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Listening games versus listening worksheets in the kindergarten classroom

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Listening games versus listening worksheets in the kindergarten classroom
LISTENING GAMES VERSUS LISTENING WORKSHEETS
IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

A Research Paper
Submitted to
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
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Entitled: LISTENING GAMES VERSUS LISTENING WORKSHEETS IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The importance of listening has been known throughout the centuries. Wagner (1966) quoted Plutarch, who almost 2,000 years ago, stated: "Know how to listen and you will profit even from those who talk badly" (p. 7). While the importance of listening has been recognized, instruction has been lacking (Swanson, 1984).

Proverbs 1:5 says "A wise man will hear and increase learning" (Schuller, 1984, p. 668). The question needs to be asked how children can be expected to be good listeners when they have not been taught. Through listening, the speaker and listener help each other to search and find what is of value in our lives. If teachers want to make a profound difference in the lives of children, they need the skills and understanding to do this.

Nichols (1957) quoted Henry David Thoreau as saying the greatest compliment that was ever paid to him was when he was asked what he thought and his answer was attended. There are many reasons why messages are tuned out. Some of these reasons are because people get bored, tired, in a hurry, or they are concerned with their own lives.

Much can be gained from listening. It can increase enjoyment of life; it can enlarge experience; it can improve use of language; it can expand the range of what is enjoyed and it can decrease the tension of daily living.

In this paper, the language arts area of listening and
its components will be examined. The teaching methods utilizing games and worksheets will be presented and examined relative to their influence on the development of listening skills.

**Purpose of the Study**

Listening is an art, and good listening is an alive process demanding alert and active participation (Barbara, 1958). It appears that teachers are not aware of what methods are best for teaching children to listen or if there is a best method. There is also a need to learn more about the components of listening. The purpose of this study is twofold: number one - to determine which method of instruction for listening is the most effective and number two - to determine which method is preferred by children.

**Problems of the Study**

It is essential that teachers recognize listening as an important goal in education and learn how to help children to improve their listening skills. The problem of this study is to determine which method, listening games or listening worksheets, is more effective for helping kindergarteners to improve their listening ability.

From the purpose of this study certain hypotheses were derived:

1. Kindergarten students will learn to listen better by playing games rather than by doing worksheets.
2. Kindergarten students will prefer games over worksheets when the option is available.
Assumptions

1. This study assumed that an objective test was capable of measuring listening ability.

2. Children will respond with their best ability to the listening tests. True measurement of it could not be made. However, an estimate of an individual's ability was determined by working with an operational definition.

Limitations

Only one form of the Stanford Early School Achievement Test was available. It was given three times, but only the first two administrations are used in this study.

Definition of Terms

Listening -- This is to make a conscious effort to hear, attend closely so as to hear (Guralnik, 1984). Children need to be taught to listen, just as we need to work with parents and other adults. Children must learn to listen, if they are to experience academic achievement.

Hearing -- This term refers to the act or process of perceiving sounds. Hearing is a physical act (Guralnik, 1984). Children can hear, but not listen. This is evidenced by the lack of follow-through on a task.

Auding -- This is the attentive listening to speech sounds and patterns, as opposed to simple hearing. This requires the process of considering all factors relevant to the situation. It is to listen with comprehension and appreciation (Russell, 1966).

Appreciative listening -- A term used when a person is
listening to classical music for enjoyment, to gain a sensory impression, and it can describe the mood of the composer. Children can rest to some music and be quite excited by other types of music. Sometimes it is determined by taste and other times, other factors.

**Discriminative listening** -- This technique helps a listener to develop sensitivity to arguments, language and to distinguish fact from opinion; it is the ability to hear the difference between the sounds of a B and a D. Children learn to listen before they read and they need this discriminative listening to be able to read.

**Comprehensive listening** -- This type enables a listener to understand a message; it is the listening that is done between the lines. The listener has the ability to have empathy for the speaker. When a child reads a story, he/she can understand what the author is trying to convey to the audience, whether it is a message for that child or another.

**Critical listening** -- This term enables the listener to evaluate and then to accept or reject a message; it is when a child has to work out a problem situation. He/she may have to decide if a person is a good person or a stranger (Strother, 1987).

**Operationally defined listening** -- This type occurred when the events contained in the 'Listening to Words and Stories' of Stanford Early School Achievement Test were observed (Madden, 1982).

**Referential communication skills** -- These skills are the
listening and speaking parts of the exchange. It is the reference point of view.
Chapter 2
Review of Related Literature

Value of Listening

Throughout history, many quotations have been found. Wagner (1966) quoted Epictetus, a famous Greek philosopher concerning the importance of listening. This philosopher stated, "Nature has given to man one tongue but two ears that we may hear twice as much as we speak" (p. 7).

First there must be an awareness of listening. Attentive listening has many positive outcomes. Wolf (1983) has observed that it can win friends, reduce tensions, solve problems, achieve cooperation, improve decision making, elicit needed information, improve sales, boost confidence, and increase our appreciation of the pleasant and the beautiful. A larger portion of knowledge can be acquired than ever thought possible.

Improving active listening skills enhances personal power and self-confidence. There is a direct relationship among listening skills, personal/professional growth, and career satisfaction (Burley-Allen, 1984).

Importance of Testing

"Many popular listening tests are more closely related to general mental ability than to listening" (Watson, 1984, p. 20). Teachers must be careful to assess listening and not mental ability. Current research suggests that listening is a complex process rather than a single skill.
Listening is being tested as three separate abilities: 1) short-term listening, or communication regarding instant response; 2) short-term listening with rehearsal, or communication allowing 15-30 seconds for information review before response; and 3) lecture listening, or over three minutes of continuous information flow, requiring mental summary and evaluation.

Inconsistent listening test results have led one to surmise that the value of listening tests is difficult to determine. Validation difficulties suggest improvement of those instruments is needed. Instead of abandoning listening research, there is an attempt to examine the listening process more carefully (Lundsteen, 1979).

**Listening through Games**

Listening is one of the greatest avenues for learning. Therefore, parents and teachers should be alert and sensitive to the many situations and occasions in which listening is necessary. The child should learn to listen as a means of extending his understanding and experiences at home and at school. Listening with understanding and speaking with accuracy will furnish a background for learning to read. Good listening should be looked upon as a form of active participation and not merely as a tolerant courtesy. Experience shows that instructional games have great value in strengthening children's ability to listen. The major justification for using a game should be to help the child learn more efficiently. Many games have a range
of interest that appeal to children of all ages (Burley-Allen, 1984).

Listening functions not only in the school but in family life, social life, and business as well. Life situations that require the ability to listen include attending church, the movies, lectures, and programs, listening to the radio, and television, using the telephone and engaging in conversation. What children derive from these and many other activities depends largely upon their ability to listen well, to evaluate and to see what they have learned (Bessant, 1975).

Nineteen states have adopted listening objectives but indicate a lack of a universally accepted definition of listening. Objectives such as: paying attention, processing information through thinking skills and giving appropriate feedback either through a game or worksheet, are a part of the complexity of the problem. Nineteen states have developed listening curriculums (Backlund, 1983).

In 1978, Congress established a legal definition for the basic skills. This law defined the basic skills as including "effective oral communication" (Swanson, 1984). The Office of Education has recently added speaking and listening to the list of "Basic Skills" under the Title II program (Dickson, 1981). This adds impetus to this study. The importance of listening is recognized by legislators as well as educators.
State Departments of Education have funded various educational attempts at listening curriculum design and universities have begun to host workshops in basic skills and include speaking and listening for the first time. The International Listening Association was founded in 1979 and functions to help teachers and others find materials. It cannot be taken for granted that children will be good listeners; listening must be taught. It is the teacher who must comply with legislated demands to teach and assess listening skills. It is the teacher who must find ways to help classroom instruction and concentrate on the very act of listening (Ridge, 1982).

The development of speaking and listening skills is more dependent upon "learn how", which is the process than on "learn that", which is the product (Cazden, 1972). Informal observations can trace disputes to poor listening habits. It is the standardized tests, paper and pencil tests that show us the effects of listening.

Swanson (1984) has quoted Ralph G. Nichols, whom he calls the "father of listening", as having said one of the common listening barriers is an attitude that the subject is boring. Swanson (1984) states, "The effective listener approaches each situation with a selfish attitude of 'What's in this for me?'" (p.8)

Children spend more than one half of their school day engaged in listening activities. More than 80% of a child's day in kindergarten is engaged in listening (Lamberts,
Young children are very distractable and must know what is expected of them. By knowing when to speak and when to listen, children can evaluate the process. Children can ask questions (Dickson, 1981).

Lamberts (1980) says we need to define for children that it is the spoken word broken down in their mind. Materials such as a tape recorder with categories of sounds (people, indoor, outdoor, animal, music, etc.) can be used.

Sixty-six studies which made use of eight basic types of games were located (Dickson, 1980). What are the best ways to teach students to listen?

"Most people absorb only 30 percent of what they hear" (Landry, 1974, p. 68). Other studies put this figure at less than 25 percent. The level of listening decreases as the age of the person increases. If we listen to our students we will find many new avenues for exploration (Landry, 1974).

In life, and especially in school, children are expected to listen. The fact is that most students do not know how to listen. Training must take place in listening. Teaching the skills of listening, getting some feedback, and modeling the skills for listening must be done by ourselves.

Listening can be improved when students are taught how to listen. An example of the listening skills and strategies which are taught to students are the following: First is to look at the person who is talking. Listening calls for a still body. When listening, listen for key
words to understand the meaning of what is being said. The fourth rule is say directions to yourself for understanding. The fifth rule is do it (Corpening, 1984).

Let the child know that listening is important. Don't yell above noise and confusion; go to the child and get the child's attention before giving the message. Speak distinctly, loudly enough to be understood, but don't yell or scream at the child. Look attentively into the eyes of the child when talking is taking place and really listen to what is being said. It is important for a child to know what it means to be heard, particularly since listening in a classroom is more difficult than in a one-to-one conversation, and since other children are less able to hold the child's attention than are adults. Much classroom time is spent listening to the teacher, but some of the time will involve listening to other children.

There are so many sounds around the listener in life today that sometimes adults forget that children must be taught to listen discriminately. Children must be guided to be more selective and to cut out extraneous material. Children of today suffer from being perpetually, though superficially, occupied. When parents talk to their children they should keep in mind to point out sounds in their environment.

There are many games being introduced into preschool curricula. Blumenfeld (1970) did a pilot study which included a game to teach both speaking and listening
comprehension skills and then to obtain empirical evidence as to how well it taught certain language skills. The results of the pilot study indicate that children can dramatically improve their language skills of listening comprehension and verbal expression through playing a game. Games were also greatly enjoyed by the children; not only was the goal to add excitement, but the cooperative activity in attaining this goal seemed to be highly enjoyable.

On the other hand, games, as presently developed, require considerable participation by the experimenter. One important feature of a game seemed to be that speaking and listening by the players served a real purpose—one which simulated closely the function of clear communication in everyday life. The game setting provided for these young children a highly relevant classroom environment of social interaction (Blumenfeld, 1970).

Research emphasizes the integrality of listening as a component of the language learning process. Listening is a useful part of foreign-language learning. The use of worksheets in the classroom is artificial in comparison to real life. The cassette recorder is recommended. (Little, 1970).

Planning the development of children's listening skills through tapes, exercises and games is a more effective use of language. Knowledge can be gained from explanations, descriptions, or answers to questions. Personal relationships are developed partly through the agency of
sound. The task is to develop the skill of listening. Listening habits must be formed by the use of listening powers to acquire desired information and by specific exercises and games (Weinstock, 1977).

Listening is taken for granted and is, therefore, seldom specifically taught. Efficient listening must be learned and practiced. In a research program, listening was taught for pleasure and relaxation, comprehension of content, and for auditory discrimination and development. Children in the kindergartens who were being taught in a structured, sequential program with appropriate materials achieved significantly more than the children in the regular kindergarten curriculum (Stanchfield, 1971).

**Use of Worksheets**

Even with the use of worksheets, a variety of materials and equipment was suggested. It is the listening behaviors that need to be taught and the materials or methodology seems secondary. Teacher knowledge is of utmost importance. And in turn, parent education of the task at hand seems to follow. The pupil's learning behavior seems dependent on the teacher's knowledge of listening behavior. Teacher education programs in listening need to be encouraged (Goelz, 1974).

The CLAS (Classroom Listening and Speaking) material certainly endorses the worksheet method as half of it is worksheets. It is material that is being used in this study (Plourde, 1985). An additional module consisting of
worksheets provided both practice in effective listening, and in responding to messages sent (Borger, 1950).

A research project investigating the effectiveness of the use of a tape recorder and taped lessons with accompanying worksheets for independent work activities in the 1st grade was done by Mary Button (1972). It was hypothesized that the experimental group, who heard lessons on reading readiness, auditory perception, phonics, and reading skills, in addition to having regular instruction from the teacher, would demonstrate greater gains in knowledge of rhyming words and initial sounds. Greater word knowledge and word discrimination skills would show greater composite reading skills. Post-test data did not support any of the hypotheses.

It was possible that the objectives were overly ambitious and that the individual differences between subjects were not accounted for by the differences in individual test scores completed. It appeared that further study should investigate the impact of the individual's cultural background upon the ability to read. The use of audio tapes did, however, improve students' listening skills and help to maintain order in the classroom (Button, 1972).

Developing a valid measure is difficult. Thus far, no single listening test has gained universal acceptance (Watson, 1984).

When listening focuses on a problem-solving climate,
children are less likely to become lost. Part of this climate is when others listen to them. When children are listened to, they begin to grow and come to life. They are happier and freer. When teachers and children listen to one another, an alternating current flows and they recharge each other. Continually recreated, they rarely tire of each other.

"In essence, tell yourself to listen with affection to children who talk to you" (Lundsteen, 1979, p. 129). Try to read the heart and don't argue or change the subject. An openness between teachers and children fosters the teacher's desire to know how children feel, and vice versa. If educators cannot communicate with their students, both become lost in the same silence (Lundsteen, 1979).
Chapter 3

Methodology

As a result of the review of the literature, the following hypotheses were developed from the original problems of the study.

1. Kindergarten students will learn to listen better by playing games rather than by doing worksheets.

2. Kindergarten students will prefer games over worksheets when an option is available.

In this chapter, the subjects will be given, the tests will be described, the method of study will be described and the design will be stated.

Subjects

This study dealt with a group of morning kindergarteners and a group of afternoon kindergarteners. The location of this study was in a small midwestern town in Iowa. The morning class of 22 students was mostly rural children and the afternoon class of 18 students was composed of town children. The school has 44% who are either on the free or reduced lunch program. Twenty-six percent of the children come from one parent homes. Six children in the morning class came from one parent homes and four children in the afternoon class came from one parent homes.

One student in the morning class was dropped due to illness and one student in the afternoon moved. This made the numbers 21 in the morning class and 17 in the afternoon.
Materials

The "Listening to Words and Stories" section of the Stanford Early School Achievement Test (Madden et al, 1982) was used to pre- and post-test the children. Because there is only one form of the Stanford test appropriate for 5 and 6 year olds, the first segment of the study ran for approximately 30 consecutive school days; from January 20th, until March 8th, 1988. The test was administered three times; only the first two were used to determine listening effectiveness. The third administration was needed because both groups switched materials. This was necessary in order for the students to express a preference concerning these materials at the end of the study.

Games and worksheets were taken from CLAS (Classroom Listening and Speaking) (Plourde, 1985) for the daily lessons to be used with each class. Lessons appropriate to the kindergarten level were selected for use.

Procedure

Mental Measurement (Mitchell, 1985) was used to select a test for the study. The "Listening to Words and Stories" section of the Stanford Early School Achievement Test was selected. It was the only test found appropriate for the ages of the subjects and which could be administered in the most efficient amount of time.

The Stanford pretest was given to both groups, after which the morning class did 30 consecutive days of games,
and the afternoon class did 30 consecutive days of worksheets. Both groups were then post-tested. The materials were switched between the groups and the procedure was repeated. Both groups were given an interest inventory following final post-testing to ascertain their preferences.

**Design of the Study**

The design of this study was developed to compare the effects of teaching listening through games to the effects of teaching listening with worksheets. A morning group composed of 22 children were taught listening through games. This group was compared with the afternoon group of 18 children, who were taught listening through worksheets. This study covered 30 consecutive school days.

At the beginning a pretest using the listening section of the *Stanford Early School Achievement Test* was given. This test was repeated at the conclusion of the study and the same test was used again.

An example of a test item that was used from the *Stanford Early School Achievement Test* follows: "Kim had a new balloon. She began to blow it up. She blew and blew, and the balloon got bigger and bigger. Her friend said, 'Stop, Kim!' But Kim kept blowing, and the balloon popped. Which picture shows Kim and her friend?" The test booklet shows three pictures. The first picture is two girls blowing up two balloons. The second picture is a girl giving a boy a balloon. The third picture is two girls with
a balloon that is popping.

An example of a **CLAS (Classroom Listening and Speaking)** game would be a child looks at a Christmas card while the rest of the class can not see it. The child acts out the picture and the class raises their hand if they think they know what the picture might be. The **CLAS (Classroom Listening and Speaking)** worksheet might work on such concepts as narrow or wide. There might be pictures of houses with different size windows and the child is to color the narrow windows.

Following the treatment, both games and worksheets were made equally available to the students. Student interest was inventoried by allowing the children to choose the materials they preferred (either games, worksheets, or both).
Chapter 4
Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first purpose sought to determine which method of instruction in listening is the most effective.

A second purpose was that of determining whether listening games of worksheets were the preferred choice of the subjects. These purposes led to the statement of two hypotheses which were tested in this study. The results from this testing are presented in this chapter.

Testing the Hypotheses

The first hypotheses was stated in the following form: Kindergarten students will learn to listen better by playing games rather than by doing worksheets.

To test this hypothesis, it was first stated in the null form: No significant difference will exist, in listening skills between kindergarten students instructed in games and kindergarten students instructed in worksheets.

After the two groups of subjects in this study received their treatments, they were administered the listening section of the Stanford Early School Achievement Test. It was found, using the $t$-test, that there was no significant differences between the groups (Games group: $n = 21, M = 36.1, SD = 4.3$; Worksheets group: $n = 17, M = 37.1, SD = 4.26, t = .65$).

The second hypothesis was stated in the following form:
Kindergarten students will prefer games over worksheets when an option is available.

The null form for this hypothesis is: No significant difference will exist in the preferences of kindergarteners between games and worksheets when they are given an option.

On each of three days, students were asked to make a choice between games and worksheets. On the first day, 27 students, from a total of 36 students preferred games (Chi-square = 9) p < .05.

On the second day, 31 students, from a total of 36 students preferred games (Chi-square = 18.8) p < .05.

On the third day, 32 students from a total of 36 students preferred games (Chi-square = 21.8) p < .05.

All three days the proportion of students choosing games was greater than expected by chance, at the .05 level of significance.
Chapter 5

Discussion of the Findings

In this study no significant difference was found between the effectiveness of listening games and teaching worksheets in the learning of listening skills. The analysis of the findings yielded the following conclusions:

1. A random sample of students was not available, therefore a sample of convenience was used. Pre-testing showed the groups to have nearly equal scores on the Stanford Early School Achievement Test.

2. The instructor kept daily records on each subject that participated in the study.

3. According to Mitchell (1985) the Stanford Early School Achievement Test was appropriate for 5 and 6 year olds.

In conclusion, one of the concerns may be that the treatment was not long enough or intense enough to assess the level of listening ability. Future studies in the researcher's school will be conducted over an entire school year. However, based on the post-study interest inventory, it can be said that the students in these groups preferred games over worksheets.

Although absolute objectivity is seldom attained, the researcher made every effort to teach both groups with equal enthusiasm. The researcher observed that a female teacher carrying a clipboard around the room presented a role model for the female students. The possibility that the female
students may have been subjected to outside peer and social pressure cannot be discounted. This will be addressed in future studies at the researcher's school.

Implications of the Study

Listening, unlike physical attributes, does not always develop with the process of maturation. Listening is a skill which must be consciously taught and developed.

Indeed, so critical is mastery of these skills, that the Education Act of 1965 was amended (in 1978) to include both listening and speaking skills as discrete instructional components in the curriculum (Dickson, 1981). More and more people are realizing the importance of listening to future success in the real world.

Children best learn effective listening skills when they have role models who are also effective listeners. Therefore, it is equally important for teachers and parents to assess and improve their own listening abilities in order to more effectively pass these important skills on to their students. Children who do not have effective listening skills find academic work and similar activities very difficult.

Clearly, teaching listening skills gives the student a powerful tool which can be extended and adapted to all areas of life. Indeed, our democratic society depends upon the existence of effective communication among both individuals and institutions. And, without listening skills, this is not possible.
There are many ways to teach effective listening skills. The teacher must employ that method which is best correlated with demonstrated intellectual abilities and attention span of each individual child.

A recently illuminated principle for all teachers is that effective listening cannot be taught unless the student is afforded an opportunity to ingest the information and reiterate it in his or her own words. Higher achieving students somehow learn to be better listeners. Thus, teachers need to find ways to help all students become effective listeners.

It may be helpful for each grade level to make their own guidelines for "Good Listeners." For example:

1. Get ready to listen.
2. Think of what the speaker is saying.
3. Are you ready to talk about what has been said?

There seems to be more ownership of responsibility if children are in the leadership role of making the rules. They can also set up the consequences (Russell, 1966).

Listening is psychological and needs to be taken into account when setting up a program. Listening is an active and demanding process. Children can be exhausted if expected to listen too long. Using eyes and ears in an atmosphere of acceptance forces one to be interested and listen to feelings (Sloan, 1987).

Games definitely have a place in teaching listening if we are to maintain the interest of children in learning.
This has been a worthwhile study; one that could be replicated without difficulty.

**Recommendations**

It is the recommendation of the researcher to have this study replicated in another area to determine if a small, midwestern town is a factor in the listening study. The economics of this situation may enter into the study in the fact that lower-socioeconomic students may be more in need of listening instruction.

It is the recommendation of the researcher that other methods be tried. The use of stories and music as a means to improve listening should be considered and explored.
REFERENCES


