

AN OUTLINE OF A COURSE IN SPEECH IMPROVEMENT
TO BE USED IN
KINDERGARTEN, PRIMARY, AND ELEMENTARY GRADES

A THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Our English language is a wonderful and beautiful one, a conglomerate language. It is vigorous yet musical, the expression of a composite inheritance. It is also a vital, growing language. In 1919 an inquiry was sent to those countries where neither English, nor French nor German was the native speech. The inquiry was sent at the request of the Northern Peace Conference which met in Stockholm. The inquiry was, "Which of the modern languages is the most suitable as a Universal one?" The majority of replies was in favor of the English language. This reply should stimulate school administrators, teachers and parents to teach speech for itself in order that future generations of fathers and mothers may speak more acceptably.

SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

School administrators as well as writers of basic speech texts, agree that the study of speech has a fundamental place in the curriculum of the elementary and secondary school, and that in order to be an effective program, the speech improvement training should be concentrated on the early stages of the primary school program. They assert that it should be started in nursery school, continued through kindergarten, primary and elementary grades, and function in junior high school as a closely-integrated program with language arts and language work.

However, there are still many school administrators, curriculum makers and parents who must be made aware that a complete program of Speech

Improvement is as important as training in reading, writing, arithmetic, music, drawing and art appreciation. The earlier this training is begun, the better able the child will be to adapt himself later on to the complex problems of social living which the culture of a democracy presents.

Teacher training programs in the past have failed to recognize that the teaching of speech to school children is a function of the primary and elementary school, and a responsibility of the classroom teacher; therefore, generally, no special preparation in speech has been given her. Perhaps this is due to the rather widespread belief that no special preparation is needed to teach speech to school children.

Many teachers deplore the fact also, that school systems make inadequate provision for speech improvement training in their primary and elementary curricula. The conscientious teacher is fully aware of the seriousness of not correcting minor speech defects or of omitting developing special skill in speech but does far too little in this field because there is not enough time allocated in the prescribed school program. For this reason, many an earnest teacher has bootlegged speech improvement work and correction therapy on regular language time. Their pioneer work has meant immeasurable benefit in more adequate vocal expression, more effective social attitudes and better emotional adjustment in the lives of their pupils.

Then, again through neglect, the speech defects which in elementary school are minor ones, are often allowed to become serious defects, too strong to be eradicated later on in life. The classroom teacher, trained in speech techniques, will recognize these and devise ways and means to correct them. Or she may feel that improvement is dependent upon special diagnosis and therapy from the trained speech correctionist. Thus the elementary speech program properly planned and administered, gives all

children skill in the tools of communication and is, at the same time, adapted to the speech needs of the individual child.

Clarence Simon, writing in the National Education Journal, emphatically states, "A program of speech improvement should be conceived as a part of the general educational experience of the child."¹

From extensive reading, the writer has come to the conclusion that the greater number of educators believe that a coordinated program in which the objective of the speech improvement program will be realized through the cooperative help of all the teachers in the school, is a most desired situation. This program not only enlists the aid of all the instructors, but seeks help of the parents and the support of the community to function successfully.

Interested elementary teachers feel that this program should extend down into the elementary and primary grades. They are eager, if a simple beginning program is set up, to try it out. A percentage of these teachers have had some speech training courses and are as enthusiastic about the program as are the speech correction supervisors who have the responsibility of planning the work of Grades I through VI. The cooperation of various P.T.A. groups could be readily obtained because youngsters whose parents are officers of these groups appear on stage and radio programs to raise money for hot-lunch projects, et cetera. These social affairs bring home to their parents the necessity for good speech, because so many times the youthful performers are children of the first generation of foreign-born citizens. Mistakes due to a carry-over of foreign dialect, or of poor intonation and inflection which go unnoticed in their homes, are obvious and embarrassing

¹Clarence Simon, "Speech Improvement for Every Child", National Education Journal, 30:96, February, 1947.

to their parents in public, and these parents are most insistent that, to put it in their own words, the youngster learn "beautiful English."

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Some excellent reasons for the setting up of a definite speech improvement program are as follows:

1. The increasing interest among primary and elementary teachers in in-service training courses in phonetics, voice, speech correction and choral speaking.
2. The very active participation by elementary pupils in community projects, club work, speaking contests and radio programs.
3. The active community interest in good public speaking.
4. All children should be given the opportunity for training in oral communication and improvement of their speech patterns.

PROCEDURE

In order to give a clear picture of the outline described in this paper, and to evaluate the findings, the writer will first attempt to show: (1) that leaders in the field of speech advocate a shift from the older trends of emphasis on corrective speech solely, to the newer trend of "general speech improvement for all pupils and teachers as well. . ." ²; (2) that all teachers are conscious of the need of better and more speech training courses to help them attack intelligently the everyday minor defects and speech problems of the classroom; (3) that the speech correction program now in operation often benefits only the children with serious speech

²H. M. Buckley, "Group Methods for Speech Improvement," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXV, April, 1939.

difficulties; (4) that secondary students would profit more from their present program of speech improvement if it were preceded by one begun in kindergarten and continued through primary and elementary grades and junior high, to function as one unbroken chain of speech and personality training for success in college or the business world.

Then will follow suggested material for a new proposed speech improvement program flexible enough to be integrated with the present primary language and intermediate language arts program. This outline will be adapted for grades I to VI inclusive, and will not include junior high school students. It is designed to meet the needs of primary and elementary students in the school system of a city, or adjusted to elementary schools in a small, growing town.

Finally, the writer will present a summary of the information and recommendations for the application of techniques in the teaching of this proposed course of speech improvement.

A bibliography of recommended books for students and instructors will follow.