

# Foreword

## What This Book Is About

This book is about how to teach students with language impairments the skills, strategies, and underlying processes needed for educational success. It is primarily directed at speech–language pathologists (SLPs), but both regular and special education teachers should find helpful ideas for addressing language skills in their instructional settings.

This book continues a journey begun in the late 1980s when I worked as an SLP in a school district in British Columbia, Canada (or perhaps even before then, as a graduate student, when I was assigned to present the seminal chapter by Carol Westby, 1985, on narrative as a bridge between oral and written language). I was fortunate to be an SLP in a time and place that allowed and encouraged freedom and innovation. Our school districts were experimenting with inclusive service delivery, non-categorical service, continuous progress in ungraded primary classes, and anecdotal reporting. Teachers were provided release time for collaborative planning. There was no high-stakes testing or standardized curricula. Speech–language services were not yet part of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). We set our own eligibility requirements, caseload size, and waiting lists. We could vary between pull-out and inclusive intervention, individual and group, as many times a week as we each saw fit, so long as we could satisfy principals, teachers, and parents in our assigned six-to-eight schools. All this freedom meant there were occasional poor practices, but it also allowed some of us to soar.

Connecting to teachers, classrooms, and classwork helped me make sense of what I was doing and made me feel part of a team. I heard Margaret Lahey speak on narrative development (Lahey, 1988), which inspired me to develop narrative intervention units employing children’s literature and pictography to target story grammar skills in a developmental order. I co-taught these units with regular and resource teachers. These experiences taught me a lot about classroom management, working with teachers, and linking between the speech room and the classroom. However, they also revealed significant challenges to providing explicit, systematic, supportive attention to specific language skills for my caseload students amid the busyness of the regular classroom.

During my doctorate at the University of Texas at Austin, I sought out experiences in developmental psychology, speech–language pathology, speech communication, and literacy education to better understand how to combine explicit skill instruction with contexts that provided meaning and purpose. In 1995, I made my way back to snow and

mountains, and found a home at the University of Wyoming. There, in my graduate school-age language intervention course, students worked through a stack of readings, largely from *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*. These articles set the foundations but often lacked the “end of the story” of the details of intervention. As a result, I invited some of these like-minded scholars to share in creating a theoretically driven but practical text on school-age language intervention for SLPs (Ukrainetz, 2006). In addition to an emphasis on teaching skills within purposeful contexts, I introduced the critical treatment elements of RISE: Repeated opportunities for Intensive, Systematically supported, Explicit instruction.

That book has served students and clinicians well, but with time and use, I judged more was needed. I invited a different array of top scholars and researchers to contribute chapters. This new book extends attention to history, legislation, and other approaches to intervention. It includes explanations of major categories of language learners and intervention guidance for reading, spelling, phonological processing, and older students. This book has a distinctly different tack from Ukrainetz (2006); staying more theoretically neutral and letting the empirical evidence lead to the answers. It turns out that, across language, and even cognitive areas, the answers again converge around contextualized skill intervention and RISE. There is still a lot to learn about how to conduct this challenging combination of explicit skill instruction and meaningful contexts. However, the broad outline continues to be what Judith Johnston called for so many years ago:

The challenge of intervention with the language-disordered child is to simplify the language learning task without changing its basic character. Language learning must remain integrated with intellect, motivated by communication, actively inductive, and self-directed. . . . But language learning must also be facilitated in specific, well-calculated ways. The challenge for educators is to manage this tension between the common and the extraordinary. What sort of intervention programme can maintain the essence of language learning and yet accelerate it? (Johnston, 1985, p. 128)

## Overview of the Book

The first four chapters of this book explain the fundamentals of SLP practice in the schools. Chapter 1 introduces the roles, service delivery options, and practices in the schools, the *who works on what where* part of the business, with enough of a historical context to show the widening road that school SLPs travel. Chapter 2 addresses the foundations of language intervention: how language intervention is organized and the level at which it is aimed to intercept the problems—underlying neuropsychology, language skills, or classroom transactions. This chapter examines what the research evidence indicates overall about school-age language intervention. Chapter 3 explains how

to provide contextualized skill intervention with RISE in a whole-part framework. In this chapter I have tried to take the best of the popular Gillam and Ukrainetz (2006) chapter on literature-based intervention and combine it with interventions that reference standardized academic outcomes, specifically those of the *Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Chapter 4 is what I call the “rules of the road”: the federal laws and regulations that govern special education and SLP services. There is even a very brief look at how special education is delivered in my home country of Canada. Two chapters (5 and 6) sort out the major categories of language learners on an SLP’s caseload in the schools: specific language impairment, reading disability, and bilingual learners. Trina Spencer and I explain what those labels mean, the terminology used in the schools, how the categories differ (and overlap), and what the research says about how these children fare over the school years.

The next chapters address best practices for spoken and written language intervention. In Chapter 7, Karla McGregor and Dawna Duff guide assessment and intervention for the diverse and deep vocabulary knowledge important in school. Catherine Balthazar and Cheryl Scott provide a primer on the grammar needed to understand and produce academic texts (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9, I discuss how to teach episodic structure, cohesion, and artful storytelling of narrative structure intervention. Carol Westby, Barb Culatta, and Kendra Hall-Kenyon explore facilitating the many dimensions of informational discourse (Chapter 10). In Chapter 11, Celeste Roseberry-McKibbin discusses how to help children with backgrounds that put them at environmental risk to cope with the language of the classroom.

Three chapters address the written code and the cognitive underpinnings of communication and learning. Chapter 12 explains the very teachable skill of phonemic awareness and the emerging areas of phonological memory and retrieval intervention. Pamela Hook and Elizabeth Crawford-Brooke hit the highlights of assessment and instruction for word identification and fluency (Chapter 13). In Chapter 14, Julie Wolter attends to spelling and its connections to language knowledge. Chapter 15 deals with reading comprehension: I attempt to provide coherent and manageable guidance for SLP intervention in this extensive and diverse domain. The book ends with a chapter in which Lauren Katz and Karen Fallon explore “the final frontier” of SLP services to high school and college students with reading disorders.

I hope this book serves students, instructors, and clinicians well. It is certainly still not the entire story, but is a research-based, comprehensive step toward effective intervention across the many aspects of what is called “school-age language” for the school SLP. I would like to thank Doug Petersen, Melissa Allen, and Mark Guiberson for many thought-provoking conversations about the nature of language learning and facilitation. I would also like to acknowledge the graduate students in my school-age language intervention course who perpetually lead me to new insights about language learning and teaching. Catherine Ross, my colleague, collaborator, and critic, continues to be my touchstone, helping me make sense to those on the front lines of speech–language pathology in the schools.

## References

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