CHAPTER 1

Rethinking Literacy and Its Leadership for the 21st Century

Today's school leaders—especially those serving large numbers of linguistically diverse learners—face a "new" normal that guides their instructional work. To be academically and personally successful in today's literacy- and knowledge-based society and economy, each of their students need to develop what we refer to as *advanced literacies*. This term denotes skills and competencies that enable communication, spoken and written, in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences. Advanced literacies also promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes. Likewise they make way for participation in academic, civic, and professional communities, where knowledge is shared and generated (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2010).

Reading and writing—language-based competencies—have become prerequisites for participation in nearly every aspect of day-to-day, 21st-century life. There was a time when basic literacy skills provided a clear path forward, when extended reading and writing were the business of education and only necessary for participation in white-collar professions. But today, students need to develop an increasingly complex set of advanced literacy skills and competencies in order to access social and economic opportunities. Importantly, the press for advanced literacies for all does not reflect a decline in the population's literacy rates. Instead it is recognition that what counts as "literate" has changed dramatically over the last few decades (Levy & Murnane, 2005).

The urgent call for instruction to promote advanced literacies among all students comes at a time when the system is already charged with building

up language skills among the increasingly linguistically diverse population. English learners (ELs) now comprise over 20% of the school-age population, which reflects significant growth in the past several decades. Between 1980 and 2009, this population increased from 4.7 to 11.2 million young people, or from 10 to 21% of the school-age population. The greatest growth has occurred in our secondary schools (Garcia & Cuéllar, 2006). This growth will likely continue in U.S. schools; by 2030, it is anticipated that 40% of the school-age population in the United States will speak a language other than English at home (Camarota, 2012). Today, in schools and districts across the United States, many students other than those formally classified as ELs are learning English as an additional language, even if not in the initial stages of language development—these children are often described as "language-minority learners." Likewise we increasingly find students who speak a nonmainstream dialect of English that is different from the academic English found in school curricula (Washington, Terry, & Seidenberg, 2013).[1]

Across these three groups large numbers are growing up in poverty (Aud et al., 2011); and we know that because of what James Ryan has dubbed the "politics of separation" in the United States (2010, p. 13), these learners tend to cluster in neighborhoods and therefore in schools. This has important implications for literacy instruction. In our own work, we find that in high-poverty settings, each of these groups—ELs, language minority learners, and nonmainstream dialect speakers—*and* their native English-speaking peers often

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "ADVANCED LITERACIES"?

Advanced literacy is a term we will use often in this book, and that we describe in more detail in the next chapter. When we say "advanced literacy," we mean much more than decoding and understanding print; we are focused on the new role that language and literacy skills take in society—in our neighborhoods and in the global world—and what this means for classroom instruction. Today's students need to develop increasingly sophisticated literacy skills to thrive day-to-day; they need to communicate (orally and in writing) in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences; they also need to understand and use print for a variety of purposes. To be successful in school and beyond, from the earliest of years, our students need to develop the skills and knowledge that go into advanced literacy.

[1]Nonmainstream dialects of English include African American English (AAE), Southern White English (SWE), and Southern African American English (SAAE) (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998).

struggle to access the language, and therefore the knowledge, that fills the pages of academic texts (Kieffer & Vukovic, 2012; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010).

The goal of promoting advanced literacies among all students—including those that are linguistically diverse—reflected in legislation, policies, and initiatives reveals a growing awareness that it is both possible and necessary to make schooling more equitable, which begins by having high expectations for our students' literacy attainment. Problematically, little concrete guidance has been provided to support progress toward this goal on the ground. This leaves many dedicated, hard-working school leaders and educators with the question: *What is the best strategy for getting there*?

There is no single answer to this question given the complexity of the task. In this book we begin the work of guiding school leaders to create the conditions at their school sites that promote advanced literacies instruction—teaching that fits a new reality of increasing linguistic diversity. In taking this issue on and providing practical guidance, we are not motivated by the standards of today. Rather we look ahead, mindful that society will increasingly prioritize and value the development of advanced literacies for *all* students.

What Does "Advanced Literacies for All" Mean for School Leaders?

Meeting today's demands for what counts as "literate" requires a new approach to instructional leadership for school leaders; they must drastically change the way their schools organize for and approach instruction. For example, the needs of linguistically diverse students have typically been addressed through instructional approaches that take place on the margins, rather than at the core of daily instruction activity. In many schools, a small cadre of specialists in second-language or literacy development have been largely responsible for the language and literacy development of ELs and struggling readers—and they have provided this instruction outside of the content-area classroom (Heritage, Walqui, & Linquanti, 2015). This is evidence that language and content teaching are typically viewed as separate and, on that basis, intervention for struggling readers is not integrated with the instructional core (Lesaux & Marietta, 2011).

Instead, teaching for advanced literacies demands what van Lier and Walqui (2012) characterize as a movement away from the conventional practice of teaching "language in isolation" from content learning. It's now recognized that, if we are to equip students with the linguistic tools needed to express their content knowledge, then reading, writing, and speaking must

be taught in the content-rich elementary classroom or in the secondary disciplinary classroom (Lemke, 1990; Hull & Moje, 2012). And for those who are struggling with acquiring language and with their foundational skills, there is a significant need to integrate the intervention with daily instruction.

Schools have generally not been organized to support this highly collaborative instruction, nor have most teachers and administrators had sufficient opportunity to cultivate the understanding of literacy and language development needed to craft it. As a result, U.S. schools struggle to provide opportunities for linguistically diverse students to develop the literacy skills and competencies necessary to learn from text and to express their knowledge orally and in writing.

Meeting today's demands for what counts as "literate" therefore requires a bold new approach to instructional leadership, especially for school leaders who are serving large numbers of linguistically diverse learners. In this book,

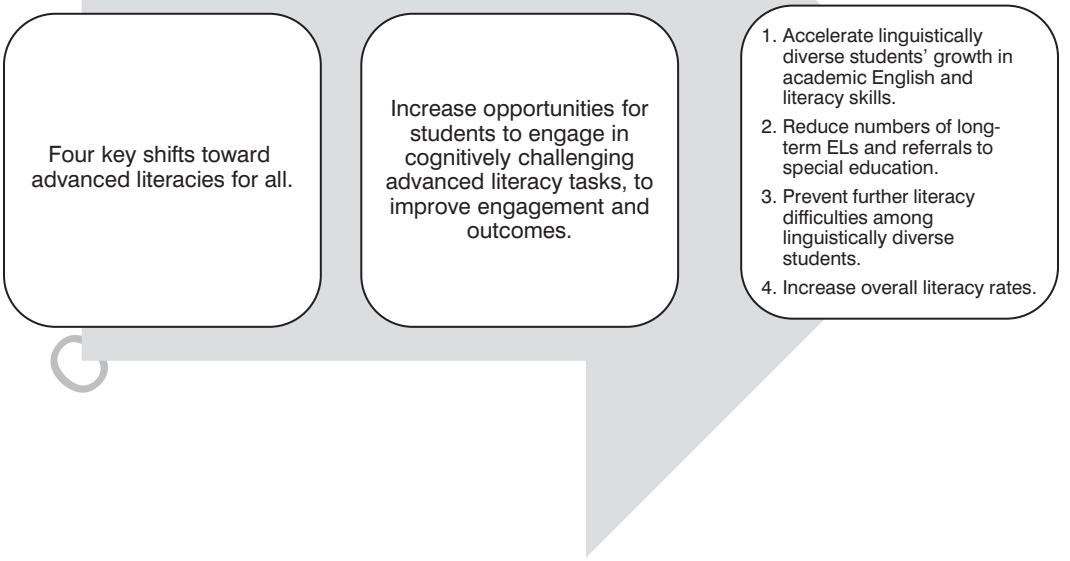

FIGURE 1.1. A theory of action for instructional leaders in linguistically diverse settings.

we identify and explain four shifts that support this instructional leadership. Following our theory of action (see Figure 1.1), these shifts lead to increased opportunities for linguistically diverse learners to develop advanced literacies. The larger result would be improved literacy performance among these populations.

Working at the Nexus of Existing Initiatives and Goals to Achieve Advanced Literacies for All

The challenge of reorganizing to promote advanced literacies for all is compounded by the rapid pace with which initiatives enter and exit our schools, forcing educators and leaders to continually play catch-up. It has been our experience that educators and school leaders already work very hard without getting the intended and desired outcome of advanced literacies for all. *Simply working longer or harder is not the answer; working more strategically is indeed a key answer.* This is difficult, however, given the way in which policies and initiatives are presented as independent in nature and unrelated to one another. We have a standards-based reform movement in the United States, symbolized by the Common Core State Standards, which aim to prepare students for college and career opportunities. Other large-scale reforms include the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the more recent response-to-intervention (RTI) model. Together, these reforms share the goal of promoting advanced literacies for *all* students, regardless of disability/language status, family income, or race and ethnicity. Yet conceptualizing these initiatives without a single architecture to guide their implementation has in many settings—especially those considered "underperforming"—caused undue expenditure of time, resources, and energy, ultimately impeding the collective goal of these efforts.

Working more strategically begins with recognizing what these initiatives all share as a desired end result—improving literacy rates among all students—and working tirelessly toward achieving this goal, even as new initiatives enter the educational landscape. For this reason, our focus throughout this book is on strong instructional design, and, as a *consequence*, meeting standards and mandated initiatives. Drawing on our experience working with schools, we suggest putting instruction into place that will meet three pressing goals: (1) to promote advanced literacies for all students; (2) to better link data and instruction for the purposes of achievement and evaluation; and (3) to meet the demands of standards-based reform—both today's standards and those that will inevitably follow in their wake. As shown in Figure 1.2, at the nexus of these three goals is the powerful brand of advanced literacies instruction we describe in this book.

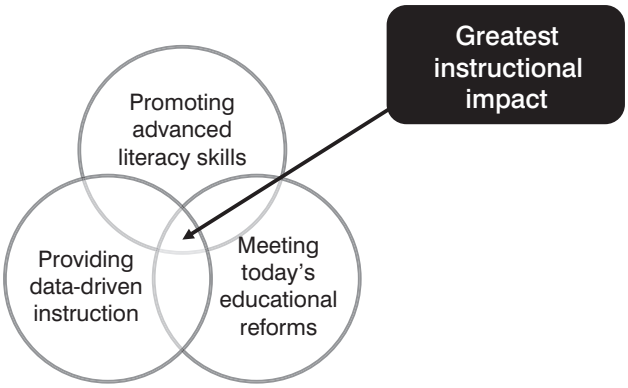

FIGURE 1.2. Powerful instruction for advanced literacies.

Working more strategically to lead instruction for advanced literacies also opens up an opportunity to capitalize on the strengths and learning profiles of these students. Language-minority learners, for instance, demonstrate relative strengths in the face of what appears to be lower academic attainment overall, on average. In other words, there are benefits to navigating two or more languages or dialects. For instance, among language-minority learners (ELs and their peers who have never been classified as such), by the end of second grade with adequate instructional opportunities, most show the basic ability to decode (or read) printed words (e.g., Geva & Yaghoub Zadeh, 2006; Lesaux, Lipka, & Siegel, 2006; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). Thus, despite having to simultaneously acquire the language of schooling *and* early literacy skills, these learners master these skills within the same time frame as their peers from middle-class, majority-culture backgrounds (August & Shanahan, 2006; Lesaux, Rupp, & Siegel, 2007). In fact, many even demonstrate heightened ability on measures of their knowledge of how language works and on their cognitive flexibility (e.g., Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003). True, the competencies that are even more directly related to text comprehension, such as vocabulary and academic language knowledge, are persistent sources of difficulty for these students, especially after elementary school (Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelley, 2010). But what's important to note is that ELs' *rates* of growth in these areas most often surpasses the national rate of growth (Kieffer, 2008). This is great news on its face, but the problem is that this growth is still not fast enough to get these students to grade level. The challenge and corresponding opportunity we thus face in our schools is *to shift our instructional model to capitalize on these relative strengths, while bolstering areas of academic vulnerability.*

A Map of This Book

In the chapters that follow, we provide guidance to school leaders charged with crafting a site-level approach—the architecture or blueprint—for developing advanced literacies among all students, especially those developing their academic English. We have written this book as a guide that ensures that the resulting approach is one that attends to the needs of all learners in the school building—students *and* adults.

As shown in Figure 1.3, the book is divided into three parts. Part I (Chapters 1–3) focuses on advanced literacies for the 21st century. Across these three

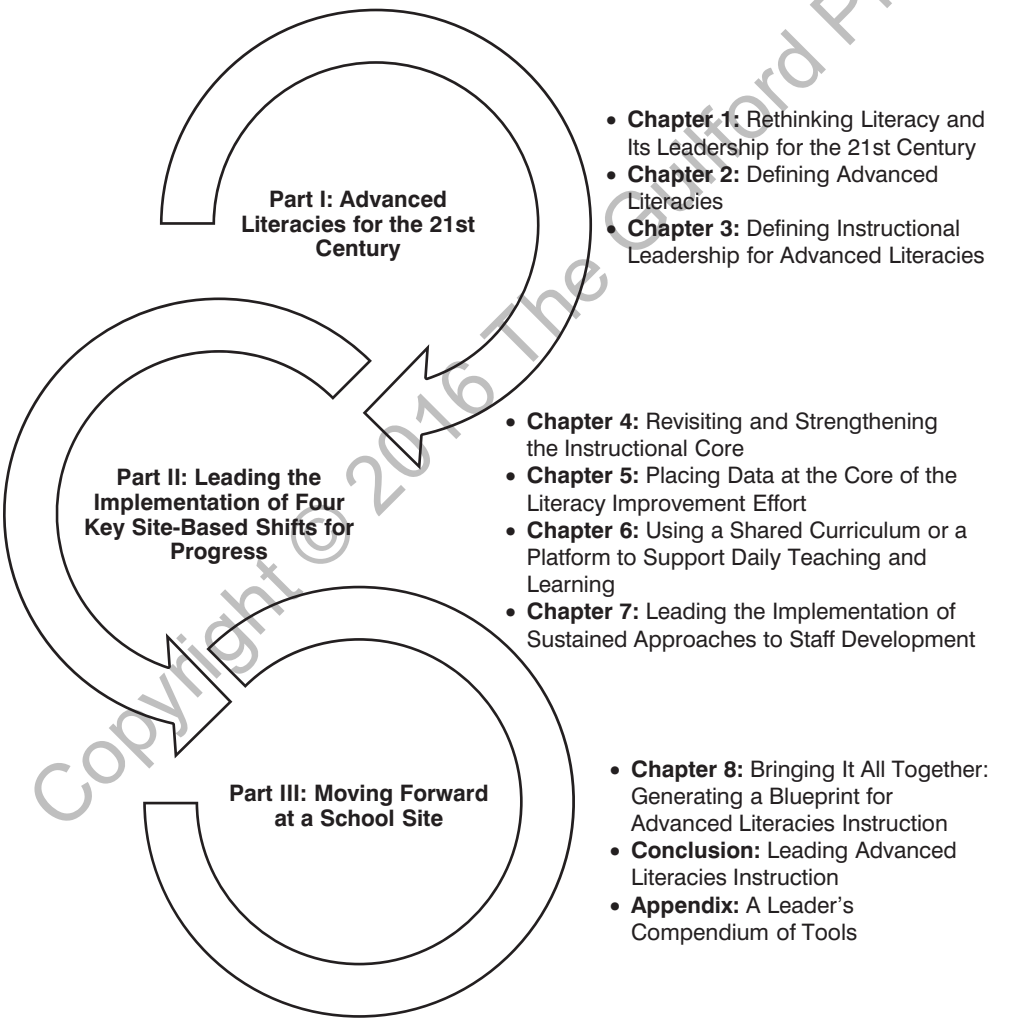

FIGURE 1.3. A map of this book.

chapters, we discuss 21st-century literacy demands and what we mean by "advanced literacies," whether we're talking about the implementation of this instruction in the upper elementary or the middle school setting. To offer concrete guidance in creating the site-level conditions that promote advanced literacies, we profile four key shifts that school leaders should undertake related to (1) curricular plans and materials in use at the school site; (2) day-to-day instruction and pedagogy; (3) student assessment data-to-instruction links; (4) and professional learning for faculty and staff. Part II (Chapters 4–7) offers concrete guidance for implementing these key shifts as part of a strong leadership approach for promoting advanced literacies day to day and across the year, with a deep focus on the instructional core and sustained staff development, and an emphasis on data-driven decisions that will inform the design of instruction that matches students' needs. In this section, we include tools for self-study to support the leader in assessing the current status of instruction that supports advanced literacies at his or her site and lead the implementation of needed shifts. Part III (Chapter 8 and Conclusion), the final section of the book, focuses on helping leaders get started with a major literacy reform effort at their school site; after all, it's only with a site-based approach that the goal of advanced literacies for all will be accomplished. Chapter 8 begins by revisiting the main issues to be addressed if we are to get to advanced literacies for all. Next, the chapter supports the leader in generating a blueprint that outlines specific action steps and decision making about priorities and instructional approaches for site-based improvement. We follow with the case example of the Rosa Parks School—a K–8 school with a typical middle school structure for grades 6–8. In highlighting key elements of the advanced literacies reform process at Rosa Parks, we draw distinctions between their work in the upper elementary schools (grades 3–5), where one teachers serves the students in a classroom, and their work in the middle school (grades 6–8), where students rotate through classrooms (and teachers) by content area. The Conclusion ends this section with a very brief summary of the issues and key strategies outlined in the preceding chapters. Finally, the Appendix features a compendium of tools for the leader, making accessible in one place all resources from this book, to support site-level efforts.

Our Case School

To center our work in the school-based context, we use the case example of the Rosa Parks School. A composite of many schools, administrators, teachers, and students with whom we have worked over the years, Rosa Parks is

a K–8 school in a large, urban district. Rosa Parks serves mostly linguistically diverse students (nearly 75% are ELs). Mirroring the demographics of the United States, the vast majority of EL students and bilingual teachers at the school speak Spanish as their first language (Aud et al., 2011), but many of these same students are said to be mostly English-only by the time they reach middle school, on account of the language of instruction (English) and the neighborhood (also English). Other students (and teachers) are speakers of nonmainstream dialects of English in their homes and communities.

Under the leadership of Principal Mary Lansdowne, Rosa Parks has worked to create an environment that is supportive of language learning, which has meant embracing research-based understandings. Because an important principle at Rosa Parks is that development of a first language supports development in a second (an idea now well established in research; see, e.g., Genesee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006), parents are encouraged to work with children around literacy activities using the language in which they are most fluent. In addition, given their strengths-based orientation, teachers frequently refer to students' errors when speaking English in the classroom as "clues" about their language development, which they use to inform instruction (de Jong & Harper, 2004). Students are also provided with formal support for English language development via pullout instruction provided by specialists and through participation in after-school, computer-based tutoring.

Despite these efforts, students' performance on state assessments have remained stagnant: nearly 80% have performed below grade level for the last 5 years. Serving 800 children across 30 classrooms, Rosa Parks is struggling to meet the needs of its students, most of whom are growing up in poverty (over 95% of students at the school this year are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches); in the district, resources—time, personnel, and finances—are scarce and expectations for student success only growing. Like many of our partner schools, Rosa Parks has been inundated with initiatives, most of which come with little support for implementation; the faculty, comprised of over 40 teachers, reading specialists, and English language specialists, though deeply committed to students, have grown weary of the steady parade of new programs, curricula, and interventions.

The Inspiration for This Book: A Partnership with a Large Urban District

Before we move on, we would like to explain our inspiration for this book, which grew out of a multiyear partnership with nearly 50 school leaders and

district administrators in one of the largest, most linguistically diverse urban districts in the United States. It was through this partnership, which most often took the form of in-depth team-based work over several days at a time, that we designed the model for advanced literacy instructional leadership that we present here.

Too often in education, knowledge lives in silos and research doesn't find its way into practice. In many instances, our work has highlighted school leaders' difficulties in determining which new practices and programs are evidence-based amid the press to rapidly adopt new practices that might benefit teachers and learners. Here, we commit to and focus on a systemic, sustained approach to supporting advanced literacy development in upper elementary through middle school that does not privilege any one ideology or movement; instead, it draws on the science of reading and its instruction, on the science of language acquisition (whether first or second) and dialectical differences, and on attending to the real-world context of instructional practice and especially urban education reform, by incorporating the key lessons from our colleagues who are experts in this area.

To this district partnership, we brought a range of professional experiences. We all started our careers working with children and continue to do so. Nonie was an educational psychologist in an urban school district focused on preventing early reading difficulties, and still provides consultations on specific cases of struggling readers. She leads a program of research focused on the literacy development and difficulties faced by ELs and their monolingual peers, and designs effective instructional environments to increase opportunities to learn for these populations. Emily was a literacy specialist and middle school teacher. Her research focuses on sharpening our understanding of the role of academic language in reading comprehension, including how academic language should be measured and taught. Sky was an elementary teacher who still collaborates regularly with teachers and schools. She investigates the home language and print experiences of young children, how these home experiences intersect with instruction, and how teachers can bridge cultural divides. We worked together as members of the Language and Literacy Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where we taught classes that train future teachers, literacy specialists, and educational researchers. Among us, we have worked in urban, rural, and suburban contexts, most often with leaders and teachers whose students face many challenges in learning to read complex academic texts. And, yet, it was work with our partners in this urban district that forced us to think most creatively and strategically about the problems of leadership and practice that we tackle in this book. We thank them for this challenge and opportunity.

Of course, our experience served to highlight the reality that there are no easy solutions to the problems and challenges one faces when preparing students for complex, academic ways of speaking, reading, and writing. However, we are excited to provide leaders with knowledge and tools that will promote advanced literacies within a district, school, or classroom. It is our belief that the architecture we provide in this book is a powerful one—one that supports educational practitioners and leaders by equipping them with the knowledge to feel confident and capable of leading the design of learning environments where students are acquiring the literacy-based skills and competencies demanded by today's global society.

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