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# Preface

**W**e have devoted our careers to trying to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students, especially English language learners. In our several years of work as teachers and as professors preparing teachers, we have noticed that one of the most challenging aspects of working with English language learners is determining why they might be underachieving. In some cases, it is that they are not being taught in environments conducive to learning or with instructional practices that are appropriate for meeting their needs. Perhaps they are struggling with English language acquisition. Or, they might truly have learning disabilities. In fact, all of the above might be contributing to English language learners' slow progress.

The first step in providing students with support that is well-matched to their needs is determining the reasons for their difficulties. Thus, the purpose of this book is to help practitioners distinguish between learning disabilities and other possible explanations for children's struggles in school. We provide readers with a wealth of information about different aspects of this important educational challenge. It is our hope that as teachers and other support personnel read through the different chapters of this book, they will reflect on their own practices, discuss the content of the book with their colleagues, and apply what they are learning with their students. We envision that the reader will become more confident and competent in determining why English language learners might be struggling.