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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses available materials for teaching listening skills at various instructional levels. (1) Recordings--"Let's Listen," a recording of sounds, emphasizes stimulation, with one band allowing students to hear their own voices as well as other human voices. "Sounds and Images" permits students to listen to various recorded sound effects and after which they describe a scene which the sound suggests. (2) Books--David and Elizabeth Russell's book "Listening Aids through the Grades" presents 190 listening activities on a general instructional level. (3) Listening Programs--skill exercises in listening by SRA include specific listening activities for all levels, grade one through adult; "The Listen and Read Program" lists a series of thirty tape recordings and workbooks; "The Listen and Think Program" consists of fifteen tape recordings an integrated workbooks, plus teacher's guides, for each grade level from three to nine. (4) Standardized tests include the listening section of the Sequential Tests of Educational programs and the Brown Carlson Listening Comprehension Test, which attempts to measure immediate recall, following directions, recognizing transitions, recognizing word meaning, and lecture comprehension. The processes of listening, sensory perception, and cognition are also discussed. (SW)

Teaching Listening[1]

Emma E. Plattor

Introduction

Listening provides the foundation upon which all of the other language arts are based. Research results clearly indicate that instruction in listening improves facility in listening. Why, then, have teachers at all grade levels virtually ignored instruction in listening? Perhaps one reason involves a general lack of knowledge concerning the specific skills to be taught and specific materials and methods which effectively teach these skills.

Research indicates that teachers tend to teach as they were taught. Most teachers have not been taught how to listen, nor have they been taught that listening as a separate and specific skill was important. Many of our educational myths involve listening, including the long-standing assumptions that listening is a passive function, that listening is an involuntary automatic reflex, that the speaker alone is responsible for the success of a communication, that listening skill develops automatically and informally without planned instruction, that the pupil who looks as if he is listening really is listening, that listening involves only the literal comprehension of all of the speaker's words. While research has shown these assumptions to be myths with very little basis in fact, they serve, unfortunately, as the basis for instruction for most teachers. Thus it is not surprising that teachers do not really know the appropriate subject matter, objectives, methods and materials for teaching listening.

To further compound the problem, a recent survey of communication courses given at 80 American colleges revealed that, while there was almost universal inclusion of listening improvement as one of the principal goals, only lip service was given to this in most schools. The textbook publishers haven't helped either. The findings of the 1965 study which analyzed the speech and listening content of American public textbooks in language arts for grades three through six published from 1959-1964 indicated that writing, grammar, and review lessons were emphasized to such an extent that only .57% of the 15,285.5 pages were concerned with instruction in listening! In another study in which an analysis was made of the content of fourteen series of high school English textbooks, it was found that, of a total of 26,141 pages, only 424, or 1½% were concerned with listening!

Instruction in Listening

During the last two or three years, the media explosion has forced educators to take a new look at listening as an instructional task. Professional materials

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in the language arts available in the form of texts, professional journals, and curriculum guides have begun to include chapters and articles devoted to listening. There is insufficient evidence available as to which instructional emphases are likely to produce the most effective listening results. However, the fact that some professional material in listening instruction is now available is very encouraging.

The author has prepared a list of selected sample professional materials in the teaching of listening at various instructional levels. Most of these materials are found in chapters in texts devoted to English instruction. However, other materials on the list do provide specific instructional suggestions. I have also prepared a list of current pupil materials at various instructional levels which include sections concerned with listening. These are organized by publishers. Many of these involve both audio and visual materials, and several are correlated listening-reading materials. Included are materials for teaching listening at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, for teaching English as a second language, for teaching creativity, and for teaching critical thinking. These lists may be obtained by writing to the author at the University of Calgary.

In addition to professional texts in English and Language Arts, professional journals provide a variety of ideas for listening activities. One instructor has discussed the use of language laboratory equipment intended for foreign language instruction as an aid to providing listening instruction. Another teacher has shared an activity in which his class in the States exchanged tape recordings with children in Alaska. He reported that this oral form of pen-pal activity provided his pupils with highly motivating practice in locating and organizing information, making presentations that hold the interest of an audience, and the like. Another instructor has described the development and utilization of listening centers in the classroom, while still another suggested that carefully structured commercial or teacher-prepared taped or recorded listening lessons eliminate extraneous teacher-talk, are highly motivating, and can provide immediate feedback or reinforcement.

A variety of commercially published taped and recorded materials for teaching listening are available at this time, and more are arriving on the market daily. These range from exercises in auditory discrimination, as in Let's Listen, a series of three records designed for supplementary phonic instruction with the readiness books, and pre-primers, primers, and first-readers of the Ginn Reading Series, through specific development of good listening habits through programmed instruction in listening at the adult level. Many good records are available which provide instruction in listening through the vehicle of English literature. Publishers of such records and tapes may be found in lists of materials mentioned earlier.

Let's Listen provides a typical example of the many kinds of auditory discrimination materials available today. Auditory discrimination is the listening skill which has been most widely stressed in instruction, since it is so closely allied to beginning and developmental reading instruction.

The Teachers' Guide for Ear Training for Middle Grades suggests three specific listening inadequacies which this record is designed to overcome. There are: selectivity -- the tuning out or unconscious editing of sounds; partiality --

the use of only part of the listening ability resulting, for example, in only vague awareness of tone or pitch; and carelessness -- the lack of intensity of listening effort.

This record is designed to be played several times, each time with a slightly different emphasis. For a while thereafter, the authors suggest that a similar listening program should be continued. Variations of the games used on the record can be developed by the teacher or by the pupils themselves.

In Band 1, Street Sounds, a variety of sounds are presented, and, after the first playing, the children might think of sounds not on the record. The marking off of the minute with 50 sounds is designed to stimulate several aspects of listening. At the first hearing, it is the unconscious listening to rhythm and pitch that is put to the test, and therefore suddenly brought to the pupils' attention. The degree of correctness of the answers is immaterial, as the resulting stimulation is the prime objective. In the area of Singing Sounds, the distinction must be kept clear between imitating a sound and singing its pitch. The pupil is asked to sing the pitch of such sounds as a bell ringing, a dog barking, and a hammer pounding. In establishing such pitch, a considerable amount of aural imagination is called for, and an awareness of pitch very quickly develops. Later games might involve pupils imitating other sounds, with other pupils finding the appropriate pitch for each sound.

Band 3 requires that pupils participate in a game in which 20 sounds are given and each must be identified by the object which makes the sound. Many variations of this can be found, including team activities, imitating, singing, and the like.

The content of another band involves sounds which influence emotions more than is generally recognized. A conscious search for such associations tends to sharpen sensitivity to sound and give meaning to sound beyond merely pitch or frequency.

In another band, pupils are introduced to their own voices and to other human voices as well. At the end of this band, a sentence is chosen which is repeated in many possible ways: angry, excited, surprised, etc. Pupils take turns saying the sound, at each round switching to another emotion. The variations of this game are many. This band is extremely important in assisting both pupils and teachers to realize the potential of the human voice as well as the shadings of meaning which can be obtained from the voice alone.

An interesting set of records is Sounds and Images, available in an Elementary and Adult Version from Ginn and Company. In this record, the participants are asked to listen to various recorded sound effects and describe a scene which the sound suggests. This helps to develop sensitivity to sound, and can also be used as a test of creativity.

A variety of published materials other than records concerned with listening activities and games are also available to teachers. David and Elizabeth Russell have collected 190 listening activities in their book, Listening Aids Through the Grades. These are listed by general instructional level. Lists of references

and materials for teachers are also provided, including audio-visual aids such as recordings, filmstrips, and the like. Wagner, Hosier and Blackman have published a collection of Listening Games, presented in order of difficulty. Among the activities at the earlier levels are games in which children listen for sound, rhyming games, and memory games. Games which "challange top intellects" include activities designed to give practice in listening attentively in order to associate names of well-known authors with titles of their books. These latter games are suggested for secondary pupils. All games are classified by specific instructional level.

Skill exercises in listening are also provided in such commerically published materials as the Reading Laboratory published by Science Research Associates and the Listen and Read and Listen and Think Programs published by Educational Development Laboratories. The SRA materials include specific listening activities for grades one through adult. The secondary and adult kit also include listening through note taking.

The Listen and Read Program is developmental, and is designed to teach the correlated skills of listening and reading. A series of 30 tape recordings and workbooks, as well as a teachers' guide and narrator script, is available for each grade level from 7 through post-high school. Such skills are included as: following the author's organization, outlining, note making, skimming and scanning, understanding figurative language, and the like.

The Listen and Think Program, also developmental, is designed to improve listening comprehension and specific analytical, critical, and appreciative thinking skills necessary for good listening. The program consists of fifteen tape recordings and integrated workbooks, plus teachers' guides, for each grade level from three to nine. Skills include identifying main ideas, recognizing sequence, summarizing, comparing, predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions, etc.

This program also includes listening to compressed speech, thus developing the skill of speeded listening. Compressed speech is speech which has been speeded in such a way that there is no distortion.

As early as 1940, Goldstein (1940) reported that people can listen to speech at a rate of more than three times that at which they normally hear it. However, it has only been during the past several years that active research interest has developed in the extent to which people can be taught to comprehend auditory materials when it is presented at rates faster than human speakers can produce it -- speeded or accelerated listening. A relatively new application to education of the technological revolution is time-compression of speech. Time-compression involves the processing of a tape recording in such a way that the material is presented at a higher rate than the initial recording without producing significant changes in such speech characteristics as frequency, pitch, intonation and stress patterns.

Research studies in time-compressed speech during the past two decades have resulted in several major findings: (1) People find some degree of accelerated speech intelligible and comprehensible; (2) After about 275-300 w.p.m., comprehension begins to decline significantly. However, the exact degree of acceleration, type of material individual aptitudes and abilities, motivation, presentation

conditions and the like have not been ascertained; (3) Retention of material presented under accelerated conditions is not adversely affected as compared to presentation under normal conditions; (4) There is substantial variability in individual ability to comprehend compressed speech.

Most of the research with time-compressed speech has involved adult subjects. The few studies which have been done with children at the elementary grade level have provided evidence that accelerated listening can be an efficient and effective learning medium for this age group. At the University of Calgary, we are now involved in both preliminary and planned comprehensive studies with children at the elementary grade level in which we will be using the EDL Listen and Think Programs as well as other materials to investigate both time-compressed and non-compressed speech and listening variables. I will be sharing our results with interested teachers as the studies are completed.

Evaluation of Listening Skills

While evaluation of instruction is as essential in listening as in any other content area, the development of standardized instruments for the measurement of growth in listening knowledges and skills has been slow. Perhaps the principal reasons for this delay have been the lack of research into the specific skills and abilities necessary for good listening, as well as into the factors within these skills which are measurable with standardized instruments. Research attention is currently being directed to this area. However, there are several available standardized listening tests which, while their reliability and validity may be questionable for research puposes, can serve as a useful guide to the classroom teacher in evaluating pupils' listening skills.

On standardized test for use at all grade levels from fourth up, is the Listening section of the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP) published by Educational Testing Service. This instrument is available in four levels, grade 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-14, and includes items relating to skills in listening comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, and application.

Another standardized test, for use at the secondary level and above, is the Brown-Carlson Listening Comprehension Test, published by World Book Company. This test attempts to measure these separate listening abilities: (1) immediate recall; (2) following directions; (3) recognizing transitions; (4) recognizing word meanings; and (5) lecture comprehension.

Informal tests can be prepared by teachers based on the objectives and content of listening lessons. Those listening factors tested in research studies in listening are also a good source of content for both instruction and evaluation.

Perhaps some further discussion of the processes of listening are relevant here. Obviously, listening must begin as a sensory process. Any substantial loss of hearing will sharply reduce the amount of listening experiences a child has and make it very difficult for him to distinguish some of the elements of speech. Thus he will find it difficult to make the appropriate associations

between the spoken and written word. Acoustical handicaps almost always lead to listening problems. The child with acuity problems is likely to be inattentive; he may ask that questions be restated; he may tilt his head; he may look very closely at the speaker to get auditory cues, etc. Children at the grade one level should be tested with an audiometer. This screening will save many hours of later remedial instruction.

Sensation is a first step toward perception. However, there are other systems beside the auditory system that must be ready if listening is to be effective and efficient. Such physical subststems as the respiratory, and hormal ones must be sensitive and ready to cope with information overload, feedback and the like. Excitation, inhibition or blockage of the sensory receivers caused by something other than a hearing defect can cause inability to exclude irrelevant stimuli and interfere with the set to attend which is essential in language learning and listening.

The next step is perception. Again, different authors define this differently. For our purposes, perception may be considered the "auding" function of listening, involving such skills as identifying or discriminating between unitary sound patterns such as the ticking of a watch, phonemic patterns such as the long or the short sound of a, and the ability to discriminate between likeO nesses and differences in sounds. One writer has suggested that there are seven levels of auding: isolation of sounds, ideas, arguments, or facts,; attributing meaning to these factors; integrating them with past experiences; inspecing them for relationships; interpreting them for implications; interpolating the statements; and introspection for understanding the effect they will have on us. Emerson Foulke, a blind psychologist at the University of Louisville, suggests that perception is that process by which the observer obtains information from the stimulation present in his environment. This definion is quite different from the one proposed by Frostig, who notes that perception is the discrimination and recognition of stimuli impinging on the senses. This implies that the listener is only going to attend to stimuli that contain information he wants and needs. Since the perceptual system is complex and constantly searching for sensory stimulation, the teacher must assist the learner in extracting information by providing training experiences which will help him notice all of the stimuli that impinge upon him. Further, the learner must be taught how to use this information to guide his behavior.

Foulke suggests that the "visual reading process" goes something like this:

1. As the visual reader (the listener) gains experience in reading, he begins to reorganize the display of letters into reduced numbers of units to be processed, with each unit giving much more information -- larger and more meaningful perceptual units -- words. The listener must do the same thing, but the presentation of the display is not controlled by the receiver as in reading, but rather by the sender. If the reader encounters an unfamiliar word, he can go back and look at it again. The listener can't do that. The elements of the acoustical display are the sounds combined into syllables, then combined into words. The listener can't process this in any way that will change the sequence -- he hears it one way and has to process in that way.

Thus it is essential that the auditory discrimination of sounds be efficient and effective, and that auditory blending be workable. The psycholinguistic components of speech all play a role here: pitch, intonation, rhythem, nuance patterns, ability to deal with morphemic units, and the like.

2. Next the reader processes the display into words and groups of words (phrases). As he reads, he generates expectations regarding what he will read next. If, because of what has been read, there is little uncertainty about what the next sentence will be, the reader tests his expectation by not reading every word. Thus, he changes his rate. If the test does not confirm his expectation, he slows his rate. The listener cannot do this. If he is unsure, he cannot slow down the speaker. This leads to information overload. Therefore it is essential that the listener be really effective with syntactic structure -- the universal rules for forming, using and understanding language. The sense of word order is very useful here. Ability with closure allows for prediction. Ability to categorize words is useful. Thus, the reader looks ahead for cues to test his expectations, and looks back to revise his expectations. The listener can't do that. Even if he had a tape, it would be cumbersome. It can be likened to a book constantly closed and one's place being lost.

Obviously, the next step is cognition. Cognition is based on the ability to abstract common elements from sensory and perceptual experiences and use these abstractions to define the characteristics of a class and then represent the generalization by a symbol or a word -- concept formation. The person who has had extensive opportunities for sensory and perceptual experiences, together with a chance to behave in response to these experiences, is likely to have the most valid stock of concepts to work with. Because we can listen, we can use language. We can use words we hear as substitutes for direct experiences. Even though these words may be second-hand, they are useful. Since they are second-hand, however, it is essential that they be heard as accurately as possible, since thinking depends a great deal upon second-hand concepts acquired through listening.

In evaluating listening skills, then, we must obviously evaluate perceptual skills as well as cognitive ones. Such tests as the Wepman Test of Auditory Descrimination evaluate sound discrimination. Many of the subtests on Readiness Tests examine basic perceptual (word recognition) skills. The Houston Test for Language Development tests such linguistic items as class and function words, grammatical categories, and the like. The PPVT looks at vocabulary, as do most readiness tests. STEP looks at listening vocabulary. Durrell suggests that this is the basis for prediction of reading ability. In an Informal Reading Inventory, the level at which the child shows his potential is determined by testing his spoken vocabulary. In the cognitive (comprehension area) the Coop Primary Listening Tests asks the child to do such exercises as the following: mark the picture that goes best with FLOCK; mark the picture that goes with the sentence: I have teeth but I cannot eat; listen to stories to which the child must respond. This test looks at such skills as these: comprehension, recall, interpretation, evaluation, and inference.

Evan Wright, in constructing a test of listening comprehension for the second, third, and fourth grades settled on the following skills: Listening Vocabulary; ability to follow directions; ability to recognize correct English;

ability to recognize rhymes; ability to make logical inferences; ability to use contextual clues in understanding unknown meanings; ability to recognize illustrative examples; ability to recognize relevant vs. irrelevant; ability to recognize important vs. unimportant; ability to differentiate between fact and opinion. Lewis, who constructed a diagnostic test of listening comprehension for grades four, five, and six, listed the following factors in listening comprehension in the order of their importance in a test of listening comprehension by wl authorities in the field of language arts: ability to recall factual matter such as names of people, places, or things; ability to draw conclusions; ability to make inferences; ability to identify speaker attitudes; ability to get general significance; ability to note details; ability to keep a series of details in mind until questioned; ability to get the central idea; ability to distinguish relevant from irrelevant materials; ability to use contextual clues to word meanings; ability to use transitional elements. In an effort to develop instructional materials in teaching listening at the grade four level, Kohls included: development of courteous and attentive listening; ability to listen for mian ideas; analyze the meanings and implications of speaker's words; adjust to speakers voice and articulation, develop appreciative listening to listerature, poetry, music; follow directions; provide auditory training in articulation, enunciation, and pronunciation. These skills suggest those with which teachers must be concerned in evaluation of listening.

In Conclusion

The new world of technology demands intelligent, skilled listeners. The world of tomorrow will probably be very different from the world of today. How, then, do teachers prepare young people to live in a world we not only don't know but probably can't even imagine? We develop all of their senses so they are alert and ready for anything. That's what listening instruction is all about.

But it's equally important to develop skilled listeners for today's world. If people don't begin to listen to each other pretty soon, tomorrow's world may never come to be!