

Shaena Engle, engle@gseis.ucla.edu
(310) 206-5951

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UCLA Professor's New Book Focuses On the Role of Language in Teaching and Learning

Alison Bailey, an associate professor in the psychological studies division of the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, has recently authored and edited "The Language Demands of School: Putting Academic English to the Test" (Yale University Press, 2007), a book of essays that addresses the current challenges of educating and correctly assessing the English-language skills of English language learners in grades K–12.

English language learners — those students whose first language is not English and who lack, or have only beginning, proficiency in English — represent the fastest growing student population in primary and secondary schools in the United States. In 2001, the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act, requiring yearly assessments of these students' English-language progress and holding schools accountable for the results.

Drawing on the authors' expertise in language policy, testing and instruction, "The Language Demands of School" focuses extensively on research conducted by Bailey and her colleagues at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA, a federally funded organization that seeks to improve school assessment and accountability systems and to help schools and districts respond to the accountability demands of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"The book incorporates research on the language children are expected to understand as they read their textbooks and when they hear their teachers speak," Bailey said. "It is important to understand how children learn language and the differences between general and academic uses and forms of language in order to accurately assess student progress."

In addition to the work of Bailey and her colleagues, "The Language Demands of School" presents a variety of perspectives from other researchers, policy-makers and educational practitioners. Educators and test-developers can draw upon the book to judge existing statewide language assessments and create and implement new assessments and curricula to support the academic achievement of English language learner students, as well as English-speaking students.

2-2-2 English Language Learners

“The book includes information on the development of academic English-language skills that are needed in order for all students to be successful in school today, not just students who are learning English as an additional language,” Bailey said.

Bailey’s research interests include language and literacy development and assessment. She currently serves as a member of the Technical Advisory Group to the California Department of Education for the California English Language Development Test.