

**TEACHING SPEECH TO
HEARING-IMPAIRED
INFANTS AND
CHILDREN**

TEACHING SPEECH TO HEARING-IMPAIRED INFANTS AND CHILDREN

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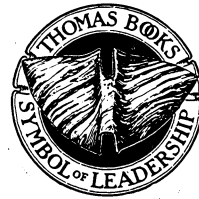
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INTRODUCTION

EARLY identification of hearing-impaired children has created a need for consistent training designed to take advantage of the most critical years for learning. Whether your program follows an oral or a total communication approach to education, teaching speech to hearing-impaired infants and children can be the most rewarding part of your job as a teacher.

This book is designed to help you make and carry out a teaching plan that will correspond to the development of most babies. We make one basic premise in presenting this material: activities that are right for a child's stage of development and for his particular interests will make his lessons enjoyable and rewarding for everyone.

The child's home or a home environment, such as a demonstration living area, will probably be his classroom during the first years of life. When you begin to work with the young child and his family, spend some time watching him play. Find out what he is able to do and what he enjoys. Then read the sections of the book that give ideas for activities appropriate for his age and developmental level. Since teaching a child involves further development of partially obtained skills as well as concentration on new skills, you'll want to study chapters preceding and following the one that discusses his present age level.

Our intention is to help you make your children's speech and listening experiences pleasant. We are not presenting a new model of speech training, or including activities for language development. We're not advocating any particular method for educating hearing-impaired youngsters. Our goal is to describe a speech program that coordinates child development, behavior management, and creativity so that teaching speech to young children can be consistent among teachers fortunate enough to initiate the aural habilitation process.

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Chapter 1

**PREREQUISITES TO
SPEECH DEVELOPMENT**

Hearing Age

WE, as teachers, know that because our students don't hear normally, they don't develop normal speech or language. For the parents, the most devastating aspect of their child's hearing loss is his lack of speech. The second most devastating aspect of their child's hearing loss can be his hearing aid. The hearing aid provides an obvious cue to parents, family, friends, and strangers that something is wrong with this baby. The hearing aid causes parents and teachers headaches and questions, and above all, the hearing aid does not provide speech. If putting on the hearing aid could immediately make the child talk like a child without a hearing loss, everyone would sing its praises, even the child.

Why is speech development such a complicated process for hearing-impaired children? The answer that makes the most obvious sense is time. A child with normal hearing doesn't start talking when he hears speech for the first time. He doesn't say his first real word until he's about one year old.

So what does the normal-hearing child do during those first twelve months? His mother and father notice a lot of babbling and cooing, but they may not notice that he's also constantly listening. He stops crying when he hears momma fixing his bottle. He jumps up in his playpen when he hears daddy come in the door after work. He listens and learns to predict his environment by those familiar sounds. The baby listens to his mother's comforting voice as she feeds him. He learns that daddy's "Weee . . ." means it's time to take a flight around the living room. He also learns that his own coos and ga-ga's bring smiles and laughter to those important big folks. Sound has meaning: it is rewarding, and it is fun.

He can even use it to make things happen. If he makes different kinds of sounds, his mother will learn when he's saying he's hungry,

when he needs a change, or when he's just tired. When he gives an especially good scream, his mother will run into the room and hold him close.

Finally, after he's listened, cried, and cooed for twenty-four hours a day for twelve entire months, he'll say his first real word. When this happens, it seems as if this was the most important thing the baby has ever done in his whole life. What a ruckus over one little da-da. Who remembers the hours of work (mostly listening) that went into that single word?

For an infant with a significant hearing loss, the first day of hearing aid use is day one of his *hearing age*. This is the "birth" of sound for the hearing-impaired baby, his first day to experience the sounds of the world through his hearing aid. He may fuss or cry. He may show no reaction except a widening of his eyes. The parents may see no reaction at all. In any case, the baby is just beginning the long 365 days of his first hearing year. With each hour he spends listening to the sounds of his world, the sounds of his mother's voice, and the sounds of his own voice, he comes that much closer to the day when the parents will hear his first word. It may seem like centuries before this happens. For the infant with normal hearing, it takes about 8,760 hours!

The earlier the hearing-impaired child is stimulated with speech, the greater the chance the auditory sense has of becoming useful for communication. Until he gets his first hearing aid, the mother can still talk and sing close to his ears — about four inches. You may not be sure how much sound the child is hearing, but don't postpone starting your speech stimulation activities. It should always be assumed that the baby is finding joy and comfort in listening.

Learning to Listen

The initial stages of the child's speech training will be primarily lessons in listening. You'll be playing with toys or materials that will motivate the infant to listen, and stimulating him with a variety of speech sounds and patterns. Our first goal is for the hearing-impaired child to learn to attend to the sounds we want him to imitate.

When a baby is fitted with his first hearing aid, he is bathed in sounds that have no meaning for him. He must learn which sounds

are important and which ones to ignore. He needs opportunities to hear the same sounds many times in similar situations so they become meaningful to him. Isolating certain environmental noises will help the baby realize their sources and diminish their distractiveness, just as isolating certain phonemes, and repeatedly linking them to something motivating or meaningful, will increase his attention to those sounds when he hears them again. Be sure to work in a quiet place so the auditory signals presented are as clear as possible.

By babbling to the hearing-impaired child, you are extracting parts of speech for him to listen to and begin experimenting with vocally. A child with normal hearing extracts these phonemes on his own. The parents are providing the hearing-impaired baby with a model that will aid the process of learning speech. Through structured stimulation activities, the baby will be developing a memory for sound patterns, pitch changes, sustained and repeated vocalizations, and a variety of vowels and consonants. He'll be learning to look to the source of sounds for information. Later, expect him to start imitating what he's been listening to for so many months.

The All-Day Hearing Aid

Putting on the hearing aid for the first time should be a positive experience for the hearing-impaired child. Since children are very aware of the attitudes of adults, we need to approach the hearing aid in an accepting manner. It doesn't bite. It won't hurt. Once the aid is on, immediately distract the child with some interesting toys. You can make speech sounds as you play with the toys, but be sure not to clap or talk too loudly near the hearing aid. If the child reacts negatively to the hearing aid, sometimes showing him a stuffed animal or doll with the aid on, or letting mother try it on will reassure him that it is harmless and fun.

Mother and father must decide that their child will wear his hearing aid, even if he resists. The decision should not be the child's. When he learns that putting on his hearing aid is associated with fun, there will be fewer tears. The hearing aid can be made more appealing to the child with stickers and colorful carriers.

Don't expect the child to wear his hearing aid all day at first. Set up a schedule of hearing aid use with the mother, gradually increasing the time he wears it each day. She may want to start out with