

*Summer Conf*

LISTENING: COMPETENCIES, CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES  
CONFRONTING STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

Two formative and formidable events, each occurring within one year of one another, have greatly contributed to both the creation and the theme of the First Annual ILA Summer Conference. The first of these events occurred on November 1, 1978, when Congress passed Public Law 95-561, which amended Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to include (among other items) the addition of speaking and listening--along with reading, writing, and arithmetic--as needed basic skills. The second of these events occurred on August 23-24, 1979, when twenty-four individuals interested in the field of listening met at the University of Minnesota with host Dr. Lyman K. (Manny) Steil and decided to form the International Listening Association. Since coming into existence, these two events--the first involving one group of decision-makers reforming a law and the second involving another group of decision-makers forming an association--have stimulated much interest in the development of listening instruction and assessment.

One group of individuals who have been most directly affected by the first event is members of federal and state departments of education. The effects of the reform of Title II have been--and continue to be--evident at both governmental levels. As of January 30, 1981, the U.S. Department of Education had awarded--under all sections of the 1978 legislation--156 grants and 15 contracts with total appropriations of over 25 million dollars.<sup>1</sup> And, according to Backlund, et al., federal funding to support the 1978 legislation is not expected to be limited to the already-awarded 25 million dollars: "the Basic Skills Improvement Program of the U.S. Department of

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Education expects to provide strong support and assistance services for the individual states in their efforts to develop quality basic skills programs."<sup>2</sup> Individual states have also responded to the federal government's inclusion of listening as a basic skill. According to Claudette Morton Johnson, 23 states have developed curriculum materials which include listening as a component.<sup>3</sup>

The group of individuals who have been most directly affected by the second event is members of the International Listening Association, whose membership now consists of 397 members. Additionally, ILA members have been affected by the first event, for the 1978 federal amendment has provided members with an additional means of being actively involved in achieving the association's purpose: "to promote the study and development of effective listening."<sup>4</sup> Their involvement has stemmed, in part, from their commitment to the primacy of listening as expressed by listening pioneer Dr. Ralph Nichols in his keynote address at the First Annual ILA Conference in Atlanta in 1980: "The most basic of all human needs is to understand and to be understood....The best way to understand people is to listen to them."<sup>5</sup>

To encourage more effective listening and understanding, individual ILA members have made numerous contributions to the field of education. They have presented conference sessions on how listening effectiveness can be developed and assessed at various educational levels, developed listening curriculum materials, written listening textbooks, compiled listening bibliographies, constructed listening tests, conducted listening research, and provided listening workshops for teachers. Even more importantly,

those members who are educators have made listening instruction an integral part of their students' education. Perhaps most importantly, however, has been the involvement of many ILA members on local, district, and state listening curriculum development and assessment committees. Serving in this capacity is of major importance to the enactment of the 1978 federal amendment calling for "educational agencies to coordinate the utilization of all available resources for elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master the basic skills of...effective communication, both written and oral."<sup>6</sup> Dr. George Smith, Superintendent of Mesa Public Schools and President of the Arizona State Board of Education, recognized that ILA members are among those "available resources" when he spoke at the Fifth Annual ILA Conference in Scottsdale in 1984: "The point is, you have an important message regarding an important topic. Education is far too important to be left to the professionals. We need your assistance."<sup>7</sup>

Although individual members of the listening and the education groups greatly affected by the 1978 federal act and the 1979 association act have worked together on some projects, the two groups previously have not had the opportunity to interact as one group. Thus, the purpose of the First Annual ILA Summer Conference was to provide this opportunity for interaction between the two groups as well as with representative members of the Speech Communication Association. It is our goal that this interaction on "Listening: Competencies, Curriculum and Assessment Challenges Confronting State Boards of Education" will result in more effective listening at all

educational levels.

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First Annual ILA Summer Conference

1. Phil Backlund, et al., "A National Survey of State Practices in Speaking and Listening Assessment," Communication Education 31 (January 1982): 126.
2. Ibid., p. 127.
3. Claudette Morton Johnson, "State Departments of Education Take Leadership Role in Listening: Fact or Fallacy" (Paper presented at the Fifth Annual Conference of the International Listening Association, Scottsdale, Arizona, March, 1984).
4. Article II--Purpose, as stated in the International Listening Association Bylaws.
5. Ralph G. Nichols, "The Struggle To Be Human" (Address presented at the First Annual Conference of the International Listening Association, Atlanta, Georgia, February, 1980).
6. "Title II--Establishment of a New Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965," P.L. 95-561, 92 STAT 2201.
7. George Smith, "The Value of Listening in a Public School Education" (Address presented at the Fifth Annual Conference of the International Listening Association, Scottsdale, Arizona, March, 1984).