

Chapter 1

Overview of PIRLS 2006

Ina V.S. Mullis and Michael O. Martin

1.1 Background

As the recognized pioneer of international assessments, IEA has been conducting comparative studies of students' academic achievement for approximately 50 years. IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provides internationally comparative data about students' reading achievement in primary school (the fourth grade in most participating countries). The fourth grade is an important transition point in children's development as readers, because most of them should have learned to read, and are now reading to learn. PIRLS has roots in earlier IEA studies, including the reading component of IEA's six-subject study in 1973 (Purdie, 1973; Walker, 1976) and IEA's Reading Literacy Study conducted in 1991 (Elley, 1992, 1994) and again in 2001 to provide trends (Martin, Mullis, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003).

PIRLS was inaugurated in 2001 to provide reliable measurement of trends in reading comprehension over time on a 5-year cycle. PIRLS 2006 is the second in a continuing assessment cycle into the future, whereby PIRLS will be conducted again in 2011 and every 5 years, thereafter. To measure trends, confounding effects due to changes from one assessment to the next must be minimized, implying a certain amount of stability in the measurement process over time. At the same time, the assessment must remain current by allowing the introduction of new curriculum concepts, addressing changes in educational priorities, and incorporating the use of new measurement technology. Thus, while PIRLS 2006 built on PIRLS 2001, it also evolved in





