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Ah, Wilderness

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Abstract

In the movement toward greater and greater specialization which is so popular these days, we can find growing tendencies for the members of new branch-professions to operate in ways which discourage interprofessional cooperation. In much the same way as adolescents strive to establish distinct and secure self-images, so the various branches of the educational profession are seeking separate identity and status, and they are choosing routes which remove them as far as possible from their neighbors. This exclusiveness is pointed up dramatically by the very labels and distinguishing lingo which the new specialties are adopting.

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Consider the young field of speech correction, my own specialty, which has struggled not only to wean itself from parental and allied professions but which also has been developing further dichotomies and factions within itself. The allied speech and hearing specialties, jointly represented by the American Speech and Hearing Association, have conducted a long and inconclusive search for titles which will not only suit the needs and divergencies of our self-images but which will also not infringe upon titles already preempted by other professions. Some of the suggested labels reflect a move toward unity, but many more of them indicate an urge toward a dichotomy—communicologists, phonologists, speech clinicians, speech correctionists, audiologists, speech therapists, and on and on.

It is, however, both amusing and very revealing to consider that, regardless of what we may elect to call ourselves, the majority of us who serve in the public schools will probably continue to be called "speech teachers" by the pupils, by the parents, and by the classroom teachers. In view of the many obvious similarities found in the goals, methods and materials shared equally by speech "teachers" and teachers of reading, for example, it is not at all surprising that they are given this label. It might be noted, however, that there is a vein of reluctance in the American Speech and Hearing Association to become too closely identified with education. Perhaps this reflects our leaning toward identification with the medical profession, which in turn has its reservations against calling us "therapists."

It does seem obvious and proper that all aspects of language education should be handled inseparably. Too often we teach sounds and articulatory skills without enough regard for their function and adoption in communication. Speech therapists who are inclined to be

too narrow, who specialize in speech sounds and patterns to the exclusion of language, would gain from knowledge of the many opportunities in the broader orientation followed by teachers of reading. More coordination between speech therapists and reading therapists, and with other teachers of speech and other language matters would surely upgrade the work of all of them.

Because of the labels and lingo which are devised to set us apart and identify our new specialties, we create serious handicaps of interdisciplinary ignorance, misunderstanding and poor communication. Our gobbledygook may even serve to obscure the fact that the tenets of a branch-profession are really not significantly different from the old principles of other professions.

A survey of the items commonly used by the regular classroom teachers of reading will reveal that speech therapists and teachers of reading have more in common than they may realize. Classroom teachers in Michigan have variously expressed their important common aims and practices in the teaching of reading, spelling and speech. Several teachers agreed that "phonics" aimed at teaching children "to listen more carefully to the spoken parts of words, to perceive their similarities and differences, and to associate sounds with their corresponding written symbols and their meanings." Projects on the learning and use of plurals, suffixes, and prefixes were meant to improve speech as well as spelling and language use. What the speech therapist calls "ear training" and "phonics" were variously referred to as "word-analysis," "recognition of rhyming," "the ability to listen for and recognize specific sounds and to enunciate them clearly and correctly," "the ability to 'work out' the recognition, pronunciation and meaning of new words," "word-study," "word-form analysis," "structural analysis," "sounding out words," and so on.

Whether they recognize it or not, both the classroom teachers and the "speech teachers" are in essential agreement that auditory and phonetic training are mutually important for reading, speaking and spelling. We can only hope that the adoption of esoteric titles and phraseology does not provide the wedge for driving apart specialties which in truth belong together.

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