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# Introduction

## What This Book Is About

This book is primarily for speech-language pathologists (SLPs), but a spectrum of educators will find helpful ideas for teaching. It is about how to teach students with language impairments the many facets of literate language needed for academic success. This is an intervention book, focused primarily on how to help students. Descriptions of disorders and assessment procedures are provided as the need arises. The interventions presented are not simply a compendium of possibilities, but a selective array from a particular theoretical framework. That framework is social interactionism, which purports that language is learned:

- By active, goal-directed, self-regulated learners
- Through internalization of the language of more competent others
- Via scaffolded interactions with those more competent others
- Within meaningful contexts

This book presents a theoretical framework and methodologies for analyzing, amplifying, supporting, and measuring skills embedded in meaningful activities. The term *contextualized skill intervention* is used to describe this social-interactionist approach, known variously as *hybrid*, *activity-based*, *naturalistic*, *functional*, or *curriculum-based*. The intervention guidance can be applied to any aspect of language. The therapeutic component of this normal language learning process is the provision of RISE:

Repeated opportunities for  
Intense interaction with  
Systematic support of  
Explicitly targeted skills.

## The Challenge of Language Intervention in Schools

Language is a huge domain, divisible in many ways, and overlapping with other domains such as speech, perception, cognition, and literacy. Language intervention is the intentional act of accelerating or changing language that is below, or different from, that expected for chronological age (Fey, 1986). Language intervention can occur in many ways (Johnston, 1983; Ukrainetz, 2005).

Understanding of what language involves and for what SLPs are responsible has expanded continuously for several decades (Rees, 1983; Ukrainetz, 2005; Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003). The explosion of morphology, syntax, and semantics knowledge in the 1960s, combined with the emergence of age and stage descriptions, led to a period Rees described as, “exciting for the language professional but still simple” (p. 310), with clear goals for language intervention and structured ways of teaching language. The situation became much more complicated, however, with the addition of topics such as pragmatics, reading, learning, and cognition. Rees stated that the problem facing the SLP in 1983 was to make sense out of all this information and apply it to principles and procedures of language intervention. Twenty years later, this continues to be a challenge. The field of school language intervention has become diverse and encompassing, ranging from traditional topics of vocabulary and grammar to newer domains of reading, executive function, social-emotional functioning, and limited English proficiency (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; ASHA; 1999, 2001).

In addition to myriad intervention target possibilities, service has extended into the secondary grades, and service delivery options have expanded. SLPs may provide intervention in pull-out individual or small groups, in a variety of in-class arrangements, or on a consulting or curriculum-modification basis. Various degrees of collaboration with general and other special education teachers can occur. With a focus on reading and curriculum-based instruction, SLPs may provide services much like resource teachers (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003).

The possibilities of intervention methods have also increased. Discrete skill instruction continues to be an option for language skills that can be shaped within tightly controlled, hierarchically structured tasks and generalized to daily life activities. At the same time, for most language objectives, SLPs must know how to systematically scaffold learning within whole, purposeful, complicated activities (Nelson, 1995; Ukrainetz, 1998). The task of language intervention has become truly daunting.

## Overview

Contributing authors for this book are scholars who: (a) come from a speech-language pathology background, (b) have a primary interest in intervention rather than in descriptions of disorders or ways of assessing disorders, and (c) partake in the vision of contextualized skill intervention. In addition, each

contributor has a particular domain of interest, such as vocabulary, morphosyntax, or peer interaction. All of us strive to provide quality skill instruction within purposeful, meaningful contexts. All of us recognize students as self-directed learners. All of us recognize clinicians as facilitators who strategically scaffold the internalization and automatization process. We each come to the task with our own views of how contextualized skill intervention can best occur, but all fit within a larger social-interactionist view of learning. Examples of interactions are taken from our work with students. We use pseudonyms for these students, who also are important contributors to this work.

The first section of the book, *The Intervention Approach*, describes contextualized skill intervention. Chapter 1 sets out the framework of contextualized skill intervention. In Chapter 2, Gillam and Ukrainetz detail how to carry out such intervention within literature-based units. The section on *Building Language into Discourse* examines the building blocks of language and how to combine them into purposeful discourse. Nelson and Van Meter provide guidance in Chapter 3 on teaching vocabulary within self-motivated writing activities. Eisenberg addresses how to teach the later acquired aspects of morphosyntax to school-age students (Chapter 4). At the discourse level, a chapter is devoted to narrative structure (Chapter 5) and another to expository structure (Chapter 6). The *Classroom Discourse* section addresses the social-interactional factors involved in acquiring literate language. Brinton and Fujiki address peer interactions (Chapter 7) and Westby addresses classroom discourse (Chapter 8). Westby's chapter includes some important cultural considerations.

The *Language in Print* section addresses ways of directly teaching some parts of the reading process. Justice, Skibbe, and Ezell discuss in Chapter 9 how to introduce preschoolers with language impairment to print concepts within storybook activities. Chapter 10 deals with teaching phonemic awareness, a language skill needed for alphabetic literacy, in a contextualized skill manner. Leahy and Justice present a novel approach to reading fluency through the dramatic activities of Readers Theatre in Chapter 11. In the final section, *Thinking and Learning*, Ukrainetz and Ross (Chapter 12) address text comprehension and bridge it to language in print and the processes involved in thinking and learning. Chapter 13, by Bashir and Singer, considers the self-regulatory processes that underlie and complicate learning difficulties. Students who do not organize, direct, and reflect on their own learning are at risk in all areas of language.

Two literacy areas not specifically addressed in this book are word decoding and spelling. The vocabulary, print awareness, phonemic awareness, and reading fluency chapters provide some information on word decoding, but

for detailed attention, additional sources will be required. An excellent analysis of the development of word recognition and the need for intense, systematically supported, explicit instruction are found in Catts and Kamhi (2005). Two good intervention articles for later word decoding and spelling are Apel and Swank (1999), and Apel and Masterson (2001).

In conclusion, I hope that in our efforts to be centrally located in the high visibility area of reading, we SLPs consider the cost to other aspects of communication. Although there are conceptual reasons for extending our attention into reading instruction, we can provide intervention that is sufficiently intense for only a few language needs for any particular student. There is also a limit to how many areas in which we can be skilled interventionists. Focusing on word recognition and spelling will unavoidably occur at a cost of diminished focus to our distinctive areas of service provision (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003). I hope that SLPs make efforts to retain their unique, specialized niches, even if those niches are in lower visibility areas of communication.

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