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## We Suggest

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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

Mackintosh, Helen K., Editorial Chairman  
*Children and Oral Language*

A Joint Statement of the Association for Childhood Education International, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, International Reading Association, and National Council of Teachers of English, 1964, pp. vii-38.

As a user of language, man is unique among all living creatures. Man's language makes it possible for him to be involved constantly in processes of social interaction. Involvement in interaction processes contributes to his growth toward maturity in all phases of development—physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. Oral language is the primary medium for such social interaction. Skill in its use is prerequisite to skill in use of its refinements, extensions, and abstractions, entailments of the processes of reading and writing. In this concise, yet comprehensive, paper-bound edition, *Children and Oral Language*, four major organizations in education, each individually committed to the improvement of teaching and learning in elementary schools, have cooperated to promote effective teaching of oral language.

As a whole, this publication is addressed to the objective of the development of a balanced program for teaching total oral communications skills at all levels, clearly defining the goals, and explicitly stating means for achieving them. In particular, its main sections are concerned with (1) examining basic characteristics of listening and speaking, (2) helping children to learn to listen and speak, and (3) determining further action that needs to be taken by all adults responsible for educating children in oral language.

In examining the characteristics of listening and speaking, Dr. Ralph Staiger states that *listening* is a learned receptive skill, while *speaking* is a learned expressive skill. Listening differs from hearing, a physiological process, because it involves interpretation and selection of appropriate meanings. Speaking communicates meaning to others. Efficient use of both helps one to develop and clarify his thinking. Muriel Crosby identifies relationships of oral language to personal development, to social development, to thinking, and to learning. She believes that concepts of self and the world are interwoven with speech patterns and usage; that speech is fundamental to formation and satisfactory growth in human relationships; that words are tools of thinking; and that listening and speaking, rooted in experience,

furnish a rich background of mental content for written and printed symbols.

The section dealing with helping children learn to listen and to speak is of real, practical value to the practicing classroom teacher and elementary school administrator. With a constant awareness of language as a human characteristic, its writers discuss competencies children need for effective communication. Research findings and their consequent implications are stated with unmistakable clarity, pointing to goals which have become new standards for skillful teachers in recent times. Some further suggestions for behavior of teachers in their roles as guides, group leaders, and evaluators are given in more specific and illustrative detail. Repeatedly, emphasis is placed upon development of the teacher's own competencies in interaction procedures and upon a *positive* approach in evaluation.

In regard to further action needed by adults concerned with the development of children as more effective language users, Helen Mackintosh, editorial chairman of this bulletin, suggests that the help of a number of key persons is vital. Parents need to recognize that they are children's first teachers. Teachers need to take advantage of "teachable moments." Professional leaders, such as supervisors and administrators, need to encourage teachers to be knowledgeably creative and imaginative. Research workers need to continue to aid teachers in evaluation techniques which provide emphasis upon improvement of individual children.

Parts of this bulletin which lend support to contradictions of some prevalent classroom practices and procedures may give rise to controversial thoughts in the minds of some readers. More common agreement may be stirred in educators' minds as they realize the truth of Dr. Stauffer's statement of the point of view with which the authors approached their writing:

Never before has the need for effective communication been more crucial . . . . Because the effect of oral communication is so crucial, there is need to make careful appraisal of current practices in teaching children to express their ideas orally with clarity, sensitivity, and conviction.

What teacher dares to remain aloof and apart from such justified appraisal?