

REPORT OF SEMINAR II

LANGUAGE and READING

New York, New York

July 8, 9, 10, 1968

The second in the series of seminars for the Children's Television Workshop brought together educators, psychiatrists and psychologists, authors of children's books, authorities in early childhood education, and TV specialists to discuss the general areas of language and reading.

The purpose of this three-day conference, July 8-10, was to generate ideas for the production staff to develop into 130 hours of children's viewing. Participants were asked to concentrate on the general ideas in language and reading that can be transmitted to four-year-olds, together with suggestions on how those ideas might be communicated.

Following a meeting of all of the participants on July 8, the sessions on the second day were devoted to four smaller group discussions, with the group reconvening as a whole on the third morning. The report that follows is a summary of the ideas growing out of all sessions, rather than a chronological report of the seminar.

#### I. EXPLORATION OF THE MEDIUM

From time to time throughout the meeting, a suggestion would be made that may be sound educationally but which goes against the realities of the medium. Whatever else the Children's Television Workshop will be, it will be a television program. If it is forced into the form of a classroom -- or even of a book or a film -- it will come through as an imitation of something else and lose its integrity.

The group felt there were even more compelling reasons to resist any suggestion of a classroom format. For one reason, children are used to fast-action shows and a static format would probably fail to interest them. Another thought was that the school day is arranged more for the convenience of the teacher than for the learning of the child and, therefore, television can take a broader, better approach to teaching.

It was suggested, however, that, since no one really knows either the potential of television or how children interact with it, the program should try to do things that may, without testing, be thought impossible. With the opportunity to evaluate techniques before actually going on the air, it was felt that a pioneer job could be done in discovering how to reach and teach four-year-olds.

During one session, it was suggested that efforts be made to have the Children's Television Workshop the only program on the air over any station during its broadcast times. Although that idea is patently impossible, an idea to offer segments of the program to commercial stations, that could be induced to air fifteen minutes or a half-hour, seemed to be in the realm of possibility.

As did the earlier seminar, this one suggested as much control over the audience as possible. There will be control in some viewing situations, such as day-care centers and nursery schools, and there may be possibilities for further control in communities with limited viewing possibilities. Even in those communities, however, there will have to be promotion to sell the idea of tuning in to an educational station.

Since children are used to watching adult shows, it was felt that the Workshop should probably not be a children's show so much as a good program that children and other members of the family would like to watch. One group suggested that the mothers be thought of as the hidden audience, with some ingredients of the program aimed especially at them.

On the matter of sequencing skills, both the medium and the four-year-old seem to militate against it. Although there could be some build-up in the skills presented within each program and possibly within a week's programs, by and large it was thought that each program should be complete in itself. This would accommodate the varying viewing patterns of the audience, which might tune in only once or twice a week, and it would also accommodate the nature of four-year-olds who, like television, believe that today is the only day there is.

The principal exhortation to the production staff was to believe that something could be done. The Rosenthal research studies show that teacher expectancy is the major factor in whether students learn. If that research done in classrooms carries over to television, everyone on the program and preparing material for it should believe that television can produce useful learning in the children who view it.

## II. FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

Throughout the seminar, the nature of the four-year-old, with special emphasis on the disadvantaged four-year-old, came in for discussion.

All four-year-olds are in the milieu full of stimuli that have not yet been clarified for them. There are sizable individual differences in children and some class differences when it comes to reading. In general, they know how to ask questions, how to put sentences together in some fashion, how to join thoughts with varying expertise. But they prefer to point, rather than to use words without gestures, fail to make a simple analysis of an over-all situation, and will usually make egocentric rather than general references. Only the advanced four-year-old will be able to make sequence relationships. Even connecting the picture of a glass with the glass in his hand is difficult for most four-year-olds. Some children will see the picture as the real thing and may even try to pour water into it. Some believe that an "A" is an apple because they have seen them together in a book. Abstract thinking is a deficiency in most four-year-olds.

The disadvantaged four-year-old has the same language deficiencies of a two- to two-and-a-half-year-old middle-class child. In a study of Mexican children, it was found that they had poor sentence structure, many omissions, changes of word order, use of vague referential words, poor enunciation and articulation, and few action words. In a blue-collar Midwestern community, children did not know the basic colors, knew few numbers and very few letters,

wrote an all-caps poor version of their names. But they learned quickly. With American Indian children, the problem often is no English at all. In the Deutsch preschool project in New York City, not all of the children knew their names, none knew the alphabet, few knew the parts of their bodies. Deutsch has defined deprivation as meaninglessness; deprived children are not aware that there is meaning to much of their environment.

Since some four-year-olds are hyperactive and others are withdrawn, two very different teaching problems present themselves. One child needs control while the other needs to be brought out.

The disadvantaged four-year-old's world is chaotic. He has little curiosity and little belief in lucky happenings. He has devised a few rote phrases to get by with adults. Unlike the middle-class child, if he needs information he has no strategy for getting it.

Playing with words is something the disadvantaged child has not done. Ordinarily, he has enormous difficulty with auditory discrimination, with "sad" and "sat," "roof" and "Ruth" the same to him. Visual discrimination gives him far less trouble.

Most four-year-olds see no difference between work and play. And, given good teaching, the four-year-old's ability to learn is amazing. Because of his ineptness, it is easy to underestimate the four-year-old. "If we underestimate him," said one participant, "we're not going to be able to lift him up."

### III. GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

In their discussions, the participants talked about three different kinds of goals for the program -- those related to life, to learning, and to the language arts. It is sometimes difficult to separate them. For example, flexibility is a characteristic needed for all three.

Although every seminar will probably conclude that its subject matter should be the permeating context for the program as a whole, there is no denying that language -- spoken, visual, symbolic -- will be used in all segments of the program. The participants suggested, for that reason, that language be used very carefully to further the language goals even in those segments that do not deal with language per se.

Among the life goals suggested were these:

-- The need to explore alternatives, to be flexible, to learn what will happen if a course of action is found.

-- The feeling of self-worth. "I am me and that's worthwhile."

-- Awareness and articulation as the two principal tools to live life fully.

-- The idea that it is permissible to make mistakes and, in fact, that trial and error is an acceptable mode.

-- The desire to know more about the world one lives in.

-- The thought that there is a future and it takes some preparation.

The goals concerned with learning included getting across the idea that learning is exciting and teaching children to learn to love books. To make the child feel more comfortable when he gets to school, the program should help him learn how to listen, to have some experience in following directions, and to have some skills that have given him a sense of mastery.

On specific language goals, in addition to communication, there are areas of concepts and vocabulary development which require more deliberate instruction. For example, the child should learn not only relationship words, such as "in," but the concepts behind them. The program should help him build a vocabulary that structures his experience. It should also give him a body of information about core things in his environment. Further, it should make a direct attack on reading itself.

The child should learn that reading does something for him -- that it is a way to exhibit power, that it is a pleasure, that it is useful.

The program can give the child some help on learning to write, which is of much greater interest to him than reading and often precedes reading.

Affective goals will interlock with linguistic ones because some words, such as mother and father, have emotional content.

The language for all of the program should be used specifically and explicitly and with variety. In that way, the program itself will become an effective model.



Since there are huge amounts of language that the child will ignore, every bit of language should be useful.

The greatest danger in language goals will come in trying to do too much. It would be preferable to set small, restricted goals. If the child could do one thing -- sing part of a song, do a dance, recognize a letter -- after each show, that would be a great accomplishment and would contribute to his feeling good about himself, about learning, and about the program.

Whether educationally desirable or not, there will be parental goals that should be taken into consideration. The program will pay off for many parents if the child begins to recognize letters or to write his name. Since such skills cannot hurt the child and may increase parental commitment to the show, there is reason to teach them.

#### IV. SPECIFIC SKILLS

The program should try to teach the alphabet, although it is not strongly asserted that children be able to recite it. Studies show that if a child knows the alphabet and its sounds, he does better in school. The lower the IQ, the farther ahead a child is with the alphabet. Furthermore, knowing the letters is something that appeals greatly to parents. The middle-class child who may already have the knowledge can simply sit back and enjoy the entertainment value of the show.

Before a child can learn the alphabet, however, he needs some help on visual and auditory perception, particularly the latter. Letters are simply shapes visually, and so the child should learn how to distinguish circles, squares, and lines. Since hearing is one of the most pervasive problems of disadvantaged children, the program should use sound in a way to train the ear to make auditory distinctions.

Vocabulary development should be another specific goal of the program. Since a child does not need all the letters before he can read words, vocabulary development can go on from the beginning. In vocabulary development, the producers should not assume that words are easier than sentences.

In teaching both letters and words, the hope would be that the child would also learn the idea or concept of a letter or word.

Generally speaking, the child should be given useful, relevant words from his world, although even beginning readers can cope with -- and love -- long, strange words like "hippopotamus." "Don't pay any attention to word count and don't limit vocabulary," advised one of the smaller groups in speaking of words to be used (not taught) on the program.

In learning to read, the essential problem is decoding. Therefore, the child needs repetitive help in recognizing letters, on beginnings and endings of words, on blending letters together. He also needs help on other language skills, such as understanding relationships, understanding sequencing of ideas, and being able to classify objects.

More specific suggestions included the following:

- . Give both upper case and lower case letters. In reading, the lower case contains much more information.
- . Be aware of critical letters. Fifty per cent of printed English is accounted for by nine units (t, n, r, and i are the first four) and, on common words, half of the language used is made up of 200 words. (Francis Mechner can supply these frequency lists.)
- . Pay special attention to such relationship words as up, down, in, out, big, little, large, small, inside, outside, on, off, with, without. In doing so, don't teach opposites together.
- . Teach multiple meanings of words. One of the disadvantaged child's learning characteristics is that he tends to get stuck on one meaning of a word.
- . Teach words about emotions so that a child will be able to talk about how he feels.
- . Pronouns are important.
- . Word endings, such as "ing" and "ed" are important.
- . Teach active verbs. A child can clap his hands but does not know what to call the action.
- . It is an important skill to distinguish the object that is the same as or different from other objects. In teaching this skill, start with the objects that are identical and then bring in the one that is different. To avoid confusion, the objects should differ in only one characteristic. Since many tests in the early school years call for the student to mark the object that is different, such a skill is important.

- . Teach child how to listen.
- . Teach them how to ask questions.
- . An important concept to teach is that of nothing.
- . Classification skills should be taught so that the child begins to grasp that there is order. Simply classifying objects according to one characteristic is helpful.

Not everyone was agreed on whether to teach the idea of language itself, what reading and writing are and how they came about. Where it has been done in Project Literacy, it has been effective.

#### V. HOW TO TEACH THE SKILLS

Throughout the seminar, the point was made over and over again that the language skills should be incidental and not presented in structured, classroom fashion. Everything should be implicit rather than direct teaching. And, above all, the child should come away with the idea that language is fun, interesting, and useful. As one participant put it, "Don't ruin good stories by over-using them for teaching tasks."

The question of dialect came in for a good deal of discussion. Even though disadvantaged children are exposed to standard English, they learn and use the language of their group, partially as a way to be understood and partially as a means of identification with the group. Finally, it was decided that the impossibility of presenting local dialects that would be understood by and appeal to a nationwide audience suggested using standard English. However, there is a wide range of standard English, including regional accents, and there would be no reason not to make some use of this range.

On the question of hosts for the program, the necessity for warm people to whom the children could respond and, therefore, from whom they could learn was recognized. Whether hosts should be members of minority groups was felt to be less important than that they be desirable models. Above all, the hosts should avoid the condescending tone too often used with children.

The need for variety was stressed for a number of reasons. For one, children have a short attention span and need continuing change to refocus their attention. However, it was suggested that the program not limit itself to fast-paced action because children also respond favorably to a low-keyed mood. To offset the continuing kaleidoscope of sound and vision, use silence or a blank or static screen once in a while. (The blank screen is also helpful in teaching the difficult concept of "nothing.")

As to the content of the program, the material has to be involved with what life is all about. The materials should have universal appeal, touching on things and ideas that are part of the lives of all children. The materials should help the self-development and image-building of all kinds of children. The specific skills should be taught in terms of self -- who I am, where I am, what I am.

Following through on these general principles, a number of specific production ideas were suggested:

. Get the child to participate by introducing him to himself through such devices as teaching him the names and functions of parts of his body. Help him understand and feel the powers of his body through such simple devices as taking a deep breath.

- . Get to the child's emotions and reactions to situations by showing a family involved in ordinary situations.
- . Some of the programming can be almost subliminal -- flashing all sorts of "A's" would be one way.
- . The visuals should be used as the new language, enlarging on what the program uses in words and fully detailing the phrases.
- . On occasion, use subtitles to teach the words that go with the pictures. But vary the pictures when teaching letters.
- . Find ways to personalize the program through such ways as teaching names, ages, months of their birthdays.
- . Use programmed instruction techniques, such as having the wrong answer fade out after the child is given a chance to guess.
- . Sometimes print out what some of the characters are saying.
- . Have a character, such as a Mr. Fluster, get things wrong. This would give both the idea that it is permissible to make mistakes and also the chance for the child viewer to be one up on the model.
- . To show how important speech is, have a character with a padlock on his lips who is handicapped by not being able to use words.
- . For the hidden audience of mothers, try to emphasize the necessity of talking with children and answering their questions.
- . Invite the child to go with the program on trips -- to the supermarket, around his body, to a classroom to meet a teacher, around the block. Use the trips to familiarize the children with

things and people they will meet later, such as a classroom and teacher, and to improve his powers of observation. The new words he encounters on these trips are a byproduct.

- . Show situations where the outcome depends on the child's ability to read.

- . Each time there is a sign on the show, spell it out.

- . Do as many read-along things as possible, even using a bouncing ball on occasion.

- . On the difficult question of getting active participation from the child at home, give him opportunities to guess, ask him to point or to raise his hand, provide time for him to answer questions, ask him to join in the songs and dances.

- . Have visual games that involve finding secret words or letters.

- . Design a series of 15-second commercials that focus on a single letter.

- . Don't use rhymes if the final sound causes confusion.

In general, use rhymes more for fun than for teaching.

- . Use nursery rhymes that now have no meaning, giving them new story lines and using them just for fun. The child can learn the rhymes quickly and think he is reading.

- . In teaching a letter, show how it is formed. Have it appear on the screen in the same way in which it is written.

- . In selecting stories, choose them primarily because they are good literature. Also, use literature that is beyond the four-year-old's ability to read.

. Be careful not to suggest a person is stupid if he does not know how to read. Many of the viewer's parents will be illiterate.

. . Don't be too quick to say an answer is wrong. There are 250 or more meanings for the word "run." Suggest that words are flexible.

. In teaching auditory discrimination, have a puppet who is a little hard of hearing and therefore gets things slightly wrong so that they have to be repeated. Another character might habitually mispronounce words so that he has to be corrected.

. . Show words having fun: rearranging themselves to say different things, for instance.

. Gear the program more for boys than for girls. One reason for this is that the overwhelming majority of reading disability occurs in boys. Furthermore, boys do not like girls' activities but the opposite is not true.

. It is better to animate or otherwise dramatize a story than to have someone reading it.

. Break action now and then by having the characters talk directly to the child.

. Nonsense words like "pow," "eek," and "ow," as well as trade names like "Duz" and "Lux" are useful in teaching phonics.

. Use rebuses as an indirect way of relating words to objects.

. There is no particular order to follow in introducing sight words. Start with words like "stop" that the child will encounter in his daily life. (A book called "The Best Word Book Ever" by Richard Scarry has excellent lists of words by categories.)



- . Have material on many different levels so there is a wide appeal to all ages.
- . Before a story is presented, introduce the characters.
- . After introducing a letter, ask the child to look for it when he goes to the store.
- . Use animals to teach many things. For instance, auditory discrimination is helped through listening to the different sounds that animals make. The animals can be grouped in different ways to teach classifying.

In general, the participants believed that the children would not pay continuing attention to the words on the program but that their learning would be incidental. The priorities on what to do should be set by the producers on the basis of what could be done well.

#### VI. PROMOTION OF THE PROGRAM

Although the participants were not specifically charged with determining how the program could be promoted, the matter came in for discussion at many points.

Since the usual avenues of communication are not used by ghetto parents, it was suggested that the staff pursue other ways to get to the parents. Word-of-mouth will probably be the most powerful tool and this can be strengthened by informing social workers of the program and encouraging them to spread the word. Door-to-door canvassers, perhaps college students, could also be used.

Various suggestions were made to encourage the viewers to write in. In return, they would get a gift of some sort, perhaps a card with their names printed. One group suggested that students or retired people could serve as volunteers to answer the letters or that schools would cooperate as a class project. The cost of supplying materials might very well prove prohibitive, however.

The question of cost might also work against ideas for puppets or buttons or other give-aways. It was suggested that various manufacturers could be asked to donate prizes. However, there would still be the expense of processing the requests.

Organized viewing on a larger scale than planned might be helpful in building the audience. Volunteer mothers or VISTA workers, for example, could set up viewing centers on a block where the children could gather. Such adult organizers would then be on hand to help reinforce the skills being taught on the program.

Radio stations should be asked to promote the program.

Everyone was in accord about the desirability of getting the child to participate in the program and follow through on the activities suggested on the show. The only question is how such participation and reinforcement can be achieved within the limitations of staff, budget, and of television itself.

Reporters: Barbara Carter

Gloria Dapper

FINAL SUMMARY

Language and Reading

A. Purposes:

1. To suggest goals for the Workshop.
2. To generate ideas for production.

B. Goals:

The goals are so worded as to suggest the topic either explicitly (e.g., teaching the alphabet) or implicitly (e.g., developing auditory and visual discrimination skills).

a) Attitudinally oriented goals

1. Showing why a child should learn to read and communicate effectively.
2. Making words and letters "come alive."
3. Developing active participation by child in the communication process.
4. Utilizing language as a means of identifying with a reference group.
5. Finding models that will be imitated.
6. Presenting dialect differences.
7. Achieving identification by the child with the show -- letting him feel that the show is about him.
8. Getting children to listen and watch.
9. Helping children to "find themselves."
10. Giving children a sense of self-worth and dignity.

b) Reading oriented goals

1. Teaching the alphabet.
2. Teaching writing with reading.
3. Showing the representation of objects by words.
4. Learning basic vocabulary.
5. Indicating how stories can illustrate feelings and experiences.
6. Presenting the history of writing.
7. Showing what a letter and a word are like.
8. Showing what it means to read -- the relationship to language.
9. Presenting our literary heritage.
10. Developing auditory and visual discrimination skills.

OBSERVERS

Observing the meeting on Language and Reading were representatives from the Office of Education, The Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, the National Book Committee, and others, including:

Mrs. Barbara Finberg, Carnegie Corp.  
Mr. Frederic Mosher, Carnegie Corp.  
Miss Marjorie Martus, Ford Foundation  
Miss Rebecca Silverman, Office of Education  
Mrs. Bertha Campbell, OEO  
Dr. Merrill Read, NICHD  
Dr. James Kavanagh, NICHD  
Mr. Daniel Ogilvie, Harvard, College of Education  
Mr. Davenport Plumber, Harvard, College of Education  
Miss Anne Hopkins, General Learning Corp.  
Mr. Coburn Wheeler, Chas. E. Merrill Co.  
Miss Virginia Mathews, National Book Committee  
Mrs. Linda Gottlieb, Columbia Pictures

- h) Reading grows out of more general language experiences.
- i) Show why we want to read as well as how to read.
- j) Present samples of our literary heritage.
- k) The show must not become Pollyanna-ish.
- l) Mr. Fluster (a name forgetter) could become a useful character (e.g., "What's wrong with him today? He can't remember vegetables." -- class words (etc.)).
- m) Teach upper and lower case letters.
- n) A child has to be shown how to analyze experiences.

D. Research Suggested:

- a) Can TV techniques most liked by children be used to teach children without adult intervention?
- b) Will there be significantly different effects when children watch the screen in the home vs. in a nursery school setting?
- c) What kind of language will children listen to? What dialects go best with which children?
- d) What sort of adult will be the most effective model for the child watching the show?
- e) What are the natural interests of four-year-olds?

c) Language oriented goals

1. Indicating the use of language to communicate.
2. Showing words are symbolic.
3. Presenting vocabulary that is functional and vital to the child (e.g., labeling experiences, colors, emotions, and body parts).
4. Building vocabulary that structures experiences (e.g., relational words).
5. Indicating the explicitness of language (e.g., big vs. thick).
6. Developing communication skills (e.g., enunciation and articulation in oral communication, using action verbs to make a story more vivid).

d) Concept oriented goals

1. Clarification of experiences -- what do they mean?
2. Making informational analyses of pictures and stories.
3. Decentering from own to others' viewpoints in communicating.
4. Developing relational concepts (e.g., direction, time, size, position).
5. Showing words convey ideas (e.g., groupings and classifications, patterns).
6. Learning about one's self -- basic concepts behind what might be read.
7. Providing negative instances of concepts and conceptual contrasts.
8. Showing causality (e.g., "what would happen if . . .").
9. Developing the concept of sequencing and anticipation of what follows what.

C. Points to be Considered:

- a) Distribution of the program will be such that a particular hour program may be seen on different channels on different days.
- b) Reading is often taught to preschoolers already and even dull four-year-olds can learn.
- c) Children love writing even better than reading.
- d) It would be useful to maximize interaction between viewer and screen.
- e) Child won't sequence on his own or put together disparate items.
- f) A child might be watching without learning.
- g) Reading should grow out of language activities.

PARTICIPANTS

## Seminar on Language and Reading

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>
Dr. Marion Blank	Department of Psychiatry Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York City
Mr. Oscar Brand	Writer, Composer, Lyricist and Specialist in Children's and Folk Music
Dr. Roger Brown	Harvard University Department of Social Relations
Dr. Courtney Cazden	Harvard University Graduate School of Education
Dr. Jeanne Chall	Harvard University Graduate School of Education
Reverend John M. Culkin, S.J.	Director, Center for Communications Fordham University
Miss Barbara Demaray	Young & Rubicam, Inc., New York City
Dr. Dolores Durkin	Professor of Education, University of Illinois
Mrs. Allonia Gadsden	Director, The Emerson School
Mr. Ezra Jack Keats	Author, children's books
Dr. Gerald S. Lesser	Bigelow Professor of Education and Development Psychology Harvard University Graduate School of Education
Dr. Harry Levin	Chairman, Department of Psychology Cornell University
Mrs. Oralie McAfee	Teacher, New Nursery School Greeley, Colorado
Dr. Francis Mechner	Director, Institute of Behavior Technology
Miss Edwina Meyers	Director, Preschool Program Institute for Developmental Studies New York University

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>
Mrs. Betty Miles	Children's book author and editor
Dr. Keith Osborn	University of Georgia Athens, Georgia
Dr. Chester Pierce	Alfred North Whitehead Fellow Harvard University Graduate School of Education
Mrs. Linda Roberts.	Reading Specialist and Teacher, Oak Ridge, Tennessee
Mr. Maurice Sendak	Author, children's books.
Mr. Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver	Wells, Rich, Green, New York City
Dr. Sheldon H. White	Roy E. Larson Professor of Educational Psychology, Laboratory of Human Development, Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Staff: Children's Television Workshop

Mrs. Joan Ganz Cooney	Executive Director
Mr. David D. Connell	Executive Producer
Mr. Robert Davidson	Assistant Director
Mr. Jon Stone	TV Consultant
Mrs. Anne G. Bower	Associate Producer
Mr. Sam Gibbon	TV Consultant

Meeting Recorders

Miss Gloria Dapper  
Miss Barbara Carter

Research

Dr. Samuel Ball                      Educational Testing Service