

## Preface

**C**ommon Core, *Bilingual and English Language Learners: A Resource for Educators* is for pre-service and practicing administrators, teachers, coaches, staff developers, curriculum specialists, leadership teams, and policymakers who are trying to make sense of what the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) mean for diverse learners. To date, federal and state departments of education have provided little guidance for educators about how to include English language learners (ELLs) in CCSS implementation. We find confusion, controversy, and questioning among educators at the state, district, school, and classroom levels about how to proceed. In response, we (Valdés, Menken, and Castro) developed this book to begin to provide some concrete answers.

We began by compiling 95 questions that we have heard from practitioners in the field, and we organized these questions into seven chapters: (1) terrain and landscape; (2) fundamental language issues; (3) family and community participation; (4) policy, leadership, and advocacy; (5) teaching and learning; (6) professional learning; and (7) assessment and accountability. We know that there is no one right answer to the numerous questions educators have about CCSS and ELLs in diverse district, school, and community contexts. This book therefore includes 136 brief, user friendly responses from 130 experts that collectively represent a range of states, institutions, communities, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and perspectives.

As the title indicates, this book focuses on students who are officially designated as *English language learners*, the term commonly used in U.S. schools and policy today. However, the editors prefer the term *emergent bilingual* (EB) to recognize students' bilingualism, and because the result of learning English at school is usually bilingualism (or even multilingualism) rather than English monolingualism. Students who speak language(s) other than English at home and who are learning English as a new or additional language at school draw on their home language(s) as they learn content, literacy, and language. As we see in many of the contributions to the book, a holistic perspective on language learning has important implications for mainstream and specialist educators who have ELLs/EBs in their classes, schools, and districts. The contributors also represent a broad range of perspectives, approaches, and contexts, and the terminology and approaches used reflect this diversity.

We also emphasize that *all* students are language learners who must learn new ways of using oral and written language for academic and disciplinary purposes. This includes ELLs/EBs who are new to English, simultaneous bilinguals who grow up using two (or more) languages at home, students who come to school speaking vernacular varieties of English, and students who speak standard varieties of English. All educators must therefore know how to prepare linguistically and culturally diverse learners to meet the same high language and literacy demands set out in the new standards. The language

and literacy education fields have much to offer the general education field, and the experts contributing to this guide provide an accessible entry point to this work.

### **Shifting Terrain and Landscape**

In an EducCore White Paper titled “The Common Core Changes Almost Everything” (included in this volume as 1.1), the distinguished educational policy expert, Michael Kirst, warns us that these new standards “will affect almost all key state and local education policies in fundamental ways.” He points out that part of the challenge is that “the Common Core Standards are trying to implement a 21st-century vision of K–12 education using 20th-century local school structures, resources, and culture.” Kirst further argues that the field of education currently lacks the integrated research and development to build the more effective teaching practices, tools, and resources that are needed to implement this completely new vision in teaching and learning.

For us, deciding what needs to be questioned and what can simply be assumed as correct or on target is an important challenge. There is much around us that is shifting, much that we fear, but also much that we may learn from. As practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who are concerned about the effects of the CCSS on ELLs/EBs, it is particularly important that we engage in critical conversations that will help clarify (1) points of confusion, (2) what may now be indefensible views, (3) implications of shifts of various types for instructional practices, (4) the effects of new assessments, and (5) the ways in which new CCSS-aligned standards policies might negatively and positively affect this particularly vulnerable group of students.

Not everyone agrees with this latest reform movement, particularly those on either end of the U.S. political landscape who question the CCSS, and several states have chosen to opt out of the Common Core altogether. The controversies surrounding the CCSS are likewise evident in the responses by the different contributors to this book, whose viewpoints run the gamut from full support to total opposition. One important purpose of this book is to actively engage all educators in these debates. At the same time, we recognize that educators serving ELLs/EBs in school systems and schools across the country are now charged with implementation of the CCSS. Accordingly, this book offers educators the support and guidance they need to evaluate the CCSS, while implementing the standards in ways that make sense for their ELL/EB students.

### **Critical Conversations**

We see this practical guide as an invitation to conversations about the CCSS and ELLs/EBs. As editors, we are a central part of the conversation. Each of us has been working in different but complementary ways to support the education of ELLs/EBs throughout our careers.

Guadalupe Valdés lives in California, which currently has the largest number of ELLs/EBs, most of them Latino, and most of them from Mexico. She is a professor at Stanford University and a founding partner of Understanding Language, an initiative that focuses attention on the role of language in subject-area learning, with a focus on

helping ELLs/EBs meet the new CCSS and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Valdés' work over a period of 30 years has focused on the English–Spanish bilingualism of U.S. Latinos and on discovering and describing how two languages are developed, used, and maintained by individuals who become bilingual in immigrant communities. Valdés has strong views and passions and has engaged in many skirmishes and battles on behalf of what she views as the most vulnerable students in American schools. She worries about the ways that language is conceptualized by educators and about the damage that misunderstanding the goals of second language acquisition pedagogy can do to children.

Kate Menken lives and works in New York City, the most multilingual city in the United States, where she is an associate professor of linguistics at Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY), and a research fellow at the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is also co-principal investigator of the CUNY–New York State Initiative for Emergent Bilinguals, which develops the knowledge base of school principals and staff to transform language policies and practices in schools enrolling EBs. Menken opposes education reforms like the CCSS when they lead to English-only approaches in schools. She also opposes the test-based accountability that has overtaken previous standards-based reform efforts, especially the test-and-punish approach that can be harmful for EBs. Menken fears that the Common Core is continuing this approach. She encourages educators, policymakers, and administrators to become politically active and push for better policies for ELLs/EBs. Menken asks educators and administrators not simply to accept and implement the Common Core as is. Rather, she encourages administrators, and policymakers to prioritize the needs of ELL/EB students, which include protecting high-quality programs like bilingual education that draw on and strengthen students' home language practices.

Mariana Castro lives in Wisconsin and is currently Director of Academic Language and Literacy Initiatives for the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium, a consortium of 35 states and territories that have joined together to develop standards-based resources and assessments to support the language development and academic achievement of ELLs/EBs. Throughout her career, Mariana's work at the school, district, national, and international levels has focused on the roles of educators in supporting student learning. Her passion for education is energized by the amazing work of teachers who draw on the linguistic and cultural resources of students and communities in diverse contexts. Through the concrete examples from practitioners included in this text, Mariana hopes to further the development of strong collaborative partnerships, not only within teacher groups in schools but also among schools and communities in ways that integrate linguistic, cultural, and experiential funds of knowledge into instructional designs that expand all students' opportunities to learn.

As editors, we started the conversation by collecting questions that we heard from practitioners in the field. We furthered the conversation by inviting experts we know and whose work we admire to participate in this project. We view these experts' opinions

as points of departure for addressing the confusion in the field and suggest concrete actions that educators can take to support student learning, curriculum, instruction, assessment, programming, professional learning, policy, and advocacy.

We ask you to imagine all of us in the room as you engage in discussions and explorations of the topics presented in this book. We invite you to disagree with us, to question us, and to convince us of your positions as you read the responses of researchers, administrators, and practitioners who are also deeply committed to the education of students new to English. We expect that the conversations you engage in will raise new questions about controversial issues, invite you to explore positions about which you feel strongly, and perhaps allow you to make new and different connections with what you know has worked in instruction for ELLs/EBs.

### **How to Use This Guide**

This practical guide can be used by educators in many ways, including the following:

- As a reference that provides clear and concise answers to specific questions that individuals or groups of educators may have about a particular CCSS-related issue.
- As part of a professional development (PD) workshop, book study group, or university class. Groups may do a close reading of one or more questions and answers to identify, compare, and contrast different perspectives on an issue, and consider how to apply what they learn in specific school or community contexts.
- To identify concrete ways to use the CCSS to focus on the role of language in education for all students, particularly ELLs/EBs.
- To organize a CCSS-aligned curriculum development project that is responsive to the needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse learners.
- To broaden educators' understanding of what is involved in appropriating the CCSS in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity by focusing attention on leadership, policy, programming, professional learning, parental and community participation, and advocacy—in addition to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability.
- To support and guide local efforts to review, monitor, evaluate, and improve the extent to which they are providing opportunities to learn and the best possible services for the ELLs/EBs in their districts and schools. For example, leadership teams might focus on particular chapters to respond to a program audit or to prepare a professional learning plan.
- To galvanize school administrators and staff to consider anew how their school is implementing and/or resisting the CCSS and their assessments, and to make changes if implementation is anything less than ideal for ELLs/EBs.

These are just a few suggestions for how educators might use this resource to open spaces for creative and innovative ways to implement the CCSS at the local level. We hope that this book will support educators as agents of change as they address the implementation gap left by federal and state policymakers who have provided little guidance about CCSS implications for diverse learners.