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SECTION I

ESSENTIALS

FOR ML EXCELLENCE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Every teacher is a language teacher. We need to bring all teachers to the table when it comes to designing curricula, assessments, and instruction for [multilingual learners].”

—Leslie Nabors Oláh (n.d.)

EQUAL ACCESS TO BELONGING AND ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Imagine a world where every student has equal access to intellectually rigorous and relevant learning, where *all* students in culturally and linguistically rich K–12 schools experience belonging, voice, and agency, and where *all* students graduate prepared to pursue ambitious dreams.

Imagine schools and districts in which *all* administrators and teachers have the efficacy and pedagogy to ensure that *all* means *all* in culturally and linguistically rich schools, and that *all* includes multilingual learners (MLs).

The term *multilingual learners* is broadly defined as students who use more than one language. MLs include students whose proficiencies in these languages range from emergent to fully proficient. In school contexts, MLs include multilingual students who are fully proficient in the language(s) of instruction, and students who are not yet fully proficient in the language(s) of instruction. This book helps teachers and leaders in both monolingual and bilingual instructional contexts teach in ways that ensure that students who are learning the language of instruction thrive with *both* the content learning expectations *and* the language and literacy demands of school.

While building capacity for teaching multilingual students, this book also helps teachers more effectively reach *all* students who are not yet at full grade-level proficiency in the languages and literacies of school. Specifically, the asset-based, interactive pedagogy of this book helps K–12 educators deepen equitable student engagement and excellence with all of the following:

- Expressing ideas with confidence across the curriculum
- Collaborating in high-level open-ended academic conversations
- Making meaning from complex texts and tasks
- Writing to articulate high-level thinking
- Arguing claims with evidence and reasoning
- Using languages effectively to communicate for a wide range of learning purposes and audiences within and beyond the classroom
- Confidence taking risks and problem-solving through challenges

Which of these goals for student learning are relevant to you? If you are a teacher, which align with what you teach every day? If you are a coach or instructional leader, which align with your goals for student impact in teaching and learning across all classrooms in your setting?

In my work as a consultant, I have the honor to work with thousands of educators across diverse teaching contexts including districts large and small, urban and rural, from mainland North America to Hawaii and international schools around the world. Consistently I hear from K–12 curriculum directors, coaches, and classroom teachers, “This book is relevant to all teachers!”

This is by design. Building from decades of work leading systemwide shifts in K–12 classroom instruction, I designed this book to be relevant, practical, and easy to apply into action in your curriculum every day.

MORE THAN “GOOD TEACHING”

Many educators, after getting into the practical pedagogy of this book and my workshops, tell me, “This is about good teaching.” Indeed, it is about effective teaching—which is foundational to ensuring MLs thrive in core classrooms.

Effective instruction for MLs also *is about more than good teaching*. Being an effective ML teacher also requires each of the following:

AN ASSET ORIENTATION: Effective ML teachers value the assets multilingual students bring to their learning including their home language(s), culture, ways of knowing and being, lived experiences, and social identities. We embody the Value mindset, which I introduce in Chapter 2, in our planning, culturally responsive teaching, asset-focused listening to and observation of students, strategic connection to students' assets in the classroom, and continuous reflection and adaptation to ensure their success.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE: Educators who are effective with MLs understand how to support language in the context of what we teach every day (Billings & Walquí, 2017; Bunch, 2013; Cheuk, 2013; Quinn et al., 2011; Santos et al., 2012; Walquí & Heritage, 2012). We understand the conceptual and linguistic demands of the *texts* we expect students to read and the *tasks* (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, viewing, representing, writing, and problem-solving) we expect students to do. To ensure access to grade-level and content expectations, effective ML teachers strategically choose, lose, and adapt scaffolds effectively to ensure ML excellence with content *and* language learning success.

AN EQUITY STANCE: As Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan define in *Street Data* (2021), “Equity is an approach to ensuring equally high outcomes for all by removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any racial, social, economic or cultural factor” (p. 29). Word choices in this definition illuminate essential nuances in an equity stance, specifically:

- *Approach:* Equity is a process and a journey and requires ongoing reflective work.
- *Ensuring:* Equity is a courageous commitment to *ensure* equitable student impact, not just to “do” strategies we associate with equity or practices we associate with MLs.
- *Currently:* Within this definition, this word illuminates an essential stance that the status quo of inequities is temporary and changeable.

Effective educators of MLs don't accept predictabilities of “success or failure” correlating with any racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, or language factor. We maintain a firm belief in our students' brilliance and in our capacity to impact their success. With high expectations for all learners, we engage in continuous, data-driven reflective inquiry about the impact of our instructional policies and practices on our students. When we see data of inequities in who benefits and who thrives, we do not accept such inequities as a given or blame the most impacted students or their communities for these barriers. On the contrary, we see data of inequities as a call to action to engage in humble reflection and continuous learning to adapt our approaches so all students access belonging and academic excellence in our schools.

In the context of practical pedagogy for effective teaching, this book strategically integrates the asset orientation, the understanding of language, and the inquiry for equitable impact that go beyond “good teaching” and are imperative to be effective teachers of MLs.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Distinct from traditional approaches that emphasize “providing language services” as the end goal, this book invites teachers, teams, coaches, co-teachers, and administrators to be in continuous inquiry about the impact of our mindsets and actions on ML belonging, experience, and academic excellence across the curriculum in every classroom, every day.

Rooted in the assumption we all have good intentions and want the best for our students, and in humble awareness of the distinction between intention and impact, it is important we engage in the humble work of continuously asking of our policies and practices, “Is this working? For whom? How do we know?”

Research on the impacts of language support policies and programs dares us to acknowledge that not everything we do in service of ML excellence and belonging in our schools actually results in these goals. While some interventions and supplemental services designed for MLs can result in powerful outcomes, this is not always the case. It is important to understand from the research the unintended consequences that can result from placement of ML students in separate support services:

- Exclusion of MLs from other content courses or electives (Lillie et al., 2012; Umansky, 2016a, 2016b)
- Tracking MLs into educational pathways that lower access to instructional rigor and advanced classes (Callahan, 2005; Callahan & Humphries, 2016; Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Kangas & Cook, 2020; Lillie et al., 2012; Noguera et al., 2015; Umansky, 2016b, 2018), limited access to the course requirements to attend four-year universities after graduation (Johnson, 2019), and underrepresentation of MLs in Advanced Placement courses (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2021)
- When rigorous coursework is replaced by lower-level language classes, missed opportunities for MLs to build the disciplinary language and literacy learning with fluent peers who access complex texts, conversations, and writing in the disciplines (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012)
- Linguistic isolation of MLs from peers in the school community, causing social stigmatization (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012) and contributing to a triple segregation of Latino students by race, language, and socioeconomic status (Gándara, 2010, 2018)
- Use of the EL label, which can stigmatize students; lower teacher, counselor, and student expectations for academic success (Kanno, 2021; Kanno et al., 2024; Torff & Murphy, 2020; Umansky & Dumont, 2021); and exclude students from decision-making about their academic trajectories (Brooks, 2022)
- Labeling, placement policies, and educator perceptions of MLs lowering ML students’ perceptions of themselves, their belonging in school, and their capacity as learners (Dabach, 2014)

AN ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

Working for equitable student access to belonging and excellence with intellectually rigorous core learning in culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse schools is a complex challenge. It is an adaptive challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Unlike a technical challenge, an adaptive challenge requires shifts in mindsets and ways of working at all levels of

our schools. It cannot be done with a checklist or a mandate to implement prepackaged strategies. It cannot be done on the margins, in a single job role or department, or as a small part of a school day. It requires *all* educators to engage in the ongoing work of reflective inquiry about the impact of our actions on the students we serve.

To remove barriers to belonging and ensure access, we need to collaborate across roles and departments that influence core teaching and learning. This collaboration must go above and beyond co-teaching models that put the responsibility on the ML specialist or ML department to support core teachers. The adaptive change work of ensuring equitable access requires that collaboration for ML excellence be integrated within the work of data-driven, job-embedded reflective practices—within teams, within professional learning communities (PLCs), within coaching duos—in every school.

Responding to the research that pullout instruction is the least effective program design (Thomas & Collier, 2002) and often has unintended negative consequences, many educators and scholars are moving toward collaborative models that engage ML specialists and teachers in co-teaching and collaborating (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2019, 2023; Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2024; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2022; Lachance & Honigsfeld, 2023) to deepen access in the core. This book is a strong complement to co-teaching models and is a call to action to expand the concept of *who* collaborates and *who* initiates and contributes to this collaboration. For the work to build collective efficacy of all teachers connected to content learning, it must be central to data-driven, student-impact-focused cycles of inquiry in grade-level and department teams (or PLCs) and the core, schoolwide work of improving teaching and learning.

No matter who you are, you can be an effective teacher, leader, and collaborator for MLs. Educators with or without ML, English learner (EL), or Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) endorsements bring expertise, lived experiences, and assets to the table in collaborative work for ensuring MLs and all students thrive in the classroom. And we need every single one of us—every team, every coaching duo, every school, every curriculum department and preservice educational community—to be in this work of adaptive change.

This book gives you a Six Essentials Framework that both is relevant to the work of strengthening Tier I teaching for all students and helps you deepen collective efficacy for MLs in the core. Leveraging the Six Essentials Framework to address the *adaptive* challenge of ensuring ML belonging and excellence in every classroom requires administrators to think beyond the lines of departments and roles.

In educational contexts where there are multiple roles and departments supporting effective teaching and learning (e.g., principals, curriculum directors, literacy leaders, multilingual department leaders, and instructional coaches), it is important to collaborate across roles and departments to align professional learning initiatives and partner when making decisions of how to leverage resources (including district professional learning days, PLC time, instructional coaches, and staff meetings). Identify interconnecting and overlapping priorities for student impact and teacher learning. Leverage the Six Essentials Framework and practical flip-to strategies in this book to support you and your teachers in the ongoing, data-driven, adaptive change work of building collective efficacy for MLs and every student in every classroom, every day.

EVERY TEACHER AN ML TEACHER

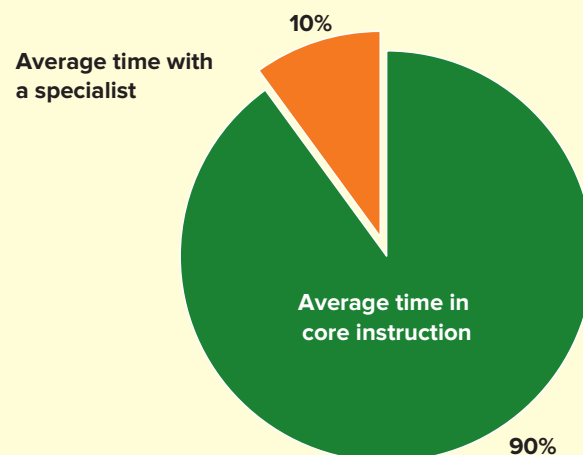
My priority and emphasis is to empower every teacher to be an ML teacher and every leader to be a leader of effective core teaching for MLs. Why do I focus on helping *all* teachers, teams, instructional leaders, and school systems build collective efficacy for MLs?

- Ensuring access to core learning begins with high-quality core teaching.
- Cultivating ML belonging and access to academic excellence is schoolwide work.
- Even in contexts where MLs are provided time with a language specialist, MLs spend the majority of each instructional day with core classroom teachers.
- Accelerating language and literacy is an all-day job involving all educators.
- Most K–12 teachers have at least one multilingual student in their class.
- The mindsets and pedagogy teachers need to be effective with MLs also benefit *all* learners and specifically students marginalized in or beyond school.

Even with a “pull out” or “push in” program design, where a specialist provides language services to students who are classified as ELs for part of the school day, it is important to consider the larger picture. See Figure 1.1 for an example of the average time a student in such a program spends with a specialist versus in core content instruction. Do you want to deepen ML belonging and access to content? Do you want to accelerate language and literacy? It takes more than a slice of the day to realize these goals. Every teacher must be an effective ML teacher!

FIGURE 1.1

AVERAGE PERCENT OF TIME STUDENTS CLASSIFIED AS ELs SPEND WITH CORE TEACHERS



Designed for core educators, this book and my aligned professional development (PD) have a strong track record of being relevant to teachers across the preK–12 continuum in all content areas and aligning with systemwide professional learning priorities. It only works, however, when it is in the hands of educators who shape core learning.

COMMUNICATING BEYOND ASSUMPTIONS

In some educational settings, there can be a misperception that the path to ML success with grade-level content, language, and literacy is in the hands of a few specialists or a language learner department. This can lead to an assumption that, when a book or workshop has the term *English learner (EL)* or *multilingual learner (ML)* in the title, it is only for language specialists, or only about language services separate from core teaching.

This book is dramatically different.

To communicate beyond assumptions, I've created Table 1.1. This table and the reflection questions that follow are both for you as a reader and to support you in your work as an advocate in your setting, moving quality ML teaching from the margins into the core.

This book helps educators across roles and departments interrupt deficit defaults and build collective efficacy to interrupt barriers to access so that MLs thrive in every classroom, every day.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THIS BOOK

Based on your role, you may appreciate this book for different reasons.

CORE TEACHERS: Understanding that MLs are not your only students and that your class community includes a wide range of linguistic, academic, social, and emotional strengths and needs, this book helps you make your job easier by scaffolding data-driven differentiation in practical ways. The flip-to strategies together with the Six Essentials Framework help you deepen student engagement in peer conversations, meaning-making, close reading, and writing aligned to your local curriculum.

ML TEACHERS/LANGUAGE SPECIALISTS: This book both helps you strengthen your direct impact with students you serve and—when your core teaching colleagues also have this book—provides you with a powerful framework and flip-to resources to support your co-teaching and collaboration (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2019, 2022; Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2024; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2022; Lachance & Honigsfeld, 2023) to put the six essential mindsets and actions in cycles of reflective co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessment, and co-reflection to ensure MLs thrive.

TEACHER LEADERS AND COACHES: This book helps you support teachers in making practical, effective shifts in mindsets and practice to deepen impact with students. Whether your goals are student centered (e.g., belonging, conversations, academic literacy) or teacher focused (e.g., high expectations, shifting from teacher talk to student talk, using formative data to reflect and adapt), the combination of the flip-to supports and Six Essentials Framework helps you strengthen the work of coaching duos and teacher teams. Unlike generic books on PLCs or collective efficacy, this resource brings an essential asset orientation, attention to language, and equity stance for culturally and linguistically rich learners into synthesis with practical tools for planning, teaching, and reflecting in continuous inquiry about impact.

TABLE 1.1

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND IS NOT

ENSURING ACCESS IN <i>EVERY</i> CLASSROOM, THIS BOOK IS . . .	COUNTERING MISPERCEPTIONS THIS BOOK IS <i>NOT</i> . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written for K–12 teachers and instructional leaders working to reach <i>all</i> students in culturally and linguistically rich schools, to help you ensure <i>all</i> includes ML students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only for educators who are language specialists or have ML (or EL, ESL, or TESOL) in their job title. It <i>is</i> an asset to specialists who teach, co-teach, and collaborate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centered on transforming impactful core teaching, aligning support services, and strengthening data-driven teacher collaboration (PLCs) to deepen ML belonging and excellence in schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About sidelined services, tracked classes, or programs that marginalize MLs from core learning, gifted and talented programs, and electives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to help busy teachers ensure access to rigorous content, language, and literacy learning across the curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For watering down learning or for teaching language as skills in isolation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligned and connected to student-centered learning goals in content, language, and literacy that core teachers and general education administrators prioritize to teach, lead, and impact for all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “One more thing” to add to what educators already do.

ADMINISTRATORS: The Six Essentials Framework in this book both aligns with and enhances data-driven reflective practice and PLC processes. Leverage this resource collectively across your school or district to help teachers and teams both strengthen effective teaching in actionable ways *and* build collective efficacy through data-driven, reflective practice aligned to your local curriculum.

TEACHER EDUCATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: Use this book to help preservice teachers learn and apply theories of language acquisition into classroom-based mindsets and actions to ensure MLs thrive with content and literacy across the curriculum. Facilitate collaborative opportunities for teacher candidates to use this resource to co-plan, co-teach, co-observe, and co-reflect on impact to build both their acumen with strategies *and* their reflective use of formative data to refine teaching.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS: Leverage this book to build the asset mindsets and pedagogy of effective teaching in culturally and linguistically rich schools. The flip-to strategy chapters go beyond the typical textbook to offer you practical support to move ideas into action both in student teaching and in your years in the classroom and beyond. May the resources help you plan, differentiate, and adapt supports with ease!

ADVOCATES FOR ML EXCELLENCE: To the brave advocates who include parents, community members, paraeducators, ML specialists, administrators, and teachers committed to leading change in your local schools and districts to elevate ML belonging, access, and excellence in core classrooms, I also write this book for you. May the framework and actionable tools in this guide help you proactively collaborate across roles and departments to make research-based pedagogy and job-embedded action, reflection, and adaptation easier and more impactful!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- In your context, what percentage of each instructional day does an ML spend with core teachers?
- What in Table 1.1 (page 9) is familiar? What is surprising? What questions do you have?
- Who are all the adults in your school (or district) who influence the experience of ML students in and beyond core classrooms? Who are all the adults who have a shared responsibility for the success of ML students?
- In your context, who is reading this book? Who is not? Who is involved in professional learning focused on strengthening outcomes with MLs? Who is not? Why?
- What are the opportunities to work collectively, across job roles and departments in your setting, to ensure that, in your work to strengthen core teaching for *all* students, *all* includes MLs?

SIX ESSENTIALS FOR ML EXCELLENCE

The Six Essentials Framework that drives this pedagogy and the collaborative inquiry model of this book can help you—alone and together with co-teaching duos, grade-level teams, and/or department teams—engage in the courageous, ongoing work of reflecting and adapting teaching for equitable impact with MLs and all students you serve.

The six essential mindsets and actions are as follows:

1. **VALUE:** Effective teachers value students' languages, language practices, cultures, social identities, and lived experiences as assets for learning. Value is a foundational mindset for culturally responsive and asset-oriented teaching and necessary for interrupting barriers to academic excellence and belonging for MLs and all students whose racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic identities are marginalized and minoritized.
2. **EXPECT:** High expectations of MLs and all students are essential for providing equal access to intellectual rigor. Effective teachers expect excellence from MLs and have clarity about grade-level expectations in content and academic literacy. When students are not yet performing at the level of our expectations, we maintain clarity on the goal and continue to reflect and adapt our approaches to ensure their success.
3. **ENGAGE:** No matter how dynamic our lessons, if MLs are in sit-and-get mode, they will not deeply learn the content learning objectives or build proficiencies in the language(s) of school. Effective teachers use a variety of strategies to engage MLs and all students in active learning, meaning-making, problem-solving, and expression of academic ideas. We plan student tasks including peer conversations, movement, and writing both to foster active participation and to gather formative data aligned to our goals.
4. **OBSERVE:** As we engage students, we observe what they do and listen to what they say to learn more about their thinking, strengths, and challenges with our content and language goals. We listen and observe with intention to see and value students' assets including their language choices and ways of thinking and being in the classroom. We also observe to see if there are inequities in who participates or how students engage. When some students are silent, unengaged, or struggling, we reflect to change our approach. As students thrive, we build on these strengths in our next instructional steps.
5. **SUPPORT:** Effective teachers choose, lose, and adapt supports strategically in response to students' assets and learning priorities. Being strategic requires paying close attention to both the strengths students bring to learning and the specific areas that are opportunities for deeper growth.
6. **REFLECT:** Effective teachers own our impact and continuously reflect to refine how we teach so that all students succeed. Owning impact is the most important mindset for equity and means that, when a student struggles, a teacher reflects, "What will I change about *my* instruction to ensure this student succeeds?"

A FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY ABOUT STUDENT IMPACT

These six essentials in synthesis support job-embedded, continuous reflection in action inquiry cycles. Figure 1.2 illuminates the relationship of these six verbs to one another in effective, asset-based teaching and collaborative inquiry for student impact.

FIGURE 1.2

SIX ESSENTIALS FOR ML EXCELLENCE



See Table 1.2 for some of the key reflection questions we ask ourselves when engaging in cycles of inquiry about our impact through the six essentials.

Many of these inquiry questions are likely familiar to educators. This is by design. These essentials are rooted in evidence-based practices of job-embedded, data-driven, collaborative professional learning that build collective efficacy (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Schon, 1996; Goddard et al., 2004; Hattie, 2012; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968).

My first book, *Opening Doors to Equity* (Singer, 2015), is a deep dive in a process for building collective efficacy through collaborative inquiry in classrooms together. Job-embedded, collaborative inquiry is transformative. When teams set their vision on a goal and collaborate in continuous, student-centered inquiry to reflect and adapt until students succeed, three things happen: (1) Students do succeed, (2) teachers build collective efficacy about the power of their actions to impact student learning, and (3) the experience shifts teacher mindsets about the capacities of students and their efficacy to ensure their success.

TABLE 1.2

REFLECTING IN INQUIRY THROUGH THE SIX ESSENTIALS

ESSENTIAL	REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND TEAMS
1. Value	Does every student feel a sense of belonging and connection in our class(es)? How are we connecting instruction to students' prior knowledge, cultural and linguistic assets, and lived experiences?
2. Expect	What goal(s) for student learning do we prioritize to impact? What does success look like? What are our success criteria?
3. Engage	How will students demonstrate success? What peer conversations and active learning tasks do we structure for this goal?
4. Observe	What do students say and do as they engage? What do students' words and actions reveal about their assets, understandings, and/or opportunities for learning with this goal?
5. Support	What instruction and supports will we choose, lose, or adapt to help students leverage their assets to thrive with the goal?
6. Reflect	How did our instructional choices impact student learning? How will we adapt our approach to ensure every learner thrives?

From this deep work, my design of the Six Essentials Framework goes beyond typical PLC protocols by centering three asset mindsets (Value, Expect, and Reflect) that are imperative for ensuring equitable access in our schools. These three mindsets, which are the focus of Chapter 2 and integrated into the entire book, help teachers and teams shift from deficit defaults about MLs and minoritized students to intentional practices that help us collectively, courageously, continuously *reflect and adapt* to ensure all students thrive.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE EFFICACY TOGETHER

The essentials—in synthesis—help us engage in asset-focused, continuous reflective inquiry about the impact of our actions on student learning. In our individual teaching, the essential verbs and inquiry questions help us engage in reflective, data-driven teaching. Collaboratively, the essentials help us—in duos and teams—collaborate through cycles of co-planning, co-observation/co-analysis of student work, and co-reflection to continuously adapt our teaching in response to our students.

Collaboration has many names in education, and the specifics of who collaborates, when, and why vary tremendously by educational context. Here are some of the popular configurations for co-planning, analyzing student data, and/or reflecting to strengthen impact:

- **TEAMS or PLCS:** Job-Alike Teams (e.g., grade level or department)
- **COACHING:** A Coach and Teacher
- **CO-TEACHING:** A Specialist (Language, Literacy, Content, Special Education, or Other) and One or More Teacher(s)

Detailing collaboration structures is beyond the scope of this book and would detour me from this important point: No matter who collaborates, how many collaborate, or what you call your approach, if your goal is to impact student learning, the asset-focused, inquiry *process* of collaborating through the six essentials helps you succeed.

Learn more about co-teaching and collaboration for MLs, dual-language learners, and MLs with exceptionalities from my colleagues Andrea Honigsfeld, Maria G. Dove, Audrey Cohan, and Joan R. Lachance (see Dove & Honigsfeld, 2019, 2020; Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2024; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2022; Lachance & Honigsfeld, 2023).

SIX ESSENTIALS, SIX SHIFTS

Collaborating through these essentials in cycles of co-planning, co-analysis of student work, and co-reflection helps us make important shifts in our mindsets and practices in practical, job-embedded ways. See Table 1.3 for an alignment of six important shifts to each of the essentials.

TABLE 1.3

SHIFTS FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO RIGOROUS CORE LEARNING

SHIFT WE REALIZE TOGETHER		ESSENTIAL
FROM	TO	
Deficit orientation	Asset orientation	Value
Low expectations	High expectations	Expect
Passive learning Teacher talk	Active learning Student conversations	Engage
Teaching as delivery	Observing and listening to students as formative data	Observe
Adopting supports Scaffolding to remediate	<i>Adapting</i> supports Scaffolding to accelerate	Support
Using data to blame or refer	Using data to reflect and adapt	Reflect

FROM SILVER-BULLET NOUNS TO ADAPTIVE VERBS

Finding more strategies and supports, as many assume, is not *the* solution to ensuring MLs have meaningful access to high-level learning. It takes a synthesis of all six essential mindsets and actions to transform our impact for MLs within our classrooms and across our schools.

A key idea with the Six Essentials Framework is to shift our emphasis from adopting and implementing nouns as the solution to scaling verbs. Nouns are strategies, books, and items we can put in a checklist. Nouns are tools in our tool kit. Tools are helpful but only part of effective teaching. It is through our verbs that we build collective efficacy for MLs and all learners. Verbs are our agency and our efficacy to be responsive, to *adapt*, and to *transform* our impact together.

Another way to think about this important concept is to distinguish means from ends. The nouns we adopt, such as our curriculum or specific strategies, are each a theory of action. They are a means to a more important end: equitable student impact. When educators mistake means for ends, we get caught up in implementing nouns with fidelity as the end goal. By contrast, when we are clear that equitable student impact is our end goal, and when we are courageous enough to be in inquiry about our impact, we then engage in the adaptive work of asking questions, seeking student-focused data, and learning from these data to adapt ourselves continuously.

It is humbling and courageous work that invites us to continuously ask questions that help us see beyond our own assumptions about what teaching practices or placement policies are effective. For example, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do our actions (e.g., this lesson, an adopted strategy or approach, a placement policy) have the intended result?
- How do we know? What's our evidence?
- What are MLs actually experiencing, feeling, and learning as a result of these actions?
- What are we not seeing? What additional questions do we need to ask? Whose voices need to be at the table in this work?

Most importantly, as you try the many flip-to strategies in this book, be in inquiry about your impact on MLs' experiences and learning. Leverage your verbs and your inquiry questions to *choose, lose, and adapt* these strategies and practices in response to students to *realize* equitable outcomes. Be intentional to ask questions that help you see *who* thrives, *who* belongs, and *who* excels in our classrooms, and collaborate courageously to adapt approaches to ensure *all* students belong and thrive.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Which of the six essentials is now a strength in your teaching or leadership? What is a question you regularly ask yourself and/or action you take that aligns with this essential?
- Which of the essentials do you want to give more emphasis in your teaching, leadership, or collaboration with colleagues?

(Continued)

(Continued)

- What processes and protocols do you now use for collaboration? What is working? What would you like to change?
- Which of the inquiry questions in Table 1.2 do you regularly ask together in your collaborative processes? Which questions would you add to deepen your collaborative work toward equitable student impact with your priority goals?
- Which of the shifts in Table 1.3 are a priority for you? Why? What next actions will you take?

TEACHING AND LEADING BEYOND THE LABELS

We teach students, not labels. And yet, we work in contexts in which labels on multilingual students have meanings—often legislated meanings—that shape policies, practices, and prejudices that students experience in our schools. The terms we use evolve over time and vary by region, leading to a complex communication challenge in our profession.

This section helps us build clarity together on the meaning of the labels used in this book. Also, it invites critical questioning on the specific meaning of the EL label that continues to shape perceptions, policies, and practices in many instructional contexts.

UNPACKING THE LABELS PUT ON STUDENTS

There are a dizzying number of labels put on students who are multilingual. These vary by context and change over time. The following are some of the many terms used:

- Multilingual learner (ML)
- Emergent bilingual (EB)
- English learner (EL)
- English language learner (ELL)
- English as an additional language (EAL)
- English as a second language (ESL)
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Notice how many of these labels center English. Such labels have grown in contexts where English is the language of instruction and the language of access to economic opportunities beyond school. Labels such as *EL* define a group of students *only* based on what they have not yet learned in English proficiency, a deficit, without recognition of their multilingual assets.

Even when used with good intentions, the label *EL* echoes historical legacies of colonization, language suppression, and forced assimilation that have deep histories in the United States, Canada, and many of the international locations where English is centered as a language of access. Labeling students as ELs supports an unquestioned framing of

“the teaching of English” as the one goal to “support” students while omitting the assets students bring and the value of multilingualism.

Framing multilingual students as lacking removes the responsibility for educators to question the barriers that exist—in our school policies and practices—to ensure MLs have equal access to belonging and intellectually rigorous, grade-level learning across the curriculum. Policies and practices rooted in such deficit framing—including remediation, segregation, and exclusion from core classes and gifted and talented programs—have lived consequences for ML students and families today.

In this second edition of *EL Excellence Every Day*, I shift from using the term *English learner (EL)* to using *multilingual learner (ML)*, which is a broader and more asset-oriented term that includes all students who are multilingual. This is more than a shift in word choice. The change in language is a necessary complement to the deeper shifts I make across the chapters of this book to align to the calls to action by translanguaging scholars (Flores, 2020; García et al., 2021) to rethink how we conceptualize language, and our role and approaches to center the linguistic assets including students’ language practices and preferences in school learning.

HOW *EL* IS DEFINED IN CURRENT U.S. POLICIES

Multilingual learner (ML) is not a synonym for *English learner (EL)*. At this time of this printing, the term *English learner (EL)* in the United States has considerable power in the ways it is written into policies and practices that shape assessment, placement, staffing, funding, and how schools report data. Even as educators, scholars, and authors shift our word choice toward the asset-oriented term *multilingual learner (ML)* or *emergent bilingual (EB)*, if *English learner (EL)* is written into policies that shape local practices in your context, it is important that you understand precisely how that term is defined in those policies.

In U.S. public schools, a student is classified as an EL through the following specific steps, which are defined per federal policy:

FIRST, parents/guardians fill out a home language survey. The questions are typically as follows:

1. Which language did your child learn when they first began to talk?
2. Which language does your child most frequently speak at home?
3. Which language do you (the parents and guardians) most frequently use when speaking with your child?
4. Which language is most often spoken by adults in the home?

THEN, if the answer to one or more of the questions indicates a language beyond English, the student is given a regionally adopted English language proficiency test (ELPT) in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (e.g., WIDA, ELPA21, ELPAC, TELPAS). If the student’s scores fall under the range of “proficient” on that measure, the student is classified as an EL.

ANNUALLY, all students who are classified as ELs take an ELPT until they achieve a score that qualifies them to be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP). Reclassification criteria vary by local education agency (LEA) and often include additional multiple measures such as formative assessments, teacher recommendations, and/or writing samples.

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language proficiency is what we call the continuum of how well a student understands and communicates a language and how what students can do with language expands over time. Imagine a color spectrum from light blue to medium blue to dark blue with every subtle shade of blue in between. Language proficiency is a similar concept, only instead of color it is a continuum of many subtle shades from no comprehension or use of the language to full proficiency to communicate effectively by listening, speaking, reading, and writing in any context.

Language proficiency assessments and locally adopted standards shape how schools quantify language proficiency into “levels.” In the WIDA Consortium, for example, schools measure language proficiency with WIDA assessments and a framework that arranges language learning into six levels of proficiency.

For ease of communication in this book, and to center practical approaches to differentiation, I refer to stages of language proficiency more broadly as three general levels:

- Emerging
- Expanding
- Bridging

See Table 1.4 for clarity in how these proficiency levels align to WIDA and/or other English proficiency assessments used in different regions. Please make connections to the frameworks you use and to the languages of instruction in your context.

TABLE 1.4

PROFICIENCY LEVELS AS DEFINED BY DIFFERENT LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS AND FRAMEWORKS

THIS BOOK	ACCESS (WIDA)	ACTFL	ELPAC (CA)	TELPAS (TX)
Bridging	6 - Reaching	Advanced Range	4 - Bridging	Advanced High
	5 - Bridging			
Expanding	4 - Expanding	Intermediate Range	3 - Upper Range of Expanding	Advanced
	3 - Developing		2 - Expanding	
Emerging	2 - Emerging	Novice Range	1 - Emerging	Intermediate
	1 - Entering			Beginning

Note: ACCESS is a suite of ELPTs by WIDA, formerly known as World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment; ACTFL = American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Performance Descriptors; ELPAC is the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California; TELPAS = Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System.

While quantifying language proficiency into levels gives the appearance of linear steps from emerging to fluent, remember language is more complex. In reality, “language development is not a straightforward linear process across proficiency levels; it is contingent on a variety of factors, including MLs’ familiarity with a topic, audience and situation” (WIDA, 2020, p. 366).

It is important to understand that the concept of proficiency applies to all languages. If you teach or lead in a bilingual or dual-immersion context, please apply these concepts to understanding students’ proficiencies in *your language of instruction*. In contexts where English is the language of instruction, it is also important to understand MLs’ proficiencies in their home languages as I detail in the next section.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What assessments or frameworks do you use locally to determine language proficiency “levels” in the language(s) of instruction? What names or numbers do you use for each level? What resources (e.g., WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors) do you have to learn more about the meaning of these levels to guide your instructional choices?
- What proficiency-level data do you have about the students you serve? What do these data tell you and *not* tell you?
- Do you look at proficiency across all four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) or just a single score for overall proficiency? Why?
- How do you use proficiency-level data in support of teaching and learning? How do you use these data to monitor progress in language learning over time?
- Who has access to proficiency-level data? What systems are in place to support easy access to proficiency-level data for every teacher in the school?

LEARN MLs’ PRIMARY LANGUAGE ASSETS

When schools only identify multilingual students with a home language survey and standardized English proficiency test, there is a major omission: learning students’ primary language assets including primary language proficiencies, language preferences, and translanguaging practices (learn more about translanguaging on page 39). Whether we teach in dual-language programs or monolingual English programs, it is important to also learn for each ML student:

- What language(s) does the student speak, read, write, and understand?
- What are their proficiencies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in each language? What prior schooling have students experienced, and in which language(s)?
- How do they perceive, value, and use their full linguistic repertoire as multilingual learners within and beyond the classroom?

All of these are important questions for educators to understand to *see, value, and teach* to students’ linguistic assets. Schools and districts committed to asset-based instruction include in their policies and practices ways of gathering formative data about primary language assets of MLs. Three options for *initial* assessment include the following:



QR Code 2:
Informal
Language
Survey

[https://
tonyasinger
.com/all/](https://tonyasinger.com/all/)

- **PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT:** A language proficiency assessment in the primary language is an option in situations where (1) you have such an assessment and (2) you have biliterate staff to administer the assessment. This approach is especially recommended in contexts with bilingual/biliteracy programs and in contexts where the local student population includes a large percentage of MLs who speak the same language (e.g., Spanish in the mainland United States).
- **INFORMAL SURVEY:** Interview family members with an informal language survey. While not as detailed as a language proficiency assessment, an informal language survey is a practical tool schools can use (with the aid of translation apps or translators) to interview either family members or the students themselves to learn how well they perceive a student speaks, understands, reads, and writes in the home language. Download a copy of my informal language survey at www.tonyasinger.com/all or create your own.
- **CLASSROOM OBSERVATION:** In the classroom, facilitate tasks such as peer conversations or writing that invite student choice in the languages they use. Observe with attention to students' preferences and assets with language(s) in these contexts. If a student uses a language you don't understand, you can still notice students' preferences and how the language(s) they use impact their participation and confidence. If you are fluent in the language or have the support of multilingual colleagues or parents, you have an advantage to gather more precise formative data as the student engages.

If primary language assessments or informal language surveys are given in your district, take full advantage and find those formative data for each ML student you serve so you have a foundational understanding of the assets they bring in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in their home languages. If this is not part of the local practices, try the informal language survey for your students, and advocate its use in the local procedures for new enrollments.

LABELS WITHIN LABELS

There is an alphabet soup of labels added to the EL label to indicate how long a student has had this label and/or their prior experiences in school. The definition of each varies by region. The most common terms and definitions as used in this book are as follows:

- **RECENT ARRIVAL/NEWCOMER:** These terms describe a student who (1) is foreign born, (2) has arrived in the nation of instruction in the past three years, and (3) has emerging proficiency in the language of instruction.
- **EXPERIENCED MULTILINGUAL:** Use of this term is an asset-oriented shift from the widely used term *long-term English learner (LTEL)*. *Experienced multilingual* (Huynh & Skelton, 2023) refers to a student who has been studying in English for six or more years and still has the EL label. Important context: Researchers suggest it takes three to four years to develop oral language proficiency and four to seven years to build full proficiency in the academic registers of language expected in school (Hakuta, 2000). Many variables influence how long it takes to build full fluency in a new language including a student's fluency and literacies in the primary language(s), the student's lived experiences, whether the student has experienced trauma, and the quality and effectiveness of learning opportunities in the new language.

- **STUDENT WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION (SLIFE):** This term refers to MLs who have limited or interrupted formal schooling due to interruptions in their education in their native countries and/or in the nation of instruction. Reasons for limited formal schooling vary widely. Students may be refugees or migrants or have other experiences that disrupted their education.

In bilingual and biliteracy programs, where there are two languages of instruction by design, all students—no matter their home languages—are **DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNERS** on a path toward bilingualism and biliteracy. Many schools, districts, and states in the United States now award a Seal of Biliteracy to recognize students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.

CRITICAL THINKING BEYOND THE LABELS

In theory, the EL identification process helps schools identify MLs who are priorities for instructional support, and the label helps educators monitor progress in language and content access until students are reclassified to FEP. The rationale and vision for this work is important.

And I invite readers to bring critical thinking and humble inquiry about the impact of this theory of action (including the placement policies, programs, and instructional decisions educators connect to these labels) on the students we serve.

CONSIDER MLs WHO ARE NOT ELs

Within a system that classifies students as ELs, there are many multilingual learners (MLs) who are not classified as ELs including students who are fluent in the language of instruction and students who are still learning the language of instruction. When making instructional decisions, including what supports to provide and how to group students within a classroom to differentiate to a wide range of assets, it is important to also think about students who are not identified as ELs who may have some overlapping instructional priorities. MLs not classified as ELs include all of the following:

- MLs who have scored “proficient” on the initial English language proficiency assessment (I-FEP).
- MLs who have reclassified to Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP).
- MLs whose parents or guardians wrote “English” on the home language survey. Thus, the students were not tested for English proficiency or potentially identified as ELs. Multilingual parents make this choice for a myriad of reasons including fear of discrimination or resistance to a classification and placement system they do not choose for their child.
- Students who are fluent in a dialect of English with rich cultural and linguistic roots such as African American Vernacular English or Black English (Baker-Bell, 2020), Chicano English, or Hawaiian Pidgin (LeMoine, 2007) and whose parents wrote “English” on the home language survey. Thus, the students were not tested for English proficiency or potentially identified as ELs.

ENSURE LABELS ARE NOT A BARRIER

When making placement decisions, it is imperative the EL label is *never* used to exclude students from intellectually rich and rigorous Tier 1 instruction. In systems that classify students as ELs based on a home language survey and an ELPT, it is important to understand that *EL* is a broad category including students along a wide range of assets including their proficiencies and literacies in English and home language(s), academic strengths, prior schooling experiences, life experiences, interests, and more.

It is also important to be clear that the ELPT is not an assessment given to all students. Many monolingual English-speaking students without the EL label, if given this assessment, might also test below proficient on the standardized tasks in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Researchers in California (California Department of Education, 2011) tested this question by giving English-only monolingual students the state-adopted ELPT to determine EL status. They found close to half of these students failed to meet the English proficiency performance level required to pass as fluent. In other words, if all monolingual students had been given the ELPT, nearly half would be classified as ELs.

If you have access to a practice test for the ELPT used in your context to classify students, I encourage you to join with grade-level colleagues in analyzing the tasks in listening, speaking, reading, and writing to understand the language and literacy demands of this measure. Then reflect, “If we tested all monolingual students with this assessment, what percentage do we anticipate would test below ‘proficient’? What are the implications for how we interpret the meaning of the EL label and how we use this label to inform instructional decisions?”

Even though assessing every student with the ELPT is not an option in most contexts, such critical reflection questions are important to ask and discuss when making decisions about grouping, placement, and differentiation. They are helpful for deepening our conversations and collaborations across roles and departments beyond the surface-level assumptions that labels can bring.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Are there students with the EL label now being excluded from Tier 1 classes or electives? What is the rationale for these decisions?
- Are there monolingual students in those same Tier 1 classrooms who—on measures of listening, speaking, reading, or writing—perform at a similar or lower level than the same excluded ELs?
- If MLs are being pulled out or put in separate tracks for language services, what is the impact of this practice on their belonging, access to core instructional programs, and achievement within content language, literacy, and learning goals? How do we know?

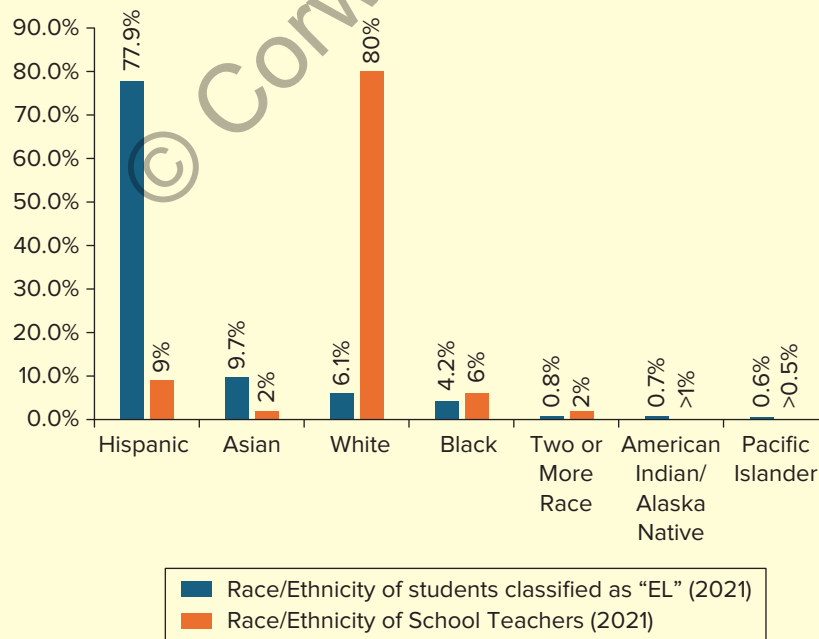
BEYOND LANGUAGE

The EL classification is defined by language: a home language survey and English assessment. There is nothing in the label specific to race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Students of all racial and ethnic identities and economic experiences can be monolingual or multilingual. That said, there are demographic trends in *who* gets the EL or ML label that are important to illuminate in our work for ensuring equitable access for MLs. Demographics vary by nation, by region, by district, and by school site, and the most important demographics for you to understand are local in your context. As a starting point for reflection and dialogue, please consider the following national data in the United States, as well as Figure 1.3:

- Of students classified as ELs, 37 percent live in poverty compared to 21 percent of the overall student population. ELs are disproportionately in low-income schools (Quintero & Hansen, 2021).
- Of students classified as ELs, 77.9 percent were Hispanic, compared to 24.1 percent of the overall student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).
- “Nearly one in ten American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students is classified in school as EL” (Umansky et al., 2023, p. 1990).

FIGURE 1.3

RACE AND LANGUAGE STATUS IN U.S. CLASSROOMS



Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, May). Characteristics of public school teachers. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Looking at these data, what do you notice? What do you wonder?
- What are your local demographics for socioeconomic status of all students, and of students classified as ELs?
- What are your local demographics for race/ethnicity of all students, and of students classified as ELs? What are your local demographics for race/ethnicity of teachers and administrators?
- How are socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity factors in the experiences and perceptions of MLs in your school? How do you know? What more do you want to understand?

Even though the EL classification is based on language alone, we must broaden our focus from language in our collective work for ML belonging, access, and equity in our schools. Many intersecting factors including socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, immigration status, home languages, experiences with trauma, and the sociopolitical contexts of our lives and our students' lives are in the room shaping MLs' experiences, educators' perceptions of MLs, and relationships in school communities. How these variables position educators, students, and families in relationship to one another is important to unpack as we strive to build identity-safe classrooms and affirming relationships, ensure student belonging, and deepen access to excellence for MLs and all students.

In Chapter 2, we'll delve deeper into these intersections in our mindsets and practices to create classrooms of belonging and intellectual rigor in which all students thrive. As this work is deep and ongoing and involves layers beyond the scope of this book, I also share reading recommendations and reflection prompts.

KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Every student is unique. When we communicate with broad labels like *ML*, it is important to remember that students with this label are as diverse and different from one another as any students in a school. MLs come to school with a wide range of home languages and proficiency levels in these languages and in English. MLs have a wide range of life experiences, academic strengths, learning priorities, life experiences, and social identities.

When we look beyond labels to get more personal, we see that our classrooms include a wide range of unique personalities, interests, experiences, strengths, and needs. While there is some value in using a label like *ML* to define a student group and gather comparative data to ensure we realize our goals for equal access, it is also important to remember the limitations of labels.

This is why my focus, first and foremost, is to help you personalize teaching to reach and teach the individuals in your classroom. Yes, I emphasize asset-based, effective pedagogy for ML belonging and achievement, and this is going to be relevant to what you teach every day. We are going to clarify high expectations, engage all students in intellectually rich tasks, listen and observe to gather formative data, and *in this context* get specific about how to help each and every student—MLs included—thrive in your classroom.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What label(s) do you use in your context to describe students who are multilingual and learning the language of instruction?
- What does each label tell you about a student? What does it *not* tell you?
- How does a student get the label? How does a student change it? How does the label shape a student's educational experience?
- What is your vision for the educational experience you want students—with or without this label—to have in your school?

PRACTICAL WAYS TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is designed to help you apply the six essentials into action. You don't have to read it cover to cover. I recommend reading Chapters 1–3 and then using the remaining chapters as an at-your-fingertips flip-to guide. Here are four entry points for individuals, coaches, and teams to consider when using this book:

1. **ESSENTIAL MINDSETS:** Get started with three essential mindsets in Chapter 2. Collaborate to reflect on the content and reflection questions in this chapter as they connect to your daily work with students.
2. **CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS:** Do you want to deepen student engagement in classroom conversations? Open to **Section II. Engage** on page 56 and flip to the strategies relevant to your goals. Leverage the inquiry supports to move through all six essentials as you plan, observe students, reflect, and adapt to realize impactful shifts in how your students thrive with academic conversations.
3. **ASSET-BASED SCAFFOLDING:** Do you want to strengthen your scaffolding of core concepts, language, and literacy? Open to **Section III. Support** on page 107. Read Chapter 3 and then flip to the strategies most relevant to your goals.
4. **COMPLEX TEXTS AND HIGH-LEVEL TASKS:** Do you want to leverage peer conversations and impactful scaffolding to support students with making meaning from academic texts? Do you want to strengthen academic writing? Open to **Section IV. Apply** on page 222. Read Chapter 8 to learn the four-step routine, and then leverage the inquiry supports of the next goal-focused chapters to move through all six essentials to help your students thrive with making meaning from complex texts in peer conversations and writing with evidence and reasoning.

Any teacher can use this book alone, and the impact amplifies when you use it with a colleague, a team, or a whole-school community. Many collaborators begin with a “book study” approach to read and discuss each session. This book also offers co-teachers, coaching duos, and teacher teams a Six Essentials Framework and aligned inquiry resources to support your collaborative efforts to strengthen student engagement and excellence in academic conversations (**Section II. Engage**), close reading of academic texts, and writing with evidence (**Section IV. Apply**). Leverage these flip-to tools to build on the assets of your team at each stage of planning, teaching and observing students, and reflecting on your student outcomes to adapt your next instructional moves.

REFLECT ON CHAPTER 1

- What in this chapter most resonates with you? What is one “aha” of new learning or question you have?
- Who are the MLs in your teaching context? What assets do different MLs bring to your school? What do you know, or want to learn, about their language proficiency levels, home cultures, and prior educational experiences?
- What shifts in ML experiences and learning do you most want to achieve in your work this year? How will you leverage the Six Essentials Framework and this guide to support this goal?
- Flip through the guide and look especially at the table of contents before each tab. What most interests you and feels relevant to your goals for students?
- How will you use this guide? Will you use it alone or with collaborators? Will you read on to the next chapter or flip ahead to a section that draws you in?
- In what ways can you leverage the Six Essentials Framework and this resource to support your work for equitable student impact?