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THE TEACHING OF

LISTENING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

(TITLE)

BY

LETHA MATTINGLY

PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION  
AND PREPARED IN COURSE

470. LANGUAGE ARTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction to the problem

In educational circles a classification that has been generally accepted points out that, within the language arts program, the field of communications is made up of four skills: the two receptive ones, listening and reading, and the two expressive ones, speaking and writing.

"Can a listening personality and capability be developed?"<sup>1</sup>

Listening is a complex ability and can no longer be ignored as an important part of our language arts program.

In this paper, this writer is concerned with the need to teach children to listen with greater efficiency so as to enhance the learning processes of the student. Of concern also is the ability to teach effective listening as a skill to be included in the elementary education curriculum.

#### Importance of study

Listening is becoming nearly as important as it was before man learned to communicate through written symbols. The reasons for direct

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<sup>1</sup>Stanford E. Taylor, What Research Says to the Teacher-Listening (Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association of the National Educational Association), p. 3.

study of the listening skills and of methods by which they can be taught are pointed out by the following statements:

Today's world is an oral world. Modern technology made it possible to talk and to listen to people in the next city, in the neighboring country, and around the world. Through the use of radio, telephone, and television, as well as in face to face conversation thousands of words are pounded daily upon the human ear. . . . Therefore, the world in which we live demands a new emphasis on listening and speaking skills.<sup>2</sup>

Too long we have

assumed that because someone does a lot of listening he will be fairly good at it. Unfortunately for such reasoning, practice is helpful only when we practice skills, not faulty; and with complex skills the instinctive or natural things we do are often faulty.<sup>3</sup>

The methods and time to be used for the teaching of listening is a point which has caught the attention of many educators. All agree that there is a lag in such classroom instruction. Anderson says:

Except in isolated instances, virtually the only instruction in listening that children and young people receive in the school is the quite useless admonition 'pay attention' or 'listen carefully'. Listening at all levels has been the forgotten language art for many generations.<sup>4</sup>

When a comparison is made of the amount of research and writing and the available helps for instruction in reading to the much lesser

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<sup>2</sup>M. Ardell Elwell, Teaching and Learning in the Language Arts (A School Department Newsletter, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ralph G. Nichols, "Listening is a Way of Learning," Teaching Trends in the Language Arts (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>N. R. Dixon, "Listening: Most Neglected of the Language Arts", Elementary English, V. 41 (March, 1964), p. 7.

amount of material on listening, one reason for the classroom neglect is apparent.

In a lecture given by Nichols at Eastern Illinois University, he reports that:

Before 1951, over 5000 publications had been released on reading while only one such article on listening had been published. The teacher has had a far greater advantage in available helps for the teaching of reading. Now that educators have realized that the child can be taught listening skills as well as reading skills, degrees in listening are being passed out by teacher training schools.<sup>5</sup>

These and other identified facts about oral communications call for, in some manner, the inclusion of instruction for the improvement of listening in our elementary curriculum. It is here that the pupil spends "more time listening to directions, clarification of points by the teacher, and the class discussion than he devotes to speaking, reading, or writing."<sup>6</sup>

#### Definition of terms

Listening - The term listening may be given a score of definitions, but perhaps more diversity will be found in the ideas held by most laymen as compared to those suggested by educators.

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<sup>5</sup>Ralph G. Nichols, "Listening," Lecture given at Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois, 1964.

<sup>6</sup>Richard S. Hampleman, "Comparison of Listening and Reading Comprehension of Fourth and Sixth Grade Pupils," Elementary English, V. XXXV (January, 1958), p. 50.

Somewhere I have heard this statement, "The world is full of a great want, not for good preachers but for good hearers."<sup>7</sup> This may have been a layman talking or someone who had not yet attempted a careful analysis of the terms listening and hearing. If an inquiry were to be made among laymen concerning the importance of teaching listening in the public schools, a great number would concede that the listening skill is determined by "hearing acuity and intelligence, and that the schools can do little about either one."<sup>8</sup> Many irate parents when they say to their inattentive offspring, "Do you hear me?" really mean "Are you listening to me?" If the child is within the distance of spoken sound and has no hearing defect, he usually does hear. Why there is often no response is one factor which has prompted the need to differentiate between listening and hearing.

As informed persons who have studied the field of communications, Greene and Petty have asserted that listening is more than hearing.

We regularly hear many sounds to which we are not actively listening. Listening implies more than hearing. Listening involves giving active and conscious attention to sounds of auditory expression for the purpose of gaining some meaning from it. We may listen to someone speaking, to the music of a fine orchestra, or to the traffic sounds outside our window. In each case, if we are really listening, we expect or may be expected to make some reaction to the sounds we hear. If we merely hear the sounds, no overt reaction may take place. We just merely comprehend the sounds we hear and relate them to our past experiences. We must give attention to what is being presented or some important detail may be missed and our comprehension of the situation may suffer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Source unknown.

<sup>8</sup>Ralph G. Nichols, "Teaching of Listening," Education Digest, V. XV (November, 1949), p. 34.

<sup>9</sup>Harry A. Greene and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Allyn and Bacon Inc., Boston), p. 87.

Babcock has this to say about listening:

Most of us are on the receiving end of oral communication about 40% of our working hours. We are not actually listening all of this time, but we are exposed to the spoken word. Listening is a verbal skill which requires thoughtful, constructive, purposeful, and critical powers of mind.<sup>10</sup>

Babcock has also identified three kinds of auditory reception and explained the reactions of people as they use each type of reception in a listening situation--passive, spasmodic, and submissive.

Passive reception is best described as 'in one ear and out the other.' Spasmodic reception is 'off and on, hit and miss, touch and go.' Submissive reception is 'hook line and sinker' reception. Some people sit quietly and offer no over resistance to spoken discourse but at the same time do not actually 'tune in' on what is being said. Others 'tune in' from time to time as interest directs, but take frequent mental side trips and wind up with a very hazy and foggy notion of what was transmitted. Still others prepare religiously a transcript of every word that is uttered but do not bother to assemble into ideas or to question the validity and practicality of the speakers convictions.<sup>11</sup>

Another attempt to explain the listening skill is as follows:

Effective listening is similar to working a jigsaw puzzle. Words, sentences, and phrases must be properly notched together by conscious, disciplined, and directed effort to produce a complete picture or idea. The pieces or verbal elements do not automatically fall into place. They must be carefully and constructively managed.<sup>12</sup>

For an effective listening skill, the term "auding" has been used by a number of writers. Most of these writers have classified

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<sup>10</sup>Merton C. Babcock, The Harper Handbook of Communicative Skills (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1957), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Babcock, loc. cit., p. 14.



the skills of auditory communication into a three-stage process:

- 1) hearing, the process by which speech sounds in the form of sound waves are received and modified by the ear.
- 2) listening, the process of becoming aware of sound sequences, and
- 3) auding, the process by which the continuous flow of words is translated into meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Russell has explained these three stages of auditory communication as levels of listening which may be indicated to the young student.

No one level is necessarily better than any other, but the following list of levels range from exact to detailed, from aimless to purposeful, from passive to creative:

#### Hearing

1. Hearing sounds or words but not reacting beyond bare recognition (e.g., knowing that Joey is speaking).
2. Intermittent listening--turning the speaker on and off in aimless fashion, as the mind wanders (e.g., hearing one fact about sled dogs but none of the rest of the report on Eskimos).
3. Half-listening--following the train of discussion but only closely enough to seize the first opportunity to have one's own say (e.g., not really hearing what your classmate did over the week-end but waiting to tell, during the conversation period, how you caught a fish).

#### Listening

4. Listening passively with little or no observable response. (The child who constantly 'glues' his eyes on his teacher but offers no reactions in words or facial expression may or may not be responding).
5. Narrow listening in which the main significance or emphasis is lost as the listener selects details which may be relatively unimportant but which are familiar or agreeable to him. (A junior high school pupil agrees heartily with two points made by a panel speaker but disregards other contributions on all sides of a question).

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

## Auding

6. Listening and forming associations from related items from one's own experience. (A second grader notes the relationship between the word 'hound' and 'found'; a fifth grader who has listened to the report on the gold rush of '49 tells of his visit to a ghost mining town in the West, relating his account to items in the report).
7. Listening closely enough to a talk or report to get main ideas and supporting details, to follow directions, etc. (An eighth-grade pupil notes that the main topic of the report is the cause of the American Revolution and lists four such causes).
8. Listening critically. (A sixth-grade pupil gives evidence of critical listening when he asks for more data on the statement made by a classmate that most South American countries have democratic governments).
9. Appreciative and creative listening, with genuine mental and emotional participation. (A pupil responds to the humor of the Benet poem 'John James Audubon,' and suggests several other poems that the group might read orally from The Book of Americans by the Benets, and tells why these poems are exciting to him.)<sup>11</sup>

By some, listening has been described as reading with one's ears. This is perhaps a not very complete but simple definition. However, when given critical thought the term "reading with one's ears" has connotations not analogous with reading from the printed page. After the word has been spoken, unless it has been recorded in some manner, there is no opportunity to review. Listening must be a more concentrated act of receptive communication than reading from a printed page where the symbols remain to be reconsidered and analyzed at the leisure of the reader.

Although listening is commonly referred to as one of the receptive

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<sup>11</sup>David H. Russell and Elizabeth F. Russell, Listening Aids Through the Grades (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbus University, New York, 1959), p. 1.

phases of the language, this generalization should not classify listening as a passive activity.

Whether the child is reading or listening, he is actively engaging in the perception and comprehension of facts. He is consciously or emotionally reacting to them and relating what he reads or hears to his experimental background. He may be formulating or deciding on a course of action.<sup>15</sup>

Attend - The mind is intent, earnestly bent, or fixed upon the thought.

#### Methods of research

Articles written for educational periodicals provided a great amount of material for purposeful selectivity when considering a listening program. Professional books, curriculum guides, articles by educators on the development of a satisfactory language arts program, and suggestions for listening activities from elementary language arts textbooks have proven helpful in determining the usefulness and need of the teaching of progressive listening skills.

Many studies have been made "where specific listening skills were emphasized, significant gains were made and, in some studies, other communicative skills were also improved."<sup>16</sup> In one such study, made by Shepherd in the Mattoon and Charleston, Illinois school systems,

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<sup>15</sup>Viola Theman and Woodson W. Fishback, co-editors, English Language Communications, "Listening," (The subject field series, Bulletin C-6, October, 1961), Illinois Curriculum Program, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield, Illinois, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Taylor, loc. cit., p. 18.

a marked improvement was made after only two weeks of special training in the art of listening. Using the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP), both initial and final tests were given. Shepherd reports that:

. . . it is evident that both the grade five and six pupils raised their mean score and their median score on the second test. The final test median for both grades was 1.39 higher than the initial median. Also, the final mean score was 3.03 higher than the initial test score.<sup>17</sup>

Other materials from the Eastern Illinois University and elementary libraries indicate the growing concern toward the need for a more specific emphasis in the teaching of critical and effective listening.

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<sup>17</sup>Terry R. Shepherd, "A Study of the Effectiveness of Listening in Grades Five and Six." (Unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of Education, Eastern Illinois University, 1962), p. 44.

## CHAPTER II

### FACTORS INFLUENCING LISTENING HABITS

When considering listening abilities and the possibilities of training for improved listening skills, the factors influencing listening habits must be reviewed. Many such factors can affect the development of the listening habits of children. The schoolroom is the ideal place to determine these influences and to control their ineffectiveness as much as is possible.

#### Intelligence

In a consensus of a number of university staff members concerning the lack of listening instruction, many of them say that "probably accounting for our neglect has been the widespread assumption that practice and intelligence are the only significant components of efficient listening."<sup>18</sup> Rational thinking would point to the fact that the child has more opportunity to practice listening than any other skill of communication. Long before the ability to utter intelligible sounds has been mastered, an infant may listen for the answer to his cries in the sound of footsteps coming into the room, or the sound of Mother's voice from an adjoining room may be all the assurance needed

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<sup>18</sup>Nichols, "Teaching of Listening," p. 34.

to quiet an unhappy youngster. Listening can surely be classified as the first communicative skill to be used. During the first several years of his life, the child has "depended heavily on talking and listening for his contact with those about him and for his information about the world in which he lives."<sup>19</sup>

As in most skills, individual differences in listening abilities will be found within each class. The slower student usually prefers listening, thus his listening skills may be more fully developed than his more intelligent classmate. As a slow learner

he depends on the special attributes of listening for much of his understanding. He is assisted in interpreting content by the speaker's appearance, gestures, facial expressions, and manner of delivery all of which contribute color and interest and also add to the meaning of the words. By comparison the print in a book lies noncommittal on the page.<sup>20</sup>

However, these slower students may also be more easily distracted than more advanced students and may possess fewer advanced listening skills than the child whose capacity for learning is average or superior in other areas. A child's ability to attend is one of the greatest factors influencing his listening comprehension. If the child does not comprehend, his attention span will be short. Comprehension is possible only within the experience of the listener. Lack of comprehension may stem from cultural deprivation or from limited potential ability.

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<sup>19</sup>National Council of Teachers of English, Language Arts for Today's Children (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), p. 106.

<sup>20</sup>Taylor, loc. cit., p. 16.

## Experiences

One of the best evidences the school has that most learning is done through listening is the background experiences so apparent in the beginner's language habits. "Children with siblings tend to develop poorer language habits than those without."<sup>21</sup> Other indications of the power of listening comes from homes where good music is appreciated. Such homes usually produce children who are able to interpret to a greater degree the sounds of the symphony. Children who have lived far from the sounds of the city in a wooded area learn early not to fear the sonorous tones of the bullfrogs chorus from the nearby pond, or the call of the screech owl from the darkness. Under the same conditions the city child learns not to fear the noises of traffic or the scream of the siren.

These last two references may be the first discriminatory acts of listening. The reaction to certain sounds has early become an established pattern in given situations. The power to listen develops from infancy through all of the complicated aspects of effective adult auditory reception. The motivation for attentive listening comes largely from background experiences. The lack of opportunity for leisurely analysis of oral communications requires at least some knowledge of the topic under consideration.

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<sup>21</sup>Hampleman, loc. cit.

### Emotions

Emotional reaction may affect listening interpretations. It has been stated that "disciplined, coerced, and captured audiences are often hostile audiences."<sup>22</sup> Certainly a child with a general dislike for classroom activities is not emotionally composed, but is likely to present a spirit of resignation to most oral presentations. Over stimulation may be equally detrimental to the listening lesson. The child who is too eager to express his own ideas about a subject being presented or discussed will not be able to gain new insights from another speaker.

Nichols has listed a number of emotions that prevent the listening process: "grief, joy, anger, self-consciousness, fear, worry, laziness. Chewing gum disturbs some, [as does] stormy weather, certain color combinations on the wall, seated among enemies, and toothache."<sup>23</sup> All these may be present in any heterogeneous grouping such as is found in the classroom.

### Environment

The atmosphere of the classroom is the responsibility of the teacher to control, change and develop as various opportunities arise. To assure attention in the typical child listener, a list of conditions to be met has been given by Robert Canfield:

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<sup>22</sup>Babcock, loc. cit., p. 251.

<sup>23</sup>Ralph O. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens, Are You Listening? (McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., New York, 1957), p. 75.



1. Adequate physical conditions are provided.
  - (a) Comfort in terms of temperature, lighting conditions, and seating arrangements allow full concentration on the experiences at hand.
  - (b) The auditory experience is of adequate volume and tonal quality (the teacher's voice is not excluded from this provision).
2. The experience at hand is adjusted to the general interest and intellectual level of the children.
3. The purpose of the experiment is understood and accepted by the listener.
4. Opportunities for expressing one's views are interspersed with listening to the contributions of others.
5. Visual and auditory distractions are minimized.
6. Good rapport between the listener and the speaker is established.
7. There is abundance and variety in the type of experiences a child is expected to attend to.<sup>24</sup>

It is true that some environmental factors are beyond teacher control. In the school located close to noisy construction activities or adjacent to a busy highway, it may be difficult to find quiet times for concentrated listening periods. Here the task of providing interesting and challenging materials is greater and scheduling the listening activities at the more opportune time may be a problem for the teacher. Room temperature cannot always be satisfactorily controlled. Here, too, scheduling and activities need special consideration.

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<sup>24</sup>Robert Canfield, "Approaches to Listening Improvement," Elementary English, V. XXXV (January-December, 1958), p. 526.

### Physical state of the listener

As in all learning situations, the physical well-being of the learner is an important determinant in the overall results of the efforts put forth by both the teacher and the student.

Children who are undernourished, tired from lack of sleep, or have some physical weakness which requires medication during class hours may not be alert to the presentations by the teacher or the discussion of his classmates. The most important factor concerning physical conditions and listening is the hearing ability of the listener. Frequent auditory checks are a must among young children, and more especially so if any signs of consistent inattention is apparent.

After determining there is no hearing loss, all teachers should be clearly aware of the factors which enable a person to attend and concentrate. To reassert these factors, which include more than the physical state of the listener, these suggestions by Taylor sum up the necessary requirements for planned oral instruction:

The general mental and physical well-being of the listener; his acquired attitudes toward listening and learning; learned ability to focus his attention; content must not be too difficult, but must be challenging.<sup>25</sup>

### Attitude of teacher

In reviewing conditions detrimental to a rewarding listening program, some disturbing personal emotions such as grief, joy, anger,

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<sup>25</sup>Taylor, loc. cit., p. 10.

worry, fear and self consciousness may have been brought into the classroom and caused by outside environmental influences. In many of these circumstances, the classroom teacher can do little to remove the causes of such emotional disturbances, but effects which prevent the child from attending to classroom activities may be alleviated by the supervising person.

Teaching is as much listening as telling. We listen to discover interests and needs. Those trained in non-directive guidance know how important it is for the therapist to listen. The psychologist listens a great deal as the patient talks. A good salesman listens to discover what customers want. The wise teacher listens to encourage the expression of children. At times a teacher listens because a child, or parent, needs an audience for a personal concern.<sup>26</sup>

"Take time to listen" and "be attentive" are two admonitions the considerate teacher may well heed. The teacher may ask herself: "a) 'What kind of auding do I do myself?' b) 'In the classroom, am I usually talking or do I often listen?'"<sup>27</sup> "She should be highly sensitive to the great truth that most teachers talk too much."<sup>28</sup> By their own actions teachers must indicate to their students that they believe good listening habits are important.

Where there is a fear of listening caused by repeated admonitions to which the child for some reason may be unable to respond, this fear

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<sup>26</sup>Paul S. Anderson, Language Skills in Elementary Education (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1964), pp. 85-86.

<sup>27</sup>Russell and Russell, loc. cit., p. 58.

<sup>28</sup>Verna D. Anderson, Paul S. Anderson, Francis Ballantine, and Virgil M. Howes, Readings in the Language Arts (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1964), p. 63.

can be eliminated by the teacher's refraining from "nagging." Consistently saying things that the child does not want to hear will cause him to develop a habit of "closing his ears" when the teacher speaks. Many opportunities for learning have been lost to the student when the teacher talked when he should have been listening, or observing as another person in the class is talking. The reason for poor attention and concentration is often found not within the students attitudes but is a fault of the teacher.

In his relationship with parents or other adult supervision with whom the children are in daily contact, the teacher may emphasize his self-responsibility to the listening program by recalling and pointing out the two elements set apart by Nichols and Cashman as related to the teaching of listening.

1. Expressed attitudes toward listening and oral communication on the part of adults with whom the young person is in close contact.
2. The observable listening habits of those same adults.

The implication that listening is primarily an asset for the student, not the teacher, always should be made carefully.<sup>29</sup>

If the above pre-requisites are developed to the best ability of the listening instructor, the results will most likely be a "learning while listening" situation.

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<sup>29</sup> Ralph Nichols and Paul Cashman, "The Approval Factor in Listening," Education, V. LXXX (January, 1960), pp. 269-270.

## CHAPTER III

### LISTENING PROGRAMS

Witty has found that "children on an average spend over three hours per day seeing and listening to television programs."<sup>28</sup> During his day outside of school there are scout leaders, public speakers, preachers, peer members, and characters in movies all demanding to be heard. In such a deluge, most often only the school can offer help that will enable the child to select, reject, understand, and use this torrent of words poured over him by a well-meaning society. There is much concern today about the most effective way children can be taught to listen to this world of sounds and decide what use can be made of what they hear.

First consideration should be given to the fact that all listening is not done in the same manner or for the same purpose. How does one listen to the song of a bird, the rippling of water in a lazy brook, or the rustling of wind through his favorite shade tree? The purpose here may be for full enjoyment, the manner relaxed and restful.

Another type of sound could include the music of the symphony, a beautiful voice singing one's favorite songs, or the words of a dramatic performer. Here the purpose could also be for enjoyment or

entertainment, and the manner may still be relaxed and restful. Yet the objective here may be carried one step further and take on the form of critical listening as the listener decides whether the performers are doing as well as had been expected. Also the motivation for listening could be altered by the reason for attendance at such a performance. Listening will probably be done more carefully and evaluation will be more effective if the emotional mood of the listener is conducive to such a performance.

When listening to a political lecture, a news reporter, a sales talk, or a discussion group, is listening to these different speakers done with the same intensity and interest? If there is to be intensive listening in each situation, there must be a feeling of need to attend to what is being presented before the auditory senses can awaken the thought mechanisms and make the spoken words meaningful to the listener. The one reacts to any situation is a good indication as to the effect upon his thinking which has been created by the events perceived. As previously stated in this paper, listening may be expected to produce reaction or it has not fulfilled the objectives of oral communication.

### Objectives

Distinct reaction to the spoken word may be the factor which most effectively determines the objectives of a well planned listening program. Considering the many different listening situations in which the child will find himself, in the elementary curriculum, the following list of objectives seem to be of prime importance.

1. To develop the ability to listen appreciatively by showing courtesy to the speaker; by deriving enjoyment from listening to the speakers, music, drama, and the sounds of nature.
2. To develop the ability to listen carefully and thoughtfully in order to follow directions, find answers to questions, grasp new ideas and interests.
3. To develop the ability to listen critically in order to evaluate information and ideas on the basis of authenticity, quality, and purpose; to draw conclusions; to recognize bias.<sup>30</sup>

To be able to reach these objectives a brief list of the skills involved provide clues for instructional opportunities. Pratt and Greene have tabulated the following listening comprehension skills:

- I. Word perception.
  - A. Recall of meaning.
  - B. Deduction of meanings of unknown words.
- II. Comprehension of ideas.
  - A. Noting details.
  - B. Following directions.
  - C. Organizing into main and subordinate ideas.
  - D. Selecting information pertinent to specific topic.
  - E. Detecting clues that show the speakers trend of thought.
- III. Using ideas to build understanding.
  - A. Evaluating an expressed point of view or fact in relation to previous learning.
  - B. Making justifiable references.<sup>31</sup>

#### Types of programs

A question often asked by elementary teachers concerns an already crowded schedule. When can I find time to add another area of specialized instruction to my classroom activities. There is need for

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<sup>30</sup>Babcock, loc. cit., p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>Anderson, Anderson, Ballentine, and Hawes, loc. cit., p. 67.

acknowledgment of the fact that although children will achieve a certain growth in listening from daily classroom activities, greater improvement will be apparent when a planned program of listening learning is provided.

By some, a regularly scheduled training program is thought to be necessary in order to assure the practice required to master listening and auding skills. Others feel that these skills can be taught in all classroom activities, with special emphasis in the language arts program. This type of listening training program can be a planned procedure by systematically including throughout the language arts program those activities which provide training in listening and auding.

The opinion of Mariam Wilt regarding auditory skills is that:

The teaching of listening is not something new to be added to an already overburdened school program. It is merely capitalizing upon those experiences which are already a part of your day and using them to make living and learning more effective.<sup>32</sup>

Pronovost says:

It is not necessary to find more time for another subject in an already overcrowded school day. An analysis of the curriculum shows that an adequate number of . . . . listening activities exist.<sup>33</sup>

The alert teacher is often able to use unscheduled opportunities to influence and guide the growth of listening habits within his classroom.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>33</sup>Wilbert Pronovost, The Teaching of Speaking and Listening in the Elementary School (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1959), p. 1.



When to include the listening skills in the curriculum is a point of consideration if there is to be a planned order of instruction.

Recently educators have come to realize that the language arts are a single pattern of interrelated skills which cannot be learned separately, and that the child's learning of the language arts is closely related to his growth patterns and to his experiences. . . .

The development of the language arts occupies almost the entire school day, in reality, language is taught from the time the child first enters the classroom in the morning until the last child goes home. It is the medium of operation in nearly everything that is done throughout the day. . . . Language is therefore not an academic subject, but a constantly used medium which can be enlarged and refined on the child's level only through experience in using it.<sup>34</sup>

From the early grades, the importance of careful listening needs to be stressed. The very young student may be told that his ears are tricky and do not always hear what he wants them to, but that his ears need to be trained to hear just as his eyes must be trained to read. This may come as a surprise to the child when he has come to school to learn to "read and write." To him, he already knows how to listen. Hasn't he been listening for a long time?

The development of the listening skills are not perfected during the first few years of school. A continuous progress should be apparent at all levels of teaching.

No element can be assigned to the course of study for a given grade level to be attacked, practiced, and mastered at that grade level. Each of the needed elements of skill

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<sup>34</sup>Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1951), p. 11.

must be introduced whenever children have need for it and are intellectually and emotionally ready to work on it. Work must be continuous from level to level, in life situations where it really functions, until children have reached the point of confident and effective use of the skill in all situations in which it is needed.<sup>35</sup>

"In one study it was found that 90% of classroom time in high school is spent in listening to discussion and lectures."<sup>36</sup> This information points well toward the elementary classroom as the place for special preparation in effective listening skills.

In the primary grades, the necessity for hearing the correct sounds of the spoken word demands good listening habits. The child speaks words as he hears them, and many children upon entering school have never heard the correct pronunciation of the most simple words. "Growth in oral language is one of the most important elements in the entire program of the primary school."<sup>37</sup> As important as listening is at this level, the direct approach is not recommended for the primary grades. As the child grows older his attention span may be expected to lengthen and the capacity for participation will broaden. More characterized and detailed listening can be presented as the abilities of the student develop.

#### Methods and activities

Early training in listening may be given by simple listening

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<sup>35</sup>Taylor, loc. cit., p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Strickland, loc. cit., p. 116.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

to the sounds heard from the classroom: the tick of the clock, the noises of the heating system, the sounds of footsteps in the hall, or the patter of rain on the window pane. After listening quietly for a short period, each child may name the sound or sounds he has heard. Listing these names on the chalkboard encourages participation by even the shyest child who is often the best listener.

Six-year-olds often display their first real classroom listening when stories are told or read by the teacher. Such stories must be brief and chosen to fit the interests of the children. After the oral presentation, if questions are asked about the who, what, and where in the story the child will feel a need to attend to what is being presented in order to participate in the discussion which follows.

More detailed response should be expected from the student as he learns to listen for descriptive words and sequential development in orally presented stories. One child may describe a picture and the rest of the class draw their own picture from the oral description. Comparing detail, color, and relationships between individual pictures give evidence of listening comprehension. Pictures used in this activity should be, as closely as possible, within the area of experience of all children in the classroom.

Sharing time is an excellent opportunity to practice good listening and speaking.

It is important for children to listen well to one another as well as to adults. In this listening discriminately for information and pleasure, children should habitually give the same kind of attention to one another as they are

supposed to give to the teacher. . . . A concomitant responsibility is that the speaker has something worthwhile to say. Courteous listening is important, but equally important is the realization on the part of the speaker of his responsibility to the group.<sup>38</sup>

The teacher is the key figure in the sharing-listening period. He has a dual role of equal importance as he guides the sharing of experiences into worthwhile objectives, and as he displays his own listening habits to the children.

A suggestion for teaching word perception is the writing of new words on the chalkboard and asking for meanings. Record these meanings as the children offer them. Read a paragraph containing the words and ask if the word meanings have changed after having heard the word used in a sentence.

For comprehension of ideas, children could be given different reasons for listening for listening to an oral reading. Multiple choice questions based on the passage read are a good test of listening ability. If detailed information has been grasped, the child will be able to choose the correct answer from among the three or four suggested. For following directions, oral arithmetic will keep the student alert to what the speaker is saying. An example might be: start with six, multiply by four, divide by three, subtract five. What is the answer? A series of such mental exercises are usually a "break" for a written arithmetic assignment as well as a good listening activity.

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<sup>38</sup> Anderson, Anderson, Ballentine, and Hawes, loc. cit., p. 54.

Children may be told to listen for the main idea of a paragraph or story, or concentrating on one certain type of information could be a valuable teaching practice. In a given story the class may be told to listen for information about countries other than our own.

Numbered facts, when used to give more than one statement about a certain point, or voice inflection and volume are meaningful methods used by many speakers and should be pointed out as a means of helpful interpretation of oral instruction. Children need to be taught to listen carefully to each clue which makes an oral presentation more easily understood.

Listening for statements which are untrue, or becoming aware of inferences not told directly require background information about the subject which is being presented. This method of teaching listening is perhaps more successfully used in the upper elementary grades.

Beyond the classroom mass media of communication such as radio, television, and motion pictures may be utilized in most situations as helpful instruments in listening instruction if the objectives indicated for classroom instruction are considered. Children may be encouraged to listen to news commentators, political speakers, and even commercials by setting forth the objectives of critical listening as guide posts.

As in other areas of learning, to effectively care for individual differences in listening abilities, some students may require independent instruction. Others will learn better in small group

activities. Still others may need only the entire class presentations to improve listening skills. Listening activities must always be suited to the ability level of the student. Insisting that a child participate in an activity for which he has no appreciation of its value is only causing more indifference toward reaching the goals which you have hoped he will attain.

In all teaching, the goals are determined by the needs for a certain type of instruction. The needs for good listeners exists throughout the day. The teacher must be aware of this need and at all opportune times be prepared to exercise helpful directives toward more effective auditory reception.

#### Aids and materials

A detailed list of teachers helps in the form of listening activities is given in Russell and Russell's book, Listening Aids Through the Grades, also in Are You Listening? by Nichols and Stevens. Most reading programs now include lessons designed for the teaching of effective listening.

Added to the regular classroom opportunities are special aids which have been proven to reinforce listening skills. In the S.R.A. reading laboratories a listening program is emphasized as the level of reading ability is advanced. S.R.A. says, "It is important to improve your listening . . . and there is a special way to do it."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Scientific Research Associates, S R A Reading Laboratories-Instructors Handbook, Elementary Education (Chicago, Scientific Research Associates, 1958).

T Q L R--or tune in, question, listen, review, is practiced by following this special plan of instruction.

A listening center has been tried with some success in the training to comprehend the spoken word. The use of a "tape playback or disk recorder with six or eight headphones so that children may listen without disturbing others in the class"<sup>40</sup> is among the aids for listening instruction. The teacher may record stories and programs, spelling words, mathematical problems such as number combinations, science experiments, and other subject material which lends itself to oral presentation. "Tapes of many educational radio programs are available from local audio-visual centers, state film and tape libraries, or the National Tape Duplicating Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Anderson, Anderson, Ballentine, and Hawes, loc. cit., p. 75.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVALUATION

Evaluating is an integral part of any teaching program. By a good program of evaluation the teacher is able to find out what progress has been made and where help is needed. The listening program is no exception to his rule. Evaluating ability is not testing the child's performance according to some scale of measurement. "Rating, as it has been used in the schools, has often been devastating, tearing down rather than building them up. A good evaluation program centers it's attention upon constructive guidance at all times."<sup>42</sup>

#### Informal appraisal

Many classroom activities lend themselves to the informal appraisal of listen instruction. A project of the Adult Education Council has been the organization of listening clinics. An activity used in these clinics might be adaptable for use in the elementary classroom as a testing device. One member reads aloud while the others around the table concentrate on what he is saying. Later they summarize individually what they heard and compare notes, often to find that accounts differ widely. Another activity applicable to

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<sup>42</sup>Strickland, loc. cit., p. 16.



purposeful listening in the upper grades is the listening to a statement-rephrasing-and correcting by the original speaker.

Evaluation involves determining how well the pupil actually uses the listening skills in each situation which requires listening. In discussion, for example, does he wait until the speaker has finished before making contributions? Is he becoming increasingly able to distinguish the irrelevant comments from the relevant and the major points from the minor ones? Does he, as a member of the discussion group, exert some influence to adhere to the topic and to reach some conclusions? In conveying a message does he accurately report the main idea? In carrying out directions does he follow the proper sequence indicated in the instructions? In listening to television and radio programs is he becoming increasingly discriminating in a variety of ways? In general, is he becoming adept in adjusting his listening to his purpose for listening?<sup>43</sup>

#### Formal evaluation

The emphasis on the listening factor of the language arts program has brought a new area into the field of research. Can listening be tested?

"Spearritt gives conclusive evidence of a listening ability related to, but separate from, other verbal abilities."<sup>44</sup> Caffrey, who developed the California Auding Test concluded that the verbal comprehension factors can be broken down into at least two factors, reading and listening comprehension and that there is a separate listening, or auding factor which can be measured.

Concerning the teaching of languages, Brooks has the following statement to make:

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<sup>43</sup> Illinois Curriculum Program, English Language Communications, Springfield, Illinois, 1961.

<sup>44</sup> David H. Russell, "A Conspectus of Recent Research on Listening Ability," Elementary English (November, 1964), p. 264.

The learning of language as communication implies the use of many more types of activity than have traditionally been employed in language testing. It has recently been discovered that listening comprehension is a factor in language behavior that lends itself remarkable well to measurement and such tests are now coming into general use.<sup>45</sup>

Multiple choice tests have been used extensively in the testing of listening skills. However, in some research, "Oral cloze procedure appears to have certain advantages over multiple choice tests as a research technique for studying the comprehension of the spoken message."<sup>46</sup>

Standardized tests for listening include the Sequential Tests for Educational Progress (STEP): Listening and the Brown-Carlson Listening Comprehension Test. The STEP tests consist of four forms including fourth grade to college level. By some experimenters, this test has been criticized as to its validity. "Some items appear to be guessed readily by pupils who have the selection on which the item is based. Other experimenters complain that the test is too long and possibly too easy."<sup>47</sup>

There has been complaints on the part of testers which say that the listening tests now available do not test all phases of auditory perception. In the study by Spearritt, which has been previously mentioned, in which the listening factor was definitely isolated, sixth grade

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<sup>45</sup>Nelson Brooks, Language and Language Learning (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.), 1960.

<sup>46</sup>Dickens, and Williams, loc. cit., p. 160.

<sup>47</sup>Sara Lundsteen, "Teaching and Testing Critical Listening in the Fifth and Sixth Grade," Elementary English, V. 41 (November, 1964), p. 744.

pupils were given a battery of thirty-four tests which measured reading comprehension, inductive and deductive reasoning, attention, meaningful and rote memory and memory span; auditory ability; and the STEP listening tests administered by tape recording. This would seem to be sufficient as a means of testing language art skills. Added to this, the California Auding Test constructed by Caffrey was designed to measure vocabulary, ability to follow directions, and comprehension of talk or lectures.

A phase of listening previously neglected by test constructors was investigated by West (1958), who developed an instrument to measure critical or evaluative aspects of listening. . . . Although this effort was, admittedly, only a beginning, it was a valuable step toward the evaluation of this crucial aspect of good listening.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps some of the best items to be used in measuring listening ability could be found in unpublished theses by individuals who have written tests which have not been standardized. Among these might be found the names of Devine, Hogan, Lundsteen, Pratt, and Hayes. These tests include subtests measuring the listening skills previously mentioned by Pratt and Greene: word perception, comprehension of ideas, and using ideas to build understanding.

When the teacher has identified the listening skills which can be practiced within the classroom, both formal and informal tests can be used to test growth of listening ability among his pupils.

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<sup>48</sup>Duker, "Listening," p. 240.

### Related evaluation in other areas

Evaluation of the listening program becomes more than determining the students progress in auditory perception, but rather how much his learning to listen has helped in other areas of his education.

It has been reported by Dow that at least:

Eighteen factors of reading comprehension seem sufficiently similar to listening comprehension to consider these two receptive skills closely related. This does not indicate that they are identical . . . listening demands a great deal more, inasmuch as the listener must follow the speaker no matter what the rate of speaking may be. Thus, in listening there is little time for reflection.<sup>49</sup>

Both Marsden and Lewis conducted studies to determine the effect of training in listening. Purposes emphasized were listening for main ideas of a selection, details, predicted outcome, and conclusions from material presented. In both studies skills in reading selections for the same purposes showed a significant improvement.

Other research has reported co-efficients between reading and listening. "The results are not entirely consistent, but many show that instruction in listening skills lead to improved reading."<sup>50</sup>

Tests of listening have also proven satisfactory in measuring reading potential. Enough research has been done to "leave no doubt that listening ability plays a vital role in determining reading success or failure."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Paul M. Hollingsworth, "Can Training in Listening Improve Reading?", Reading Teacher, V. XVIII (November, 1964), p. 121.

<sup>50</sup>Sam Duker, "Listening and Reading," Elementary School Journal, V. 65 (March, 1965), p. 322.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

The close relationships of the listening and reading skills are evidenced by considering some of the ways in which listening and reading are similar.

1. Both are related to the readiness factor. (experiences, mental maturity, speaking and hearing vocabulary, and interests in language activities).
2. Both flourish in a relaxed social situation. (encourage free communication).
3. They can be improved as the group agrees on standards to be attained by group members. They may be summarized in chart form for ready reference.
4. Both can be done more effectively when the concepts or ideas in the material are at least partly familiar to them.
5. Both are more easily learned when their purposes for so doing have been clearly defined.
6. Both include two main types, functional and appreciative. (putting information to work as in following directions, getting facts, finding the main idea, or reading and auding for enjoyment).
7. In both the word is not the unit of comprehension but it affects comprehension of the phrase, the sentence, and the paragraph. (There must be no confusion of key words. Word meaning in context and in varied relationships is important to both reading and auding).
8. In both the unit of comprehension is the phrase, sentence, or the paragraph. (The use of signals such as punctuation marks and their corresponding pauses and intonations in oral language).
9. Both may involve critical or creative interpretation of the material. In both cases the receiver may utilize his previous experience to combine the materials into some fresh, original, and personal interpretations.
10. Both take place in either individual or social situations.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Russell, and Russell, loc. cit., pp. 6-7.

One analogy has been stated as follows:

In both listening and reading you are trying to understand what another person is saying, only one person may say it outloud for you to listen to, while another may say it silently on paper for you to read.<sup>53</sup>

Speaking also carries a close relationship to the listening skills. It has been said that, "In a real sense, listening and speaking are reverse sides of the same coin, one speaks to a listener: one listens to a speaker."<sup>54</sup>

The growth of children in listening is continuously inter-related with their growth in speaking, and after the early years of childhood, with their reading and writing as well. (Listening is a forerunner of speaking and continues to bear a reciprocal relationship to it.) For every speaker there must be a listener: the listener in turn becomes a better speaker for having listened well to the speech of others.<sup>55</sup>

The teacher has a responsibility in speech improvement, not to be confused with speech correction. He must listen discriminately to the articulation of the consonant sounds in the speech of the child. Once the incorrect sounds are identified, the direct teaching of distinct sounds is important. This teaching can only be done in a speaking-listening situation. One major point in the stress on clear enunciation is to determine the physical state of the auditory organs of the child. Often the child cannot hear the sound and may need to be referred to the speech correctionist for further help in forming the correct sounds.

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<sup>53</sup>Scientific Research Associates, loc. cit.

<sup>54</sup>Aletha Berry, "Interrelationships Between Listening and Other Language Arts," Elementary English, V. XXXI (March, 1954), p. 165.

<sup>55</sup>The Commission on the Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English, Language Arts for Today's Children (Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., New York, 1934), p. 71.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational research has definitely established that there is a listening skill which can be strengthened by providing opportunities for instruction and practice within this major area of communication.

The lack of listening instruction has been recognized. Also, this world of sound in which we live reflects the necessity of acquiring profitable listening habits. The listening skills have been identified as a part of planned learning, and objectives for a course of study to be followed have been suggested.

A profitable listening program can be planned by co-ordinating listening lessons with other areas of education, recognizing auditory reception as a major area of the language arts program. At this time it does not seem necessary to add another curricular subject in order to teach listening skills.

Special emphasis on listening needs to be as carefully administered as reading instruction. Children should not be expected to listen to expository materials too difficult for them. The experiences and needs of the child are the basis for the planned listening program.

The teacher can do much to provide a good listening climate by carefully appraising the time pupils are expected to listen. The length of time spent in oral presentations must not exceed the ability

of the student to maintain the high level of interest necessary to efficient listening. Helping children to recognize the importance of listening and to analyze the problems which prevent them from being good listeners is an outstanding feature in the beginning of a program designed to improve listening skills.

Since 1958 greater emphasis on listening has resulted in more materials for use in teaching understanding of the orally presented lesson. Much research has been done in the area of testing growth in listening ability, but a great deal of it has been repetitive with relatively little material on testing for listening skills provided for the classroom teacher.

More careful research would clear the way to productive ways of teaching the listening skills. Many experimenters have used unsuitable techniques, and inadequate samples in their studies. Short periods of study do not offer conclusive evidence of the best teaching methods, and are often contradictory in their findings.

Experimental research would do well to co-ordinate their efforts with other language arts skills, especially reading because of the close relationship of these two skills. Research in speaking and writing could also lend a service to studies in listening comprehension. In the teaching field listening is an area which cannot be segregated from the language arts program and it must not be excluded from research in related fields. This type of research has more recently come into being. If the interrelationships of reading and listening are ignored, effective planning of either subject will be curtailed.



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