

# **Learning to Listen to Learn**

**Using multi-sensory teaching for effective listening**



**Helen White &  
Christina Evans**

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Lucky Duck is more than a publishing house and training agency. George Robinson and Barbara Maines founded the company in the 1980s when they worked together as a head and as a psychologist, developing innovative strategies to support challenging students.

They have an international reputation for their work on bullying, self-esteem, emotional literacy and many other subjects of interest to the world of education.

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## **How to use the CD-ROM**

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The CD-ROM contains PDF files, labelled 'Worksheets.pdf' which contain worksheets for each lesson in this resource. You will need Acrobat Reader version 3 or higher to view and print these resources.

The documents are set up to print to A4 but you can enlarge them to A3 by increasing the output percentage at the point of printing using the page set-up settings for your printer.

To photocopy the worksheets directly from this book, set your photocopier to enlarge by 125% and align the edge of the page to be copied against the leading edge of the copier glass (usually indicated by an arrow).

# Preface

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This programme is concerned with listening as auditory and visual attention, rather than listening as a comprehension activity. Effective listening may appear to be common sense, but in reality it is a complex activity, which benefits from direct teaching. Professionals need training in how to teach and engage in good listening behaviour. We have called the programme *Learning to Listen to Learn*, and it will lead to improvement in social skills and assist classroom management

We have a keen interest in helping students to find new ways to learn, with a particular interest in improving listening and thinking skills. In our professional lives we sometimes support pupils with impaired language development in mainstream classes at secondary school to help them access the language of the curriculum. During these support sessions we observed that increasingly teachers were repeating instructions three or more times, only to have pupils ask, 'What do we have to do?' We realised that the listening skills programme, which we had used with our pupils in the Speech and Language Centre for many years, would benefit all mainstream pupils as well.

We are fortunate in that the Speech and Language Centre is sited in a very forward thinking school, Lampton School in Hounslow, which is always seeking new ways to challenge pupils' learning. Lampton, despite having pupils speaking more than 50 different languages, is one of the highest rated schools for value added education. Susan John, the headteacher, believes strongly in keeping abreast or ahead of new ideas and it was her faith that allowed us to be able to develop a programme which could be used to train all mainstream pupils. Although the programme has been mainly written for secondary pupils, it can be adapted and used by primary pupils, business people and parents/carers.

We developed two sessions, one for listening 'to make friends' and one for listening 'to learn'. It was decided that we would train all the new Year 7 pupils at the beginning of the school year and so the programme commenced. Although neither of the authors had ever taught a class before we managed to hold each class's attention by the very nature of the skills they were learning. The programme has been running for six years which means that every pupil in the school has been trained in the active skills needed for listening, and it has become a school-wide policy to remind the pupils of these skills in every lesson, when the teacher is instructing the whole class. Other schools and other professionals showed a lot of interest as the programme became

more widely known and we became involved in training adults in how to use it. Finally, when the Commissioner for London Schools, Professor Tim Brighouse, chanced upon a class we were teaching and requested a copy of the programme it was decided to publish.

Tim Brighouse wrote:

I was being given a whistle stop tour of Lampton School when I glimpsed some magic. It was the authors of this book engaged with a Year 7 class in something that was so enthralling that they quite failed to notice my sudden appearance with the headteacher in the classroom.

There was something else unusual – namely the presence at the back of the room of a dozen or so other adults who turned out to be fellow teachers.

‘What’s going on here?’ I enquired in a whispered intrigued aside to the headteacher. And that’s when I learned about ‘Learning to Listen to Learn’ and how it was a vital part of the Year 7 curriculum. The fellow teachers were attempting to make sure that they reinforced the skills that the Year 7 pupils were all learning, in their teaching of other subjects.

Naturally I was impressed because it’s always seemed to me that acquiring the habits of behaviour and the associated carefully practised skills are essential to everyone and there’s probably no better time to focus on them than during the first year in secondary school, when sadly it’s all too often the case that youngsters slip backwards in their learning and most importantly in their confidence.

So ‘learning to learn’ courses become part of any school’s repertoire of programmes for Year 7 – to be reinforced at regular intervals in later adolescence.

Ever since my visit to Lampton School I’ve been telling other schools of their practice and I’m delighted that the outstanding practitioners involved have now written a book to make some of their knowledge and practice available to others.

# **Introduction and Rationale**

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For many years there has been a major focus in education on the content of the syllabus and its delivery. There has been far less interest in how students are receiving this information and their understanding and learning from it. In other words, listening and attending appear to be considered automatic reactions in children. In contrast to this there has been an increasing realisation in business that a good communicator, which inevitably means a good listener, is the person who will succeed and should be valued. Professional teams are often trained in how to listen actively to others.

Schools have traditionally focused on the teaching of language skills through reading, writing and spelling, speaking and listening. Although the first four are explicitly taught, there has been little attention paid to the fundamental skills needed for listening. Yet good listening underpins everything we do. Educators are paying increasing attention to it and it has been included as a separate part of the National Curriculum. However, in this context it usually refers to the process of comprehension of spoken language, as in, listen for and recall the main points of a talk, reading or television programme. (DfEE 2001). It is not seen as a set of active skills that need to be taught. When we deliver our programme to the pupils, each class group identifies at least thirteen different skills that produce optimum listening. It is accepted that listening involves attention, but how this is brought about has not been comprehensively addressed. Yet there are many children with very limited listening skills sitting in classrooms and not attending to the teacher's message. Some of them will also be disrupting the learning of other students who are attempting to learn but are prevented by noise or interruptions.

## **The importance of listening and language development to learning**

Listening and attention are learnt behaviours. If one is born into a family where there is constant noise and people do not listen to one another, obviously one will not acquire the necessary skills. Research from the Basic Skills Agency in 2003 indicated the concern of headteachers that the behavioural and verbal skills of children starting school were at an all-time low. Many children were unable to sit still and settle in school, were unable to follow instructions and were not ready to learn.

Listening begins well before a baby is born. In fact it has been discovered that a foetus will move a specific muscle when it hears a specific speech