

COMPREHENSION – LISTENING SKILLS

Relevance to Literacy

It is estimated that primary school students spend up to half a day engaged in the activity of listening. It is therefore important that children are able to remain focused during listening activities so as to not risk missing important learning opportunities.

Listening has many different purposes in the classroom and students should be made aware of them. They listen for content, to receive information, to relate, to explain, to participate in discussions, to feel and more.

The listening vocabulary is generally the largest of all the four vocabularies (listening, speaking, reading and writing). If the students' ability is limited in the area, all areas of the language arts are affected.

Communication = speech + language + listening

The Listening Process

Listening is more than sitting quietly or passively absorbing someone else's ideas. To listen effectively we need to think about what we are hearing in order to make sense of it, which takes energy. There are three main parts of active listening:-

1. Hearing and focusing attention on the verbal message.
2. Discriminating between the important and irrelevant information to make meaning of the message.
3. "Executive or brain" control to monitor attention and internal evaluations which need to be held in the working memory long enough to be able to formulate a response.

"Many skills common to both reading and listening, such as focusing attention and thinking about meaning are likely to be best learned in the listening mode, where feedback and clarification can be more immediate. If students are able to respond appropriately to the spoken word, they are more likely to comprehend the message in its written form" (A Time for Talking, p67).

Types of Active Listening

In the classroom, students must listen in order to:-

- recollect sequences of information or events that have occurred.
- find information/details
- identify the main idea of a story.
- understand language and emotional responses to language.
- engage in analysis and critical thinking.

Factors affecting auditory memory-

- hearing
- health and well being – if tired, unwell, uncomfortable the child will find it difficult to concentrate
- language level – a lack of language skills may make extra demands on the child's ability to complete and activity, thus affecting her memory capacity
- familiarity with the adult
- formal versus informal situations
- time pressures
- age of the child – memory skills are linked with language and develop with age
- cognitive abilities – memory skills are linked with the cognitive level of the child
- noisy background – the child may be distracted and find it harder to listen with competing auditory stimuli
- busy visual background – may cause distraction and the child may find it difficult to concentrate on two different types of stimuli: auditory and visual.

Listening in the classroom

Listening is an essential skill to have for many activities at school. Therefore difficulty listening may lead to difficulty with other activities in the classroom such as following instructions to complete activities, understanding what is required of them in the classroom or reading.