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Application of NCA's Standards on Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy to the
Elementary Classroom Context

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Abstract

Communication is vital to the future of our young students and society as a whole. Listening is an integral part of that communication process. Lack of competency in the skill of listening can lead to dire consequences in terms of career, family life and well-being. Research, however, indicates that students, regardless of age group, are currently not getting sufficient training in improving listening skills. This study suggests one specific listening activity to improve listening skills. A theoretical explanation of the exercise, as well as a discussion of the application of the "Listening Stick" exercise to a group of elementary school students is presented. A qualitative analysis of fourth graders' responses to the exercise follows. Finally, an application of the NCA *Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 Education* to the "Listening Stick" activity is presented.

Keywords: Listening Training, Listening Education, K-12 NCA Standards

Introduction and Rationale

Communication is indispensable to not only our essence of being human, but on a more practical level, to our success in life. Indeed, scholars of communication, those in the field of education, as well as business executives recognize the importance of the ability to send, receive, interpret, and give feedback to communicative messages, as the key to being effective in the school, work, home, and civic settings (National Communication Association, 1996; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). As a reflection of the importance of all aspects of communication to education, the National Communication Association was mandated to provide a set of guidelines for state and local educators, resulting in the release of the NCA *Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 Education* in 1996.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on one key element of communication that is of particular importance to the communication process, listening. The paper first reviews the literature on the importance of listening for everyone, including K-12 students. It also reviews some of the current problems in listening competencies of these students. Then, the paper proposes one specific method of implementing some of the standards suggested by the NCA, through the use of an exercise called the “Listening Stick”. A theoretical explanation of the exercise, as well as a discussion of one application of the “Listening Stick” exercise follows. A qualitative analysis of fourth graders’ responses to the exercise, and how they believe it helped them become better communicators is presented. Finally, an application of the NCA *Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 Education* to the “Listening Stick” activity is presented, indicating how this activity helps students achieve specific standards suggested in the NCA document.

Review of the Literature

Various studies have underscored the importance of listening in the communication process. In purely quantitative terms, listening has long been shown to take up most of our time spent in communicative activities, when juxtaposed with other activities such as speaking, writing, or reading (Rankin, 1926; Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Percentages may differ somewhat according to the populations studied, or according to how the study was conducted, but results consistently indicate that listening takes up between forty to over sixty percent of our daily time spent in communication. Listening as an important skill is gaining more attention from various sectors of society. It is seen as vital for various career fields, as reflected in scholarly articles on the importance of listening for such diverse areas as health care (Calhoun & Rider, 2008; McFarland, Rhoades, Roberts, & Eleazer, 2006), counseling (McGough, 2010), family communication (Garland, 1981; Lam, 2000), supervisor training (Taylor, Cook, Green, & Rogers, 1988), law education (Middleton, 1982), and Helpline management (Paukert, Stagner, & Hope, 2004).

Focusing on K - 12 students specifically, listening is recognized as being an important factor in their education. Studies on the communicative activities of these students show that results of the studies on the other age groups also apply to this particular population, with a majority of these students' daily communication time spent in the activity of listening (Duker, 1971; Goodlad, 1983; Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983).

On a qualitative level, the importance of listening for these students is also marked. If elementary and secondary students are spending a predominant amount of time listening, then improving these skills is important. In fact, Buttery (1990) states that listening is one of the most important aspects of children's learning that impacts academic success.

Listening well will lead to more retention of important information such as content material or instructions about assignments, leading to higher academic performance. The same argument may be expressed conversely; poor listening behaviors lead to negative academic performance. Beyond the academic realm, later in their lives poor listening can lead to numerous negative consequences, including physical, psychological, and monetary loss (Crossen, 1997; Hunt & Cusella, 1983; Smeltzer & Watson, 1982). Listening is a communicative skill that is vital for students, not only in their present academic work, but also in their future lives.

On a larger macroperspective level, listening takes on a more fundamental social role in students' lives. Not only is improving listening skills important for their success in life, but listening well can have a spillover effect on future generations. Students of today will become tomorrow's parents, teachers, and social leaders. If students are taught the skills of effective listening, the skill will have a heuristic function. Their learned skills will be used when they are parents, teaching their own children to become effective listeners in turn, through social learning or modeling, continuing the chain indefinitely. Whatever the pragmatic or philosophical perspective one may choose to view the issue of teaching listening skills to children from, the conclusion is clear: students in our schools today should be taught how to improve their listening skills.

However, indications are that students in our schools are inadequately prepared to be good listeners (Adams & Cox, 2010; Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Twenty percent of our nation's young cannot accomplish simple communicative tasks such as relaying a message, which necessitates listening skills (Vangelisti & Daly, 1989). Moreover, according to an article in the Wall Street Journal, children's listening skills actually decline as they grow older (Crossen, 1997).

This disheartening view of the level of listening competence among school age children may be due to the fact that traditionally in the past, most of the instructional time was spent on reading and writing, with little attention to speaking and practically none to listening (Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983). Regarding this dismal state Beall, Gill-Rosier, Tate and

Matten state: "Listening education is especially scarce in primary and secondary schools notwithstanding the fact that listening is linked to both literacy and academic success" (2008). Even at the undergraduate level, recent empirical study of basic course textbooks show that listening is still not adequately taught, as evidenced by only 1 – 3% of the textbook's content being dedicated to discussion of improving that important skill (Adams & Cox, 2010).

As a measure to improve the current state of listening skills in our schools, Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1995) suggest that rather than to simply assume that all students can innately speak and listen well, we need to teach them those skills directly. This is one impetus for the release of the *Speaking, Listening and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 Education* by the NCA.

The *Speaking, Listening and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 Education*, is set up in three phases. In the first phase, the standards have been established. The second phase focuses on in-class projects and assignments to aid in designing curricula and teaching towards the standards. The third phase results in the means for evaluating and testing the learning from the activities suggested in the second phase. Acknowledging the significance of the standards set up by the NCA for speaking, listening and media literacy skills among K through 12 students, this study investigates the effect of one specific activity for improving students' listening skills, the "Listening Stick" activity.

The "Listening Stick" Activity

The activity chosen for improving listening skills is the "Listening Stick." The rationale for choosing this particular activity for implementing in an elementary school class is two-fold: First, it is an intuitively appealing activity with rules that are simple enough for elementary school students to follow relatively easily. Second, the Listening Stick activity has been implemented in the college classroom with positive results (Hyde, 1993), but it does not necessarily follow that the activity will be successful in elementary school classrooms as well. In other words, I wanted to find out whether this activity would be applicable to elementary school students as well, and how they felt about the activity.

This activity is based on the practices of the League of Iroquois and the peoples of the Southwestern Pueblos (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991). The underlying idea behind this activity is to give everyone present a voice in the public discussion, where a hierarchy of power is avoided and each individual's view is respected. This method was used by "The Council", the community's decision-making group, in native cultures as a method of decision-making and mutual understanding. The method is quite simple, with only three rules: speak honestly, be brief, and listen from the heart (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991). In order to empower each person to speak in turn, the listening stick is passed to the person on the left,

or following the motion of the sun in clockwise fashion. Only the person with the stick can speak.

In classroom exercises, the stick can be any object, but a stick from the schoolyard can be garnished with pieces of rope and feathers to create a more dramatic effect that is reflective of its Native American cultural origin. I chose to bring an interesting birch stick with knots and bends that I had brought home from a family camping trip for the purpose of this activity.

The Listening Stick activity can be used when teachers want students to state their views about the class topic at hand, or talk about an issue that students need to resolve, or perhaps as a means to make decisions that require group consensus. In my college classrooms, I have used the exercise to complement the class topic of effective listening. I find that the activity serves a dual purpose; that of teaching students the importance of effective listening, as well as giving students an added insight into diverse cultural ways of communicating, something that college students can benefit from learning about.

There are variations of the exercise that can be used as a method of conflict resolution. One is a kind of fish bowl exercise, with the two contentious parties in the middle, and two neutral evaluators behind them. The two people will in turn take the listening stick and state their own position. The two other people will listen to the two in the fishbowl and will try to be impartial and state how they see the situation after the two in the middle (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991) have had a chance to each make their own statements.

Specific Application to Fourth Grade Students

In this particular situation, the class I taught was an advanced reading class for fourth graders. I volunteered to teach the class once a week at a local community school. There were ten students, four girls and six boys in this class. At the beginning of the trimester, I was aghast at how much time and energy was spent in simply trying to manage the communication of the class. Everyone would speak at once, or at times would get distracted and talk among themselves or “doodle”, as their teacher or other students spoke. In short, they needed to work on improving their listening skills.

This Listening Stick activity was one that I had applied in a listening skills class in college. The Listening Stick exercise is cited as being effective in inducing interpretive listening (Hyde, 1993). Given the experiential nature and intuitive appeal of this exercise, I decided to try this exercise on the fourth grade class to foster good listening skills.

Procedures for the Activity

The students sat in a circle on the floor. I introduced this activity to them by providing a brief explanation of the cultural origin of the exercise and by stating the three rules: 1)

speak honestly, 2) be brief and 3) listen from the heart. The stick was referred to as a “magical listening stick” to elevate the appeal of the exercise for the fourth grade students. I then explained the procedures to be followed: The holder of the Listening Stick is to be the only one who speaks, and after the holder speaks the stick is to be passed to the person to the left. I also added an additional requirement in this activity. To induce active listening skills and paraphrasing skills, I requested that the statement that was made immediately before the student whose turn it was to speak be paraphrased or summed up prior to the statement of his/her own view.

The students understood and agreed to the rules and began in turn to speak about their feelings and thoughts over the readings for that day. After making the round of the entire circle, I asked them to take a sheet of paper and to write down how they felt about that activity and why they liked or disliked it. I asked them not to indicate their names on the sheets to provide anonymity.

Student Responses to the Listening Stick Activity

Of the ten students who participated in the activity, all of them stated that they liked the exercise. Although the consensus was that they all liked the exercise, their reasons for liking it were varied. A thematic analysis (Collier, 1991) revealed five types of reasons for liking the activity.

Thematic analysis is a method of sorting and categorizing qualitative data based on recurring themes. While there are criticisms about the potential lack of rigor of thematic analysis, its versatility makes it a useful qualitative method of interpreting data into meaning categories or themes (Brandt, 1981; Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be followed up with other methods, and even with quantitative methods. Themes are inductively created based on prevalence and recurrence. The number of times a theme occurs is not necessarily the deciding factor for category creation, but rather how well the theme elucidates the research question can be just as important (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is especially well-suited as a method for this study as it is useful for discerning patterns that can initially inform our understanding of the data, as a first step in an exploratory study.

Two of the students liked it simply because “it was cool.” They did not further indicate any reason for their judgment but simply declared that they thought that the activity was cool. Two of the ten students like the exercise because of the effect it had in quieting them. They stated they “had to listen” and “it kept everyone quiet.” It seems that the simple reduction in noise factor as they were trying to listen was a benefit of this activity for them.

Three of the students liked the exercise because it actually gave them a chance to hear others. They made such statements such as “you can hear more without a lot of people talking.” Two stated that they felt others were more attentive to them when they spoke. They

stated “I like when we had the listening stick because everyone would listen” or “everyone listened when I talked.” Finally, one student stated, “I liked the listening stick because it taught us how to listen to each other.” Other than feeling that people were generally more attentive to each other and that the noise level was lowered, this student felt that it taught about how to actually listen to each other.

Application of NCA Standards

Specifically, in terms of the *Speaking, Listening and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12*, one may say that this exercise works toward achieving Standards 1, 4, 8, 19 and 21. Standard 1 states that the communicator demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the relationship among the components of the communication process. By recognizing the importance of paraphrasing and nonverbal indications of attentiveness as an important part of communication, namely feedback, students can be more aware of the communication process. Standard 4 indicates that the communicator can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the role of personal knowledge and the knowledge of others in the nature and quality of communication. By participating in this exercise, students can understand how important it is to be attentive to others and to share our views with others and that the way in which we do so affects the quality of our communication.

Standard 8 states that the communicator can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the role of communication in the democratic process. Participation in the “council” method of sharing ideas gives them an egalitarian view of the decision-making process and teaches them to acknowledge the participation of other members of their group and to share the participation equally among members.

According to Standard 19, the effective listener can demonstrate the ability to identify and manage barriers to listening. In their responses to this activity, the participants acknowledge the importance of controlling noise level when trying to express their own ideas or trying to understand the ideas of others. Controlling noise level is admittedly a small step towards achieving that standard. However, learning the importance of being silent when others speak, and more importantly experiencing how pleasant it is to be accorded full attention when one is speaking is an indispensable first step towards achieving this standard.

Standard 20 states that the effective listener can demonstrate the ability to receive, interpret, and respond to messages. This exercise helped the students to achieve this standard by having them practice the skills of listening, interpreting, and paraphrasing by summarizing the statements of the previous speaker as well as learning the behavioral skill of being able to remain silent when others speak.

Conclusion

Communication is vital to the future of our young students. Listening is an integral part of that communication process. Lack of competency in the skill of listening can lead to dire consequences in terms of career, family life and well-being. However, research indicates that students, regardless of age group, are not getting sufficient training in improving listening skills. This study suggests one specific listening activity to improve listening skills. The students unanimously liked the exercise. Additionally, most thought that it taught them to pay attention, and more importantly it seems to have taught them *how* to be attentive listeners.

One additional benefit of this exercise is that it implements not only listening but also speaking skills, too. Requiring the students to express their thoughts and feelings publicly during their turn to hold the Listening Stick teaches them to formulate their ideas clearly in an organized manner to enable their classmates to understand the message. All the students in the circle are practicing effective listening skills by being silent and paying attention to the speaker. Additionally, because of the requirement for participants in the Listening Stick activity to paraphrase the previous speakers' comments before beginning one's own, students are also practicing clear paraphrasing of ideas. More importantly, these students see both speaking and listening as equally important and interdependent parts of the communication process, an initial step in cognitively understanding the process of communication.

Affectively, they can feel the benefits of being listened to with attentiveness, which will hopefully induce them to get in the habit of reciprocating that attentiveness to others. In fact, all of the ten students in the test group unanimously stated that they enjoyed the Listening Stick activity. Consequently, we can conclude that there are cognitive, affective, as well as skills based behavioral benefits of using the Listening Stick exercise in our classes. As such, I feel that the Listening Stick exercise is beneficial to students and that it can help them to achieve the standards as prescribed by the *Speaking, Listening and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12*. Studies have shown that the Listening Stick exercise can benefit the college student (Hyde, 1993; Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991). However, to the author's best knowledge, there has been no empirical test of the Listening Stick exercise to elementary school students as yet.

This study applied the Listening Stick activity to a small, convenient sample of fourth grade students. Results show that the activity worked for them. They perceived the activity as making them listen attentively to others, making themselves be heard, and helping them to understand how to listen. Admittedly, the sample was a relatively small group. A future study could test the effects of the Listening Stick activity on a larger and less select group and at different levels, such as primary and secondary levels as well. More studies of other activities that can help specifically implement the standards for K - 12 suggested by NCA will

be beneficial on various levels. Future studies of this kind will benefit scholars in the field of communication by helping us to further understand the communication process through new insight into various applications of instructional activities and their effects on communication. On a more practical level, studies of specific activities to improve speaking, listening and media literacy skills will serve as a practical guide for teachers to implement in their classrooms. But most importantly, the people who will reap the most gains from such studies in the future are students who will benefit from being taught by teachers who have a grounded knowledge of what activities are most effective for helping to increase their competencies as effective communicators.

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Teaching Listening In the Classroom: Embodied Listening: Engaging Listening as Experience

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Type/Aspect of listening in focus: This exercise uses a performative mode of engagement to generate a discussion about and awareness of listening as a fully embodied communicative act.

Course Titles: Public Speaking, Introduction to Communication as Performance, Interpersonal Communication

Course Level: Undergraduate, secondary, primary

Goal: Students will (1) gain awareness of the body during the act of listening, (2) develop their ability to generate and use descriptive language, (3) understand listening as an embodied practice, and (4) understand listening as a practice that shapes experience

Description:

How do we use our bodies when we listen, and what does this teach us about our listening practices? Listening is an embodied act of communication, and this exercise presents an experiential and performative approach to exploring and reflecting on listening. In other words, this exercise asks students to consider the function of their bodies as they listen. The primary goal of this exercise is to present students with an opportunity for exploring listening as an embodied act or performance. This exercise also offers opportunities for students to develop descriptive language about their listening practices.

Ihde (2007) explains, "I do not merely hear with my *ears*, *I hear* with my whole body. My ears are at best the *focal* organs of hearing" (p. 44). Listening always entails the use of the body. By attending to the body as it listens we can begin to understand the ways listening operates as an embodied practice. Focusing on the functions of the body in listening reveals insights about the ways the body shapes and is shaped by the listening experience. Our

bodies react to the sounds of the world and of others in ways that inform both what and how we hear.

This exercise asks students to consider the role their bodies play in shaping the ways they listen through an embodied activity. This activity can generate a conversation about the different ways our bodies work while listening. This activity might also generate a conversation about the performative aspects of listening. For Warren (2003), it is through experiential and embodied classroom engagements that students can begin to develop their theoretical understandings of how their communicative practices function performatively (p. 84). As Butler (1988) explains, it is through stylized repetitions that performative acts constitute reality (pp. 519-527). By focusing on the body, students can begin to recognize the function of their own stylized repetitions as they listen.

In addition to asking students to actively explore the function of their bodies as they listen, this exercise also asks students to develop descriptions about their listening based on the activity. Listening is a practice that is central to communication. Describing and reflecting on listening can help students understand the importance of listening as an embodied act of communication.

Preparation and Procedures:

Stage 1: Class Preparation

First, create an open space in your classroom. Clear chairs, desks and miscellany to the perimeter. This activity works well after a discussion of audience or listening in the introductory public speaking courses. To draw attention to the communicative functions of listening in terms of empathy and interpretation, the instructor may provide readings by the following authors: Arnett & Nakagawa, (1983); Stewart, (1983); Pelias & VanOosting, (1987). These authors provide clear discussion of the active role the listener takes in the communicative interaction, as well as, offer a careful discussion of the function of listening in shaping understandings and meanings.

Stage 2: Body Awareness (2-3 minutes)

Then proceed in an exercise about body awareness. Ask students to stand and walk around the space. Encourage them to “fill the space.” Discourage them from following one another and walking continually in one direction. As they walk, ask them to pay attention to their bodies. Ask students to pay attention to the way they place their feet on the ground. Ask them to think about what they are doing with their hands. Ask them to be aware of their posture as they walk.

Stage 3: Exploring Listening (3-5 minutes)

As students become aware of their bodies, tell them that you are going to give them further instructions in which they simulate body reactions to types of listening and sounds. Tell students that the following activity involves “freezing” in an embodied listening position. Ask students to freeze in place in response to a variety of imagined sounds. These may include, but are not limited to, the following directions:

- Freeze as if you hear someone dropping a stack of plates
- Freeze as if you hear someone screaming
- Freeze as if you hear a low flying airplane
- Freeze as if you hear your favorite band or musician
- Freeze as if you are trying to hear a whispered conversation through a closed door

After each direction to freeze is given, ask students to hold their pose and to silently observe the way they are holding their bodies. Ask students to notice their posture. Direct them to pay attention to any tension in their bodies. Ask them to think about where their hands are and what they might be doing with their ears. Ask students to consider what listening “feels like” in their poses. After each “freeze as if” moment, ask one student to stay frozen. Have the remaining students describe what they see. Have them describe the position of the body. Have them compare the model’s body to what they felt in their own body when they were frozen. After leading students through these observations, ask them to shake out their pose and continue moving through the space. Then repeat the process by directing students to freeze in response to another sound.

Stage 4: Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Debrief the activity using the following discussion questions:

What similarities and/or differences did each pose yield?

How does your embodied response impact your understanding of these imagined sounds?

How does this relate to your experience as a listener?

What does this activity teach us about being “good” listeners?

What does this activity teach us about how we might interpret audience behaviors?

Depending on the objectives of the class the conversation generated by this activity may also turn to questions of ethics and listening or “good” listening.

Tips and Debriefing:

Students develop an awareness of their embodied practices while listening during this activity. Students also begin to develop their use of descriptive language to account for the

use of their bodies while responding to the imagined sounds. In their observations, students typically make remarks about the way their bodies leaned either toward or away from the imagined sounds. Students also develop an understanding of the way listening as a communicative act shapes experience. Students often discuss the way listening uses the entire body and is always taking place. Students also begin to make connections between the way they listen and the way they experience certain communicative interactions including presentations, performances, and lectures in class. After this activity, student behaviors and responses during class presentations, performances, and discussions are often notably different. Some differences include more attentive posture and more relevant and meaningful feedback and responses during class discussions.

Variations of this activity include using pre-recorded sounds to stimulate embodied responses, and in using groups of students to create frozen images of listening for the class to observe and analyze. For example, recordings of music or sounds may be used in place of the suggested sounds. Students may be asked to freeze in various moments during the recordings in order to attend to their embodied responses and interactions with the sounds. Students may also be organized in groups and asked to create static images or tableau that demonstrate what various modes of listening might look or feel like.

Assessment:

This performative engagement generates a conversation about listening that acknowledges the fully embodied nature of listening. The experiential approach of this exercise asks students to reflectively call on pre-existing embodied knowledge they have about listening as a site for knowing and making sense of an otherwise taken for granted practice. This emphasis on listening as embodied also functions to frame discussions of other approaches to listening as a fully embodied sensory experience, as opposed to just a conceptual practice. For example, this frames discussions of empathic listening or interpretive listening in terms of performance and the body (Arnett & Nakagawa, 2008; Pelias & VanOosting, 1987; Stewart, 1983). This activity is effective in generating a discussion about listening and embodiment, and students generally also come to an understanding or recognition about the ways listening functions as a cultural practice.

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Review of teaching material

Title reviewed: *Listening: Processes, Functions, and Competency* by Debra L. Worthington and Margaret E. Fitch-Hauser, Boston: Allen & Bacon, 2012

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The newest edition to the small lineup of listening texts, *Listening: Processes, Functions, and Competency* by Worthington and Fitch-Hauser, also offers the most thorough and current treatment of scholarly research in the field. The text serves its purpose of providing “a vehicle to spur student awareness of and interest in listening as a critical communication competency and as a field of study” (p. ix) by presenting twelve chapters organized into four parts – listening as a cognitive process (Chapters 1-4), listening as a social function (Chapters 5-7), listening as a critical professional competency (Chapters 8-11), and listening: new frontiers (Chapter 12). Given the admitted focus of the book on “[reviewing] listening research with the goal of providing [students] with the knowledge of the current state of the field while synthesizing research from areas outside communication” (p. 272), it seems most appropriate for upper-level listening courses that are equally concerned with the attitudinal (motivation), cognitive (knowledge), and performance (behavior) aspects of listening competency (Wolvin & Coakely, 1994). Educators wishing to use this text in a course heavily weighted towards teaching listening skills will be served by using the text to help prompt in-class discussion of issues and to provide students with an adequate knowledge base in order to help facilitate activities; however, because of the focus on adequately and accurately presenting listening research in an intelligible fashion (a laudable goal in the eyes of this reviewer) those teaching skills-based courses will have to do a bit more leg work compared to other texts. The trade-off seems worth it given the extensive coverage of valid knowledge about listening and an honest treatment of what we do not yet know.

Fortunately, the text does offer two tools for courses focused primarily on teaching listening skills. First, several “Think on It” boxes are contained in each chapter that encourage students to apply key concepts to their daily lives and that instructors can develop into more detailed assignments and activities if they wish. Second, each chapter begins with a case study that seeks to introduce the general theme of the chapter and provide a readymade example to help illustrate key concepts. Each case study involves the same cast of characters creating consistency for the reader, and each is concise enough that students

are less likely to skip over the material and miss its important pedagogical function. In addition to these two tools, throughout the text the authors also illustrate the importance of listening in a variety of life contexts – from supportive communication (Chapter 5) to education (Chapter 8) to organizations (Chapter 9) and beyond. By stressing how listening is vastly important to our lives in general in the first chapter, the authors make sure students understand the purpose of taking a listening course is not just knowing the research (as important as that is for many of us) but being able to adequately apply it to their everyday experiences.

So, in general, I recommend this text because it takes seriously the role of research in building a knowledge base about listening. The text also provides sufficient resources for the creative instructor to encourage his or her students to think critically about listening and to apply what they have learned in order to become a better listener. These resources offer educators flexibility, ultimately allowing the particulars of the course and the students enrolled to drive how (and which) listening skills are introduced and taught.

Of course, this text, like its competitors, is not perfect. My first set of criticisms concerns organization. First, while each chapter is introduced with a thoughtful case study, missing are introductory sections to each set of chapters (e.g., listening as a cognitive process). Such an addition (at least for the first three parts) would seem to assist instructors and students alike in understanding broad themes tying together the chapters contained therein. Instructors may wish to spend a bit of class time providing an introduction to each unit in order to spur students picking up on important themes as they read chapters in that unit. Second, although organized into “parts” this choice seems somewhat arbitrary. The lack of a clearly defined organizational structure (aside from organizing chapters into “parts”) is evident insofar as material is often repeated (e.g., cognitive complexity is explained in Chapters 3 and 4). One way to alleviate this is to organize the material around “types” of listening, something pioneered by Wolvin and Coakley in their text, *Listening*. The types could correspond to the many functions listening serves – to learn, relate, organize information, and be critical (Imhof & Janusik, 2006) – or the ways in which listening has been conceptualized in the extant literature (see Bodie et al., 2008). Each of these organizational structures would be possible as material is covered. Of course, the concern about organization is not detrimental to one’s ability to read the text, to understand material, or to teach that material to students. Instead, it is a perhaps best described as a caution to potential adopters that some thinking may need to be done when structuring a class around the book and assigning readings from the book to fulfill course goals (a challenge with adopting any text).

My second set of criticisms concerns a few places in the book where the authors present seemingly valid but outdated research. Granted, 99% of the research presented is

accurate and up-to-date, and the text is a vast improvement over the way in which listening is presented in basic course and interpersonal texts which forward more myth than fact. As one example, the MATERRS model of listening presented in Chapter 1 seems to suggest there is a choice at every “stage” of the listening process. Putting aside issues concerning stage models more generally, the fact is that much of our listening is not conscious nor is it intentional. Restricting listening to intentional processing of information seems problematic, though fortunately the remainder of the book does not take that stance (and indeed some research on schema is presented in Chapter 3 that allays much of this concern). Perhaps the most obvious oversight is the presentation of listening style preferences in Chapter 4 and the printing of its primary scale, the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16). The LSP-16 has been found to be psychometrically unsound (Bodie & Worthington, 2010), and research since at least 2003 has questioned the underlying conceptual structure of people-, action-, content-, and time-orientations toward listening (see Bodie et al., in press). I am comforted by the fact that the first author of the textbook is also an author on some of the revisions being made to the LSP-16 framework, and I am confident that the next edition of the text will reflect our current change of opinion about what constitutes listening preferences. Indeed, this particular text is likely to go through several revisions on a regular basis if only because it focuses so heavily on presenting research-based knowledge, knowledge that changed rapidly. I am excited about this new edition to our lineup and look forward to adopting it (and subsequent editions) in the near future.

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