Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great interest in the topic of English literacy development of English language learners (Freeman & Freeman, 2001; Hudelson, 1994; Schiffini, 1996). Educators around the world, and especially in the United States, are always in search of approaches, interventions, and instructional strategies to meet the language and literacy needs of learners whose languages and cultures are different from those of the school in which they are enrolled. More and more, educators realize that academic success and achievement do not depend on language proficiency alone, but also on students' literacy development and skills and knowledge of the various disciplines or content areas of the curriculum. As students progress through the grade levels, the demands of academically rigorous subject matter, combined with greater dependence on expository texts, make the attainment of academic literacy imperative (Schiffini, 1996).

A significant number of English language learners (ELLs) are unsuccessful in meeting grade-level academic demands. Through the years, this group of students often fails to attain grade-level literacy, and faces an increasing struggle to meet the academic demands of the curriculum. These students confront cognitively challenging content involving higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation. They need to develop high levels of literacy in order to achieve school language literacy demands, personal literacy goals, and societal expectations regarding the use of literacy skills in education, in work, and in other daily activities. Little research, however, has been conducted with second language learners who manifest difficulty in English literacy attainment in the upper elementary grades.

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, and the creation of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (US Department of Education, 2001), school districts across the nation must provide programs that are founded on scientifically-based research. School districts are hold accountable for meeting annual achievement objectives and measuring academic development. For ELL students, school districts must provide programs and activities with high academic standards that develop English proficiency, and must hold schools

accountable for meeting annual measurable achievement objectives, including making adequate yearly progress.

Literacy acquisition and development is a cognitive process and the students' role is to actively and functionally use written language to construct meaning through a transaction with written text that has been created by symbols. As Hudelson (1994) explains, this mental transaction involves the reader in acting or interpreting the text, and the interpretation is influenced by the reader's past experience, language background, and cultural framework, and the reader's purpose for reading. Upper elementary students are supposed to read to construct meaning from their own texts and the texts of others, to learn about the world through the school curriculum, and to make and maintain connections with other individuals by identifying purpose in reading and writing. In addition to the above, English language learners (ELLs) need to acquire academic literacy in order to integrate themselves into the life of the school and the community at large. Literacy is also needed for academic success in school and ultimately for economic survival and well-being. In order to achieve, students require a classroom that provides an environment that is supportive of continuous language and literacy development. If students are going to succeed, schools must be prepared to make a long-term commitment to support the academic development of all students, including ELL students. Consequently, all teachers in all schools must address the learning needs of ELLs by individualizing their instruction to take into account the very different levels of English language proficiency and literacy development.

A major theme of this book is that the literacy gaps of struggling ELLs need immediate attention. If not, these gaps will increase as the demands of the curriculum increase. Because an increasing number of these 'struggling ELLs' appear in grades four to eight (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Schiffini, 1996), this book addresses those English language learners who are enrolled in upper elementary grades between approximately grades four and six, who have fairly good knowledge of spoken English, and who are struggling with academic English literacy even though they have demonstrated basic English literacy skills. These children probably demonstrate phonemic awareness, knowledge of phonics, decoding, and word recognition. However, they demonstrate lower levels of literacy than would be expected of students in their age group and grade level. They have difficulties in producing the functions of literacy and using written language for communicating with others or for self expression. In general, these students come from two instructional or programmatic settings:

- ELLs who have left language assistance programs such as ESL and bilingual education without the appropriate English proficiency to tackle all instruction in English:
- ELLs who have been in English monolingual classrooms because their parents opt to enroll them in monolingual English classrooms, or because the school district does not offer language assistance programs.

There are terms that we use throughout the book and that we need to define in

these introductory comments. One term used is that of the 'struggling English language learner' (ELL). English language learners is the label recently used among second language researchers and practitioners to identify students for whom English is a new or second language. We are encouraged to use the term throughout the book, and attempt not to use it to portray ELLs as deficient learners but as individuals who are learning through a second language. There is the need, however, to directly address the characteristics of this population: those who are struggling with the reading and writing demands of the curriculum. These students need strategies to ease them into trusting the functionality of reading and writing and to use literacy for purposes of communication and learning. Most struggling ELLs are in monolingual classrooms – classrooms where the teacher assumes that all children are proficient in the English language and are capable of meeting the high academic and linguistic demands of the curriculum.

Although the focus of this book is on how best to serve the literacy needs of struggling English language learners, this does not mean that we favor educational programs for ELLs that teach only through English. Nor does it mean that ELLs' culture and home language should be ignored by schools and replaced by English and the mainstream culture. On the other hand, this book puts the responsibility for educating ELLs in the hands of all educators, including those in English classrooms. These educators must use their professional competencies and resources in planning and delivering instruction to meet the literacy and academic need of ELLs. Planning and delivering instruction to meet the literacy gaps on the basis of ELLs' existing competencies, prior knowledge and experiences provides opportunities for helping these students to build and extend skills, knowledge and processes.

The highly complex process of language learning and literacy development calls for multifaceted instructional approaches. We propose strategies to help educators, especially teachers, to improve these students' English reading and writing. We have looked at the field of effective instruction, and in proposing strategies for struggling ELLs we have adapted many of the strategies found in the literature. The use of these strategies and suggestions would probably make schools more rewarding both for ELLs and for those who teach them. Strategies that we have modified include, among others, scaffolding, vocabulary development strategies such as rich semantic contexts, comprehension monitoring, comprehension strategies such as literature logs, instructional conversations to clarify and respond to text, narrative and expository writing strategies, sheltered instruction and problem-solving steps.