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STATE AND HIGHER EDUCATION EFFORTS IN
LISTENING ASSESSMENT: A STATUS REPORT

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Since the 1978 Federal enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the traditional research and curriculum development gap between oral communication and written communication has begun to narrow. This increased activity is due to the legislation's new definition of basic skills, "reading and mathematics and effective communication, both written and oral." This addition of oral communication motivated many states and school districts to develop instructional materials or guidelines in oral communication.

In an effort to monitor, advise, and coordinate the increased activity associated with basic skills legislation, the Educational Policies Board of the Speech Communication Association established the Task Force on Assessment and Testing in 1979. Specifically, the Task Force (now the Committee on Assessment and Testing) was charged to "facilitate the flow of information on assessment of communication skills from members of the speech communication profession to Federal, state, and local educational leaders" (Backlund, Booth, Moore, Parks, & Van Rhee, 1982). To accomplish this, the Task Force was organized into three committees: (1) the Committee on Current Assessment Practices, K-12; (2) the Committee on Oral Communication Assessment in Higher Education; and (3) the Committee on Assessment Instruments and Instrument Development (Pre K-12).

The primary purpose of this report is to describe the status of state and higher education efforts in developing curriculum programs and/or assessment procedures/instruments for listening, an issue addressed by the first two of the Task Force committees. Before pursuing this issue however, attention should be given to the related activity and products of the third committee, charged with identifying assessment instruments and instrument development for pre-K through grade twelve. In an effort to meet the need of educators to make an informed selection of assessment instruments, the committee surveyed forty-five different assessment instruments. The abridged report of the committee (Rubin, Daly, McCroskey, & Mead, 1982) reviews the instruments with respect to content domain, response and scoring procedures, administration feasibility, target population, and potential sources of test bias. Of the instruments surveyed, twenty are designed to assess listening specifically, and an additional twelve are designed to assess listening as well as other oral communication skills. The full report of the committee will be forthcoming as a monograph published under the auspices of ERIC/RCS.

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With reference to listening assessment specifically, Backlund (1984) provides a more recent review of sixteen listening assessment instruments currently available. Moreover, after identifying and describing four categories of general listening skills, he identifies the instruments designed to assess each listening skill category.

State Efforts In Listening

The Committee on "Current Assessment Practices, K-12" has provided a comprehensive description of current state efforts to develop curriculum and/or assessment programs for listening. The committee's initial report (Backlund, et al., 1982) provides a description of the data gathering process used in the study, a summary of the findings, and a report of the conclusions of the committee. It also provides a state-by-state description of oral communication assessment practices and plans through July 1981. A copy of the report, less the state-by-state description, was also published in the April, 1982 issue of Communication Education.

The report has since been updated and is scheduled to be published by the Speech Communication Association in the near future. The current draft report (Van Rheenen, McClure, & Backlund, 1983) covers changes in all states through August 1983. A table summarizing the latest data is provided in Appendix A. As is revealed in the first column of the table, eighteen states currently have no assessment programs in speaking or listening and no plans to implement any such programs. The second column reveals the nine states that have expressed intentions to develop either curricular or assessment programs in speaking and/or listening, but have not done so to date. Of those states, only four have identified listening as a specific program goal.

An examination of the last three columns reveals the nineteen states which have or are developing curriculum and/or assessment programs in listening. Specifically, five have developed statewide procedures to assess listening, while another ten have developed (or are developing) curriculum materials for teaching listening skills. However, only four states (Michigan, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia) have developed both curriculum materials for teaching listening and procedures for assessing listening skills. To provide an indication of the comprehensive nature of these state programs, the descriptions for each of the four states are reprinted in Appendix B. The description also includes the contact person within the appropriate state agency and the communication professional, within the state, representing the SCA Committee on Assessment and Testing (CAT). A complete copy of the most recent report is available from the Speech Communication Association.

To illustrate the wide range of learning objectives states have placed under the general classification of "listening," selected listening objectives of several states are provided in Appendix C. The complete list of objectives for Georgia and Massachusetts are presented. However, to conserve space, only selected portions are presented from the lists of the other states. An examination of the list of objectives provides clear evidence that "a universally accepted definition of listening does not exist" (Backlund, 1984, p.8) and suggests why so few states have developed or adopted listening assessment procedures. For example, while eleven states made progress in curriculum development in the two years from 1981-83, only three states made progress in developing assessment procedures.

Higher Education Efforts In Listening

Having acquired an initial description of the K-12 curriculum and assessment practices of the state educational agencies, CAT turned its attention to higher education. Specifically, the subcommittee on "Oral Communication Assessment in Higher Education" was charged with identifying the "state-of-the-art" in the oral communication assessment of students in higher education.

Of an initial population of 2,200 colleges and universities contacted, only forty-five were clearly identified as institutions with "uniform large-scale assessment procedures and/or instruments" in use. An examination of the information provided by the institutions reveals four main purposes for oral communication assessment programs in higher education: course exemption, placement/screening, assessment within class, and teacher certification.

The committee's final report (Rubin, Moore, Quianthy, & Sisco, 1983) provides a complete description of the survey method employed and the results of the study. It also provides descriptions of the procedures and/or instruments used by each of the forty-five institutions. Each description includes a contact person and a list of descriptors that refer to the assessment's purpose, skills that are assessed, and the mode of assessment. An abbreviated report was recently published by Rubin in the April, 1984 issue of Communication Education.

With respect to listening, of the forty-five institutions identified in the study, only six (13%) reported assessment procedures and/or instruments. In all but one institution, the assessment instrument and materials appear to be locally developed and not to have been empirically validated.

Summary

The data gathered by the Speech Communication Association's Committee on Assessment and Testing reveals that listening is an issue of concern to a large number of state education agencies. However, over half of the states have yet to establish listening as a priority for either curriculum development or assessment.

Of significant concern is the remarkably low interest expressed by higher education. For institutions that have developed large scale assessment programs, there is a nine-to-one probability that the focus is upon speaking rather than listening. Until the nature of listening becomes more clearly understood and corresponding assessment instruments are available, there appears little chance for this ratio to change significantly. On the contrary, the increased interest expressed by state education agencies over the past few years is encouraging and may stimulate a corresponding interest within higher education.

Before concluding this progress report, a note of caution and a call for help must be issued. The efforts of the Committee on Assessment and Testing are the first attempts to identify and characterize the state-of-the-art in oral communication assessment on any level. Thus, there is a high probability that one or more states, school districts, and/or institutions of higher education with curriculum development and/or assessment programs may be missing from the final reports of the subcommittees. To this end, the reader is encouraged to carefully examine the relevant documents, specifically, the committee report of Backlund, et al., (1982) and the recent update by Van Rheenen, et al., (1983), as well as the committee report of Rubin, et al., (1983). Should you have more accurate information about a state, district, and/or institution than is provided in the report, please notify the appropriate committee chairperson and/or complete the form attached to the end of this report. Similarly, as you become aware of states, districts, or institutions with curriculum and assessment programs or plans which are not reflected in the current reports, you are encouraged to notify the chairperson of the appropriate subcommittee or the chairperson of the Committee on Assessment and Testing, Rebecca Rubin, Kent State University.

The Committee has begun the process of disseminating information on oral communication curriculum development and assessment to Federal, state, and local educational leaders. However, to insure that the most complete and accurate information is being disseminated, the assistance of communication professionals at all levels is vital.

REFERENCES

- Backlund, P. (1984). Issues in assessing listening. The Communicator, in press.
- Backlund, P., Booth, J., Moore, M., Parks, A. M., & Van Rheenen, D. (1982). State Practices in Speaking and Listening Skill Assessment. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Rubin, D. L., Daly, J., McCroskey, J. C., & Mead, N. A. (1982). A review and critique of procedures for assessing speaking and listening skills among preschool through grade twelve students. Communication Education, 31, 285-303.
- Rubin, R. B. (1984). Communication assessment instruments and procedures in higher education. Communication Education, 33, 178-180.
- Rubin, R. B., Moore, M. R., Quianthy, R., & Sisco, J. (1983). Oral Communication Assessment Procedures and Instrument Development in Higher Education. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Van Rheenen, D. D., McClure, K., & Backlund, P. (1983, November). State practices in speaking and listening skill assessment through 1983. Progress report presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Washington, D.C.

APPENDIX A

STATE PRACTICES IN SPEAKING AND LISTENING
SKILL ASSESSMENT THROUGH 1983*

<u>Category #1</u>	<u>Category #2</u>	<u>Category #3</u>	<u>Category #4</u>	<u>Category #5</u>
No Programs No Plans	Intentions to develop programs	Skills + Assessment	Skills + Curriculum	Skills + Curriculum + Assessment
Alabama	Arkansas	Connecticut (L)	Alaska (L)	Michigan (L)
Colorado	California	Hawaii (L)	Arizona (L)	Pennsylvania
Delaware	Idaho (L)	Maine (L)	Georgia (L)	Utah (L)
Florida	Indiana (L)	Massachusetts (L)	Illinois (L)	Vermont (L)
Iowa	Nebraska	New Hampshire (L)	Louisiana (L?)	Virginia (L)
Kansas	New Jersey (L)		Minnesota (L)	
Kentucky	Ohio		Missouri (L)	
Maryland	Oregon (L)		North Carolina (L)	
Mississippi	Wisconsin		South Carolina (L)	
Montana			South Dakota (L)	
Nevada			Tennessee	
New Mexico			Texas (L)	
New York			Washington	
North Dakota				
Oklahoma				
Rhode Island				
West Virginia				
Wyoming				

NOTE: (L) Denotes specific programs (or plans) for listening skills, curriculum, and/or assessment.

Category Description:

1. No curriculum or assessment programs in speaking and/or listening and no plans to implement any such programs.
2. Intention to develop either curriculum or assessment programs in speaking and/or listening but have not done so to date.
3. Have identified speaking and/or listening skills and are developing (or have) statewide procedures to assess these skills.
4. Have identified skills in speaking and/or listening and are developing (or have) curriculum materials for teaching these skills, but do not have (statewide) assessment procedures.
5. Have identified skills and have developed (or are developing) both curriculum and assessment procedures for those skills.

APPENDIX B

STATES WITH CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS IN LISTENING

Michigan

Description: Public Law #38 called for statewide assessment in language arts, reading, etc. In Jan. 1973 Criterion-referenced assessment was mandated. The Department of Education Developed objectives for the state in 1975-76, including objectives for speaking and listening. This is part of a general curriculum effort that includes objectives, assessment procedures, and curriculum strategies. Listening was tested through MEAP in October 1979. The test was administered to 1691 students at the 10th grade level. The test is not a requirement for graduation, but serves as a curriculum check on listening skills. The Dept. of Education then developed (in Sept. 1980) a booklet titled "MEAP Support Materials for Listening Skills." This booklet closely described the listening objectives, test items related to them, error analysis, and instructional strategies. Information can be found in: "MEAP Support Materials for Listening Skills," "Minimal Performance Objectives for Communication Skills," and "State Basic Skills Improvement Plan." Michigan Department of Education, Lansing, MI 48809. Copies of these documents are in committee files.

State Contact: Judy Hood
State Dept. of Education
620 Michigan National Tower
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 373-8793

CAT: Cassandra Book
1853 Burrwood Circle
E. Lansing, MI 48823

Utah

Description: One of the few states that has a program of testing basic skills in place and operating in a program of functional competencies. Begun in 1977, it has been refined and developed to the point where it has been adopted statewide. Further refinements are being planned. The system has five functional competencies: communication (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), math, problem solving, democratic government, and consumerism. Current plans include a change in focus, so that elementary and junior high would focus on communication, math, and problem solving, while senior high would focus on democratic process and consumerism (in addition to other subjects). The handbook published by the State Board of Education provides material on curriculum, performance indicators, testing procedures, and various forms. It is informative and helpful. Currently skills are assessed at the 6th and 8th grades by the classroom teacher who uses procedures described in the handbook, "Teacher's Handbook of Functional Competencies for High School Graduation." Utah State Board of Education, Salt Lake City, UT 84111. A copy of the document is in committee files.

State Contact: Bob Leake
Utah State Board of Education
250 East Fifth South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
(801) 533-5572

CAT: Gabriel Della-Piana
Director, Bureau of Educational Research
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Vermont

Description: Vermont has an assessment program in place. The program began with the school year of 1977-78. During this year, 95,486 students were assessed to determine the level of mastery in the basic skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, computing, and reasoning. The identified competencies will be required of graduates beginning with the class of 1981. While too detailed to describe here, the data gathered on these skills is informative. The data and the discussion of results is contained in a series of booklets published by the Dept. of Education, entitled, Basic Competency Program. The specific assessment is done by the classroom teacher. The Basic Competencies Manual gives guides for the assessment of speaking and listening together with sample materials. Materials are available from: "Basic Competencies: A Manual of Information and Guidelines for Teachers and Administrators." Vermont's Basic Competency Program (published yearly). Vermont Dept. of Education, Montpelier, VT 05602. A copy of the Manual and reports for selected years are in CAT files.

State Contact: Becky Parent
Assessment and Testing
State Department of Education
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 828-3111

CAT:

Virginia

Description: In addition to a statewide program, "Standards of Learning Objectives," which includes learning objectives for all the basic skills (including speaking and listening), Virginia is now developing assessment instruments that will include an explicit assessment procedure for oral skills. They hope to have a statewide program operational by Fall of 1984. They will be field testing assessment instruments next year and hope to have a teacher resource book for assessment published by August of 1984. Still available is: "English Language Arts: Standards of Learning Objectives", Dept. of Education, Commonwealth of Virginia, Richmond, VA 23216. A draft copy of this document is in the committee files. Some positive change in VA since the last survey.

State Contacts: Claude A. Sandy
Associate Director for Testing
Division of Research, Evaluation, and Testing
Department of Education
P. O. Box 60
Richmond, VA 23216
(804) 225-2102

CAT: Anita Taylor
George Mason University
Arts and Communication Dept.
Fairfax, VA 22030

APPENDIX C

SELECTED STATE LISTENING OBJECTIVES*

Georgia - Listening Skills

The learner will:

1. Expand the number of words understood when heard in context.
 - a. Learn multiple and specific meanings of words, their denotations and connotations.
 - b. Understand figurative language, idiomatic expressions, colloquial terms and allusions.
 - c. Learn specialized vocabularies.
2. Adjust listening strategies according to:
 - a. The purpose (distinguish message from noise, concentrate, suspend judgment, avoid distraction, wait for turn to talk, avoid interrupting, display interest and involvement.)
 - b. The nature of the material (topic, density and concept difficulty)
 - c. The organizational cues of the speaker (statement of points, organizational phrases, repetition.)
3. Listen and respond for a variety of purposes.
 - a. Pleasure and enjoyment
 - b. To follow directions
 - c. To make intelligent consumer judgments
 - d. To function as an informed citizen, e.g., news broadcasts, editorials, speeches, political appeals
 - e. To obtain information
 - f. To apply information heard to new situations
4. Recognize and discriminate among common sounds and sound signals in his or her environment.
5. Demonstrate understanding of a basic vocabulary related to his or her environment.
6. Recognize and recall the following when specifically stated by the speaker.
 - a. Main idea(s)
 - b. Details
 - c. Sequence
 - d. Cause-effect
7. Infer the following when not specifically stated by the speaker.
 - a. Main idea(s)
 - b. Details
 - c. Sequence
8. Receive and comprehend varied materials at different levels of thinking, e.g., literal, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative.

*Source: Backlund, 1984.

9. Receive and evaluate material critically by making judgments about validity, bias, speaker qualifications, facts and opinion, fantasy or realism.
10. Recognize and identify the qualities of a speaker's style, imagery, word choice and technique.
11. Accept and understand other dialects as valid communication.

Main - Listening Skills

1. Recognition and Discrimination
 - a. Discriminate between speech sounds.
 - b. Demonstrate attentiveness and courtesy in listening situation.
 - c. Demonstrate effective listening skills (e.g., attentiveness, courtesy).
 - d. Recognize the effects of intonation, pitch, and juncture on meaning.
 - e. Recognize the meaning of gestures and other nonverbal communication.
2. Comprehension
 - a. Follow orally presented directions.
 - b. Identify the topic of an orally presented selection.
 - c. Retell a story that is presented orally.
 - d. Identify the topic sentence and supporting details of an orally presented selection.
 - e. Identify the point of view of the speaker of an orally presented selection.
 - f. Identify facts and supporting details of an orally presented selection.
3. Interpretation
 - a. Predict the outcome of an orally presented selection (e.g., an incomplete story).
 - b. Interpret the emotional tone of an orally presented selection.
 - c. Identify the purpose of an oral communication.
 - d. Identify implied main ideas in an orally presented selection.
 - e. Differentiate between the stated and implied main ideas in an orally presented selection.
 - f. Analyze cause and effect relationships in an orally presented selection.
4. Evaluation
 - a. Distinguish between fact and fiction in an orally presented selection.
 - b. Given an orally presented selection, distinguish among fact, fiction, opinion, assumption, and inference.
 - c. Identify source/message bias.
 - d. Evaluate the validity of oral reasoning.
 - e. Recognize the influence of cultural, social, educational, and environmental factors on speech.

Massachusetts - Listening

1. Basic Listening Skills
 - a. Recognize words and phrases used by the speaker.
 - b. Indicate why the speaker can or cannot be understood.

2. Understanding What You Hear
 - a. Understand spoken words and ideas.
 - b. Identify and understand main ideas.
 - c. Associate important details with main ideas.
 - d. Understand descriptions of events and experiences.
 - e. Understand speaker's purpose.

3. Using What You Hear
 - a. Understand and respond to survival words used in emergency situations.
 - b. Summarize information and draw conclusions.
 - c. Follow straightforward directions.

Michigan - Critical Listening

1. Identify the main idea of an oral presentation of appropriate length.
2. Identify the most appropriate summary of a selection presented orally.
3. Identify the purpose of an oral presentation.
4. Recall information presented orally.
5. Identify cause and effect relationships within an oral presentation.
6. Identify appropriate inferences about either the presenter herself/himself or persons described by the presenter.
7. Identify differences between fact and opinion in an oral presentation.
8. Identify/describe the main story line or sequence of events of a story or event presented orally.

North Carolina - Listening

Competency Goal(s)

1. The learner will be able to hear differences between and among sounds.
2. The learner will be able to listen literally for items of information, sequence, main ideas, comparisons/contrasts, and cause-effect relationships.
3. The learner will be able to listen interpretively in order to predict outcomes, classify, summarize, and consolidate.
4. The learner will be able to listen interpretively in order to infer main ideas, supporting details, comparisons/contrasts, cause-effect relationships, and meaning from figurative language.
5. The learner will be able to listen critically for fact, fiction, opinion, bias, propaganda, assumption, inference, and relevance.
6. The learner will be able to listen critically in order to draw conclusions and make judgments about content and performance.
7. The learner will be able to listen creatively in order to construct sensory images and to talk about emotional responses.

8. The learner will be able to listen creatively in order to develop solutions to problems and to formulate new ideas.

Performance Indicators

"The first number for performance indicator corresponds with the skill number above."

Grades K-3

- 1.01 With eyes closed, identify a number of sounds from nature (e.g., animals) and man-created objects (e.g., bells, whistles).
- 3.01 After hearing the first half of a story, predict the outcome.
- 4.05 After hearing an effect, infer a cause.
- 7.01 While listening to a given selection of music, respond through body movement in a manner to reflect the mood, rhythm, etc.
- 8.01 Propose solutions to classroom or school-related problems presented by the teacher or classmates.

Grades 7-9

- 1.01 Given an audio-taped list of 25 sentences in which endings (e.g., -ed, s, 's, 'ing) are omitted or slurred, identify these unconventional pronunciations and pronounce them in the conventional way.
- 2.01 After listening to a weather report, accurately repeat general information about conditions in the forecast.
- 3.01 After listening to a sound-filmstrip of an open ended story, complete the story orally and state reasons why a conclusion is logical.
- 4.01 After listening to a reading of a letter to the editor of a newspaper, write the purpose of the letter and the reasons that support that purpose.
- 5.03 After listening to an argument for or against a school rule, identify orally the bias of the speaker.

Texas - Listening

Program Goals

1. The program provides opportunities for students to develop skills in attending to a speaker.
2. The program provides opportunities for students to develop skills in following oral directions.
3. The program provides opportunities for students to develop skills in analyzing an oral presentation.
4. The program provides opportunities for students to develop skills in responding to oral presentations.

Utah

Life Competency Areas - Listening

1. Listens and responds appropriately to commercials, instructions, and other oral communication necessary as a consumer of goods and services.
2. Listens and responds appropriately to questions and other oral communications related to career.
3. Listens and responds appropriately to doctor's instructions, safety warnings, and other oral communications related to health and safety.
4. Listens and responds appropriately to statements by elected officials, participants in a discussion and other citizenship related oral communication.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

If you are aware of errors or omissions in either the "state practices" report (Backlund, et al., 1982) or the "higher education" report (Rubin, et al., 1983), please provide as much of the following information as possible.

1. The name of the state, school district and/or college/university
2. The name and address of a contact person within the organization
3. Any information you may have about the error and/or omission
4. Your name and address

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State

And survey was done.

updated report (1983) to be published