Preface

Our Purpose for Writing this Text

This text is for you, teachers, who are working toward becoming reading specialists. Our goal in constructing this book is to provide you with opportunities to apply the required knowledge and skills to enable you to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a reading specialist as defined by the International Reading Association Standards for Reading Professionals, particularly, that of a reading intervention teacher—one who provides intensive instruction to struggling readers, within or outside the students’ classrooms. It is also our intention to provide you with critical questions and introduce you to frameworks for thinking about diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties, and to bring these questions and frameworks alive through actual diagnostic procedures using authentic case studies, drawn from our experience and that of other reading specialists. We bring some new perspectives and illuminating insights to diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties. This book will extend and enhance your knowledge, skills and appreciation of the complexity of the intervention processes for unskilled readers and writers.

We also intend the book to serve as a resource to classroom teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and professional development providers in areas of diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties.

Our background for this book stems from our own experience as teachers, as reading specialists and literacy coaches, as researchers, and as professional development providers in schools and districts. Thus, we approach this book from both a theoretical and practical perspective. It is informed by current research on assessment, specifically, on diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties, and the extensive background and field practice of the authors. We hope that this book will ultimately contribute to the development of well-prepared reading professionals in assessing the reading and writing of their students and planning appropriate instruction.
Unique Features of the Book

1. The organization of the book and each chapter is straightforward, and considerate of our readers. We feature one of the six key principles of diagnosis in each chapter as framework for thinking about diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties.

2. We take a theoretical and practical approach to the presentation of each of the six principles of diagnosis.

3. Each chapter on a featured principle of diagnosis begins with an overview, followed by a set of critical questions to guide the reader, and a brief narrative description of the featured principle. The chapter then presents three authentic case studies that lend themselves to the application of the featured principle. The first case study models to the reader how the featured principle can be applied during the diagnostic process through a think-aloud narrated format from a reading specialist's perspective. The second case study uses a scaffold approach to learning, and the final case study serves as an independent practice case study. A summary is provided at the end of each chapter, including references and resources.

How the Book is Organized

On the whole, we have sequenced the book chapters in a way that we believe to be most satisfactory for presenting the six key principles, establishing frameworks and providing practice for diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties. It is also formatted to incorporate research based assessment approaches that enrich and extend dialogue on diagnosis.

The first chapter provides a brief description of each of the six key principles in diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties. In this chapter the reader is introduced to the components of a case study with detailed description of each component.

Chapter 2 focuses on Principle 1 of diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties: Diagnosis is a decision-making process. The following critical questions are addressed: What is involved in the decision-making process? What are the criteria in making appropriate decisions about a child during the diagnosis of
reading and language arts difficulties? How does a reading specialist approach the decision making during the data gathering process? How does a reading specialist approach decision making during the assessment process? How would you know if you have made a good decision as a reading specialist?

A case study of a male student at the intermediate level, with strong oral communication but inconsistent academic performance, is used to model the application of Principle 1. A second case study of a first grade bilingual female child, with limited emerging literacy competencies, is included for scaffold learning of Principle 1. Finally, a third case study of a middle-grade male student, who is being reevaluated for exit from special education, is included for the reading specialist to apply Principle 1 in independent practice.

Chapter 3 addresses Principle 2 of diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties: Diagnosis considers the whole child. It highlights the importance of diagnosing a child’s reading and language arts difficulties from different perspectives. Three case studies that present multiple factors contributing to a child’s reading and language arts difficulties are used to model the application of Principle 2, and to provide scaffold learning and independent practice. The first case study is of a 6th grade female student attending an urban alternative school and exhibiting reading difficulties with print, vocabulary and inferential questions. A second case study of a 3rd grade male student who lacks attention and reading progress is included for scaffold learning. Finally, the reader has opportunity to independently apply Principle 2 using a third case study of a withdrawn 8-year old female student who was referred by her teacher.

Critical questions that guide the understanding of this principle include: How can a child’s interests, strengths and abilities be utilized to help in planning instruction? What steps should be taken to ensure diagnosis of the whole child? What types of assessments and data can bring about a whole picture of the child? Who should be involved?

Chapter 4 presents Principle 3: Diagnosis is thorough and balanced. When is diagnosis thorough and balanced? Why must diagnosis be thorough and balanced? Why is it important to use multiple assessments throughout the diagnostic process? What are the values of formative and summative assessments? formal and informal assessments? What are the criteria for selecting materials for assessment? Why is it important to understand assessment information?
To answer these questions the chapter walks the reader through a detailed process of applying Principle 3 using a case study of a sixteen-year-old 9th grade male student whose reading ability is that of a third grader, and who receives assistive technology support in school and at home. Also included for scaffold learning is a second case study of a thirteen-year-old 8th grade female student whose score in a single word reading task is at the beginning 4th grade equivalency, and overall reading performance is at second to third grade level. The reader may apply Principle 3 independently using a third case study of a ten-year-old male 5th grader who has demonstrated positive attitude toward learning.

Chapter 5 focuses on Principle 4: Diagnosis is a team effort. A case study is used to model a team approach to diagnosis, and describes how a team approach can benefit the child. Critical questions include: Why is a team approach to diagnosis beneficial to the child? Who might be considered for diagnostic team? What are the characteristics of an effective diagnostic team? How can a diagnostic team acquire collaborative skills and become a better team?

A reading specialist walks the reader through a case study of a 2nd grade boy whose family recently immigrated to the states. The child has emotional, social and cultural adjustments to make, in addition to the English language. The reader also has opportunity to clarify their answers to these questions through scaffold learning and independent application of Principle 4 using two case studies. The second case study involves a 12th grade female who has been assigned to a low reading group; the third case study focuses on a 10th grade male whose content area teachers suspect does not have skills and strategies in reading comprehension expected of 3rd grader and has consistently scored either very low or failing in content area tests.

Chapter 6 discusses Principle 5: Effective communication is essential in diagnosis. Reading specialists are expected to be effective communicators. They should be able to effectively communicate information about the child to teachers, parents, primary caregivers, colleagues, and the child himself. Using a case study of a 4th grade ELL female student, this chapter demonstrates how a reading specialist might communicate information about the child in oral and written forms to different audiences. It also provides the reader insights into the importance of professional communication and the types of information that may be included. Additional case studies involving an 11th grade male student with special needs and a male 5th
grader who is reading at 2nd grade level are included to provide the reader with scaffold learning and independent practice.

Critical questions include: Why is effective communication essential in diagnosis? How can a reading specialist effectively communicate information about the child to various audiences? What kinds of information are appropriate for sharing for which audience?

Chapter 7 examines the utility of Principle 6: Diagnosis and remediation go hand in hand. How does diagnosis inform remediation? Why is it important to identify the match and mismatch between the student and his/her reading instruction? How does a reading specialist prioritize diagnostic information for instructional purposes?

Starting with the first case study of a 3rd grade male student it takes the reader through a complete process of diagnosis and remediation of reading and language arts difficulties in order to illustrate the relationship between diagnosis and remediation, and why it is relevant for both to go hand in hand. Then the reader’s understanding of the insights gained from the first case study narrative is enhanced through scaffold learning using a second case study of an 8th grade female student. The chapter concludes with a final case study of a 6th grade ELL male student to provide the reader with opportunity to apply Principle 6 as an independent practice.

The remainder of the text includes additional case studies of a diverse range of students to provide the reader with opportunities to apply their in-depth understanding of the six principles of diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties, resources, and references.

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