Even without a detailed reading of the brief biography of Dr. Debbie Zacarian under the section About the Author (Zacarian, 2011, p. xi), the reader gets the message that the writer has vast experience in working with and in the interest of English Learners (ELs). But the content of the book, Transforming Schools for English Learners: A Comprehensive Framework for School Leaders, does more than highlight Dr. Zacarian’s knowledge of and experience with ELs. The book seemed to have been born, not just out of the desire for further academic pursuit or to merely meet the professional requirements of a job; there seems to be genuine concern for the plight of ELs in the United States. Dr. Zacarian’s vast expertise and deep concern are clearly portrayed in the title, content and strategies used to convey her messages.

English Learners (ELs), according to the author, are those students who have “learned another language other than English during [their] primary years and [are] not able to do ordinary classroom work in English” (Zacarian, 2011, p. 174). These students are said to face a number of problems within the school system. Their inability to cope efficiently is seen in the fact that despite the type of assessment instrument used, a large proportion of the EL population is performing way below the national average for the total school
population. ELs are failing badly, and the problem seems to be getting worse. The EL population is growing rapidly while the gap in the academic performance of this category of learners and those who have a firm grasp of English in order to use the language in school is widening (Garrett, 2011, p. 51; Zacarian, 2011, p.1).

The author’s deep concern for these students is clearly captured in her effort to let the audience fully grasp the enormity of the problem, to recognize their obligation to assist these learners and to follow efficient procedures to assist ELs. These goals are vividly seen in the content and organization of the book. Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of programme development that will ultimately lead to the accomplishment of her goal. And what does Dr. Zacarian hope to achieve through this book? She wants to assist school officials such as school superintendents, principals, curriculum supervisors and teachers, inter alia, to “create and implement or strengthen policies, decisions and day to day operations for the benefit of the growing EL population” (Zacarian, 2011, p. 1).

A cursory glance at the content page gives a useful and clear synopsis of what is being offered. There are no fancy or technical subtitles. There is serious business to be done and the author does not wish to go through frills. This EL situation has to be seen as a serious issue as the welfare of these students as well as that of the wider society is at stake. Each topic listed on the content page speaks to the performance of an action: administering, selecting, developing, designing, identifying and making. These are all action words that help to drive home the message that action is required.

This feeling of being propelled into action is also seen in the first word of the title: transforming. To transform, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is to make a thorough or dramatic change. Thus, the author is asking for deep-seated or radical changes that follow set principles that are likely to bring the desired results. She seeks to reach all the stakeholders in the attempt to get these radical changes. Thus the aim is for the entire school to be transformed, not just a programme or the teachers; everyone has a role to play (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011, p. 118).

In the first chapter, an effort is made to provide the reader with a clear understanding of some of the difficulties surrounding the education of ELs within the US school system. However, the author does not create the illusion that the situation is easy to fix. She adequately shows that the issue
is complex as ELs do not fit into a neat little group of learners. Among the varying difficulties are the facts that ELs speak a wide variety of languages, originate from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds as well as display a number of personality traits. These distinctions may not just be among groups of ELs at different schools; a single school may contain ELs with a number of significant differences. They may speak a variety of languages or even different dialects of the same language. These issues demand that very ingenious means that are based on extensive analysis and research have to be found to efficiently overcome these barriers to the effective education of ELs. The book has an entire chapter that deals with “making data-driven decisions” (Zacarian, 2011, p. 149).

In addition, to effectively help ELs the affected teachers must have adequate training. However, as stated by Dr. Zacarian, many of the teachers who have to deal with these students lack the requisite training and experience. The author also suggests that in some contexts, teachers with the desired training are not given the required support. Again, the situation in each school would vary. The problems associated with the inadequacy of teacher training or undervaluing of teachers with training will likely be mitigated if school leaders, (including superintendents and principals), are intimately involved in the process. “Effective school leadership is key to students’ academic success” (Golding, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, and Cravens, 2009, p. 1) and the issue regarding ELs is no different. This is probably why Dr. Zacarian opted to use the all-embracing term: “School Leaders” in the title.

Despite the many problems, the situation has to be successfully addressed and Dr. Zacarian ably supplies the school leaders with the rationale upon which their EL programmes would be built. She shows the depth of her knowledge and preparation skills by outlining the important historical facts, laws and requisite findings of linguistic research on second language learning that provides the impetus for action. After carefully reading this information in chapter two, school leaders with ELs within their school population should have no difficulty defending the desire to garner and utilize resources to develop and implement the requisite programme.

The audience is promised a comprehensive framework for assisting ELs and that is exactly what is delivered. After providing relevant background information, the author goes on to supply all the necessary information that anyone aiming to help ELs would require. Although, the book is not a mere listing of steps, it provides a recipe for achieving the desired goal. The
author guides the potential user through the steps of effective programme development and implementation. However, these guidelines are not just thrown out to the reader as accompanying each step are crucial details that sometimes provide examples, explanations or rationale for action. In addition, she includes actual examples of instruments used for analysis and assessment of key factors within the educational context. Thus the programme developers are not just left with a theoretical description of what should be done; there are models that can be used as is, or adapted to fit the specific context.

Along with the excellent content, there are a number of stylistic features that add to the appeal of the book. Each chapter, for example, begins with a scenario that identifies specific places, names and situations involving ELs. This makes the issues discussed seem real and adds to the emotional appeal of the text. The school leaders may be able to relate to the issues being highlighted as they may recognize similar problems to their own. These scenarios are also used as the framework around which the advice is given. The author first illustrates the problem or issue, and then shows how it could best be solved. My only problem is that these scenarios are employed from the very beginning in the introduction and are then used to open every chapter. This technique loses its allure after the first two or three instances. The presentation of the scenarios served a valuable purpose, but perhaps there could have been some variety in how they were used. This one flaw, for me however, in no way seriously detracts from the value and appeal of this book. It is just a minor stylistic problem.

Another clever tactic on the part of the author is the way each chapter ends. After discussing the relevant information for that section, the author ends by presenting the void that now needs to be filled. This forms the impetus for moving on to the following chapter that then provides the relevant guidance. This strategy helps to reinforce the notion that the book, though divided into chapters, is a comprehensive, cohesive whole. In addition, this technique depicts one of the features of a quality programme: each step feeds into the other.

*Transforming Schools for English Language Learners*, despite its role as a manual, is very easy to read and digest. The language is simple and devoid of too many technical terms. But Dr. Zacarian does not just leave it there; she goes on to prepare a very useful and easy to understand glossary. Even
with my being outside of the American school system, I could still grasp the meaning of her messages with the help of this added aid.

The eye-catching cover design and *easy on the eyes* experience of the inside presentation help to confirm the author’s role as an educator who attempts to find effective means of reaching *her students*. The font size and type as well as the page width all contribute to comfortable reading. In presenting tables and sample documents, there is no compromising of this *easy on the eyes* approach in order to save space. In some cases, documents are spread across one or two pages. This is not usually the case for most texts. Also, for a book within the given price range, the quality of the paper is high.

On the whole, I would recommend *Transforming Schools for English Learners* to anyone who has to facilitate the educational development of learners within second language contexts. Although its focus is on speakers of other languages within the United States, its basic principles of programme development and implementation are applicable to all contexts where learners are expected to survive in an educational setting that delivers instruction in a language other than their mother tongue. The techniques used by this knowledgeable and experienced writer to ensure that her message is understood and achieves its intended purpose, will go a long way in assisting any interested educator. After all, Dr Zacarian’s expertise lies in helping *the challenged learner*.

**References**

