This book contains 14 chapters, divided into three parts. Part I presents theory and research on the relations between language and literacy. Part II covers instructional issues, based mostly on the major theme expressed in Part I, that literacy is predominantly a “language-related” phenomenon. Part III concerns legal and policy issues as they relate to special education and to students with learning disabilities in postsecondary institutions.

Much of the information in Part I resonates with my understanding of the acquisition of literacy in deaf and hard-of-hearing children. For example, the authors argue that phonemic awareness is critical for developing proficiency in the use of the alphabet system and, subsequently, for developing word identification and spelling skills. In addition, problems with vocabulary, syntax, and textual comprehension can be attributed, in part, to a breakdown in phonological processing. The overall problems with language in general contribute pervasively to the literacy problems of children with language learning disabilities. In essence, a strong case is made for little separation between language disabilities and learning disabilities. This is characterized as the “fuzzy boundary” between deficits in spoken language and those associated with literacy, particularly reading.

Despite our vast knowledge, interventions have not been effective for improving achievement levels of children with language learning disabilities, especially after the 4th grade. The authors, in Part II, do offer instructional guidelines, which range from the roles of school, classroom, and peer discourse to using scaffolded techniques and technology. Also mentioned is the need to avoid the one-size-fits-all method—that is, instruction should be tailored to individual student needs. Nevertheless, whatever methods are used should be based on extant theory and research.

Nearly all of Part II elaborates on the ubiquitous role of language. There is even a strong call for better and advanced education of teachers and speech pathologists in the language basis of literacy and for a closer working relationship between classroom teachers and speech pathologists. The only chapter in Part II that seems out of place is chapter 11, which focuses predominantly on social interactions. Interestingly, this chapter asserts that language difficulties are not sufficient for explaining the social interaction problems of children with language learning disabilities. Social development is critical; however, this chapter does not relate directly to the recurrent themes in the rest of the book.

It is not clear why Part III was included in this text. I do not question the importance of understanding the major principles of IDEA, ADA, or Section 504. However, this information does not contribute much to the overall themes.

The subtitle of this book is “New Paradigms in Research and Practice.” For those of us who have kept pace with theory and research in the larger field of literacy with children who are typical (i.e., nondisabled), not much is really new. Granted, it is important to do research on children with special needs; however, this text demonstrates there are fundamentals that apply to all children, especially for the development of English language and literacy skills.

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