

The Truth is Out There

Spencer, P. E. & Marschark, M. (2010). *Evidence-Based Practice in Educating Students Who Are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing*. New York: Oxford University Press. Paperback. 240 pages. \$37.95.

This is a compilation and analysis of research in deaf education. Its narrative combines both descriptive and interpretive perspectives on what is “known” about factors that affect the educational outcomes of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. To be “true” has to be supported by valid empirical evidence. Research comes in many forms and from diverse traditions, both qualitative and quantitative. The relative strength of research paradigms is considered in a way that echoes the field of education as a whole: anchored in experimental design. Although very few “gold standard” randomized control designs exist in deaf education research, it is against this standard that the relative strength of the research literature is compared. Describing what is true, versus what is assumed, is why Spencer and Marschark embark on a very detailed analysis of research in the field.

As one might expect, the chapter foci are language, literacy, cognition, achievement in mathematics and science, educational placement, etc. Previous volumes have framed their discussion around training educational professionals or providing information for parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children. In contrast, this book contextualizes itself in inferences that can be drawn from empirical research in the field. This context is most helpful when reading the extensive details about the participants, methods, and procedures from a large number of research studies. Summaries at the end of each chapter provide a snapshot of the comprehensive analysis in the body of the chapter. Evaluations of causal connections between factors and outcomes are often couched as tentative and rest upon cumulative findings across studies. These summaries are primarily meant to *inform* practice, not to make

prescriptive guidelines about what teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing children should look like.

The tone of this book is quite formal, yet readable and accessible. The approach is tempered by a need to “stick to the facts” without extensive examples from practice or ways to apply the information. Such formality is perhaps essential when analyzing data from others’ research because interpreting empirical findings requires using a specific language and measured prose. Spencer and Marschark do a good job in using the linguistic parameters and evidence-based criteria they set forward in the beginning of the book. One never feels as if they have a personal agenda or have somehow viewed the data inconsistently across studies or areas. Debunking assumptions (and there are some surprises) is never a neutral process. The authors give sufficient context to their conclusions such that one knows why the statements are plausibly true given the information available.

The intended audience appears to be those who are interested in digging into the research evidence in a rigorous and thorough manner. It is also a compendium for educators and the next generation of scholar-practitioners. This book may create both hopeful and anxious feelings—hopeful to know the accomplishments and yet anxious to see how much further we need to go to have a comprehensive research base to support educational practice. The purpose of this book, one that the authors certainly achieved, is to view the available research findings in pursuit of knowing what is true about educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students. For those working to support academic achievement in this population, this book is an invaluable resource.

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