

Articulation Therapy In the Public Schools

Some of today's public schools are trying to eliminate articulation therapy for mild cases from their school programs because it is believed that these errors do not impact education. However, throughout the history of mankind, there have been three ways to measure one's level of intelligence and success in education. These have been the ability to read, to write, and to speak clearly. In former decades, before the onset of political correctness, speech-language pathologists had no difficulty talking about the role of good speech in education and society. In fact, the way speech reflected one's level of education was the very reason speech-language pathologists began to work in the public schools in the first place. The following quotes are among those that I show in my live seminars to demonstrate this. They are arranged chronologically to illustrate the unfolding idea that good speech is an integral part of a good education.

1759

The cry to help students speak better began in the mid 18th century. Thomas Sheridan was an important advocate of this:

“There is not the smallest branch of [education] which can be well executed without skill in speaking ... A wise nation will therefore, above all things, apply themselves to advance the powers of elocution [speech], to as high a degree as possible.”

Thomas Sheridan (1759) *Elocution and the English Language*.
Miller: London, p4-17.

1833

Speech classes could be taken privately in the 19th century. These teachers of elocution stated unequivocally that good speech was a reflection of one's level of education:

“A cultivated taste is always perceptible in pronunciation, as in every other expression of mind; and errors in pronouncing are unavoidably associated with a deficiency in the rudiments of good education”

William Russell (1833) *Lessons in Enunciation*. Boston: Carter
Hendee, p53.

1856

Charles Dickens is known for his novels about the poorer classes and the abuse of children in the mid-19th century (*Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, *A Christmas Carol*). He lamented the fact that only the wealthy could afford speech correction for their children. He wrote on this subject in a magazine called *Household Words*. Here is Dickens' original quote and a modern translation. Like others of that century, Dickens uses the term "stammering" to mean any and all problems in speech production [Recorded in Eldridge, Eldridge, M. (1968) *A History of the Treatment of Speech Disorders*. Edinburgh: Livingstone, p39-40]:

Quote: "Although the houses of married physicians will be found hereafter to afford most excellent asylums for children among the upper classes, such a recourse cannot be calculated on, for obvious reasons, for the middle and lower classes ... stammering then rises as a barrier by which the sufferer feels that the world is separated from the world within him."

Translation: "Although the wealthy can afford speech correction for their children, it is not affordable to the middle and lower classes. A speech deficit can become a barrier that causes children to suffer and feel alienated from the rest of the educated world."

1919

Smiley Blanton was ASHA president in 1933 and 1934. He and his wife wrote one of the first speech books for children in the United States:

"It is one of the anomalies of the educational world that speech, the highest development within the possibilities of man, has been relatively ignored ... Training for correct speech during the formative years would do more to break down social barriers and eliminate false ideas of class than would any one field of endeavor ... In a democratic nation, therefore, our present neglect of speech training becomes almost antisocial. It is a remnant of autocracy whereby we say that the child has only a right to that which he inherits"

Margaret and Smiley Blanton, (1919) *Speech Training for Children: The Hygiene of Speech*. New York: The Century Company, p10-11.

1939

Charles Van Riper is known as the Father of Articulation Therapy in the United States, and he won ASHA's Award of the Association in 1957. In the very first edition of his classic book, Van Riper wrote that teaching children to speak correctly was just as important as teaching them to read and to write. He saw a day when speech correction would be done in the public schools:

"We have this vast number of speech-handicapped individuals in our society. They need help and they need it immediately. Some agency must take the

responsibility for giving it to them ... Much information can be disseminated through the universities, college, and extension speech clinics. However, the real responsibility must fall upon the public schools.”

Charles Van Riper (1939) *Speech Correction: Principles and methods*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p8-9.

1958

By the mid-20th century, speech correction was taking place in most public schools. Textbooks published during this time reflected the philosophy that good speech was an integral part of a good education:

“We live in a social order in which there are levels of linguistic usage. Each level has distinguishing characteristics that may be identified immediately as those of the educated, the less well educated, or the uneducated. The cultivated speaker will be judged in part by his speech and voice.”

Johnny Akin (1958) *And So We Speak: Voice and Articulation*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p4-9.

1960

James Carrell was ASHA president in 1956, and won ASHA Honors of the Association in 1974. This book on phonetics was one of the best of its time:

“Good speech is not, then, a cloak for superficiality. It is, instead, the rightful and natural mark of the educated, cultured, and intellectually vigorous person”

James Carrell and William Tiffany (1960) *Phonetics: Theory and Application to Speech Improvement*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p.1.

1963

By the 1960s, speech therapy took place in virtually every public school in America. Jon Eisenson was ASHA president in 1958, and won the Honors of the Association in 1967:

“The classroom teacher is no longer likely to be called upon to do remedial speech work with children ... Speech correctionists may have one of several titles in our schools ... *speech correctionists* ... *speech therapists* ... *speech clinicians* ... *speech consultants* ... *teacher of speech improvement*. Whatever the title, the individuals we are talking about are professionally educated and trained in the diagnosis and treatment of persons with communicative impairment.”

Jon Eisenson and Mardel Ogilvie (1963) *Speech Correction in the Schools*. New York: MacMillan. p. v-vi.