

**Language learning disabilities: diagnosis and remediation****Carol T. Wren, editor***Rockville, Md and London: Aspen Systems, 1983. xi + 345 pp.*

The aim of this book could almost be used as a paraphrase of the editorial policy of this journal: it is to provide a bridge which will enable 'the professional or advanced graduate student . . . to understand current research and to formulate a framework upon which to base diagnostic and remedial strategies' (p. ix). The notion of language disability is seen as 'a disturbance in processing oral language' (p. ix), which interferes with all modalities of language, written as well as spoken. The book focuses on the younger child, because this is where most of the research has been carried out, but some reference is made to older children.

There is an introductory chapter on language and language disabilities by Wren, and then separate chapters on phonology (Harris-Schmidt and Noell), semantics (Hoskins), morphology and syntax (Wren), discourse and pragmatics (Spekman), conceptualization (Harris-Schmidt), reading (Noell) and writing (Major). Each author has organized her chapter (all authors are female, incidentally, and all received doctorates in learning disabilities from Northwestern University, Illinois) into three sections: the nature of the disability, diagnosis, and remediation. The opening chapter, likewise, has three sections: normal language and its development, language disorders, and a synthesis of these two. This editorial control, plus the common intellectual background of the authors, makes for a highly coherent book – far more than might be expected of a collection of papers. The focus throughout is on the integration of theoretical knowledge from psycholinguistics (especially language acquisition) with a model of learning disability, so as to produce a set of practical guidelines for planning intervention.

It's an excellent conception, and it works to a fair extent. The introductory summaries of each topic are clear, systematic and sensible, and provide a good way of getting an up-to-date grasp of many of the basic issues in psycholinguistic theory and diagnosis. The weakness – as ever – lies in the remedial sections, where the constraints of space and knowledge combine to permit only a general discussion of goals and techniques. The discussions are a step in the right direction, and will be useful to anyone who is encountering psycholinguistic topics for the first time, and wondering where they lead to. But there is still a large gap left between theory and practice, as illustrated by such comments as, 'The

raw materials are available. It is the teachers who must weave them into a pattern . . .' (p. 109), and 'a careful analysis . . . will enable clinicians to select and if necessary modify published material . . .' (p. 283). The book which bridges this gap has yet to be written. In the meantime, anything which makes us think carefully about what we do and why we do it is to be welcomed. On this count, the present volume has to be judged a success.

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