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Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children

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LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION OF CHILDREN

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS IN CHILDREN, by Gertrud L. Wyatt. New Jersey: Collier Macmillan International, 1969. xviii, 372 pp.

Dr. Wyatt's latest volume signals, perhaps, the apex of her long career in which she has traversed interdisciplinary fields and renowned institutions dealing with speech pathology, and therapy, psychoanalysis, special education, as well as, clinical and developmental psychology.

Part I, focuses on the verbal interaction between child and mother, the implications for language learning and the concomitant relationship to language deviation in the child. The author continuously reinforces by observation-experimentation and related commentary, the concept that the years from two to four are a fertile period for the cultivation and acquisition of language. Through hypothesis and illustrations, it becomes apparent that the task of language learning can be facilitated through verbal and non-verbal communication as imbibed in the physical and emotional tones of parent-child interaction, that is, when the parent's feelings for the child are positive, a good speech model is provided for the child. Furthermore, the timing and continuity of the adult's response, the level and the content of the message, personal emphasis on words, and corrective feedback are some of the dimensions examined as they relate to the child's unique style of talking and the degree of satisfaction or frustration which might be experienced by a youngster in his environment.

Theoretical issues, prevailing theories on stuttering and approaches to therapy are central considerations in Part II, or, chapters six through sixteen. Bridging the gap between the child's overt language disorder and covert psychological difficulties, the position of Hans Zulliger, the Swiss educator and child therapist, is elucidated. Zulliger's therapy would evoke rapprochement between the mother and child while Wyatt opts for a developmental crisis theory of stuttering. The author, bearing in mind the effect of significant others on the child's behavior has relegated many pages to the role of the parent in the therapeutic process; counseling overtones prevail, and a "how-to-do-it" emphasis is complimented by many informative tables. Although a distinction is made between a clinical and school setting, collaboration of professional, paraprofessional, and parents is stressed as the vital key to successful communication therapy. Examples of communication therapy are pragmatic and comprehensive, inviting the reader's imitation and imagination.

The author's use of such words and phrases as "sphincter", "the linguistic level of communication", and "mixed cerebral dominance"

might be more meaningful if a chapter on neuroanatomy, particularly the relationship between the various Brodmann's Areas of the cerebral hemisphere and neurology, had been included, in addition to, a glossary of terms. Although the stuttering syndrome is a primary focus to the book, severely defective articulation, and multiple motor-perceptual and language abilities are discussed while related topics like cleft palate and voice disorders appear in the appendices. Tracing normal language development and deviations through the maturational, physiological, and sociocultural factors in the child makes this a valuable source book for all involved in language communication. The very extensive and detailed appendices, particularly XVII, "Design for a Comprehensive, School-Centered Program of Teaching and Therapy for Children with Communication Disorders", and a scholarly bibliography of approximately 500 titles further enhances the significance of this book. Dr. Wyatt's contribution is timely and commendable.

MAUREEN MCCARTHY