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A comparison of teacher referrals for language assessments in whole language and skill-based curricula

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whole language and skill-based curricula**

Rios, Cheryl Lynn, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1992

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106**

**A COMPARISON OF
TEACHER REFERRALS FOR
LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS
IN WHOLE LANGUAGE AND SKILL-BASED CURRICULA**

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of
Communication Disorders and Sciences
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts**

**By
Cheryl Lynn Rios
May, 1992**

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF TEACHER REFERRALS FOR LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS IN WHOLE LANGUAGE AND SKILL-BASED CURRICULA

by Cheryl Lynn Rios

Trends in seven schools in one school district in teacher referrals of first grade students for assessments to determine the presence of language disorders were investigated. Since the district used two language arts approaches, whole language and skill-based, both were reviewed. The educational perspectives on the concepts of referral, modifications, standardized assessments, and population demographics of special education were also presented.

Twenty-three first grade teachers and seven speech-language pathologists were surveyed for prevalence of consultation, classroom evaluation techniques, and desired training in the whole language approach. Actual referrals generated by first grade teachers over a four year period were tabulated for area of concern, type of standardized assessment, and for certification of language disorders. The language arts curricula approach used was not found to have a significant effect on the number of referrals generated nor the ability of the teacher to accurately refer students with language disorders.

DEDICATION

I feel very fortunate to have learned a valuable lesson in human kindness, along with the academic enlightenment I gained from having completed a thesis. The completion of this thesis was truly a group effort, for which I am eternally grateful. I wish to thank the entire faculty of the Department of Communication Disorders and Sciences and San Jose State University for their flexibility in assisting me with the completion of my degree. I thank the late Dr. Kay Armsted for the initial encouragement she gave me to return to SJSU to finish my Masters program. Thanks also go to Dr. Gloria Weddington for serving as chair of my thesis committee, and for her understanding of my personal needs. I thank Minnie Galvan for also serving on my committee. I wish to convey many thanks to all of my colleagues in the Oak Grove School District, especially those at Baldwin School and in the Speech Department. I could always count on a word or two of encouragement as deadlines drew near. Special thanks goes to Lee Ann Laraway who served as a member of my thesis committee. She was always available to answer questions, give advice, or just chat. I could not have achieved this goal if it were not for Lee Ann. She embodies the true spirit of being a friend. Aaron Sagray is deserving of special thanks for his patience as he expertly made my charts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Given the power to accurately understand others and to express oneself, the potential of human beings is limitless. This power is language. Language is all about expressing and receiving thoughts and ideas through all media and in all social contexts. School is an important social setting. When a person experiences a delay or deviance in language skill development, interpretation and expression of thoughts and ideas may be incorrect or incomplete. As children grow through the educational system, the classroom teacher has a wonderful vantage point from which to judge the language competencies of their students.

First grade teachers often have the unique challenge of beginning a five or six year old child on the road to academic fulfillment. With changing curriculum and teaching strategies, first grade teachers wonder how to evaluate the language learning abilities of each student. Based on the evaluations, teachers must then determine which students need specialized assistance. It is in this initial academic phase that children may be noticed to lag behind their peers academically. This lag may have a language disability at its base, because language is pervasive in all human interaction and thinking. As Nelson (1989) indicated, as a child is "doing math" or "doing science," he is also "doing language."

Background to the Problem

Each school district adopts a particular curriculum approach in each of the different academic subjects. From these curriculum approaches, basic competencies are often established in each subject area for each grade level.

Two commonly used approaches to teaching language arts in first grade are "whole language" with works of literature, and "skill-based" with workbooks and basal readers. Individual student skill development is to be monitored or tested in a documented fashion to assure adequate rate of progress.

The philosophy of whole language places meaning as its primary objective and the learner as its motivating force (K. Goodman, 1989; Y. Goodman, 1989; Harste, 1989; McCaslin, 1989; Pearson, 1989; Watson, 1989). Children are taught language with all its systems (semantics, syntax, and graphophonemics) intact during the instruction (K. Goodman, 1989; Sanacore, 1990). The role of the teacher in this child-centered curriculum is to plan learning experiences based on the child's own experiences and background (Y. Goodman, 1989). Students are encouraged to build on their strengths as a means of gaining confidence to overcome their weaknesses (K. Goodman, 1986).

Skill-based curriculum models, on the other hand, tend to isolate and fragment the language children are taught through direct instruction (Cambourne & Turbill, 1989; Pearson, 1989; Watson, 1989). This style is commonly associated with basal readers and consumable workbooks which teach only a single skill, such as reading words with the short /a/ sound or changing regular verbs to the past tense. Once the targeted skill has been presented and practiced, students are often tested for skill mastery.

Regardless of the approach used, there are some students who develop language skills inadequately or slower than their peers. The teacher must become aware of these students, whether through whole language assessment techniques (Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1988), or specific

associated with skills directly taught. Once a student has been so identified, the teacher usually refers the student to the speech-language pathologist. The concept of a referral for special education intervention is similar to the concept of a referral used by professionals in various other fields, such as medicine, psychology, and business. The notion of consulting with others who have more specific expertise in the area of concern or need is universal. The public school referral process sets into motion either modifications to the student's curriculum or the teacher's style, and possibly a series of tests and/or evaluations to determine the presence of language disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

The field of speech-language pathology has traditionally been an extremely clinical one requiring statistical data from standardized measures to support or disclaim a particular observation or impression. The role of the public school speech-language pathologist is to evaluate, monitor, and remediate speech and language development. A skill-based curriculum typically provides teachers and speech-language pathologists with a clear idea of those students experiencing difficulty developing adequate language for their age peer group and curriculum through objective worksheets and tests. In the whole language, child-centered, classroom evaluation relies solely on observation and analysis of student work (K. Goodman, 1989; Sanacore, 1990). With reliance on subjective observation and evaluation, whole language teachers often face the responsibility of being the only judge of language development for a class of thirty-three children, until the initial referral for consultation with or

evaluation by speech and language specialists is made. With that awesome responsibility comes concerns over adequate training in evaluation techniques of whole language and the delivery of early identification and intervention strategies for those first grade students seen as lagging behind their classmates in some area of language learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding the effectiveness of first grade teachers in referring students with possible language disabilities. The researcher gathered data covering four years at seven elementary schools in the Oak Grove School District. The first two years of the study examined referrals from a skill-based curriculum, and the last two years examined those referrals from first grade teachers after implementation of a whole language curriculum. Data gathered from special education referral logs and teacher questionnaires demonstrate a comparison of the two language arts approaches with respect to referral of possible language disabled children in the first grade. The referrals were compared for validity based on results of standardized tests provided by the speech-language pathologist. The questionnaire responses were compared for levels of confidence in adequately identifying disabled children for both teachers and speech-language pathologists. Speech-language pathologists can use the information presented in this study to guide their efforts to collaborate and consult with first grade teachers in the identification of language disordered children. Through surveys and referral information, data showed strengths and weaknesses in teacher referrals, as determined by how many referred students actually qualified for language services.

Delineation of the Problem

Parents and students rely on their teachers to detect learning difficulties as early as possible. The teachers must rely on constructs and parameters of a given curriculum approach to provide enough information for a decision about rate and level of progress. Given this information, teachers must consider its implications and decide if a referral for further evaluation is necessary or if the performance is typical of the student's peer group.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study. First, taken from actual referrals, what evaluation methods do classroom teachers report to use for assessing first grade students' language learning abilities in skill-based and whole language curriculum approaches? Second, based on survey responses, in what capacities do speech-language pathologists collaborate/consult with first grade teachers prior to the referral of a student for special education assessment for possible language disabilities? Third, based on survey responses, what level of confidence do teachers and their speech-language pathologists report to have in the teachers' abilities to accurately identify students with possible language disabilities when using a whole language approach? Finally, what information and training do first grade teachers and speech-language pathologists need to become successful evaluators of young children's language skill within a whole language curriculum style?

Hypothesis

When using a whole language approach that teaches and evaluates students' meaningful language, it is hypothesized that first grade teachers make fewer referrals for evaluation for language disabilities than when a skill-based approach is used. It is further hypothesized that the referrals from whole language teachers will be proportionately more accurate in predicting students with language disabilities than those from skill-based classrooms.

Operational Definitions of Terms

Basal reader. Standard reading texts aimed at teaching subskills of reading individually.

Collaboration. The teaming of general education teachers and special education teachers in providing appropriate educational modifications to meet individual student needs for academic success.

Consultation. The planning, among general and special educators, of strategies for implementation of appropriate classroom and curriculum modifications necessary for academic success.

Consumable workbooks. Workbooks associated with skill-based curriculum approaches in which students practice individual writing or grammar skills with the pages torn out and sent home or put in a student folder to demonstrate skill level accomplished.

Criterion-referenced tests. Tests that state a particular level of understanding or correct responses as signifying mastery learning.

Curriculum modifications. Modifications to the general curriculum content or teaching strategy within the regular classroom for those

students identified by the teacher as not benefiting from the general curriculum.

General education. The current term used to describe a "regular" classroom attended by students who receive little or no special education services.

Language disability. According to federal and state requirements, students are language disabled if they score, on two or more standardized measures, 1.5 Standard Deviations or more below the mean for their chronological age or at/or below the seventh percentile in one of the following areas of language development: morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics.

Language formulation. The selection and retrieval of words and the organization of these words into a logically and syntactically appropriate form.

Morphology. The ability to change words by adding prefixes and suffixes to change meaning.

Pragmatics. The efficient use of language to convey thoughts and needs in socially and linguistically acceptable ways.

Referral. The process by which teachers elicit assistance from other professionals within the school to determine a student's special learning needs if satisfactory progress in any academic area is not being made.

Resource Specialist (RS). A special education teacher who works with groups of learning disabled students in the Resource Specialist Program (RSP).

Semantics. Skill in the understanding of word meanings.

Skill-based curriculum. The teaching of skills by a standard curriculum in which skills are typically taught one at a time in a developmental sequence with mastery being determined by criterion-referenced tests.

Special education. A subsystem of general education designed to meet special learning needs of special students not benefiting from the general program.

Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP). In the public school, a special education teacher who works with groups of language and speech disordered students.

Student Study Team. In some instances, this is a group of special education and regular education teachers that discuss the learning and assessment needs of specific students and modification needs of the classroom teacher. In other instances, this may be a problem solving body consisting of general education teachers and parents designed to modify a student's general classroom program or environment to best meet his/her individual needs for academic success.

Syntax. Knowledge of word order according to the rules of grammar of the language.

Whole language. Written and oral language in connected discourse in a meaningful contextual setting (Watson, 1989).

Limitations

This study is limited to one school district in San Jose, California and the educators and students within that district during the time this study encompassed.

Delimitations

Children whose primary language is not English were not included in this study, as a variety of factors outside the scope of this study affect success in first grade and language acquisition and development. Previously identified special education students were not considered in this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Current research in the area of actual referral of elementary aged students to speech-language pathologists as demonstrating possible language deficits in the general classroom is almost non-existent. For the purpose of a literature review, studies of general referral procedures for all areas of academic concern have been cited. The rationale for this review is that language disabilities fall under the umbrella term of learning disabilities according to federal guidelines for special education. Also some references pertaining to referral procedures in the medical profession have been cited to illustrate similarities in need and function among both the medical and education communities.

Literature on the topic of "whole language" was reviewed as exemplary of the mandate by the state of California that an "integrated" language arts curriculum in which comprehension of associated language is stressed in all parts of the curriculum presentation. Literature specifically related to "integrated" language arts was not found, nor was current literature supporting or discussing skill-based curricula for language arts.

Referral

It is a generally accepted practice for professionals of all types to refer patients or clients to others, either inside or outside of their own occupational specialty. The impetus for referrals is better service to the patient or client by a professional with specific expertise for the client's individual needs. The medical community operates two different kinds of referral systems (Pray, 1991). The closed referral system requires a doctor's

order for all additional services to the patient which he/she is not personally rendering. The open referral system acknowledges referrals for services from a variety of sources, such as nurses, family members, and patients. The public school system ideally operates within an open referral system. However, most referrals for special education intervention come directly from classroom teachers.

Just as teachers must be aware of various resources to assist students, both within the parameters of the school and the community, so must doctors be aware of all available resources to meet patient needs. Doctors have been called "gatekeepers" (Pray, 1991), responsible for meeting the needs of their patients. The same can be said for teachers. Without knowledgeable, aggressive "gatekeepers," patients and students, alike, may have vital available services unexplored.

Demographics

In 1989, Harste found 7.5% of all school-aged children labeled special-education. The referral demographics reported by Algozzine, Christenson, Pianta, Wang, and Ysseldyke (1983), indicated that of all special education students, 71% were males, 29% were females, 70% were in primary grades (k-3), and 30% were in intermediate grades (4-6). Many referrals from first grade teachers focused on behavioral concerns rather than academic difficulties (Anderson, Cronin, & Miller, 1986).

Many studies have documented biases teachers have for students and how those biases affect a teacher's decision for referring a student for special education intervention. Silverman and VanOpens (1980) studied the role sex biases played in teacher referrals for speech and language services. They found teachers more likely to refer girls for voice, language,

articulation services, and boys for stuttering services.

Grossman and Franklin (1988) found that undergraduate students in a university training program in speech and language pathology also held biases. Their study found that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to be seen as appropriately referred for speech and language services, compared to children from high-economic backgrounds. These researchers also found undergraduate students to possess the bias that females have higher language capabilities than boys, and for the high-economic group, girls were more often seen as needing speech and language services than boys.

The question of teachers' understanding of the role of the speech-language pathologist comes to mind as Algozzine et al. (1983) reported that less than 5% of referring teachers consulted with this specialist regarding particular students. Pray (1991) also pointed to the fact that doctors, similarly, often have limited perception of psychosocial problems that are appropriate for referral to social work agencies, due to a lack of understanding of the role a social worker.

Although general academics, such as reading, math, and memory, are typical referral categories, language difficulties are seldom considered at the time of the referral as being possible contributing factors. Anderson, et. al. (1986) looked at reasons for referral according to the referral statement. They found that when language arts was singled out as an academic area, only one out of 269 referrals from grades one through five listed language arts as the primary difficulty in class.

Prevention and early intervention

In 1975, Congress passed PL 94-142 which gave federal, state, and local governments the responsibility to meet the educational needs of all children, including handicapped children (Federal Register, 1975). Early, wide-scale screenings, usually at Kindergarten entrance, was a way to comply with the mandate from PL 94-142 which states that all children in need of special services are to be "identified, located, and evaluated" (Azzara, Gracey, & Reinherz, 1984).

Sanacore (1990) stated that virtually every positive action of preschool and early primary teachers involves early interventions to prevent future problems. He further stated that early success in literacy and language development is critical to document, as foundations for future success and self-esteem are dependent upon it. The same holds true for early identification of all learning difficulties, including language learning and development. All learning difficulties left unaddressed in early years have the potential to become major learning disabilities in later elementary years (Sanacore, 1990; Slavin, 1990).

Slavin (1990) cited reading as the critical area of the first grade curriculum which predicts future school success. He called for all programs to make certain that every first grade student learns to read through the use of any resources available, such as tutors and additional staff. Teachers in early primary grades need to be aware of student behaviors and developmental characteristics of early learning difficulties and appropriate classroom programs they can implement to accommodate these differences (Anderson et al., 1986). It is in these areas that the speech-language pathologist and other specialists can be of great value to

classroom teacher through consultation and collaboration. Similarly, Pray (1991) pointed out that social workers continue to educate doctors in the characteristics of domestic violence, as this problem was found to have a low identification rate, even though doctors reported that they felt the incidence was higher than documented. Consultation and collaboration services in the schools are valuable whether the student requires special education placement or not, as teachers need to understand and accept individual differences within their students (Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1989). Such a teaming of educators is seen as preferable, because individual teachers may focus on one salient feature without analyzing the integration of numerous factors that make up learning (Algozzine et al. 1983).

Modifications

Algozzine & Ysseldyke (1986) described the typical school referral procedure as "refer-classify- place-and-forget." They urged schools to adopt a practice of pre-referral interventions. Since learning difficulties are seen to be a reflection of the environment in which they occur (Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1989), a great deal of research has been done in the area of instructional environment (Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1986; Algozzine et al. 1983).

The decision to refer a particular student for special education intervention does not need to be the sole responsibility of a single teacher. Algozzine et al. (1983) reported that 93.4% of teachers surveyed reported consulting with at least one other person concerning a referral, but only 13.4% were formal conferences. Referrals should be made with referral statements describing discrepancies between a student's current

referral is to devise an intervention strategy to lessen the severity of the specific discrepancy on the referral form (Algozzine, Christenson, & Ysseldyke, 1982; Anderson, Cronin, & Miller, 1986; Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1989). The importance of documenting rate of progress observed due to a classroom instructional intervention has been emphasized, yet documentation verifying modifications attempted is lacking, as reported by Algozzine, Christenson, Pianta, Wang, and Ysseldyke (1983).

Standardized assessment

Special education exists in the education system because large numbers of children cannot benefit from attendance in regular classrooms (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1986). Teachers are usually efficient predictors of school success or failure. Studies found 3-5% (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1986) and 4-6% (Algozzine, Christenson, & Ysseldyke, 1982) of school populations are referred annually for screening or psychoeducational assessments for all types of learning difficulties. Large percentages of referred students are fully evaluated and ultimately placed in special education programs (Algozzine et al. 1982; Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1986; Anderson, Cronin, & Miller, 1986). Care must be taken to avoid pre-assessment bias which can occur when testers develop a preconceived notion about the student solely on the content of the referral statement (Anderson, Cronin, & Miller, 1986).

Language Arts Framework

The State of California does not mandate school districts to implement a particular program or series of books to teach English-Language Arts. Rather, a "framework" has been designed to guide districts in their selections, implementations, and expansions for a systematic, articulated

program, K-12 (Barr, 1988).

The California Department of Education recommends the following elements to be considered as each school district adopts a new curriculum series to keep in accordance with State guidelines for Language Arts reform:

1. A literature-based English-language arts program for all students;
2. The integration of all the language arts (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in every unit of study, incorporating the writing process as a key strategy;
3. Assessment of the complete language arts program with alternate strategies and forms (Barr, 1988).

Based on research findings that stress a teacher's need to encourage students to relate past experience and knowledge to what they need to learn in school (K. Goodman, 1986), California recommends these additional guidelines:

1. Achievement criteria for discussing whole works of literature orally and/or in writing;
2. Learning activities involving all students actively;
3. A sequence of activities and content respectful of conceptual stages of student development. Student errors are to be used to indicate developmental stages of language growth;
4. A focus on increasingly higher standards of literacy (Barr, 1988).

The proposed integrated language arts curriculum transcending all subject areas is believed to motivate all students, even special needs students, to participate in core experiences through talking, reading and writing. While the needs of divergent students were addressed by the

authors of California's language arts framework, the specific needs of language disabled students were not specifically addressed. Only minority language users were specifically mentioned as having special needs within the general classroom.

Whole language

The whole language approach teaches language skills and concepts naturally with all of the systems of language intact during all discourse. These systems include semantics, syntax, graphophonemics, and pragmatics (Watson, 1989). Sanacore (1990) described the whole language classroom as being "success-oriented," with the focus being on what the children can do, not what they cannot. Whole language teachers create a rich environment in which the students are not asked to engage in the impossible task, but simply the delightfully difficult (Watson, 1989).

There are several environmental factors to be considered to insure success. Whole language teachers focus on partner and small group learning. Teachers build their curriculum content around learning experiences to expand on the background of their learners (Y. Goodman, 1989). Whole language is child-centered with language beginning by making connections to life experiences (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990; Harste, 1989; Watson, 1989; Y. Goodman, 1989).

Teachers are encouraged to accept all student errors during reading, writing, and oral communication (Watson, 1989). Teachers are able to document student progress by determining the developmental stages at which the errors are made. Another key to a successful learning environment is "change" (Harste, 1989). Children are always asked

questions such as, What have you learned? What do you know now that you didn't know before?

K. Goodman (1989) found the key elements of whole language to be:

1. A positive view of human learners with teaching to begin where the learner's development is and with the learner taking ownership over his learning with maximum support to develop and fulfill his goals;
2. Redefining the teacher's role as being a mediator to facilitate learning, not to control it;
3. Language as central to learning in a sense of society, because language is internalized from social interaction. Oral and written language are learned best and most easily in authentic speech acts and literacy events designed to serve real functions; and
4. A dual curriculum aimed at building linguistic and cognitive skills. Language and thinking develop at the same time that knowledge is developed and concepts and schema are built.

The whole language concept is not new, yet teachers and parents often do not know what whole language is all about and how it will benefit children. Watson (1989) offered the following explanation for the whole language obscurity: "Whole language is difficult to define as whole language teachers are encouraged to make certain that what happens in their classrooms is consistent only with their own definition."

Philosophy

Whole language classrooms put learners in control of what they learn regardless of what they are taught, as content can only be understood and seriously studied when the learners are actively involved and interested in the learning (Y. Goodman, 1989). To accomplish this objective, whole

language incorporates, rather than denies or ignores, the diverse cultures represented in the classrooms (Harste, 1989). Therefore, whole language is a theory of voice that concentrates on all students being heard, as language allows children to give expression to their experiences. Unique to this approach is that its curriculum is negotiated by students and teachers to begin with the life experiences of the language learner (Harste, 1989).

Whole language incorporates several theories of learning, such as education, anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, child development, curriculum, semiotics, and philosophy (Y. Goodman, 1989; Watson, 1989). Whole language was initially developed as a theory of language, but quickly became a theory of learning (Harste, 1989), part of which is a literature-based reading program (Y. Goodman, 1989).

With 7.5% of all school-aged children labeled special-education, whole language advocates, such as Harste (1989), saw their philosophy as a way to improve the education system for all, including those in special education before they ever become identified as such. He stated that whole language is exemplary of a good language arts program which expands rather than stifles communication. This end is accomplished through an open invitation to inquire into the nature of language and learning (Harste, 1989). Students are further actively involved in their own learning, because whole language teachers never do for students that which students can do for themselves (Watson, 1989).

Evaluation methods in whole language

Advocates of whole language see traditional methods of assessment as inappropriate in whole language classrooms (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990). Administration of such grade level standardized tests for skill mastery is

dichotomous to the concept of the natural learning environment (Sanacore, 1990).

Cambourne and Turbill (1990) observed parents and their children as parents "assessed" the development of their children. Their observations led to the recommendation that students ought to be evaluated by their teachers in the same manner as children are by the parents. Observed aspects of these parental assessment included observation, reaction, intervention, and participation in the activities undertaken by children on a daily basis. "Natural learning theory" is the explanation of the natural development of language and other learning as it occurs in the daily ebb and flow of human experiences (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990).

To accomplish the evaluation of the natural learning taking place in whole language classrooms, classrooms should be organized to facilitate multiple opportunities to gather data. Cambourne and Turbill (1990) suggested that the "responsive evaluation" methods proposed by Stake and Guba and Lincoln. Responsive evaluation is not controlled, but rather is based on the student being the assessment instrument as the teacher studies student behaviors within given situations.

K. Goodman (1986) described "kidwatching" as the primary method of evaluation in the whole language classroom. Kidwatching is described as a continuous process of: 1) observing students' use of language, leadership, problem solving, and collaboration with peers; 2) interacting with students through conferences, small and large group discussion, posing relevant questions, and responding to students' journal entries; and 3) analyzing language development and knowledge base through reading miscues and oral and written language errors. He further suggests these three

evaluation tools be integrated as each can help confirm interpretations from the use of the others. Portfolios of student work and anecdotes are also recommended (Watson, 1989).

Skill-based approach

Recent literature points to the inadequacies of the skill-based curriculum approach. No recent proponents of basal readers and workbooks were found. Typical criticisms included:

1. Schools using basal readers and accompanying workbooks as the foundations of the language arts program lack the ability to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of particular students, because this is considered a "standard" curriculum (Durkin, 1990).
2. Standard curriculum models rely on test scores to measure student success in the area of reading, even when the testing instruments have little to do with the requirements of successful reading (Durkin, 1990). Such tests measure the ability of students to read or decode words with little attention to the students' ability to understand and use the selection's vocabulary, or relate the passage to past knowledge or experience to acquire meaning.
3. Built into the skill-based program using basals and workbooks is the idea of "mentioning" (Durkin, 1990). Mentioning is the descriptive term for the teaching style of this standard curriculum by which teachers present a given skill, teach it, practice it, test it, forget about it. Those students requiring more teaching or practicing for mastery to occur will probably not achieve mastery with this "one shot" presentation style.

4. California suggests basal readers and anthologies are appropriate under the new language arts framework if they contain whole, unedited literary works (Barr, 1988). California cautions use of basals, however, as research by Anderson and Sawyer are cited to have found them inadequate due to a lack of predictable story lines, simplistic story lines, and lack of character motivation (Barr, 1988).
5. K. Goodman (1986) indicates that mastery of a sequence of isolated skills does not add up to literacy or oral language competence.

Summary

This review presents the various factors which surround the identification of a student as learning handicapped. The review of the referral process described teachers, as well as professionals in other fields, as "gatekeepers" seeking better service to meet the needs of students and clients. Various researchers found special education to be populated predominantly by males in the primary grades, and predisposed to biases based on gender and socioeconomic background. Federal law mandated special education emphasis on prevention and early intervention through passage of PL 94-142. Several experts reviewed proposed collaboration and consultation with classroom teachers as the primary step for all special educators in the direction of prevention and early intervention. In this process, modifications to the learning environment can be implemented to meet individual student needs, prior to the beginning of a standardized assessment for special education placement.

This review also included descriptions of the language arts framework for California, and two approaches for teaching language arts to primary

grade students. Whole language was described as teaching language naturally with all language components represented as an intact unit. Student evaluation is accomplished by evaluating errors made and the developmental level represented by the errors. Whole language was described by Sanacore (1990) as "success-oriented." The skill-based approach was described as involving objective workbooks and tests. These tools are used to teach and test one language task or concept at a time. Proponents of the skill-based approach were not found in the education research compiled for this study. This study attempted to determine the success first grade teachers achieved in identifying language handicapped students through the parameters set forth by each of the two different language arts approaches used in the same school district.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Subjects for this study included speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and first grade teachers in one school district in San Jose, California. The current teachers and SLPs were asked to complete surveys specific to this study. The four research questions asked by the researcher were answered in these surveys. The referrals for special education intervention were examined for data pertaining to the researcher's two hypotheses under investigation.

Speech-Language Pathologists

The SLP at each elementary school served a vital role in conducting this research. Each one was the contact person at their respective schools. The researcher contacted each SLP by phone to discuss the nature of the research and their interest in participating. Five SLPs out of twelve, representing ten schools, did not participate for various reasons. Seven SLPs agreed to participate. Thus, seven of seventeen schools in this district are represented in this study. All SLPs met hiring standards set forth by the district, each having at least a B.A. degree in Speech Pathology and a Clinical Rehabilitation credential. The time of professional employment in the California public schools ranged from four years to twenty-six years.

Teachers

All current first grade teachers at each of the participating seven schools were asked to participate in this study by completing a Teacher Survey. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, as the researcher invited candid responses to survey questions. Of the schools participating

in the study, 100% of the first grade teachers responded. Thus, survey results from 23 first grade teachers in this district have been tabulated in this study.

Referrals

Federal law requires schools to retain written documentation of all students referred for all types of special education intervention, from teacher consultations with special educators, to screening and assessment data, to program placement. It was found during the course of this research that all schools kept their written documentation in a binder or file dated for each individual school year. Beyond that, some schools kept the information in chronological order of interventions throughout the year, while others alphabetized the information by student last name, keeping all pertinent notes on the student together.

All first grade students, from September, 1988 through January, 1992, with original documentation of need for any type of special education assessment were included in this study. A Special Education Referral Evaluation Form was completed for each student referred for special education intervention according to school records. Those students already served in a special education program were not included, even if a new concern was documented. A total of 123 referral evaluation forms were completed, tabulated, and analyzed to test the two hypotheses put forth by the researcher.

Procedure

Once an SLP volunteered to participate in this study, and permission was granted from the school principal, first grade teachers were contacted

by phone to request their participation in this study, by completing a Teacher Survey. Each SLP also completed a Speech-Language Pathologist Survey for each school they represented. Survey forms were then returned to the researcher via the district mail system. When the surveys were completed, the SLP met with the researcher to examine documented information on first grade students referred for any type of special education assessment.

Responses to the survey questions were tabulated to answer each of the four research questions posed by the researcher. A statement citing percentage of responses to the four questions will follow. While all surveys completed by teachers and speech-language pathologists were utilized in this study, the referral evaluation forms were carefully analyzed to screen out students with a primary language other than English, referrals solely for articulation, voice, or fluency services, and referrals for services other than language intervention, such as academic or psychological services. A total of 49 referral evaluation forms were used to test the two hypotheses of this study.

Materials

The information gathered for this study was done through two original surveys and an original referral evaluation form. Each was specifically designed to meet the needs of this study. The Speech-Pathologist Survey and the Teacher Survey are similar in that they both seek to provide answers to the research questions which guided this study. Each survey was comprised of similar questions, seeking the differing perspectives between general education and special education. The referral evaluation

designed to provide the researcher with the necessary data to test the study's hypotheses.

Statistical Measures

The statistic measure used was a simple chi-square (Bruning & Kintz, 1977). This measure was used to test both hypotheses studied. For hypothesis 1, chi-square analysis was used to determine the effect of the two different language arts approaches on the quantity of teacher referrals for special education intervention when language skills were documented as an area of concern. Hypothesis 2 was tested by chi-square to determine the effect of the two different language arts approaches on the validity of referrals for special education intervention, as determined by those students given standardized assessments for placement in a special education program when language skills were reported to be weak.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if the language arts approach a teacher uses in first grade has an effect on special education referral rates and validity for identifying language disordered children. Additionally, questions were asked of teachers and SLPs to determine: 1) which language evaluation techniques are used in whole language classrooms; 2) how first grade teachers and SLPs consult with each other; 3) how confident SLPs and teachers are in the teachers' ability to identify possible language disordered children through classroom performance; and 4) what additional information and/or training on language arts, whole language, and language development teachers and SLPs feel is needed. The results of these efforts are presented in Appendices D and E.

Hypothesis 1 was tested using the application of a simple chi-square (Bruning & Kintz, 1977). Hypothesis 1 stated that teachers using whole language generate fewer referrals at the first grade level citing language skills as an area of concern. Statistical analysis of the raw data gathered from existing referrals generated since September, 1988 at seven schools in one district, however, failed to show any significant difference between the two language arts groups. ($\chi^2(1, n=23) = .051, p>.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is rejected. Statistical analysis suggests that language arts curriculum approach does not have a significant effect on teacher referral rates for language abilities.

Hypothesis 2 was also tested using the application of a simple chi square (Bruning and Kintz, 1977). Hypothesis 2 stated that referrals citing low language abilities from whole language classrooms would be more valid

than those generated by the skill-based classroom. Validity was determined by those students who went through standardized assessments for language disorders. ($\chi^2(1, n=23) = .137, p>.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is rejected. Statistical analysis suggests that whole language teachers are no more reliable than skill-based teachers in their ability to detect language disabilities in their students.

The data collected through the Special Education Referral Evaluation Form are tabulated in Tables 1 and 2. The referrals are categorized by area of concern, either academic, academic and language, language, academic and speech, or speech. Testing information was tabulated by specialist and type of testing, if any. Resource Specialist is represented by "RSP," and Speech-Language Pathologist by "L" or "Language," or "Sp," depending on the type of tests administered. Finally, data on students who qualified into one or more special education programs are tabulated in the row listed as "Qualify." Table 1 details the referral information gathered from the skill-based approach, while Table 2 details the referral information gathered from the whole language approach.

Speech-Language Pathologist Survey Forms were completed by seven SLPs, and twenty-three first grade teachers from the seven participating schools completed Teacher Survey Forms. Appendices D and E are compilations of the responses to the Speech-Language Pathologist and Teacher Survey Forms, respectively.

Concern	Acad			Acad/ Lang			Lang	Acad/ Sp			Sp
Test	13			10			9	1			16
	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	LANG	RSP	RSP/SP	SP	SP
Qualify	0	5	2	0	9	1	7	0	1	0	16
	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	LANG	RSP	RSP/SP	SP	SP
	3	1	0	3	5	0	1	0	1	0	1

Table 1. Referral data generated from skill-based teachers.

Concern	Acad			Acad/ Lang			Lang	Acad/ Sp			Sp
Test	19			24			6	0			22
	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	LANG	RSP/L	RSP	RSP/SP	SP
Qualify	2	3	2	2	10	8	5	1			22
	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	RSP	RSP/L	LANG	LANG	RSP	RSP/SP	SP	SP
	2	0	0	4	2	0	6	0	0	0	1

Table 2. Referral data generated from whole language teachers.

The results of this study suggest that referrals for special education intervention are not significantly affected by either a skill-based approach or the whole language approach to teaching language arts to first grade children. While there is no statistical significance when looking at rate and validity of referrals, the raw data collected reveal some interesting trends that may be of interest to school personnel.

First, despite the notion that whole language is a "success-oriented" teaching method that focuses on what children can do (Sanacore, 1990), referral data show that whole language teachers noted language difficulties on more than one and a half times as many referrals as skill-based teachers. In total, from the whole language approach, which is a theory of all learning (Harste, 1989), encompassing all academic subjects (Nelson, 1989), nearly one and a half times as many referrals for special education intervention were generated compared to the skill-based approach.

Factors involved in this data, which seem opposite to that described by all proponents of whole language, need exploration. For this district, whole language was implemented as the curriculum approach of choice only recently, in September, 1990. One explanation for the seemingly high rate of referrals may be that teachers were not comfortable with the dynamic differences whole language presented. This notion is further supported by the overwhelming response on the Teacher Survey Form for additional training and/or information on whole language. Very few teachers, only three, responded that they wanted no additional inservices.

Secondly, while whole language teachers referred nearly one and a half times more students, the validity of their referrals did not increase

proportionally. As previously stated, Hypothesis 2 was rejected as curriculum approach did not have a significant effect on language referrals and the subsequent certification of students into special education as language disordered. What this information implies is that first grade teachers are not yet secure in their abilities to teach and accurately evaluate the language learning abilities of their students within the structure and the techniques of whole language.

Such data do not support the findings that half of the teachers responded that they were confident or very confident in their ability to identify possible language disordered children in their class. Speech-language pathologists responded with similar confidence ratings. The referral data supports the notion that teachers do, indeed, refer students who become certified as language disordered; however, the referral data also shows that SLPs spend many valuable hours completing standardized assessments on children who are not language disordered.

This research suggests the need for continued collaboration and consultation between SLPs and teachers. When considering the total amount of testing undertaken for referrals, alternatives to standardized assessments should be considered. All teachers reported some collaboration/consultation with the SLP, yet several responded that more is needed and always welcome. The collaboration/consultation model allows the SLP to assist the teacher in evaluating the individual needs of her students without the time consuming standardized assessment. The SLP can then have an integral role in how those needs can be appropriately addressed and met through classroom and/or curriculum modifications. Exploring these possible modifications may result in a reduction of what

appears to be needless standardized assessment for children with no language disorders.

Even though referrals for speech evaluations were not targeted in this study, some interesting figures naturally presented themselves as all referrals were reviewed. A total of 38 first grade students were referred over the last four years for screening or standardized assessment for teacher identified speech problems, predominantly articulation errors. Of those 38 referred students, only 2 qualified for special education as having articulation disorders. Through increased collaboration/consultation with first grade teachers, either in the form of information on sound acquisition development and age as they relate to certification for articulation disorders or through on going contact in the classroom, SLPs may reduce the need to do individual screenings and assessments for students who do not exhibit articulation disorders.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY

The failure of a first grade child to show growth in one or more areas of the school curriculum is often interpreted by teachers as a sign of possible learning disabilities, including language disorders. To accurately interpret student language learning difficulties, teachers must rely on their knowledge of the structure of the language arts curriculum, ways to remediate and enrich students within the curriculum approach, and typical patterns of normal and abnormal development. A child is typically referred for special education intervention when a teacher's attempts to modify the learning environment to assist a student are not successful in meeting the expectations for language learning.

Results indicated that language arts curriculum approach had no significant effect on the quantity of referrals generated with documentation of language difficulties. Although statistical significance was not found, whole language teachers referred nearly one and a half times as many students for support or evaluation by the SLP. When standardized assessments were implemented, fewer than one-third of all referred students were found to have language disorders. Thus, curriculum approach was also not found to significantly effect referral validity for the diagnosis of language disorders.

The compiled data from the Teacher and Speech-Language Pathologist Surveys indicated an overwhelming need and desire for additional information on development, whole language, and evaluation techniques from any and all sources. However, several different evaluation strategies were listed as currently being used by teachers. Although Sanacore (1990)

described whole language as being "success-oriented," focusing on what children can do and not what they cannot, teachers do not yet perceive it as the panacea for all students. Some students were still seen as less capable than others and not fully benefiting from the whole language approach.

Teachers seem to readily welcome consultation with the SLP. This attitude is important to foster as the collaboration/consultation model of special education becomes more widely accepted and implemented. Utilization of this model by SLPs on a consistent basis with first grade teachers may reduce the need to provide one-to-one screenings and evaluations for children who may have weak language skills, but not specific language disorders requiring special education placement. Such a reduction would allow more time to focus services on those students with diagnosed speech and language disorders.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST SURVEY

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST SURVEY

School_____

Language Arts curriculum used: __ Whole Language
 ___ Skill-Based

1. Do you consult with your first grade teachers, and when?
 ___no ___yes ___on going ___when necessary

How?

If no, please explain why not

2. How confident are you in your teachers' abilities to identify students in their class as possibly having language disabilities?

1 2 3 4 5
not confident very confident

3. What information or training do you feel you and your first grade teachers need to better evaluate language learning in your students when using a whole language approach? (check as many as apply)

—consultation with speech-language pathologist for developmental expectations and special education qualification criteria

__district inservicing on whole language evaluation techniques

—inservice by curriculum publishers on evaluation techniques specific to the materials being used

—inservice by whole language experts on evaluation techniques (not district staff)

I don't need/want additional training/information, because

__return to skill-based curriculum approach, because _____

other Please explain

APPENDIX B
TEACHER SURVEY

APPENDIX C
SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL EVALUATION FORM

SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL EVALUATION FORM

Referral Number _____

School _____

Grade _____

Student's Primary Language _____

Language Arts Curriculum (check one)

☐ Whole Language ☐ Skill-based

Areas of Concern (check appropriate areas)

☐ Behavioral☐ Social-Emotional☐ Academic: ☐ reading☐ writing☐ math☐ Language: ☐ comprehension☐ vocabulary☐ oral expression☐ following directions☐ grammar☐ concept knowledge☐ auditory processing☐ memory☐ Speech: ☐ articulation☐ voice☐ fluency

Modifications attempted and their result (+ or -)

Special Education Assessment requested: ☐ yes
☐ no

If yes, check those involved:

☐ Speech-Language Pathologist☐ Resource Specialist☐ Psychologist

Did student qualify for special education placement?

☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, in what program?

☐ Speech-Language

Area of disability _____

☐ Resource Specialist

APPENDIX D
TABULATED RESPONSES TO SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST
SURVEY FORM

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST SURVEY FORM

1. Consultation with teachers: no _____ yes _____
on going 2 when needed 5
2. Confidence in teacher evaluation skills:
1 _____ 2 _____ 3 3 4 3 5 1
3. Inservice/training needed: a) district employees. 3
b) publisher representatives.. 2
c) whole language experts.. 5
d) no additional training.. 1
e) return to skill-based.. 1
f) other.. 1 (phonics)

APPENDIX E
TABULATED RESPONSES TO TEACHER SURVEY FORM

TEACHER SURVEY FORM

1. Evaluation techniques used:

observation of verbal expression	vocabulary
listening to oral reading	general observations
workbook pages	conversation skills
question responses	class discussions
playground conversations	sharing
journal writing	written work
language samples	brainstorming
checklist for language development	creative dramatics

2. Consultation with SLP: no _____ yes 2
 on going 7 when needed 14

3. Confidence in teacher evaluation skills:

1 1 2 1 3 9 4 10 5 2

4. Inservice/training needed: a) consultation with SLP 12

b) district employees 8

c) publisher representatives 5

d) whole language experts 11

e) no additional training 3

f) return to skill-based 5

g) other 6 (phonics, language experience)