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Educating Deaf Learners: A Book Review

Knors, H., & Marschark, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Educating deaf learners: Creating a global evidence base*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Pp. 688; ISBN: 9780190215194. \$98.50.

Evidence-based practice in the classroom environment is now the norm in the field of education and current conceptualization of educational research, yet remains a relatively new phenomenon and practice in special education fields such as educating deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) students ([Luckner, Sebald, Cooney, Young, & Muir, 2005](#)). The subtitle of this book, *Creating a Global Evidence Base*, was intriguing enough to merit further scrutiny. A global deaf education network, as this textbook proposes, supports interconnectivity within deaf education programs across the nation. The concept of globalizing this network does seem to be a more current one and one that is exciting for Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) to explore.

Purpose of the Review

According to Spencer and Marschark (2010), due to the low-incidence of deafness and the relatively short history of educating students in the USA who are DHH, current research in evidenced-based practice that addresses within group diversity in this population can be sparse. Preparing pre-service deaf education teacher candidates to meet the needs of their students in a way that acknowledges and incorporates current practice, accountability, standards, and evidence-based outcomes is a challenge. This book review is written through the lens of a postsecondary EPP faculty body that is exploring current and relevant literature on evidence-based best practice in deaf education for possible program curriculum adoptions. Globally networking deaf education is a phenomenon for which future educators might adopt as a

foundational practice, allowing for a more widespread commitment to the betterment of the profession and the quality of services provided to students who are DHH.

Scope and Relevance of the Text

The editors of this textbook are well-established researchers in the field of deaf education, which lends credibility and trustworthiness before even opening the book. The contributors are a unique set of authors, most of which are unfamiliar to the reviewer, as they are globally diverse, spanning multiple continents and countries. This offers a much-needed breadth to the field of deaf education; it is hoped that gleaning an international scope of understanding and knowledge will shed light and fill in gaps in this field of study to more adequately meet the current trends, norms, and paradigm shifts in education. Studying the pedagogy and practice in deaf education across the globe is not normative in American institutions of higher learning for this field, but an exciting and intriguing possibility presented by these editors and authors.

Immediately, the editors of this text acknowledge the growing trend and expectation of evidence-based practice, as well as the lagging-behind that has taken place in special education and deaf education over the years in the USA. This is appreciated and shows that the editors understand the historical context of the field and do not offer a temporary bandage of sorts to fix current problematic areas; rather, approaching evidence-based practice and scholarly research from an historical perspective and acknowledging the unique characteristics of deaf students and deaf education offers a much more comprehensive outlook for future practice and growth. The initial acknowledgement in the text of the history of the field and the resulting implications, practices, and theories allows the reader a comfortable and promising place to land before beginning to dive into the contents of the book.

A Review of the Textbook Content

It is the opinion of the editors and authors in this volume that data should support decision making and that evidence-based approaches are necessary to accomplish this outcome. Since the reviewer of this book is charged with preparing pre-service educators to teach students who are DHH in this current evidence-based environment, knowing that the authors support and understand this thrust is a check-mark in the positive column for adoption of this book into program curriculum. As previously stated, what is most appealing about this text is the fact that it calls for a global collaboration in the field of deaf education to fill in some of these gaps that exist between theory and practice. This is a unique research approach in the field and one that the reviewer of this text has not previously encountered. The attraction to this perspective is that it stimulates the development of new and fresh ideas for reflection and discussion, leading to more effective and collective problem-solving, a program goal for most postsecondary research institutions.

The preface alone reassures stakeholders in the field that there is no *one-size-fits-all* mentality when it comes to educating the diverse population of students who are DHH. The editors, thankfully, do not “choose sides” on many of the common dichotomous and emotionally divisive issues in deaf education (e.g., manual versus oral communication, cochlear implantation versus non-implantation). The obvious openness with regard to modality of communication, related technology developments, theory, and pedagogical practice is a breath of fresh air in a field where heated debate and stark disagreement is rampant (Spencer & Marschark, 2010). It is further appreciated that the editors and authors foster a sense of open communication, offering a platform for which stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, educators, administrators, and policy-

makers) can exchange understanding and knowledge and fill in gaps in order to see growth and forward momentum in the field.

The comprehensiveness of this text likely prevents an adoption as a sole textbook for any one course, as it is too expansive to be pigeon-holed into one particular course. However, the vast array of topics is beneficial in that it offers an EPP an ample selection of portions of the text to parallel and supplement specific course goals and objectives. To demonstrate the far-reaching topics covered, a list of the five thematic units is included below:

- Part One: A Changing World for Deaf Learners
- Part Two: Language, Literacy, and Numeracy
- Part Three: Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Development
- Part Four: Technology for Learning and Development
- Part Five: Learning and Educational Content

The plethora of globally relevant topics within these five parts include: characteristics of students who are DHH, education attainment and academic success, socialization, language and literacy development and instruction, research on the brain-science of cognition, common stressors for students who are DHH and their families, mental health issues, advancements in technology and implications (academically, emotionally, socially, etc.) due to those advancements, challenges in assessment and standardized testing, and even specific manual signing languages and systems from various nations. The issues and topics discussed span such a wide range that professionals in many fields would glean valuable information from this text. Professional educators, those in the medical field, mental health practitioners, school administrators, and the already-mentioned postsecondary EPPs are all beneficiaries of this volume.

Although there is some information peppered throughout the text with regard to educator preparation, it *is* lean on including information from other EPPs on an international scale. As previously stated, this review was written from the perspective of faculty in such programs. It would be beneficial for this text to have included more information on how EPPs across the world are preparing future practitioners in researching, dissecting, implementing, and exploring evidence-based practices in deaf education. In other words, how are EPPs in various countries utilizing the research contained in this excellent, comprehensive text? This insight would allow for greater program efficacy of EPPs, resulting in more highly qualified and trained educators.

Summary and Recommendation

The reviewer did appreciate that many chapters in this textbook offered a section to include next steps for possible research avenues, opportunities for collaboration, and stakeholder action plans to move the paucity of the current research in deaf education to a level of abundance and advancement. The appeal of these call-to-action sections in regard to EPPs is that this text could foster a sense of scholarly research in deaf education early in the careers of educators of DHH students. When preservice educators are aware of what is occurring on a more comprehensive and global scale, similarities in gaps are more easily identified and magnified, hopefully spurring a passion for empirical research in the field.

Overall, this textbook would make an excellent adoption for Deaf and Hard of Hearing EPPs. The views expressed therein are unbiased, which is refreshing. Voices of dissent were allowed equal access to the reader. The polarity that exists in the field regarding how best to educate students who are DHH *is* addressed in this book; issues are presented in such a way as to respect all schools of thought and meant to bring the reader and practitioner to the conclusion that in order to best serve this unique and diverse population of students, there is a call for open-

mindedness, collaboration, and willingness to network to problem-solve. This text is a catalyst for growth in the field of deaf education.

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