

# *Introduction to the Second Edition*

The second edition of *Why Do English Learners Struggle With Reading?* contains updated and contemporary research-to-practice material about the education of ELs who struggle with reading, and who may also experience misinterpretation of their language acquisition skills and abilities as a learning disability.

## **NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION**

Updated citations reflecting contemporary research and literature about ELs and reading, and ELs and learning disabilities

Inclusion of *Vignettes* in several chapters

Discussion of educational needs of students with limited and interrupted formal education (SLIFE)

Expanded coverage of response to intervention (RTI) to include the contemporary framework of multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that combines key features of RTI and positive behavioral supports in the academic and affective education of all students

Theories of second language acquisition discussion and table (Chapter 3)

Addition of *Misconception 9*, which discusses misinterpretations between sequential and simultaneous bilinguals in today's schools

Expanded coverage of cultural diversity and associated behaviors in distinguishing learning differences from disabilities

Addition of a new chapter (Chapter 5) that describes several select research-based reading methods for teaching ELs

Development of a cultural and linguistic diversity reading methods table that summarizes methods appropriate for helping ELs acquire different reading skills (Chapter 2)

Updated select Research to Practice examples

## SECOND EDITION PERSPECTIVE

Many English learners (ELs) in our schools continue to struggle with reading. Why? What can educators do? *Why Do English Learners Struggle With Reading?: Distinguishing Language Acquisition From Learning Disabilities (2nd ed.)* provides educators with information designed to help determine whether their ELs are struggling with reading because they may have learning disabilities (LD) or for some other reason associated with second language acquisition. Simultaneously, we attempt to clarify many of the misconceptions surrounding EL instruction and assessment.

The unprecedented growth of the EL population, concerns about the number of inappropriate referrals of ELs to special education, the challenges associated with distinguishing between reading difficulties related to second language acquisition and problems caused by LD, along with the lack of a comprehensive research base on these and related issues, strongly suggest the importance of and need for this practical book. With increased momentum nationwide to provide evidence-based intervention to all students, it is essential to revisit some of the more pressing issues that have challenged educators of ELs who struggle with learning, particularly in reading.

Our goal is to provide solutions to the challenges educators face as they work to address the recurring needs of ELs. In each chapter, we describe a different aspect of distinguishing between language acquisition and LD. Chapters include numerous guides, checklists, figures, and tables for easy reference and use by practitioners. It is our hope that they will facilitate data-gathering and decision-making efforts to provide the most appropriate education to ELs, while simultaneously reducing their inappropriate referral and placement into special education.<sup>1</sup>

US schools continue to be transformed due to diversity of learners and associated learning qualities. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004) included momentous changes intended to significantly alter the ways schools support student learning and identify students as having LD. No longer is a discrepancy between intelligence and achievement needed as part of the special education identification process. Instead, educators are encouraged to determine the extent to which students respond to research-based interventions, using data to inform progress, instructional adjustments, and possible referral for special education. Additionally, the reauthorization and restructuring of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), was recently passed and signed into law. Though specifics are forthcoming, the passage in 2015 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will result in several significant changes in the education of English learners and students with disabilities, as well as teacher preparation. According to the Council for Exceptional Children, the overall impact of ESSA is seen in the transference of authority from the federal

government to states and/or local districts in the areas of accountability, school improvement, and educator evaluations. One significant change is that the “Highly Qualified Teacher” requirement has been eliminated. Other key ESSA provisions strengthen teacher preparation education academies and replace adequate yearly progress with statewide accountability systems. Overall, reading education of ELs, including those with disabilities, are impacted by various changes and provisions in ESSA and readers are encouraged to attend to ongoing developments resulting from this recently reauthorized law.

As a result of legislation, school systems nationwide have been initiating efforts to implement multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) as the primary school and district-wide structures in the comprehensive education of all learners. Although MTSS models may be new to some practitioners and require a paradigm shift in how we think about helping students, some of the same practices and principles previously used as part of the special education process are still mandated by current law (i.e., IDEIA, 2004). It is against this backdrop that we have updated and revised this book. We describe MTSS for diverse schools, identifying best practices, while clarifying which practices and procedures are similar to and different from previous approaches. Specifically,

*In Chapter 1*, we provide background information intended to set the stage for future chapters. We detail contemporary demographic information about the diverse EL population in the United States and explain what we know about the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education. Then, we present a brief description of LD, finishing the chapter with an overview of what we know from research about distinguishing between LD and language acquisition among ELs.

*In Chapter 2*, we describe the MTSS model for educating ELs. First, we provide an overview of MTSS; then, we discuss assumptions underlying MTSS that can be problematic when applied in schools with high percentages of ELs. This chapter also illustrates challenges schools may face as they attempt to implement MTSS. For each difficulty, we discuss possible solutions.

*In Chapter 3*, we focus on the language acquisition process. We pay particular attention to common misconceptions about second language acquisition that can be confusing for educators and contribute to misperceptions about language delay or LD. For each of nine misconceptions, we explain what we know from research about the realities of that aspect of the language acquisition process among ELs in US schools.

*In Chapter 4*, we tackle the very real challenges classroom teachers face while teaching reading to their ELs. It is classroom teachers who most

#### 4 Why Do English Learners Struggle With Reading?

often first notice that a child is not progressing, and classroom teachers who may first suspect that a child might have LD. We explain what we know from research about how literacy instruction differs for ELs and focus on helping classroom teachers distinguish between second language acquisition and LD among ELs by explaining some of the struggles ELs face when learning to read in English.

*In Chapter 5 (new chapter),* we expand our discussions begun in Chapter 4 to include specific evidence-based practices found effective for teaching reading to ELs. We include a summary of the research, an overview of the methods, and detailed steps for easy application in the instructional environment.

*In Chapter 6,* we outline issues to consider when assessing ELs for possible special education placement. This chapter focuses on referral and assessment for instruction, eligibility, identification, and diagnostic purposes. We discuss the validity of tests for assessing the performance of ELs and point out the impact of regional and dialectal differences on test scores. In addition, the chapter stresses an ecological perspective to assessment, including authentic assessment.

*In Chapter 7,* we portray data-driven decision making in a multi-tiered model. We discuss factors teachers should consider when their ELs first show signs of struggling, and we provide charts in which we compare and contrast characteristics of LD, cultural diversity, and language acquisition. In addition, we offer practical guidelines regarding what kinds of data to consider when making decisions about students.

*In Chapter 8,* our conclusion, we focus on “putting the pieces together.” Using the analogy of a puzzle, we note how each previous chapter adds to our understanding of ELs who struggle with reading and how to determine whether they may have LD or are simply manifesting expected signs of the language acquisition process or cultural teachings. At the end of our conclusion, we provide a wrap-up of the topics explored in this book and discuss possible future directions for practitioners.

Overall, the text includes thirty tables and figures, and coverage of numerous evidence-based reading practices and other practical instructional suggestions for assessing and teaching ELs who struggle with reading. We hope that practitioners at both elementary and secondary levels of education will find the practical ideas, suggestions, guides, and checklists valuable resources as they continue with their own professional growth to best meet the educational needs of English learners with or without disabilities.

## NOTE

1. This book is based in part on a series of research papers presented at a 2004 conference on English language learners. This conference was held in Tempe, Arizona, and was cosponsored by the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) and Arizona State University, with support from the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This book is sponsored by NCCRESt. The second edition builds upon these efforts with expanded and updated research ideas, practices, and findings.

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