1

Introduction to the Achievement Gap and the Literacy Gaps Model

We have a state of emergency in the educational system of the United States. This state of emergency relates to the under-achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) and Standard English Learners (SELs) and the growing gap between ELLs/SELs and their native English-speaking peers. In a country that purports to stand for freedom, education for all, and social justice, this state of emergency educationally and morally mandates that teacher training institutions, teachers, schools, districts, parents, and communities come together to solve this crisis. This book, *The Literacy Gaps: Bridge-Building Strategies for English Language Learners and Standard English Learners*, attempts to do just that. By presenting data regarding the historic and present crisis, we will provide the research-based rationale for a new teaching model that will assist teachers in bridging the gap between ELLs/SELs and the text (readability issues), ELLs/SELs and their teachers (perceptions and expectations), and

English Language Learners (ELLs) are "students whose primary language is not English and whose English language skills are not sufficient to allow them to function fully in academic English" (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

ELLs/SELs and their peers (differentiation strategies). The Literacy Gaps Model will also have the ability to integrate familiar research-based teaching practices into a coherent, holistic model that can strengthen the framework around which teachers conceptualize effective practices that enable ELLs/SELs to access academic language, literacy, and ultimately success within the American educational system, thereby providing a springboard from which students may enter into mainstream society as educated, productive citizens who will lead the next generation.

This introductory chapter verifies the achievement gap between mainstream and nonmainstream students in the United States, including immigration patterns and specific linguistic and cultural data, detailing recent and historic research. First, we introduce (1) demographic patterns, (2) languages spoken and socioeconomic factors, (3) ELL achievement, and (4) findings from the National Literacy Panel. Second, we will introduce the concept of the Standard English Learner and an emerging body of research that demonstrates specialized linguistic needs. Finally, we will introduce the Literacy Gaps Model around which the book is written, presenting a model that will assist teachers across the United States in bridging the achievement gap of their English Language Learners and Standard English Learners.

Standard English Learners (SELs) are students who grew up speaking variations of Standard English, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Chicano English, or Hawaiian English.

DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

In this section, the analysis of data by Goldenberg (2008) presents a strong foundation for the urgency of meeting the needs of ELLs in today's classrooms. In the past 15 years, the number of students who do not speak English fluently has grown dramatically. Whereas in 1990, an estimated 1 in 20 public school students in grades K–12 was an English Language Learner, today the figure is 1 in 9, virtually a 50% increase. Similarly, the estimate is that in 20 years the figure will be 1 in 4, which will represent yet another 50% increase.

Figure 1.1 represents the dramatic ELL growth over the past 18 years, as well as the continued demographic forecast for this subgroup. It further demonstrates that the issue of closing the literacy and achievement gap is not a temporary need, and that the number of ELLs in U.S. schools will only continue to grow in the next 20 years (Goldenberg, 2008).

In addition, whereas the overall population increased by 20% since 1990, the ELL population grew from 2 million to 5 million in the same time period, representing a 40% increase (Goldenberg, 2008; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2006, 2008).

Figure 1.1   K–12 ELL Growth
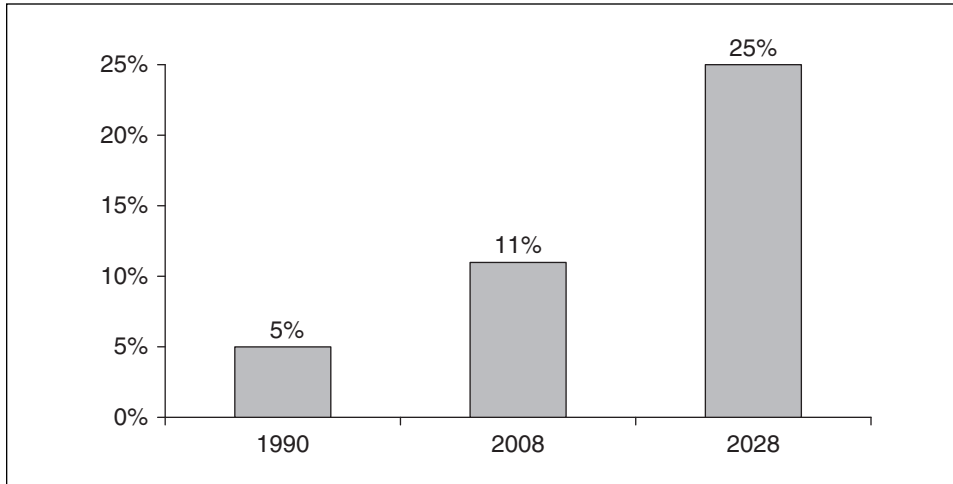
SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008.

Figure 1.2 represents the 20% increase in overall population in contrast to the 40% increase in ELLs during the same time period. The dramatic increase of this subgroup compared to the general population has created instructional gaps in meeting the specific needs of these learners. Even states that typically have not had to contend with the needs of ELLs, such as Indiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee, all saw an increase of approximately 300% in their ELL population from 1994–1995 and 2004–2005 (Goldenberg, 2008; NCELA, 2008).

Figure 1.2   Percentage of ELL and Overall Population Growth
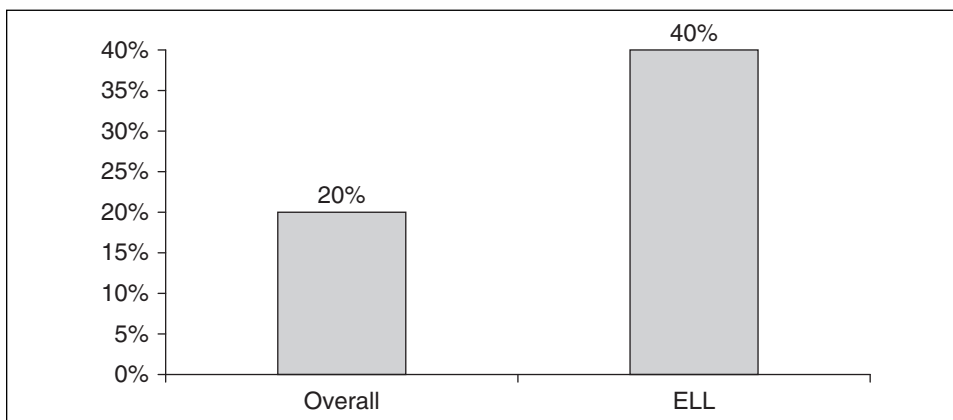
SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008; NCELA, 2006, 2008.

LANGUAGE SPOKEN AND SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

In addition, 80% of ELLs in the United States come from Spanish-speaking homes and the majority of ELLs are Spanish speakers. This group generally comes from lower socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as compared to the general population or other immigrant groups. Whereas 24% of immigrants from Mexico and Central America are below the poverty level (see Figure 1.3), only 9–14% of immigrants from other regions of the world are below the poverty level (Goldenberg, 2008; Larsen, 2004).

Figure 1.3   Poverty Level Percentages
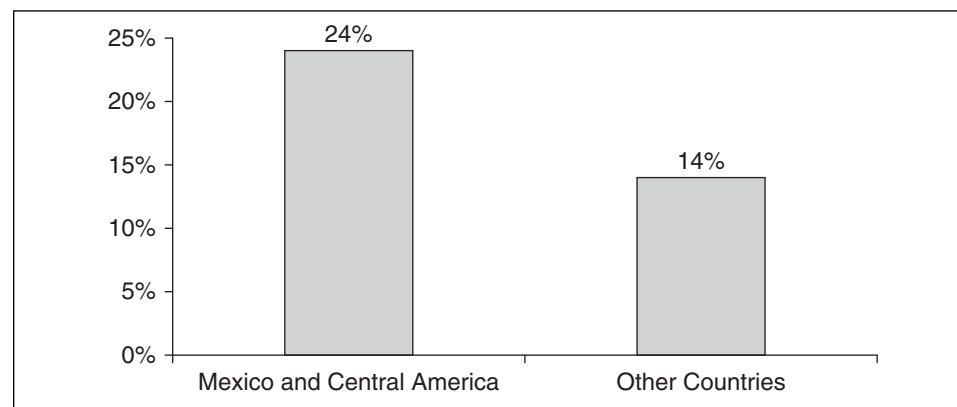
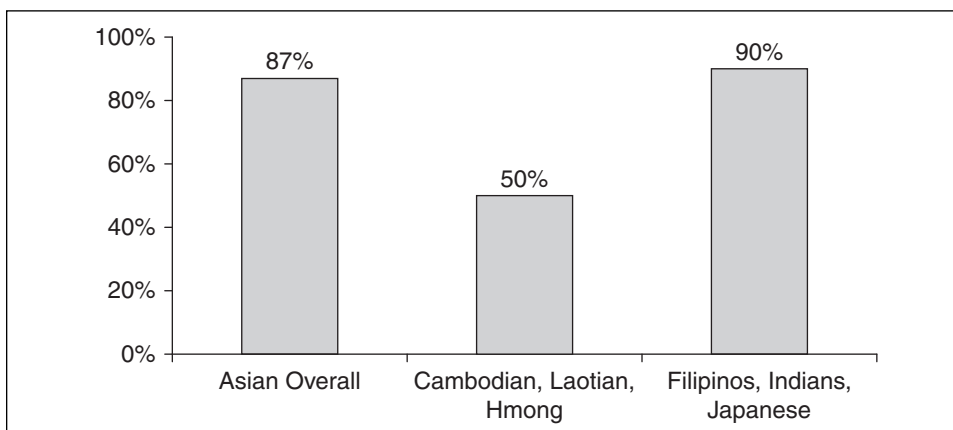SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008; Larsen, 2004.

Whereas fewer than 40% of immigrants from Mexico and Central America came to the United States with the equivalent of high school diplomas, 80–90% of immigrants from other countries came with at least a high school diploma (Goldenberg, 2008). Such statistics suggest that ELLs from Mexico and Central America often come to school with less English and more socioeconomic barriers, facing more challenge and adjustments than other immigrants. For example, socioeconomic gaps can create misunderstandings between educators and parents when immigrant parents are not as visible in school because they work multiple jobs in order to provide for their families. Educators can misinterpret parental absence as apathy. Instead, educators must find additional ways to meet the needs of students and families who are merely trying to economically survive in the United States, creating bridges, rather than barriers, in the educational process.

Figure 1.4 represents the fact that immigrants from other countries are more than twice as likely to have graduated from high school as those from Mexico and Central America. Both poverty and education levels become important as they present potential risk factors for students in school. In essence, ELLs from Mexico and Central America have to overcome additional challenges that can interrupt education or present additional challenges in school. As classroom teachers, it is imperative that we understand the distinctive needs that each group of ELLs comes to school with so that we can target instruction and meet needs appropriately.

Figure 1.4   Percentage of High School Diplomas
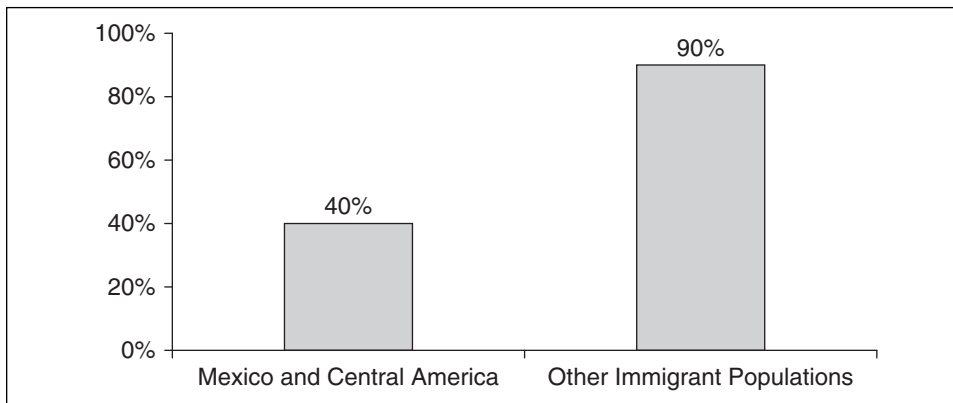
SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008; Larsen, 2004.

The second-largest group of ELLs in the United States—about 8% of all ELLs—is speakers of Asian languages, including Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Korean, Khmer, Laotian, Hindi, and Tagalog (Goldenberg, 2008; Larsen, 2004). As a subgroup, these students tend to come from higher socioeconomic and educational backgrounds than do other immigrant populations. Socioeconomically, Asian immigrants represent the second-lowest poverty rate, 11.1%, with over 87% having the equivalent of a high school diploma (Goldenberg, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). There is, of course, variation among speakers of Asian countries. (See Figure 1.5.) Compared to 87% of Asian immigrants overall who have the equivalent of a high school diploma, only 50% or fewer Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong adults in the United States have completed high school. In addition, Filipinos, East Indians, and Japanese in the United States have high school completion rates around 90%, while over 60% of Taiwanese and East Indian immigrants have college degrees (Goldenberg, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Figure 1.5   High School Graduation Rates for Asian Immigrants

SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008.

Data suggest that we must not assume that all Asian immigrants come to the United States with the same set of skills and socioeconomic background. In other words, this is not a monolithic group. Group tendencies as well as individual differences must be considered. Schools with large groups of ELLs from Southeast Asia may have some of the same educational gaps as schools with ELLs from Mexico or Central America, and may benefit from some of the same instructional accommodations. However, when an ELL comes from a home where parents are educated and literate, there can be instructional acceleration of social language in order to more quickly address academic language needs.

ELL ACHIEVEMENT

Achievement data suggest that ELLs lag far behind their native English-speaking peers. Nationwide, only 7% of ELLs scored "at or above proficient" in reading on the 2003 fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as compared to about 30% of students overall. Results on the 2007 NAEP were similar, with only 7.5% of fourth-grade ELLs scoring at least "proficient," while 35.5% of native English speakers scored proficient (Goldenberg, 2008).

Figure 1.6 illustrates not only the gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers, but also the fact that ELL achievement has only progressed slightly—less than half a percentage point—while native English learners have progressed by 5.5% over the 4-year period (Goldenberg, 2008). Certainly for an ELL, any assessment becomes an English proficiency assessment of language when these students are in the process of learning language; therefore, educators and educational leaders and systems must become knowledgeable in meeting the needs of this growing ELL population so as to close the gap, not increase it, over time.

The achievement gap between ELLs and native English learners is not just an individual teacher or school issue but is also a systemic issue—one that most states and the nation as a whole must address with fervor. With Title III of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, districts are held accountable for ELLs' progress in English Language Development (ELD), as well as academic progress and achievement in academic subject areas. Annual measureable achievement objective (AMAO) targets must be reported separately for ELLs by states, districts, and schools. According to Kathleen Leos (U.S. Department of Education, 2005), former director of the Education Department's office of English-language acquisition, "The failure of most states to make [progress] for ELLs means that the language-proficiency standards developed in most states are not developed to a high enough level where they can provide access to academic content achievement" (p. 12). Data from California, where both standards and assessments have been developed for ELLs, suggest that although students become fluent in English by reclassifying into ELD, the rigor of the ELD standards and California English Language Development Test (CELDT) are not enough to provide access to grade-level content. It is then often the

Figure 1.6   NAEP Reading Results: ELL vs. Overall
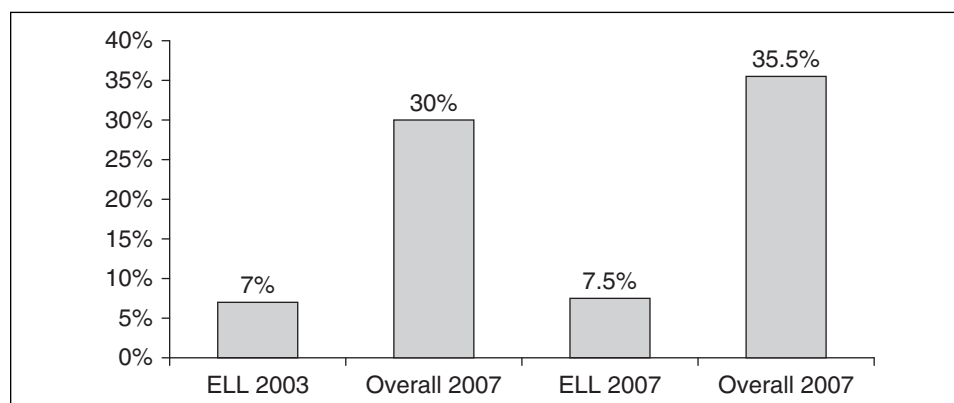
SOURCE: Goldenberg, 2008.

job of the classroom teacher and school system to reconcile ELD and content area standards.

STANDARD ENGLISH LEARNERS

Standard English Learners (SELs) are students who grew up speaking variations of standard English, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE); wide variations of Chicano English; Hawaiian Pidgin English; or other English variations of indigenous peoples, such as Native American tribes, that may have established vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and register patterns that differ from Standard English. Standard English Learners can also be students who live in isolated rural settings where they rarely hear Standard English spoken in their home or community. These students, then, naturally arrive at school with a uniquely rich linguistic heritage, yet one that differs from the Standard Academic English experienced in the American classroom. These unique and rule-consistent English variations ought to be considered a linguistic and cultural asset (Hollie, 2001b)—that SELs have internalized an English structure that is combined with an indigenous structure, creating a new language structure—yet educator attitudes often create a barrier for these students in school (LeMoine, 2006).

According to LeMoine (2006), Standard English Learners often have some of the lowest achievement scores, yet we do not have a process in place in the United States that systematically disaggregates test data across schools, districts, states, and regions, identifying and supporting Standard English Learners. For example, we collect Home Language Surveys to determine whether another language is spoken in the home—and if another language is spoken, we provide additional language assessment. However, we do not systematically conduct nationwide data collection on variations of Standard English spoken in the home. We do disaggregate

data from the perspective of ethnicity, but this lumps everyone into the same category, inviting false assumptions. For example, every Latino child is *not* an English Language Learner, a Standard English Learner, or an immigrant. Many Latino children are born in America, grow up in America, are children of educated parents, and hear Standard English modeled in their homes every day. However, there is also a large group of Latino children who speak English, but it is a variation of Standard English. These students, when coming to the text—just like an ELL—experience a mismatch between their home language and the language of the classroom, and therefore have an additional academic challenge as compared to their Standard English–speaking peers, yet they often go without specialized linguistic mentorship.

In the same way, we can look at test scores for African American children, but not every African American child is a Standard English Learner. Many African American children grow up in affluent, well-educated homes where they hear Standard English spoken every day. These African American children speak Standard English and excel in school; however, there is another group of African American children who speak African American Vernacular English or both AAVE and Standard English. For those children who only speak AAVE, and not Standard English, a mismatch between their home language and the language of their school exists. Consequently, these students experience unique linguistic challenges in the educational process.

We can also look at the scores for Caucasian children and lump them all together, but then we miss the linguistic variations and challenges of the Appalachian child raised in an impoverished environment with non-Standard English spoken at home, or the Caucasian student who is the first in his family to complete high school or go to college. We say all this only to underscore that there are subgroups of English-speaking children whose linguistic needs systematically go undetected, leading to larger literacy gaps over time—children who grow up in English-speaking homes where non-Standard English is spoken, yet are not identified in a systematic way for specific linguistic assistance. SELs are not ELLs, but their academic performance, or lack thereof, cries out for linguistic mentorship in a similar way. Therefore, as we have conceptualized this book, we want to expand the reader's thinking with regard to the literacy gaps and the Literacy Gaps Model that we will propose. We want you to consider the literacy gaps in light of any students who are still acquiring Standard English skills and offer them every advantage of linguistic mentorship that you would offer the ELL, so as to minimize the fossilization of non-Standard English to the exclusion of acquiring Standard English, and instead treating their non-Standard English as an L1 (first language: non-Standard English) that can be contrasted with their L2 (second language: Standard English).

Educators and linguists have documented that Standard English Learners can benefit, both culturally and linguistically, from many of the

> *SELs are not ELLs, but their academic performance, or lack thereof, cries out for linguistic mentorship.*

> *L1 refers to a student's first language. L2 refers to a student's second language.*

same practices utilized in English Language Learner methodology (Hollie, 2001a). Affirming one's home language, explicitly contrasting that home language with Standard English, and expanding students' linguistic "repertoire" to include both their non-standard language as well as academic English, empower students to succeed and enter mainstream society (Hollie, 2001a).

Our shared goal is academic English competence for all children so that all students have access to college and the workplace. The Literacy Gaps Model applies to both ELLs and SELs, and where there are specific skills and approaches for each group, they will also be addressed for further differentiation. We address the common needs of ELLs and SELs in order to make instruction manageable for teachers in a classroom, but differentiation needs to also occur, especially with ELLs at the beginning stage. The needs of SELs and ELLs become more similar at the Early Advanced and Advanced stages of English Language Development. Although we do not currently have a body of research to cite for achievement scores for differentiated SELs, we do see emerging evidence (California State Department of Education, 2007, p. 301) of acknowledgment of SEL groups, such as the acknowledgment of AAVE by the California Department of Education's Reading/Language Arts Framework. In addition, we see research, such as Labov (1998), that uniquely identify the coexistent systems within AAVE. Labov's work, and others', helps us understand that variations of English have unique linguistic systems that demonstrate grammar consistency, yet differ from Standard English, and the speakers of these variations require unique linguistic support. This book primarily focuses on the needs of ELLs, but as commonalities emerge, the needs of SELs will also be addressed.

> *Our shared goal is academic English competence for all children so that all students have access to college and the workplace.*

THE NATIONAL LITERACY PANEL

Emerging research by the National Literacy Panel (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL], 2006) has provided guidance in the best instructional practices to bridge grade-level content achievement gaps for ELLs. The authors of this book believe that these findings can benefit ELLs, SELs, and all children. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences convened a National Literacy Panel (NLP) of expert researchers from the fields of reading, language, bilingualism, research methods, and education. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics Web site,

> The charge of the panel was to conduct a comprehensive, evidence-based review of the research literature on the development of literacy among language minority children and youth. The panel was to produce a report evaluating and synthesizing this research literature to guide educational practice and inform educational policy. (p. 1)

In 2000, the National Reading Panel conducted a similar study synthesizing findings on experimental studies of reading instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and vocabulary; reading fluency; and reading comprehension, although it excluded studies of ELLs. In contrast, the NLP looked specifically at experimental studies of instructional procedures with ELLs. The findings of both the NLP (CAL, 2006) and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006) produced three common conclusions as shown in Figure 1.7.

Figure 1.7   Findings of NLP and CREDE, 2006

- Instruction in the primary language aids achievement;
- Good instruction for ELLs is similar to good instruction for other, English-speaking students; but
- ELLs require instructional accommodations.

SOURCE: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006.

Since the publication of findings of the NLP, as well as CREDE, in 2006, we have current, research-based insight on closing the achievement gap with ELLs, and therefore their research serves as the underpinning of this book. The following is a summary of the NLP findings and how they have impacted the book:

• **Instruction in the primary language aids achievement**—There are two main methods of educating ELLs (although there are also variations within these two), which include English immersion and bilingual education. English immersion provides instruction in English with sheltered or scaffolded support, while bilingual education teaches ELLs subjects both in English and their primary language. Meta-analysis by the NLP (CAL, 2006) with 17 studies comparing English immersion and bilingual education concluded that teaching ELLs to read in their primary language and then in their second language, or in both languages simultaneously at different times of the day, compared to only in English, increases reading achievement in English. The reason for this seems to be what educational psychologists and cognitive scientists call *transfer.* That is, when you learn something in your first language (L1), you are able to transfer those concepts and skills into the second language (L2) more rapidly. Specific strategies for transferring knowledge and skills between two languages, such as cognate word walls, will be addressed in the practical strategies infused throughout this book.

• **Good instruction for ELLs is similar to good instruction for other English-speaking students**—As with English-speaking students, ELLs

benefit from clear goals and objectives, well-designed instructional routines, active engagement and participation, informative feedback, opportunities to practice and apply new learning and transfer it to new situations, periodic review and practice, opportunities to interact with other students, and frequent assessments, with reteaching as needed. It is important to note, however, that although these elements are considered good instruction for English-speaking students, these elements are *essential* and *imperative* for ELLs who are engaged in the complex task of learning content and English at the same time. These two simultaneous processes—acquiring subject matter content and learning English—are critical to the "good instruction" that is typically taken for granted even in classrooms of native English-speaking students. In addition, findings by the NLP (CAL, 2006) were similar to those of the National Reading Panel (2000) in the area of reading instruction indicate that phonemic awareness (manipulation of sounds); phonics (decoding words); as well as focused instruction in vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension were also effective for ELLs. It was found that with systematic, explicit instruction, ELLs can make similar progress to native English speakers in the early stages of reading. Progress in vocabulary and in the content areas, however, begins to slow around the third grade when academic expectations begin to accelerate. Specific needs of ELLs in decoding and comprehension will be addressed in Chapters 2 through 5.

• **ELLs require instructional accommodations**—Although there are several common instructional needs between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers, there are also differences that must be specifically addressed. The NLP (CAL, 2006) found that ELLs especially benefit from opportunities to practice and extend oral English skills, as well as lessons that target both language and content objectives. These components will be addressed throughout the book. The following scaffolding techniques create academic bridges that prove beneficial for ELLs:

- Strategic use of primary language (e.g., cognate walls)
- Predictable, clear, and consistent instructions, expectations, and routines
- Extended explanations and additional opportunities for practice
- Redundant information that strengthens context-embedded access to information, such as visual cues and physical gestures
- Focus on the similarities/differences between English and the native language (e.g., contrastive grammar analysis)
- Building upon students' knowledge and skills in their native languages
- Identifying and clarifying difficult words and passages
- Consolidating text knowledge through summarization
- Providing extra practice in reading words, sentences, and stories
- Targeting vocabulary and frequent comprehension checks
- Teacher paraphrasing of students' remarks and encouraging expansion (e.g., use of English language stems)

These instructional accommodations assist in closing gaps for ELLs, both in English Language Development and across the content areas, as well as support Standard English development for SELs, and will be addressed at length throughout this book.

THE LITERACY GAPS MODEL

In order to close the literacy gaps, educators must examine every possible venue for increased quality of learning in the United States school system by increasing the quality of preservice and inservice teacher training, instructional practice, and measurement of learning outcomes. This book focuses on the needs of ELLs and SELs, presenting a theoretical teacher training model, the Literacy Gaps Model (Hetzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007), which illustrates the complex barriers that inhibit student learning in the classroom (the gap between the students and the text, the student and the teacher, and the student and his or her peers) and offers bridge-building strategies that close these gaps, specifically for English Language Learners, including Standard English Learners, who are so often "left behind."

To help the goal of closing the literacy gaps to become reality for all students, preservice teacher training models and inservice professional development opportunities must be modified to include a deeper understanding of individual differences and how these play out in classroom dynamics, particularly in the area of reading comprehension and literacy in general (Infante, 1996; Peterson, 2006; Turbill, 2006). The following three literacy gaps hinder student learning and must be understood by every teacher:

(1) The gap between the student and the text, including readability issues such as decoding and comprehension, which are greatly affected by background knowledge and experience; the student's L1 (first language); and the student's level of English Language Development; (see Figure 1.8)

(2) The gap between the teacher and the student, including teacher perceptions and expectations, cultural differences between the teacher and the student, and socioeconomic differences (see Figure 1.9)

(3) The gap between the student and his of her fluent English-speaking peers, including primary language(s) and English-language proficiency levels. These can be addressed by creating micro structures within the classroom, such as homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, coupled with open-ended, flexible, tiered assignments and broadspan teaching, as well as macro structures, such as grouping across grade levels and schoolwide programs that support global citizenry through language study, immersion programs, and heterogeneous and homogenous groupings. (see Figure 1.10).

The Literacy Gaps: Bridge-Building Strategies for English Language Learners and Standard English Learners provides a model around which teachers can rally, organizing their literacy strategies and strengthening their classroom

Figure 1.8   The Gap Between the ELL Student and the Text

Student   **Gap**   **Text**

Readability Issues
Decoding
Comprehension

background knowledge and experience, primary language, ELD
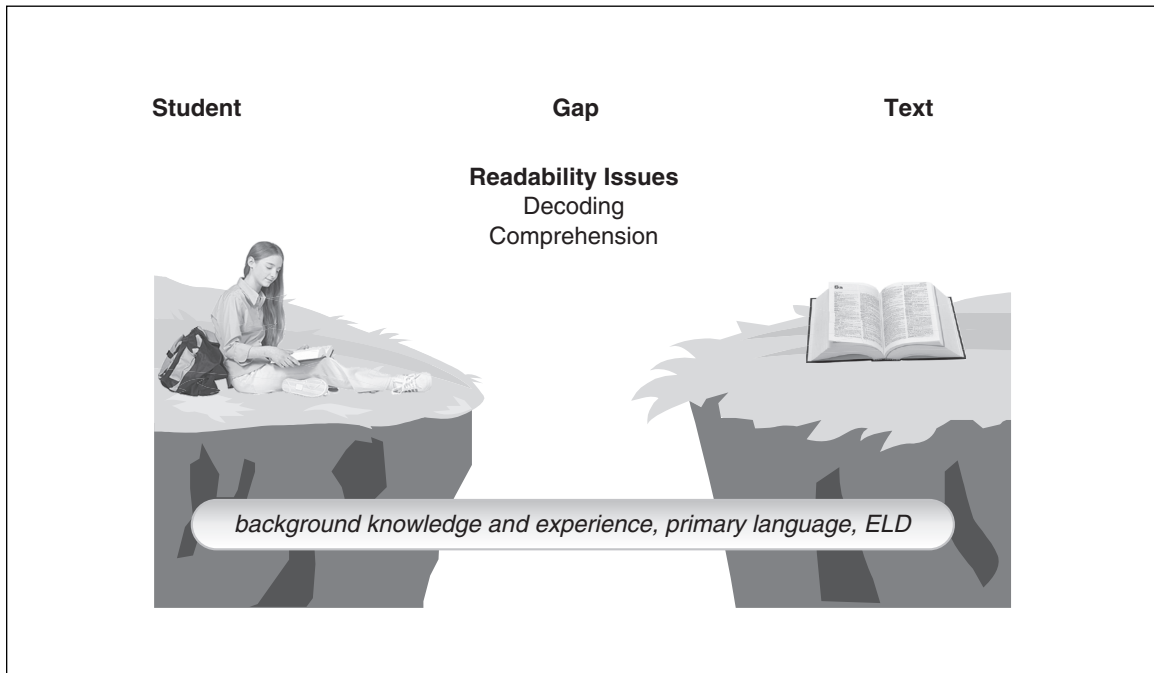
Figure 1.9   The Gap Between the ELL Student and the Teacher

Student   **Gap**   **Teacher**

Perceptions
and expectations
Culture differences
Socioeconomic differences

background knowledge and experience, primary language, ELD
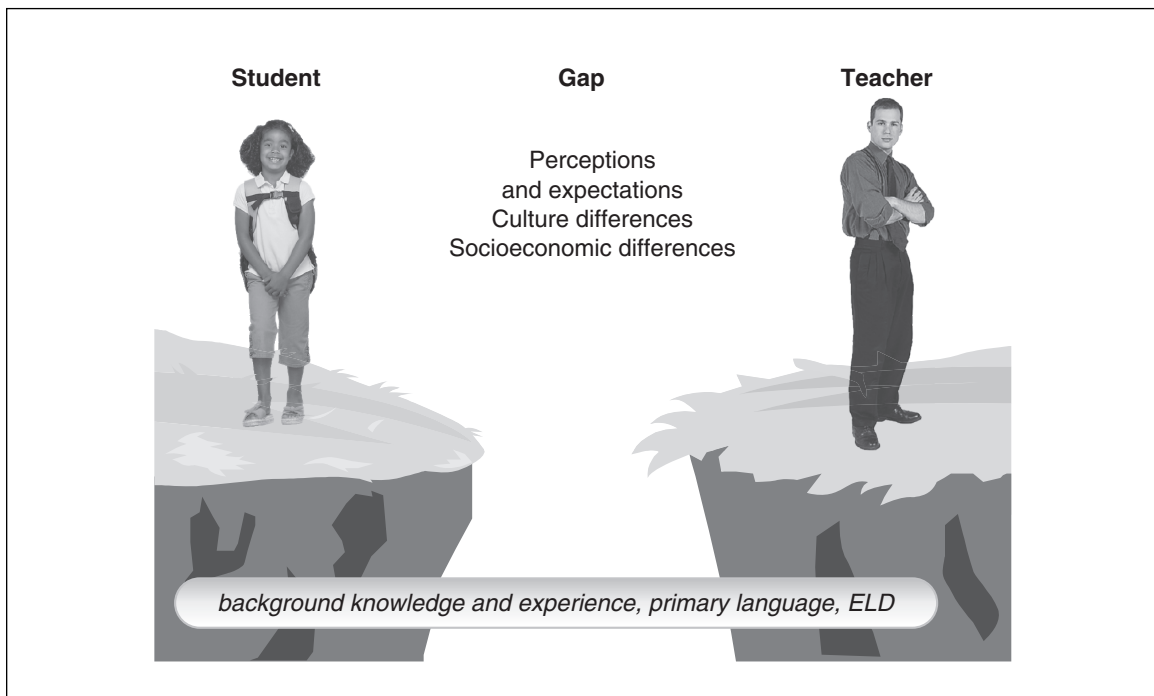
Figure 1.10   The Gap Between the Student and His or Her Peers

Student **Gap** **Peers**

English language
proficiency levels

background knowledge and experience, primary language, and ELD
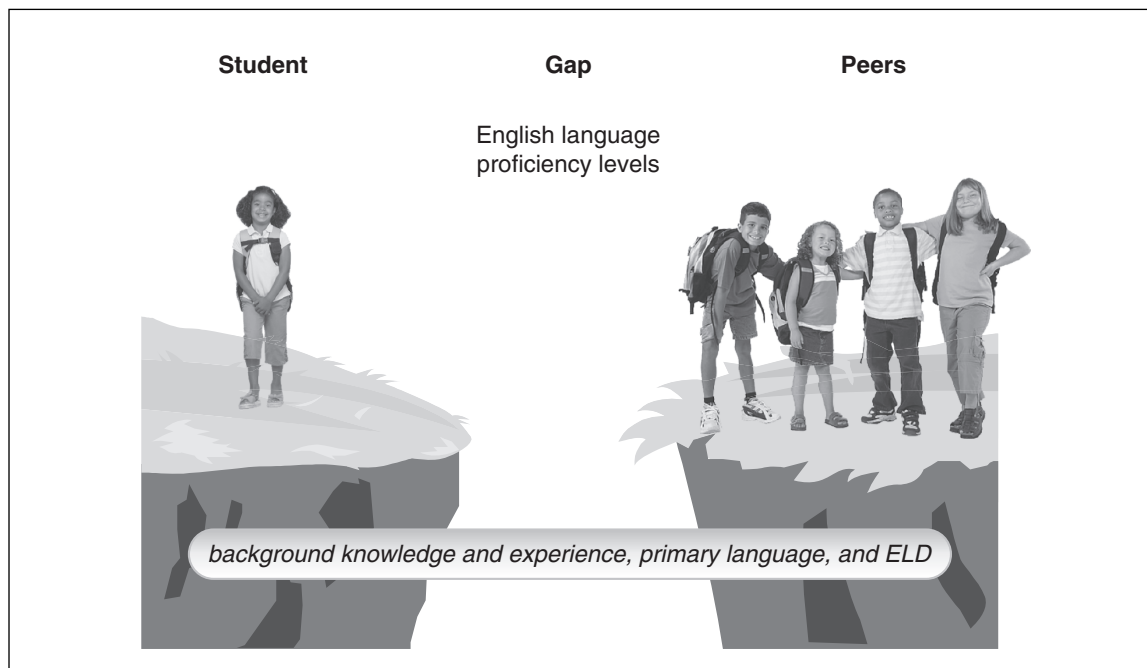
practices. This book, based upon an article by the authors (Hetzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007) that was presented at the 2006 Oxford University Round Table and published in the *Journal on Public Policy*, offers a model for reorganizing instructional practice for a variety of educational audiences, including teacher education, teacher induction, and professional development. The model of the three literacy gaps—the gap between the student and written text, the student and the teacher, and the student and his or her peers—provides a framework around which educators can organize current, research-based instructional practices so as to close the gaps and increase English Language Learners' and Standard English Learners' academic achievement.

The Literacy Gaps: Bridge-Building Strategies for English Language Learners and Standard English Learners begins with the research-based rationale for this book and the urgency for educators to immediately attend to the needs of our ELLs and SELs across the nation. Then, as we have only briefly introduced the Literacy Gaps Model, we will unpack the model in detail throughout the remainder of the book. The middle section of the book provides detailed treatment of each of the literacy gaps. Each gap corresponds to subcomponents that are carefully crafted and unpacked within the context of research-based theory and practical experience. Practical strategies are introduced and supported with examples that can immediately be used in a classroom context. The text's language is intended to be user-friendly for classroom teachers, yet with enough research included to be a support in the university classroom. We hope

that you as the reader, and ultimately your students, will greatly benefit by having spent some time in studying this book.

The text is applicable for classroom practice in that it provides contextualized experiences and classroom conversations that demonstrate how to apply the principles in a classroom context. Readers should find focused and detailed suggestions for incrementally altering instructional practice. The scenarios outlined will assist you in visualizing yourself in the classroom, and hopefully, after you have read this book, you will implement change that will fundamentally impact ELL and SEL student achievement.

OVERVIEW OF BOOK CHAPTERS

A brief summary of the remainder of the book follows.

Chapters 2 through 5 relate to the first gap, the gap between the student and the text (see Figure 1.11).

Literacy Gap #1: The Gap Between the Student and the Text

Chapter 2, "Decoding," examines concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words, and automaticity in the context of developing word recognition and reading fluency for ELLs and SELs. Chapter 3, "Background Knowledge and Experience," helps teachers understand the role of background knowledge and experience, or schema, as the critical foundation for understanding text. In Chapter 4, "Comprehension," the reader studies meaning-making strategies, considering how academic language, including vocabulary, syntax, and text structure, affects comprehensibility of text for ELLs and SELs. In addition, strategies are presented to support comprehension monitoring as well as (re)organization of text, including appropriate questioning.

Chapter 5, "English Language Development and Academic English," guides the teacher, step-by-step, through the process of sensitive language mentorship for English Language Learners, including Standard English Learners whose language might be associated with African American vernacular, variations of Chicano English, or Hawaiian Pidgin.

Literacy Gap #2: The Gap Between the Student and the Teacher

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 address the second gap, that between the student and the teacher. (See Figure 1.12.) This section unveils three important barriers between the student and the teacher that affect learning—perceptions and expectations, cultural differences, and socioeconomic differences. Chapter 6, "Perceptions and Expectations," refers to mental models and belief systems educators hold about ELLs and SELs and their ability levels. These perceptions are unpacked and practical strategies are provided to

Figure 1.11   Gap #1: The Gap Between the ELL Student and the Text

Student   **Gap**   **Text**

Readability Issues
Decoding
Comprehension

background knowledge and experience, primary language, ELD

Figure 1.12   Gap #2: The Gap Between the ELL Student and the Teacher

Student   **Gap**   **Teacher**

Perceptions
and expectations
Culture differences
Socioeconomic differences

background knowledge and experience, primary language, ELD

assist teachers in bridging this gap. Establishing and holding high expectations for all students is an essential component to successfully meeting individual needs (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Brisk, 1998; Education Trust, 2003). Moreover, teachers' expectations of students are inextricably linked to their perceptions about students' abilities, their own pedagogical skills, and their content knowledge (Ferguson, 1998; Howard, 1995; Wenglinsky, 2001). When educators are not well-informed regarding the population and needs of the students they instruct, they can unknowingly hinder rather than further educational progress. This chapter steps into the gap and bridges this divide.

Chapter 7, "Cultural Differences," examines mismatches between the teacher and his or her students that can create gaps of misunderstanding. Caring teachers must know their students and build bridges to their students' home cultures. For example, Valdés (1996) suggests that assistance to Mexican-origin families must be based on "an understanding and an appreciation and respect for the internal dynamics of these families" (p. 203). Chapter 7 prepares educators to explore these cultural differences as assets to school life both inside *and* outside the classroom. Teachers reframe their thinking, discovering that cultural differences can inform them in how to do their work better, as opposed to viewing cultural differences as potential deterrents to educational progress.

Chapter 8, "Socioeconomic Differences," examines another major gap between the teacher and so many, though not all, of his or her ELLs or SELs. Parents in the lower socioeconomic class, like the parents of middle- and upper-class children, want their children equipped with academic language skills for college and beyond. And, since children from impoverished homes may not already be equipped with implicit linguistic academic codes, it is the responsibility of teachers to make those codes explicit for them. In Chapter 8, teachers learn how to provide explicit literacy instruction for varied language registers, involving the teaching of conventions of reading and writing in a reflective manner, with real-life, culturally appropriate examples. Teachers learn strategies to bridge socioeconomic differences so that students are able to use academic language for a range of purposes in a contextually embedded, accessible learning environment. In this way, teachers build bridges to fill in gaps between students' home language registers that might reflect a lower socioeconomic status to that of the language registers of the dominant culture, by explicitly understanding and teaching the idiosyncrasies of the dominant language, all the while respecting the home language and any derivations of Standard English the student might be speaking.

Literacy Gap #3: The Gap Between the Student and His or Her Peers

Chapter 9, "Language Proficiency Levels," unveils the mystery behind assessments and formally identified English Language Development levels. Language proficiency levels are often used much too rigidly to

Figure 1.13 Gap #3: The Gap Between the Student and His or Her Peers
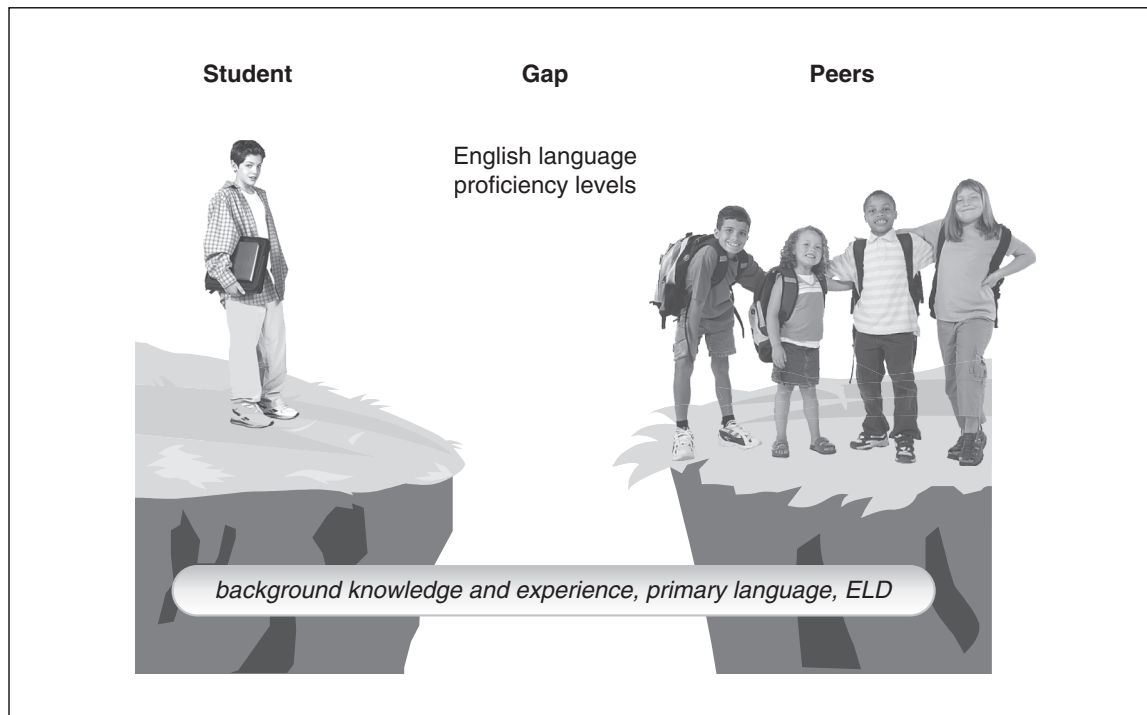
depict what students *cannot* do, instead of the intended usage, as a means of giving a range of what they *can* do. For example, if a student has been identified at a beginning level, he or she might be expected to write simple words. Some educators might keep to this descriptor much too rigidly and not expect students to write both simple words and phrases. Some educators might also assume that all ELLs are the same, despite first-language ability. In Chapter 9, the authors expand the reader's understanding of language proficiency levels and assessments, and then provide practical techniques to maximize language acquisition, using the first language to assist the second language acquisition process. (See Figure 1.13.)

Chapter 10, "Grouping Strategies," puts the puzzle pieces together, providing practical insight on grouping strategies based upon proficiency levels. The gap between the student and his or her peers with regard to language acquisition, the art of differentiation, can be bridged by creating micro structures within the classroom, such as homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, coupled with open-ended, flexible, tiered assignments, and broadspan teaching. Chapter 10 then addresses grade level and schoolwide programs.

Chapter 11, "Beyond the Gap," explores potentials for moving students beyond the achievement gap, nurturing lifelong learning, and preparing them for successful futures. Chapter 11 invites educators to create sociocultural environments in which ELLs and SELs thrive, gain confidence through their academic achievements, capitalize on the rich funds of knowledge that they bring to society, experience equitable access to all that society offers, and ultimately gain the skills to be the leaders of tomorrow.

As educators, we must reenvision a future with success for all students, including ELLs and SELs. We cannot lose hope. We must embrace the reality that standardized test scores show that we, as educators, are failing many of our students, demanding that we change educational and literacy practices. Naturally, demographic transformation requires renovations in instructional practice so as to meet the needs of all students. Chapter 11 highlights the redesign of teacher preparation and instructional practice for ELLs through the introduction of the Literacy Gaps Model, one that can encompass familiar as well as new research-based instructional practices, assisting and enabling teachers nationwide to indeed have "no child left behind."

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 establishes the historical evidence of the literacy gaps provided by Goldenberg (2008) and the National Literacy Panel (2006), paving the way for research-based methodology to close the literacy gaps for ELLs and SELs. The Literacy Gaps Model (Hetzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007) provides a conceptual structure around which conversations can occur in professional communities, observations can be made, gaps can be identified, and bridges can be built, especially for the English Language Learner and the Standard English Learner, in order to help every child succeed. Now, journey with us as we step into Literacy Gap #1, the gap between the student and the text.

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