

The4Skills#2: Listening Reflection Paper with Response (Beth Neher)

The Four Skills

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Listening Reflection Paper

When I first started the Listening Module, my understanding of listening as a skill was very basic. My perception of listening—one of the four vital skills in language learning—was shaped largely by my own experience as a learner. In the English classrooms where I studied, listening was rarely emphasized. Consequently, I came to see it as a sub-skill of minor importance, particularly within the Mauritanian educational context, where English language teaching was still relatively new. *(I really appreciate your describing your own learning experience and what it left you feeling/believing.)*

Over the course of three sessions, through engaging discussions with peers and instructor as well as interaction with diverse texts, my understanding of listening expanded dramatically. I began to view listening not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a profoundly relational act. Listening became meaningful to me on two levels: first, as a life skill that helps us connect with others and foster relationships; and second, as a pedagogical tool that establishes relationships within the classroom.

Listening, I came to realize, creates a space of connection between individuals—what I might describe as “listening for healing.” *(Can you say more here? I believe that listening can be about healing relationships; I wondered about your saying that it is about healing.)* Similarly, within the classroom, listening establishes an essential relationship between the student (Thou) and the

target language (It). *(I agree. I think the triangle needs to be expanded to accommodate the complex relationships related to listening.)*

Recognizing the relational nature of listening helped me understand its importance in facilitating second language acquisition. Just as children develop their first language primarily through listening, second language learners, too, rely heavily on this skill for comprehension and internalization. This realization reshaped my perspective on teaching, prompting me to reconsider both the theoretical and practical implications of listening instruction. Among the key insights I gained was the distinction between *listening for comprehension* and *listening for acquisition*. *(These two paragraphs make clear a huge change in your thinking.)*

In terms of pedagogy, I found it enlightening to explore the various perspectives on teaching listening. A central idea is that language exists for communication; therefore, instruction should focus not only on form and rules but also on real-life communicative use. Viewing listening through this communicative lens makes it integral to language teaching. When students engage with authentic listening tasks, they draw upon the same processes that shaped their L1 acquisition, allowing them to experience language naturally. *(Communication? ... And it's an experience they've had in their L1, whether they remember it or not.)*

Another crucial concept I encountered was the distinction between *top-down* and *bottom-up* processing. Reflecting on my past learning experiences, I realized that one major limitation in my own instruction had been an overreliance on top-down techniques—focusing too much on meaning and too little on form. In practice, effective listening involves a combination of both approaches—what is often referred to as *interactive processing*. Thus, teachers should integrate

activities that engage both levels of processing. *(Yes, we need to encourage Ss to use both. How can we do that?)*

From a practical standpoint, the Listening Module provided me with strategies and techniques to effectively incorporate listening into lesson planning. Activities such as prediction, inference, monitoring, clarification, and evaluation proved particularly adaptable across various lesson structures. For lower-level learners, techniques like micro-listening (“bits and pieces”) or “listening for specific information” can scaffold comprehension. More advanced learners may engage in inferential listening—“listening between the lines”—to detect emotional or contextual cues.

The course also helped me identify potential challenges in teaching listening. One key issue is the tendency of teachers to *test* listening rather than *teach* it. Additionally, students may struggle with pronunciation, speed of speech, or limited exposure to authentic listening situations.

Teachers must therefore design lessons that not only measure comprehension but also support learners’ listening development through guided practice and feedback.

(Where do all these thoughts leave you? I have a sense that you’re moving forward with many thoughts and much greater awareness. What else?)

(Mohamed, as I said in a comment at the start of your reflection, it sounds like you took a lot on board in just three lessons. I’m glad. Taking in so much in such a short time will take some time to process, I know. I hope your internship provides you with time to experiment with and implement much of what you’re thinking about. I wondered what you are taking away from the

other reading you did (i.e., other than Wheatley) and from the experience of talking through your lesson plan with peers.)