1

Administering Schools With English Learners

Manuel moved to the United States from El Salvador when he was 13 years old. In El Salvador, he had worked on his uncle's bus as the ticket taker and money exchanger. He is a very sweet, polite Spanish speaker who came to the United States without any formal schooling or prior exposure to English. His family moved to Centerville, a small town, to work in a relative's restaurant, where they hoped they could earn a living wage. Although Manuel had no prior schooling, Mr. Pronowitz, the principal at Centerville Middle School, decided to place Manuel in the eighth grade so that he could be with his same-age peers.

Ernesto moved from Mexico to the same town as Manuel. His father, an engineer, had been transferred to work in a city near Centerville. Before moving, Ernesto had completed seventh grade in a private school where he had received an excellent education. He loved mathematics and had won an award for "most promising mathematician." When his parents enrolled him in Centerville Middle School, his father tried to convey Ernesto's prior schooling experiences to Mr. Pronowitz. But because his English was limited and his wife and Ernesto could not speak any English at all, Mr. Pronowitz could not understand much about Ernesto's strengths, achievements, and needs. He assigned him to the same grade as Manuel.

A few days after Manuel and Ernesto began school, they were given a standardized test to determine their fluency in English. Both scored at the beginning level. With this testing information, Mr. Pronowitz assigned them to the English as a second language (ESL) class that met for one 45-minute class period a day. He also placed them in the same remedial classes for the rest of their school day. He assumed that Manuel and Ernesto would feel more comfortable with each other because they were the school's only Spanish-speaking English learners (ELs). He also thought that placing them in remedial classes would be less demanding for them because they were both beginning learners of English, unlike the other ELs in the school. Overall, Mr. Pronowitz thought that these placements were academically appropriate and sensitive to the boys' needs.

When Manuel and Ernesto began speaking to each other, Ernesto quickly realized that Manuel had never been to school. Ernesto also felt that his classes, especially math, were much easier than he was used to. He assumed that being a Spanish-speaking EL in the United States must mean that he was not a smart or good student. He felt isolated and divorced from everything that was familiar to him. Within a few weeks, he began to feel very depressed. By the end of the first term, Ernesto had decided to stop attending school. His parents quickly moved him to a parochial school, assuming that it would be a much better place for their son than Centerville Middle School was. When Mr. Pronowitz was made aware of Ernesto's absences, he called Ernesto's home. He was unable to communicate with Ernesto or his parents. While he thought about Ernesto occasionally, he never knew why he missed so much school. When Ernesto stopped attending altogether, Mr. Pronowitz assumed that he had moved to another town.

Manuel also felt entirely lost. He could not understand any of his classes. They were moving much too quickly for him. He was constantly exhausted from trying to learn. At least Ernesto could help him understand a little about what was happening. But when Ernesto was absent, which had become a frequent occurrence, Manuel's day was hopelessly confusing. He began thinking about quitting school. After a month of struggling, he decided to meet with Mr. Pronowitz. He was failing all of his classes and desperately wanted to do well. He asked his uncle if he would come to translate for him at the meeting. When they met, Mr. Pronowitz decided that Manuel should be referred for a special education evaluation to see if he had a learning disability. With Manuel's parents' approval (they trusted the school and didn't believe it was their place to do anything more than listen and heed the principal's advice), the referral process began. The assessors assumed that Manuel's poor progress was due to a disability as opposed to what it really was: lack of a formal prior education and academic skills, even in his first language.

Sergi, a Ukrainian-American EL who was born in the United States and attended Centerville Middle School for three years, then moved to New York City, where he enrolled in the ninth grade. He was one of the city's 148,000 ELs (Zehr, 2009), and when his English proficiency was tested, Sergi was found to be at the fourth of five English proficiency levels. The school decided that he did not need to be enrolled in the English language education program. Within the first few weeks, Sergi was unable to keep up with his peers. He had trouble grasping some of the vocabulary and course assignments and tasks. He pored over his homework and stayed up well after midnight each night. He attempted to go for afterschool help but worried that he would be fired from the afterschool job that his family depended on. As a result, Sergi began failing many of his courses and thinking that school was not for him. By the end of the ninth grade, Sergi was like the other 41.8% of the city's ELs—a dropout. According to Zehr, less than a quarter of New York City's ELs graduate within four years, and the overall dropout rate of 41.8% continues.

These scenarios are not that unusual among our nation's ELs. Many are failing, being referred to special education programs, and dropping out of school. Whether we measure achievement by the tests that each state administers to its students, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, or by the national report card known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the achievement gap between the nation's ELs and the total student population is significant and growing (Zehr, 2009). On the National Report Card, as noted by Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008), ELs had a score of 38.2% in reading versus the general population's score of 70.5%, and only 43.8% of ELs scored proficient in mathematics assessments versus 67.4% for all students.

These outcomes speak to not only the need to think of more responsive ways for designing programming, but also the ways in which we lead schools that ELs attend. This book focuses on school leadership for the purpose of creating and sustaining effective programs for ELs. It is intended for school- and district-level leaders who are charged with administering and supervising the curriculum, instructional programming, teachers and support staff, parent and community outreach and engagement, and all related activities regarding the education of ELs.

The following questions are intended to help us in this reexamination process:

- Who are ELs?
- Typically, who are the teachers of ELs?
- How does what we are doing complement our district's and school's mission and vision?

WHO ARE ELs?

ELs represent a large and growing population in our nation's schools. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of the nation's ELs grew by 57%. During the same time period, growth in the number of all students was flat. Urban schools, which were once dominated by American monolingual speakers of English, have rapidly shifted to being much more linguistically diverse. Simultaneously, suburban and rural districts that had never had ELs were beginning to have them. In 1992, there were between 1.2 and 1.7 million ELs in public school (Nieto, 1992). By 2005, that population had jumped to 5.1 million (Maxwell, 2009). By 2009, they were at least 10% of the nation's K–12 students (García, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009), and some believed that the actual percentage was much higher (Capps et al., 2005). Further, while most ELs are concentrated in California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas (Capps et al., 2005), the National Center for Education Statistics (2004) indicates that over 50% of ELs attend schools in places where they account for less than 1% of the student population. The remaining half attend schools with very large populations of ELs, nearly 30%, and are often isolated from the general population (Capps et al., 2005). These realities have deep implications for the choices that school leaders make on behalf of the ELs in their schools, including the reality that some will lead schools with small numbers of ELs and others large.

It is important to understand that ELs are not a monolithic group. They represent 350 different language groups (García et al., 2009). And while the majority (68%) are Latino, 14% are non-Hispanic white, 13% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% are Black, and 1% are classified as "other." Altogether, 200 countries are represented among the nation's ELs, but many ELs are born in United States ("A Distinct Population," 2009). Some schools have ELs from a wide range of language groups, while others have students from just one. Even neighboring schools may have very different languages represented among their ELs.

The primary language that a student speaks is but one descriptor. Even students who speak Spanish, for example, have distinct cultures and represent many countries. Some hail from countries in Central and South America, others are from Caribbean nations, and many others were born in the United States. They also speak different dialects. The same diversity is true for students from any language group.

There are also other factors that are important to consider. Some of the nation's ELs have rich literacy and prior schooling experiences (New Levine & McCloskey, 2009; Pransky, 2008). Typically, these students' parents and families have strong literacy backgrounds. Books are commonplace in their homes, and parenting practices are oriented to developing the language and cognitive skills that their children will need in school. It is typical in these homes to observe parents reading a variety of texts and for their children to observe these literacy behaviors as part of their

development. These students' home life resonates with everyday school practices such as doing homework and reading for pleasure. Thus, one segment of ELs enters school with strong, school-matched language and thinking skills as well as an understanding about formal schooling. However, this does not negate that they initially need cultural sensitivity so as not to feel alienated from the school culture as well as language support to address their need to learn academic content and English.

Conversely, there is also a large group of non-literacy-oriented ELs (Pransky, 2008). Typically, their families are less educated than those from literacy-oriented homes, and parenting practices are not oriented to American public school practices. This is not to say that all parents do not love and nurture their children. It is to say that among the population of ELs, there are distinct groups, and one of these is not as well prepared for American public schools as the other. While these less-prepared ELs share the need for cultural sensitivity and language support, they also need an educational program that emphasizes their need to develop school-matched thinking and language skills (Pransky, 2008).

There is also a large number of ELs who have experienced major disruptions in their families' lives, such as poverty, war, long-term stress, and other factors. Because of these disruptions, they have not had the systematic acculturation experiences of either the literacy- or non-literacy-oriented communities. When they enroll in American schools, it may be their first exposure to literacy and content learning (Calderón, 2007). They have not had the opportunity in either home or school to develop the skills that they need in order to learn. This population of ELs poses particularly distinct challenges to educators.

Poverty is also a big concern for many of our nation's ELs: Close to 66% come from families whose income is 200% below the poverty level ("A Distinct Population," 2009; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). Students who are learning English are among the very poorest of students in our schools.

Each of these factors is important to consider when leading programs for ELs. While many of us are most concerned with the speed at which students will learn English and are often impatient with the process, the variation among our nation's ELs must not be ignored, as it will greatly help us in creating and sustaining programs that work.

In sum, the nation's ELs come from a wide range of personal, linguistic, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This population continues to grow at a significant rate as a percentage of our nation's students. Overall, they are performing at a much lower rate than their English-speaking peers. And these realities are occurring against a backdrop of schools whose teachers and administrators feel unprepared for them (Maxwell, 2009).

To advocate for the best program and to support their teachers, school leaders need to understand their EL populations very well, from a cultural and linguistic perspective. They also need to understand that students

come from diverse backgrounds and have varying degrees of school readiness. Finally, they need to learn specifically about the effects of poverty on learning and how to help students overcome these effects.

Are there commonalities among the ways in which we organize programming for ELs?

If you were to visit classrooms in the United States that have ELs, you might notice many different features. In some, you would hear the student's native language being spoken. In others, you would hear only English; even using another language informally is discouraged. You might also observe students having little to no support to learn English in some schools, while in others you would observe ELs in multigrade classrooms spending the school day with other ELs. You might travel only a few miles to another school and see students spending half of their school day learning in one language and half in another. There are literally hundreds of programming models for ELs to learn English as they learn academic content (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Soltero, 2004). While many believe that the name of a program, such as *transitional bilingual education,* defines the how it is practiced, the reality is that each program model can be enacted differently in one district than it is in the next, adding up to the hundreds of types (Lessow-Hurley, 2008). We will look more closely at these in the next chapter.

School leaders have to sift through each of these types to try to identify the one that they believe will work the most effectively in their context. They also have to consider how prepared their school's or district's teachers are to work with ELs.

TYPICALLY, WHO ARE THE TEACHERS OF ELs?

In 1992, most of the nation's teachers were White, middle-class, monolingual English speakers (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996), and the situation has not changed dramatically since then (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Teacher preparation programs are heavily dominated by "white middle class females, from suburbs and small towns and have limited experience with people from cultures other than their own" (Hollins & Guzman, 2005, p. 485). Not surprisingly, in an empirical review of 101 studies that were conducted between 1980 and 2002 to investigate teacher preparation to work with students from diverse populations, Hollins and Guzman found that most students enrolled in teacher preparation programs were more comfortable and preferred working with students and parents from experiences similar to their own. Courses in key areas that are needed for teaching ELs, such as bilingual education, second language acquisition, and multicultural education, were more likely to be optional electives (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Most of the nation's teachers have no training or experience working with the growing population of ELs. They are not sure how to address these students' English language learning needs or how to adapt subject matter instruction for them. Because many teachers have no experience working with students unlike themselves—including students who live in poverty and older students who have very limited literacy skills, or none at all, and no prior formal schooling—they have no experiential framework to draw from. All of these factors pose complex challenges for educators.

Unfortunately, federal law does not require teachers to be highly qualified to teach ELs (Honawar, 2009). What is equally concerning is that training to teach American public school ELs, particularly for general education teachers who spend a good deal of time with ELs, is not required in most states ("A Distinct Population," 2009). This contributes to why there are few commonalities among our nation's states in terms of teaching ELs (Honawar, 2009). At the same time, while training seems like an obvious solution, it is extraordinarily challenging to keep pace with the growth of the EL population and wide variety of their needs. According to the EPE Research Center (2009a), 56,000 ESL teachers will be needed during the next five years. This number is staggering when you consider that there are not enough as it is and it doesn't include the content teachers needed. If all these numbers are factored into the equation, it is likely that *most* of the nation's teachers lack training in how to work successfully with ELs. Just as ELs must often sink or swim in the educational system, teachers are expected by their school leaders—who, like them, are not trained to know better—to sink or swim in teaching ELs. The poor performance of ELs seems to parallel the lack of preparation among their teachers to teach them.

School leaders need to try to ensure that the teachers who work with ELs in their school—classroom/content teachers and ESL teachers alike—are well trained.

What about teachers who have had training?

Some schools do have general education teachers who are trained to teach ELs. Many are members of the same language minority groups as their students and have a solid understanding about their students' language, culture, and prior schooling. They have been trained in the theories and practices of second language acquisition and understand the process of learning a new language and teaching their students. Others, most commonly ESL teachers, also have been trained to teach English to ELs, understand the developmental process of learning a new language, and are prepared to teach their students.

Sadly, while these teachers have knowledge that many of their colleagues lack, a significant percentage report feeling marginalized by their colleagues (Cummins, 2001; Zacarian, 2007). Rather than being valued as assets, they all too frequently feel relegated to the fringes of the school.

They believe that their schools are enacting what is occurring to linguistic minorities in the world around them, namely, they are not considered members of their school communities and are often treated as inferior and powerless by their peers (Cummins, 1994, 2001; Zacarian, 2007).

Luckily, some teachers who have been trained to work with ELs are not marginalized, feel empowered as leaders of their schools, and are valued as assets for teaching ELs. This is particularly true for a large group of teachers who participated in a longitudinal study that led to what is known as the *sheltered instruction observation protocol* (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). In this study, researchers from the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Center for Research on Equity and Diversity looked at schools in which ELs were performing well. They observed classroom teachers of ELs for a five-year period and noted the elements for planning and delivering an effective lesson. From this research, they developed an observational protocol that highlighted the elements that the researchers believe are essential for students at the third, fourth, and final stage of English language learning. At the heart of this research is a strong belief in collaboration among teachers.

We need to understand ways for leading our schools so that ELs can succeed in the learning process and become active members of their school community. School leaders have an enormous, if not the most essential, role in the educational programming for the nation's ELs. They are the primary architects and supervisors of the instructional programming that is provided. Knowing that it is not likely that teachers will have been trained in this important area, that they may be uncomfortable working with students from backgrounds other than their own, and that they may, intentionally or unintentionally, marginalize teachers who are EL student advocates and who have had appropriate training and experience, leaders must seek ways to build and sustain effective programming.

HOW DOES WHAT WE ARE DOING COMPLEMENT OUR DISTRICT'S AND SCHOOL'S MISSION AND VISION?

Many if not most schools have a mission statement. Mission statements typically mean that leaders have examined their school and its core purpose to define and make available to the community their school's or district's goals and the ways in which they will be measured. Mission statements might be considered the symbolic heart of the school, as they describe the best of an organization's core values and beliefs for building a school culture and climate. In mission statements, school leaders often encapsulate what they believe to be important for learners and the school community.

The same type of process is needed for creating a program for ELs. Doing so takes time, collaboration, and a belief that the program must

complement the mission of the school while also addressing the complex needs of language-minority students. Selecting a one-size-fits-all model does not work for the widely diverse population of ELs.

To create an optimal English language education program, whether for large or small number of ELs, requires that we think of learners as individuals, members of the school community, and members of the town or city community as well. To lead our schools, we must collaborate with our students, their families, teachers, and other stakeholders.

In Chapter 2, we will begin to look more closely at developing a rationale for a district's or school's English language education program model for its ELs.

REFERENCES

A distinct population. (2009). *Quality Counts, 28*(17), 15.

Ballantyne, K. G., Sanderman, A. R., Levy, J. (2008). *Educating English language learners: Building teacher capacity.* Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.

Calderón, M. (2007). *Teaching reading to English language learners, Grades 6–12.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwantoro, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Cummins, J. (1994). Knowledge, power, and identity in teaching English as a second language. In F. Genesee (Ed.), *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community* (pp. 33–58). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2001). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire.* Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Echevarria, J., Vogt, M. J., Short, D. J. (2008). Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

EPE Research Center. (2009a). *Perspectives on a population: English-language learners in American schools.* Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education.

García, E. E., Jensen, B. T., & Scribner, K. P. (April 2009). The demographic imperative. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 8–13.

Goldenberg, C., & Coleman, R. (2010). *Promoting academic achievement among English learners: A guide to the research.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin.

Hollins, E., & Guzman, M. T. (2005). Research on preparing teachers for diverse populations. In M. Cochran Smith & K. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 477–548). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Honawar, V. (2009). Training gets boost. *Quality Counts, 28*(17). Retrieved December 8, 2010, from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/01/08/17training.h28.html

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice, and policy. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 747–761). New York: Macmillan.

Lessow-Hurley, J. (2008). Foundations of dual language instruction (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Maxwell, L. A. (2009). Immigration transforms communities. *Quality Counts, 28*(17), 10–11.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *English language learners in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000.* Retrieved December 10, 2010, from http://nces .ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004035

New Levine, L., & McCloskey, M. (2009). *Teaching learners of English in mainstream classrooms K-8: One class, many paths.* New York: Pearson.

Nieto, S. (1992). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education.* New York: Longman.

Pransky, K. (2008). *Beneath the surface: The hidden realities of teaching linguistically and culturally diverse young learners K–5.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Soltero, S. (2004). *Dual language: Teaching and learning in two languages.* New York: Pearson.

Zacarian, D. (2007). Mascot or member? *Essential Teacher, 4*(3), 10–11.

Zehr, M. A. (2009). Adopted tongue: English language learners pose policy puzzle. *Quality Counts, 28*(17), 8–9.

Zeichner, K., & Hoeft, K. (1996). Teacher socialization for cultural diversity. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook on research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 525–547). New York: Macmillan.