

Foreword

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Articulate and coherent communication skills in the language of the majority allow the individual who possesses them to more easily negotiate the world in which he or she lives. This is especially evident in the experiences of individuals born with significant hearing loss. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing are at a considerable disadvantage in learning to talk if they do not hear clearly enough to perceive the nuances of sound that make up spoken language.

Limitations of hearing aids available in the past created very real barriers to the acquisition of spoken language. Historically, efforts to develop spoken language in deaf children were met with more than occasional success. However, the enormity of the task often left children with such limited spoken language competence that they could communicate only with immediate family, teachers, and close family friends.

In years past, educators became specially trained and prepared to undertake this challenging task. Not surprisingly, the global advances in technology that have influenced our everyday lives have created opportunities for a new generation of deaf children to learn spoken language more easily by mitigating the effects of severe to profound hearing loss. Today's digital hearing aids and cochlear implants have provided unprecedented auditory access for the children who receive these devices. There are children for whom these devices are all they need to acquire spoken language; however, there remain a significant number of children with hearing loss who will require more from the teachers and clinicians with whom they work.

These are children who perhaps come to language learning somewhat later in life or who are challenged by processing or learning issues beyond the peripheral hearing loss. Auditory access alone, even with intentional guidance by the teacher and clinician, will not be sufficient for the acquisition of spoken language. These children will need more intentional instruction to launch their journey in spoken language learning. And, once underway, they will continue to benefit from the systematic application of the knowledge and skills involved in this instruction.

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It is our good fortune that authors Susan Easterbrooks and Ellen Estes have teamed up to create a text designed to assist teachers and speech and hearing professionals in developing spoken language in children with hearing loss. Geared specifically for the child for whom auditory access is not sufficient for language acquisition without intentional instruction, this text will be of particular benefit to the teacher or clinician working with a child who presents as “languageless.”

The authors’ combination of theory and practice in this book encourages novice teachers and speech-language pathologists to create a conceptual framework for the task of developing spoken language intentionally. At the same time it provides rich and practical examples of objectives that will lead to a child’s learning to talk. Just as a fledgling artist learns concepts of figure, ground, distance, and perspective as a prelude to drawing and painting, so too the novice speech and hearing professional will be exposed to concepts such as auditory brain tasks, listening and speaking skills, and external factors that will influence teaching and learning. Once armed with the conceptual framework, the reader is challenged to locate the intersection of these factors that represents the point at which any particular student stands in the journey to spoken language competence. The varying model aspects can be manipulated to assist the child in moving through the three dimensions of spoken language learning.

Susan and Ellen are to be commended for their thoughtful preparation of this text. The accessibility of the concepts presented through their framework will allow for precise communication between and among all those helping the child. As expert teachers of children with hearing loss and as experienced teacher educators, the authors demonstrate their own scientific knowledge and artistic skill in crafting this text to invite us to learn more about developing spoken language in children with hearing loss.

Preface

The ability to communicate with others develops normally and naturally for most young children unless something out of the ordinary occurs. A hearing loss is one of those out of the ordinary events that can make it difficult for children to learn to communicate. Spoken language is a very complicated task requiring our amazing brains to act as master coordinators of thoughts, sounds, and movements in what appears to be an effortless process. A hearing loss influences communication development. One tool we have for overcoming these influences is a well-prepared teacher. Another tool is an empowered parent. Finally, technological advances have made it more likely that children who are deaf and hard of hearing will hear well enough to develop spoken language. This book was written for the teachers who are in the important position of working with children who have hearing losses, whether they are regular educators, special educators, early interventionists, or specially trained teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. How you have come to be working with a deaf or hard of hearing child does not matter. What you can do about it does.

In this book, we focus specifically on young children who are learning spoken language and not sign language. American Sign Language (ASL) is a wonderful language that provides many deaf children with options to communicate richly and completely; however, it is not the focus of this book (for a comprehensive discussion of learning a signed language, see Easterbrooks and Baker, 2002).

There is an art and a science to imparting spoken language to children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The art comes in the creative ways we interact with a child to support the development of communication. In Part 1 of this book, you will learn numerous strategies for teaching spoken communication. We hope you will apply these artfully. There is also a science to intervening with deaf and hard of hearing children. In Part 2 you will learn about the science behind the art of teaching spoken communication to children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The better one understands the science, the better an artist he or she can become.