

MODY, M., & SILLIMAN, E. R. (EDS.). (2008)

Brain, behavior, and learning in language and reading disorders

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Brain, Behavior, and Learning in Language and Reading Disorders, edited by Maria Mody and Elaine Silliman, is a comprehensive resource designed to provide current research and theory on language-based learning disorders. The authors assert that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the interaction between behaviors, brain functioning, and environmental variables in understanding cognitive development. This book is intended to promote an integration of these factors in order to facilitate a more functional understanding of the development of language and reading disorders. This useful resource has many strengths, including its organization, the quantity and quality of information, and the integration of theories; however, there are also areas for improvement.

Mody and Silliman have organized the book into three main sections: new frameworks for understanding language and reading disorders, brain-behavior relationships, and the role of experience. The editors provide a summarizing introduction to each section that highlights the main points and encourages critical thinking about the information and theories described. This organization is helpful, as it prompts readers to critically evaluate the material and consider the implications of integrating it with the preceding and subsequent sections and helps the reader conceptualize a more unified integration of the relevant theories in the field. The introductory chapters also make it easy to identify particular topics within each section, which is helpful to theorists and researchers looking for a more complete understanding of all factors contributing to learning disorders. This helps to facilitate further discussion and progress in integrating the various theories, thereby promoting the stated goal of the book.

Mody and Silliman have included articles from prominent scholars in the field of language disorders in the book. Each article is well written, easy to understand, and complemented by explanatory diagrams, charts, and figures. To stimulate critical thinking on each topic, the articles integrate current knowledge in the field with subsequent theories for further investigation. The amount of information in Mody and Silliman's book is impressive, and it is clear that much effort was made to ensure the quality of these contributions.

An additional strength of the book is the encouragement of the integration of nature and nurture theories in understanding language-based learning disorders. The authors assert that current knowledge in this field is simplistic and focuses too much on either brain localization or environmental variables without progressing toward a cohesive view.

Although the book has many assets, there are also some areas for improvement. First, it should be noted that the book may not be a useful guide for practitioners who are looking for information on how to assess and treat disorders of learning and language. Instead, it is more theoretical in nature and focuses on conceptualizing and understanding the development of these disorders. While this is certainly useful knowledge for clinicians to have, the book does not provide much information on the application of this knowledge in clinical practice. It also may be challenging for beginning-level graduate students, as it provides a more in-depth, critical view of the field and is written in scientific language that may be difficult for individuals without extensive training in the subject to understand. Also for this reason, the book may be inappropriate as a resource for parents or families of children with language and reading disorders. A final critique is that the chapters provided by Mody and Silliman at the beginning of each section may be inadequate in promoting a cohesive understanding of the factors contributing to language and reading disorders. The three sections may leave the reader feeling as though there are separate and distinct areas in the field. More extensive discussion of the integration of these areas would be useful, although the authors do note that the purpose of the book is to fuel new ideas and thinking regarding the field, rather than to present a completely integrated new theory.

Overall, this book represents a good start at fostering more integration in the field of language and reading disorders and encourages a cohesive understanding in an organized, informative, and stimulating manner. Although there are some considerations to make in the application of this book, Mody and Silliman's innovative look at this field makes it an excellent resource for professionals. The book is sure to promote further research and discussion that eventually will lead to progress and a better understanding of the interaction between biology, experience, and individual factors in the development of language and reading disorders.

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