

CHILDREN AND ORAL LANGUAGE

By a Joint Committee of the

ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
INTERNATIONAL

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF
ENGLISH

Listening and speaking are universally the most frequently used means of communication. We share with others the concern about effective written communication, but we here voice the need for equal concern about educating all children to be effective speakers and listeners. For every individual, child or adult, dull or bright, rich or poor, vocationally skilled or unskilled, the ability to listen and to speak effectively is probably the most important asset that he can acquire and maintain throughout a lifetime.

During the past year, representatives from the four organizations have met on repeated occasions to study present educational programs for improving the speaking and listening of children and to prepare recommendations based on new research and on a fresh evaluation of present needs. This statement presents highlights from the total report. With one voice the four organizations thus announce their combined thinking on basic beliefs, important facts, and needed action with respect to children and oral language.

BELIEFS

Never before has the need for effective communication been more crucial than now. Jets and rockets and the new mass media are creating a world community. Speed and ease of transportation and communication, increasing mobility and urbanization, the influx of refugees intermingling with people of varying backgrounds—all enhance awareness of differences in spoken language. Regional differences once localized are no longer isolated. We are learning to recognize and accept deviations, rather than to curb and suppress them. Communication need not become strained as we seek understanding and good will.

We as teachers are committed so to teach at every level of instruction that pupils will grow continuously in their powers to communicate. Effective communication is essential for self-fulfillment and for participation in society. To the objective of a balanced program of language instruction, clearly defined goals and means for achieving them, we address this publication.

FACTS

Children whose physical and emotional development is normal learn first to listen, then to speak, next to read, and last to write sequentially. Since listening and speaking develop first, they are the bases for achievement in reading and writing.

Words are tools of thought. The ability of children to think, abstractly or critically, is solidly linked with their development in listening and speaking, reading and writing.

Children today command larger vocabularies and employ more complex sentence structures than did children of one or two generations ago.

Children's oral language patterns and habits are largely set by the time they enter school.

Both adults and children spend more time in listening than in any other communication activity. Many are less effective listeners than they might be, and research shows that listening ability can be improved through teaching and practice. Effective listening makes it possible to acquire new information, to deepen concepts, to think and to act with increasing maturity.

Listening and speaking reflect highly personal as well as interpersonal needs. Concepts of self and of others have roots in early childhood, when these concepts are closely interwoven with family speech patterns and usage.

The quality of one's spoken language can determine the level of social development an individual can attain.

Genuine communication through speech is fundamental in the development of understanding within families and neighborhoods, in schools, and in and among nations.

Differences in accents, in usage and structure, in colloquialisms and idioms add spice to language. Recognizing and understanding these differences lead to greater enjoyments of language and appreciation for those who contribute to its vitality.

ACTION THAT IS NEEDED

→ Helping parents to—

Recognize that they are the first teachers and as such should set a good example. Children bring to school their patterns of listening and speaking. These may be refined and improved when:

- Home and school share responsibilities for out-of-school activities.
- Parents support the role of the school.
- Parents capitalize on their own child's language achievement, however small, when talking to him and about him to teachers, relatives, neighbors, and all others with whom he comes in contact.

→ Developing classroom experiences which—

Provide for listening and speaking to be learned as part of all the subjects that are taught in the classroom.

Allow for variation at any age in children's potential and skill in listening and speaking.

Provide a variety of situations in which children can listen and speak: committee work, puppetry, tape recording, role playing, making announcements.

Stress the importance of purpose in listening.

Create an atmosphere that encourages spontaneous interchange of ideas through discussion.

Capitalize on the teacher's awareness of these assumptions, his resourcefulness, and his creativity.

→ Encouraging teachers to—

Set the best possible example for boys and girls through their own habits of listening and speaking.

Make each child feel that he is important as an individual and that he can make a contribution to his school group by:

- Helping children to appreciate variations in community and regional accents represented in the school group.
- Helping children to overcome nonstandard English spoken in the home without "losing face."
- Becoming sensitive to "teachable moments" and to signals indicating that individuals and groups are ready for next steps in language growth—adjusting schedules, materials, and techniques to each learning situation.

→ Developing children's competencies in oral language so that they will—

Use language suitable to purpose, setting, and audience.

Understand the structure and form of language and apply this knowledge in speaking.

Master the components of effective oral communication:

Distinct, pleasing voice

Clear enunciation

Wide vocabulary, precisely used

Pointed, conclusive discussion

Attentive, evaluative listening

Notice the sequence, relative importance, authenticity, and bias in spoken ideas.

Use oral reading to communicate ideas and to express their reactions to literature.

React sensitively to the beauty and power of language.

React appreciatively to melody and rhythm in poetry and prose.

Accept social and regional differences in others' speech without ridicule or rejection.

React in words rather than in gross physical activity.

→ Urging supervisors and administrators to—

Take the leadership in interpreting to the community the role of language in all of learning and the importance of cooperation between home and school in its continuous development and refinement.

Encourage teachers to compensate for gaps in preservice education through additional courses at colleges and universities and provide scholarships for them when possible.

Offer workshops and provide released time for study or for visits in other classrooms to help teachers acquire additional skills in and understanding of oral language.

→ Evaluating children's competencies in oral language in such a way that—

All of the listening and speaking competencies, rather than just one or two most easily measured, will be included, with concentration upon a few at a time.

Relatively little of the evaluation of listening and speaking will be done by standardized tests. More will be done by short teacher-pupil-made tests, rating scales, tape recordings, records kept by individual children, and observations by teachers. The pupil will participate in evaluating his own work.

Major attention will be placed upon the individual pupil's development, with language proficiency evaluated at the beginning and at the close of the school year.

→ THE FORTHCOMING BULLETIN

This statement represents an overview of what we believe, what we know, and what we should do about oral communication. During the spring of 1964, a bulletin will be published by the four cooperating organizations to provide a more comprehensive statement, supporting evidence, detailed recommendations, and a bibliography. Subsequent information concerning the full statement may be obtained from the ACEI, ASCD, IRA, or NCTE.

For the four organizations,

Howard Blake
Erna Christenson
Muriel Crosby
Mildred Dawson
Eugenia Hunter

Walter Loban
George Manolakes
Ralph Staiger
Russell Stauffer
Helen K. Mackintosh, chairman

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