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LISTENING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD:
A CLINICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE LISTENING PROCESS
IN THREE-AND FOUR-YEAR OLD CHILDREN

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate some aspects of the listening process in early childhood education. The investigation was based on the premise that listening was a cognitive activity displaying cognitive-structural features similar to the development of knowledge.

The review of the literature revealed that the listening process as a cognitive activity in early childhood had not been sufficiently considered. In order to investigate the listening process a Piagetian theoretical perspective was developed. Inherent in this perspective was the relation of listening to the structuralist position as elucidated by Piaget.

Inherent in Piaget's principles was the clinical interview as the method of inquiry. As the methodology selected for the study, it was determined to be more penetrating in the discovery of underlying cognitive-structural features of listening. The clinical interviews involved 20 subjects, ten three-year olds and ten four-year olds, each encountering four different stimulus situations developed specifically for the investigation. The four interviews with each child were recorded for later transcription.

The analysis of the interview protocols, preceded by formal coding, investigated the listening process across the four stimulus situations by the central process of equilibration. The exemplification of the constructs of equilibrium which included the cognitive structures of listening facilitated the explanation of the listening process in three-and four-year old children.

The conclusions of the study relate to the corroboration of the postulates for each Piagetian theoretical construct. First, a model of the listening process was suggested involving the equilibration of cognitive structures. Second, the study indicated that the clinical interview is a useful method for the inquiry of listening in early childhood. Also, since the methodology has been utilized successfully in the investigation of listening it is suggested this procedure constitutes a useful method for the inquiry of other phenomena in early childhood education. Finally, the study indicated educational implications for the curriculum and suggested areas for further research.

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