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Lems, Kristin; Miller, Leah D. & Soro, Tenena M. (2010)
Teaching Reading to English Language Learners: Insights from Linguistics. NY: The Guilford Press.

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A timely contribution for practitioners looking for sound information, *Teaching Reading to English Language Learners: Insights from Linguistics* combines progressive pedagogical practices with language acquisition theory and research. The book was based on materials the authors used in university courses and consequently is an excellent resource for university literacy methods courses. Instructional leaders in schools, reading teachers and specialists, ESL teachers, and general education teachers would also benefit from this book. As classrooms become more diverse, a solid understanding of linguistic principles is a must and this book engagingly describes literacy and linguistic theories applicable to educators.

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Authors, Lems, Miller, and Soro manage to uniquely combine what we know about linguistics with what we know about literacy learning. Some might quibble with merging these two areas of study, preferring to rely on progressive literacy pedagogy for English learners and native English speakers alike. Other, more linguistically focused educators may prefer to focus on direct teaching of English phonology and grammar. The authors bridge these two platforms by suggesting the use of both top-down (world knowledge and cognitive processing skills) and bottom-up (language processing strategies and language knowledge). The authors discuss Birch's (2007) model of the reading process and include a useful diagram which helps explain their stance toward reading instruction.

Chapter 1 begins with a thorough discussion of language acquisition concepts such as affective filter (Dulay & Burt, 1977), and comprehensible input, (Krashen, 1985). When a student's affective filter is low, learning will take place because the student is relatively free from stress. Comprehensible input is achieved by providing enormous amounts of a new language at a level which the learner can understand. A useful glossary is provided to guide the reader through these and many other linguistic terms described in the book. Next, the authors guide the discussion into similarities and differences between reading English as a first language and reading English as a new language. Chapter 2 examines the first language influence on learning English and discusses the language threshold theory as key to the argument that there are important differences between learning a first language (L1) and learning a second or additional language (L2).

The [language threshold] theory incorporates an understanding of the importance of L2 language specific skills that are needed for L2 learners to be successful readers. The needed "threshold" will vary according to the purpose for reading and the text being read, and it will vary among learners. (p. 35)

It is through teaching bottom-up strategies, the authors argue, that English learners will achieve the necessary threshold of language specific skills to be successful English readers. This basic understanding sets the stage for

the following chapters, which emphasize the importance of listening comprehension and oral language development (chapter 3). Both skills should be developed through authentic language such as engagement in rich instructional conversations in English. Halliday's (1993) three language functions: learning language, learning about language, and learning through language frames the discussion of instructional practices. Information on oral language development, suggestions for combining spelling and reading study, and a section on expository writing are examples of how the three language functions are interwoven throughout the book. This framework supports a progressive pedagogy based on current understandings of literacy development.

Chapter 4 explores the challenges of learning to read, write, and spell words in English as a new language. This chapter focuses on the importance of morphemes and probabilistic reasoning in English reading. "As we get to know print better, the better and better at predicting what the next letter of a word is likely to be and how it is likely to sound." (p.66) The history of how the English language developed and information on other languages in this chapter will help the reader understand the unique challenges of reading English. Chapters 1-4 include a variety of tables and figures, such as a guide for planning instruction in all language domains, and photographs of environmental print in various languages. All chapters conclude with probing questions, which would be useful for class discussions in teacher education courses.

The final five chapters focus on vocabulary, word formation processes, fluency, comprehension, and writing. Each describes similarities and differences in learning these components of reading in a first language compared to learning them in English as a new language. The focus is on providing tools for the English learner, such as teaching morphemes to learn new words, and understanding how new words are made in the English language. This is consistent with the metalinguistic and metacognitive approach stressed throughout the book. In describing this approach, the authors write:

When teachers combine their knowledge of morphemes with their metalinguistic awareness of new word formation in English, they can transform this knowledge into an

exciting, word-centered classroom for English language learners and native speakers alike. (p. 125)

In these chapters, the authors provide examples of how implementation of their ideas would look in the classroom and include useful illustrations and photographs.

Throughout the book, the authors discuss many complex skills which native English speakers take for granted, yet may be difficult for English learners. These include subtleties such as recognizing individual words in a stream of speech, stress patterns in words and phrases, and the opaque relationships of sounds to symbols, and symbols to sounds in English spelling and reading. Additionally, idioms and phrasal verbs are difficult to master for English learners. Fortunately, the authors provide many engaging ideas for instruction that target these skills without rote drill and practice. They point out that pop and country songs are full of phrasal verbs and idioms that can be used to teach common speech patterns by analyzing and singing along with song lyrics. Devoting consistent classroom time to silent or partner reading along with reading assigned as homework is recommended to develop all of the strategies needed for effective reading.

The authors' extensive knowledge of both the reading and language acquisition processes provide a theoretically sound, yet practical and readable resource. The book provides the "why" and "how" for reading instruction in today's linguistically diverse classrooms and demonstrates it is possible to marry current literacy research and pedagogy with linguistics. Many teachers today have English learners in their classrooms and confess to not being sure of how to meet their language development and academic needs. This book offers both theory and very concrete direction.

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About the Reviewer

Lucy K. Spence is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. She teaches undergraduate and graduate level literacy methods courses. Her academic interests are English learner writing and the application of socio-historical and cultural theory to assessment practices.

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