words:

If can, can. If no can, no can.

Translation: If I can possibly do it, I will. If I find that it can't be done, don't expect anything. We must believe, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that our students who speak HC as their primary language can and will become excellent readers. To be successful, we must rely on sound professional development to prepare teachers with the knowledge and confidence they need to hold high expectations, build their school's staircase curriculum, and teach essayist literacy well. If can, can.

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