

# STANDARDIZING GENERATION 1.5 PROGRAMS IN MARYLAND

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Whether you have heard of Generation 1.5 or not, it is very likely that you have Generation 1.5 students in your classroom. Generation 1.5 students are children of immigrants who are foreign-born, partially foreign-educated, and partially US-educated, and whose dominant language may be either the language of their parents or English. The characteristics of these foreign-born, mostly US-educated students and implications for appropriate placement and program design were the topic of a recent colloquium organized by members of the Language Studies Department at Prince George's Community College.

The goal of the colloquium was to meet and work with the representatives of local colleges to establish standard approaches and programs that address the needs of Generation 1.5 students. In this article, the colloquium conveners want to share with the wider college community why this topic needs to be addressed, what the colloquium has accomplished and wants to research in the future, and why this is a great opportunity for the community colleges of Maryland to work together on an emerging issue.

The English as a Second Language program at Prince George's Community College, like all ESL programs at community colleges in the metropolitan area, has seen an increase in the number of foreign-born, U.S.-educated language minority students who "arrive in the United States as school-age children or adolescents and share characteristics of both first and second generation."<sup>1</sup> This group of students has been classified in recent studies under the term "Generation 1.5."<sup>2</sup> Although these long-term immigrants are attending classes throughout the college, the greater number of them, entering college through placement into the ESL program, makes this issue a new challenge for the Language Studies Department.

Generation 1.5 students have unique educational needs, particularly when it comes to reading and writing. English is often the only language in which they have experienced academic preparation and literacy, but they often do not feel that the language is truly theirs. They exhibit characteristics of both native speakers and non-native speakers; in other words, they are often identified as "ear" learners—students with functionally communicative language skills, but with few ideas of grammatical concepts—as opposed to the traditional ESL student who has studied English in the classroom and has acquired formal grammar training and metalinguistic knowledge. Many of these students acculturate and assimilate successfully, and go on to pursue their academic interests in colleges of their choice.

However, many of these students do not graduate from high school with competitive scores, and usually perform badly on placement tests. Their placement scores and writing samples place them into ESL classes. Quite often, they are offended to be labeled as such, since they speak English fluently and dress and look like other American students. Their placement scores indicate that they lack critical literacy, or better understanding of intertextuality, a skill necessary to succeed in understanding and producing academic texts. In addition to writing problems that

are common among all developing writers at the college, the writing of Generation 1.5 students also reveals persistent language problems at the word and sentence level.

Because of their unique position, Generation 1.5 students often fall between the cracks that divide traditional ESL classrooms from "mainstream" English classes. The growing numbers of Generation 1.5 students in Prince George's Community College's Language Studies Department has brought this matter to the foreground. As a result, the need to better place and provide for these students has become more critical. Since many of these students are long-term immigrants and often fail to identify that English is not their first language, they test into DVE /DVR or EGL classes. This highlights the important issue of appropriate placement, since mainstream instructors often lack knowledge of second language acquisition processes and of linguistic features characterizing various stages of second language writing proficiency. One of the goals of the colloquium was to establish procedures for identifying these students within the whole college community, and for collaborating with the ESL, Developmental, and EGL composition programs, which encounter most of these students upon entering college.

Northern Virginia Community College and Montgomery College, the two colleges in the area with the greatest numbers of linguistically diverse students, have already been dealing with Generation 1.5 students within the confines of their local situations and on their own terms. Other colleges, Prince George's Community College among them, started raising questions about how to approach this new situation; therefore, the Language Studies team proposed to hold a one-day colloquium, to which representatives of each community college in Maryland were invited. Participants from Prince George's Community College, Montgomery College, Howard Community College, Anne Arundel Community College, Frederick Community College, U.S. Naval Academy, Community Colleges of Baltimore County, and Baltimore City Community College accepted the invitation to come share ideas, set guidelines for identification and placement of students, and discuss practical solutions.

Karen Walsh from Northern Virginia Community College agreed to give a presentation on the surveys, research, and current approaches of the program that they have already started implementing. This presentation gave the participants a guideline for the possibilities the Maryland programs could emulate. Another invited speaker was Eileen Cotter of Montgomery College, who shared with us the first solutions that have been started at their Rockville campus. In addition to the presentations, the participants shared current trends in student population at their colleges.

In one of the workgroup sessions, the participants compiled questions and criteria for identification of this group of students, first in their own departments, and then within their college communities. Another workgroup put together standard guidelines for addressing the different steps of the implementation of programs that focus on the development of critical reading and writing skills. Each participating college received the materials developed during the colloquium, so it could be shared among all interested parties at their colleges. It was clear from the focus of the questions that identification of Generation 1.5 students across the college population was central to future research at all participating institutions. Appropriate identification of these students can result in providing the strongest support possible for these students.

The Language Studies Department at Prince George's Community College not only recognizes the new challenges in the field, but also wants to spearhead the effort to standardize the new approaches in all Maryland community colleges. The team believes that it is necessary to develop a common direction for newly conceived programs in all area colleges because mutual support strengthens the efforts of each program. This colloquium was a good starting point for a greater collaboration between the colleges, in order to reach the Generation 1.5 students more effectively. Plans for future workshops and dissemination of this issue among the larger college community are currently underway.

If you are interested in this student population, or you have specific questions about the support you can give those students in your classes, please feel free to email us.

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<sup>1</sup> Harklau, L., Losey, K. & Siegal, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Generation 1.5 meets college composition. Issues in the teaching of writing to US educated learners of ESL*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.

<sup>2</sup> Rumbaut, R. G., & Ima, K. (1988) *The adaptation of Southeast Asian refugee youth: A comparative study*. (Final report to the Office of Resettlement). San Diego, CA: San Diego University (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 299 372).