

# Preface

*Teaching Adolescent English Language Learners* grew from our discontent with the demands currently being imposed on secondary teachers with respect to educational reform initiatives prompted by No Child Left Behind and other federal and state mandates. For the most part, these mandates are constructed with little forethought about secondary students who are learning English or the teachers and programs that serve them. It also grew from our experience in secondary schools, both middle and high school, where we learned it takes the combined efforts of language and content teachers, as well as guidance counselors and families, to respond to the many demands and expectations secondary students are expected to meet to graduate from high school.

Unlike the elementary grades, in secondary schools there is no single teacher with full responsibility for the education of the English language learner (ELL). Instead, a number of teachers work with the student on a daily basis, and little time is provided for the teachers to coordinate their efforts with one another. From our firsthand experience in middle and high schools, we know that secondary educators want to meet the needs of their ELLs and are looking for strategies that can support them in their work, yet they find it hard to locate strategies that are realistic and proven to get results. This book is designed to offer some proven strategies to middle and high school teachers who work with ELLs, particularly with regard to the development of academic language in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is written by and for practitioners who work on a daily basis with a very diverse range of ELLs in urban secondary schools.

For many secondary teachers the pressure is great. Graduation seems a distant and unattainable goal for some of their ELLs—those who are just beginning to learn English in the later grades or those with limited formal schooling. We choose to focus on adolescents and secondary schools because of the intense needs of secondary ELLs and their teachers. At the same time, understanding the demands and time pressures placed on such teachers daily, we intend to make the book as practical and accessible as possible.

Research shows that more than two-thirds of new jobs require some form of postsecondary education (Barton, 2006), yet America has a steady high school dropout rate of nearly 30% (C. B. Swanson, 2008). Even worse for those working in urban schools, the rate is significantly higher for Latinos and African Americans (Barton, 2005; Menken, 2008; Thornburgh, 2006). In some urban school settings the dropout rate can reach as high as 60% of students (C. B. Swanson, 2008).

One source of high dropout rates is students' perception that they will never graduate. Experts like Richard Fry, senior research associate of the Pew Hispanic Center, document that ELLs are among the furthest behind on national standardized testing scores (Fry, 2007). In 2005 more than two-thirds (71%) scored below basic in mathematics, and the same percent scored below basic in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The lack of proficiency



Ivssara, Cape Verde

among students in reading and math coupled with the high dropout rate has led to many reform initiatives for U.S. secondary schools. Most of the reform efforts focus on increased personalization of instruction, flexible use of time, educational structures, and professional development designed to support secondary teachers in meeting the seemingly impossible demands placed upon them (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2006).

Fry (2007) also documented important changes in the composition of the ELL population between fourth and eighth grade where many students are moved out of that status as they acquire language skills, while many newly arrived immigrant children are added to the group. It is this pressure that middle and high school teachers of ELLs feel—the constant arrival of new students at all secondary grade levels with vastly different educational and proficiency profiles. Yet these students are expected to meet the same graduation requirements as every other student, despite the fact that they were educated outside of the United States for a significant portion of their schooling experience and are still learning English. Especially in urban secondary school settings, ELLs make up a sizable proportion of the secondary population, and this situation affects achievement and graduation rates. In fact, in New York City, ELLs are overrepresented in schools identified as failing (Menken, 2008).

But our purpose is not to sound alarm bells, as others have already done that. Nor is it to share ways to shelter instruction for secondary English language learners, as that has been well done by Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) in their research-based SIOP approach. Instead, we focus on what is needed in order to program well for secondary ELLs; to create welcoming schools and classrooms where language and content teachers work together to actively develop their academic English across language and content classrooms. Teachers need proven strategies to advance students' English proficiency for academic purposes, and that is our primary reason for writing this book. We want middle and high school ELLs to make it to graduation.

At the same time we feel the pressures of secondary schooling environments; we know the joy of working with ELL young adults in middle and high schools. There is a satisfaction like no other in teaching in taking students who are in very formative years and aiding them in making a good transition to their adult lives, educations, and careers. We also hope we convey this joy in teaching in our writing, for it is this passion that can aid teachers in meeting the tremendous challenges involved in working with ELLs at the secondary level in the current climate of school reform and high standards.

## **Our Work in Schools**

The authors met in an urban school in 2006 where we began a professional partnership focusing on a school-based professional development series designed to prepare content teachers to work more effectively with their ELLs and to obtain the ESL endorsement for their content-area teaching certificates. We were quite a diverse group of educators—ESL and bilingual teachers; English and public speaking teachers; foreign language educators; algebra, calculus, biology, chemistry, music, history, and technology teachers; and special educators—all focused on one thing: how to better serve ELLs in real-life secondary classrooms. Each

classroom situation was unique and compelling, and one theme remained paramount in everyone's minds—how to help these kids make it. This experience helped to clarify for us what secondary teachers need to advance the academic language of their learners—the essential teaching strategies that can promote language and literacy learning and the guidance and other support services that are needed to complement high-quality instruction and help the kids make it to graduation. It was because of this experience that some of us joined forces—a university professor, a seasoned ESL teacher, a bilingual content-area teacher (history), and an English teacher. We viewed ourselves as representative of the teachers that come into the lives of the students on a daily basis and try to do all they can to help them develop the skills they need to succeed. We have had many rich discussions since we first met, and these discussions finally culminated in this book.

We are first and foremost secondary educators by experience. We come from or still dwell in secondary classrooms. Our teaching experience is exclusive to adolescents, grades 6–12. These are “our kids,” the kids we think about every day, the kids we worry about and carry in our hearts. We understand firsthand the high stakes our students face in U.S. secondary schools and are committed to making a difference for them and their teachers. We did this first and foremost for ourselves, but we also felt compelled to share with other secondary teachers the essential programming and language-development strategies we know work. So this book is fundamentally designed to share the highly practical strategies we know can make a difference for your kids.

## Sharing Our Voices

I started my teaching career in San Francisco, where I lived and worked in the public schools for seven years. I taught in the early days of bilingual education, always in the middle grades, and I worked in schools with multiple bilingual programs and many levels of ESL. These were ethnically and linguistically rich schools, and I was hooked from the get-go, since Spanish language and literature were my areas of specialization and I had prepared to be a second-language teacher. I taught kids in grades 6–8 in both Spanish and English and networked with colleagues who taught in other high-incidence languages in bilingual programs in my school and across the city.

From the beginning, I felt the deep longing of the kids to be understood and respected, to learn English, and, almost without exception, to be successful at school and in life. No matter their motivation level or educational background, the road was not an easy one, and I admired their courage to face school each day in a second language with people unlike themselves, at times dealing with ugly incidents of prejudice and discrimination from not only other students but also some adults in the building and surrounding community.

In this environment, I learned very quickly the importance of having a strong native language and identity to get you through and help you succeed. I too was a learner and benefited greatly from the richness of my students' backgrounds and their life experiences.

The connection between these students and their teachers is very strong as teachers help them navigate a powerful life transition on many levels. I have always been aware of the depth of the relationships ESL and bilingual teachers experience with their students, and as a result, my work has always had power and purpose. Even on my worst

days as a teacher in an urban school, I have known that what I did mattered and I felt tremendously inspired to continue, no matter the pressures.

Middle school is a demanding and at the same time wondrous place. When it goes right, teams of teachers collaborate to deliver integrated curricula to students and solve problems together to meet their students' needs. Urban schools pose special challenges yet offer unparalleled rewards. Most days I was running from the minute I arrived and often asked myself at the end of the day if I had ever eaten lunch. I had thousands of interactions, yet always felt the pain of knowing there were kids I didn't quite get to, despite my best intentions. Through it all, I loved it and still do. I am in urban schools as much as I can manage. ELL middle schoolers are going through a passage like no other. You are their witness and, if you are lucky, their navigator. It's a fantastic experience.

Ever since that time, my work has always focused on urban schools. I am completely committed to urban education and to improving urban public schools for ELLs. Now, as a teacher educator, I try to bring my passion for urban teaching to prospective and practicing teachers, especially secondary teachers. I want them to last. I want them to love it. I want them to know their kids and offer them everything they deserve. I want them to make sure their English language learners make it to graduation.

Nancy Cloud, Rhode Island College

I came to education through my work with children as an adolescent—volunteering in elementary schools, working with after-school programs, and working as a counselor at summer camps. I loved working with little kids—their enthusiasm, innocence, and wonder a constant source of motivation and inspiration for me.

After eight years of working with children, I decided to try my hand with adolescents. When I was 21 years old I worked as a residential advisor and teacher at a summer enrichment program for high school students. It was my first experience working with high school students and I was terrified—why would these students respect me, a young adult only a few years their senior? What I found was that I loved them and they loved me. My closeness in age allowed me to relate to them in ways that many other adults struggled to do. These young adults were yearning for instruction and guidance from somebody who could relate to them in a way that only I could, because I had recently gone through the struggles of adolescence myself.

Since then I have not looked back. I graduated from college with a B.A. in History and a state certificate to teach in the Rhode Island public school system. Now, I am in my fifth full year of teaching at the secondary level in an urban setting, and I have recently completed an M.Ed. in Teaching English as a Second Language. Over these five years, I have taught bilingual history, general education history, and ESL history, spanning all grades and all levels.

I have become inspired to specifically work with ELLs because of my own experience as a second-language learner in Ecuador. Although the process of learning a second language was a formative experience, it was actually living in a culture different from my own and connecting with people in that culture that was truly transformational and mind opening. My time in Ecuador changed who I am as a person and was one of the most difficult and rewarding times of my life. Being able to help others go through that process is an incredibly enriching experience, and my own struggles allow me to be both sympathetic and, more importantly, empathetic to my students' plight. Since my time in

Ecuador, I have also traveled to Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Guatemala—all in search of a better understanding of where my students come from and how I can help them. In the Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Guatemala, I spent time with family members of the very students I serve here in the United States, attempting to learn from them and understand them in a way that only being in their homeland can accomplish. I plan to continue these journeys around the world, as I continue to serve ELLs; they have been some of the most enriching and educational experiences of my life.

I am inspired to work in an urban setting because I consider myself to be both privileged and fortunate, and I think the only response for having been this lucky is to give back. In my opinion, there is no group more disenfranchised in the United States than ELLs and their families, and so it is them that I wish to serve. I believe that my experiences abroad in combination with my knowledge of a second language make me particularly adept at helping ELLs navigate the difficult world of U.S. secondary schools and come out successful; it is a challenge I thoroughly enjoy.

Judah Lakin, Bilingual Social Studies Teacher

I grew up and pursued my teacher education in Southern California, where there is an abundance of English language learners in the communities and the schools. Since I can remember, I have been intensely interested in both education and language. In fact, my “teacher education” began at a very early age, as I grew up hearing firsthand the educator view of school and school life. My dad was a high school administrator, my mom worked at the different schools I attended growing up, and I was always interested in their stories and conversations about education.

I was especially drawn to secondary education because of the amazing and inspirational secondary teachers I had in high school and the way in which I was challenged and motivated by them and by my high school experience in general. At the same time, my younger brother was often frustrated and unmotivated during his time in high school, and his experience has given me a broader view of what high school is and can be for different students. In turn, I am inspired by the challenges, views, and experiences high school students bring to the classroom, and how we can shape our shared experience to benefit all students.

I love and am fascinated by language, and how we communicate and relate to each other. Growing up in San Diego, I became aware at a young age of many immigrant issues, and was struck by how many of the prejudices, difficulties, and misunderstandings that revolved around immigrants and ELLs were the result of a communication barrier. I became committed to learning Spanish and studied in Spain for a year, experiencing firsthand what it is like to be a foreigner and language learner. In 2006, I traveled to the Dominican Republic for five weeks to visit and to learn how I can better serve my students and their families, both educationally and socially, as they make the transition to a new life in the United States. I engaged in a similar experience when I traveled to Guatemala in 2009 to visit the families of several of my current students. I believe that education is power, so I work hard to give my students the independence to make decisions and be successful on their own terms. I am committed to helping students and their families and communities gain access to education and opportunities to better themselves and their lives.

This is my fifth year of teaching ESL; and every year I feel I am equally learning about and refining my practice. I am endlessly energetic and relentlessly optimistic, and I use these characteristics to create a vibrant and dynamic classroom. I am inspired to work in urban settings with adolescent ELLs because I feel that this setting offers both the greatest challenge and the greatest need. I feel that my educational experiences, positive attitude, high energy, and bilingual perspective allow me to positively connect with kids, challenge them, and hopefully empower them to confront life with confidence and perseverance.

Erin Leininger, ESL Teacher

Working in an urban setting provides me with the cultural resources that a city has to offer as well as the cultural and language diversity and richness that immigrant populations bring. I'm also motivated to teach where I do because public schools are the frontlines of democracy. My work in the United States and in South Africa—through teaching and through work at several education reform initiatives—has convinced me that as our education system grows poorer or richer, weaker or stronger, so does our capacity to live out the promises of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

My commitment to adolescent ELLs and their families is as deep as my commitment to maintaining democracy: All residents of the United States need to have access to language support and civic education that will enable them to participate fully in the life of the country.

I have taught students from grades 8 to 12, and from at least 10 different language backgrounds. I love teaching adolescents because they are in the midst of developing a sense of their own identity; as such they are in desperate need—as desperate as the youngest children—of positive and powerful role models. They are also very curious and willing to question authority, traits that make them ripe for engaging in critical thinking and debate, the cornerstones of democracy.

Laura Maxwell, English Teacher

## The Need for Specialized Strategies for Middle and High School Teachers of ELLs

Because we work in secondary schools, we understand the demands that are placed on teachers who serve as many as 120 students per day. We have written this book to try to offer specialized strategies for middle and high school teachers that respect their teaching roles and conditions.

Whether you serve as a language or content teacher, we take it as a given that you know your subject matter; therefore, our book does not pretend to tell you how to teach your subject. Rather, we share strategies for systematically developing the language and literacy skills of the students enrolled in your class for whom English is a new language. Our experience in secondary classrooms has taught us that teachers who know how to develop oral language and literacy skills, offer native language support to ELLs, and engage their learners in collaborative learning and meaningful, standards-based learning activities deliver powerful instruction to ELLs (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007). English language learners excel most

when enrolled in well-planned programs delivered by teachers who care and invest in them. Recent research on effective secondary schooling for ELLs affirms that caring teachers, culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Noddings, 1999), and effective second-language instruction motivate secondary ELLs and insure that they succeed academically (Travieso-Parker, 2006).

In the chapters that follow we first outline the challenges of secondary school as we see them and the critical role played by effective guidance services, particularly scheduling secondary ELLs into the appropriate classes. Then we describe how to make use of the learner's native language, even when the teacher does not know or speak the learner's language. The book then sets a framework for language and literacy development in secondary school to ground our work prior to sharing strategies for oral language, reading, listening and note taking, and writing that can be used with ELLs in language and content courses. Finally we describe the all-important topic of bridging to mainstream English classes, once ESL services are no longer required.

We conceptualize the book as a "how-to" guide, not a theoretical presentation or review of the literature. Instead, we present theory and educational frameworks only as needed to ground the practices suggested, with referrals to other sources for those who want to learn more. We offer as many concrete strategies, teaching tips, and resources as possible in the hopes that each teacher can select those he or she finds most useful for his or her particular teaching situation. Our goal is to show that we understand your world and its pressures and to offer you ideas that work—strategies, teaching tips, and concrete resources to aid you in your daily interactions with English language learners.