

EVALUATION OF A READING PROGRAM:
TEACHER JUDGMENT AND PUPIL PLACEMENT

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In order to evaluate a reading program, it is important to go beyond numbers being served and reading test scores, to examine the population being served in relation to the needs of that population. This study examined the sex and race of students of the population referred as compared to those served in a special reading program. It also examined the effect of teacher judgment in the referral process.

Background

Past research indicates that, in general, boys have more difficulty in learning how to read than girls. This is especially true in the lower grades. Recent studies have examined cultural influences and sex role expectations as possible causal factors. They point to cultural factors such as teacher expectation that girls will perform better in reading, to the social structure of our elementary schools, to the importance of preschool education programs, and to parents' views of sex-role stereotypes and the roles they play in expectations (Downing, 1975; Johnson, 1976; Downing & Thomson, 1977; Gross, 1978; Shapiro, 1980). While boys are designated for special reading classes by margins of from 1:1 to 10:1, research indicates that test score differences between boys and girls may not be as great as was formerly thought (Naiden, 1976).

One possible explanation for boys being disproportionately represented in special reading classes could be the presence of sex bias in the referral process. If this is so, girls may not be receiving special help in reading in proportion to their needs (Thorndike, 1976; Johnson & Greenbaum, 1980).

Purpose of the Study

This study had the following purposes: to examine the role of teacher judgment in the placement of pupils in a special reading program, to examine the ratio of black and white boys and girls referred to those being served, and to determine whether either sex or race was disproportionately represented.

Procedures

Data were gathered on students in grades 2, 3, and 4 in 21 public and 4 parochial elementary schools served by Chapter One in Calcasieu Parish in southwest Louisiana. Data were collected on those students who were considered to be eligible for special reading classes in the school years 1980-81 and 1981-82. The sample included a total of 1,380 boys and 978 girls. The descriptive data collected on each subject included grade level, sex, ethnic origin, SRA reading score, Teacher Judgment score, and assignment to Chapter One reading classes in Calcasieu Parish.

Pupils were assigned to this federal program based on total points accumulated using the following criteria: Teacher Judgment Score (0-18), SRA Test Score (0-18), Reading Proficiency Test (0-6), Grade Retention (6), and Past Participation in a Chapter One Program (6). At the time of the research study, particular attention was focused on the number of points assigned under the unspecified "Teacher Judgment" section of the form, as compared to SRA scores.

In order to determine the effect of teacher judgment in the referral process, data were gathered on students who fit the following criteria: SRA scores did not indicate a need for referral. (Scores were above the 41st percentile and students were assigned points of 14 or less on the eligibility form.) Teacher Judgment scores regarding "Degree of Need" did indicate a need for referral. (Students received 11 points or more on this section of the eligibility form.)

Results

The findings for Chapter One Reading by grades for 1981 are reported in Table 1. Sixty-five percent of students referred for remedial reading were boys. Of those referred, 75% were served. Compared to this, 44% of students in 1981 were girls, and 71% of the girls referred were served. There were almost equal numbers of Blacks (610) and Whites (608) referred for remedial reading. Seventy-six percent of the black students referred were served, while only 71% of the white students referred were served.

A significant difference ($p < .05$) appeared at the second grade level between referred boys served (80%) and referred girls served (66%). Eighty percent of both black and white boys referred were served. However, 70% of black girls were served, while only 61% of white girls referred were served. At third grade, black girls were served at a higher rate (87%) than others. (Black boys, 79%; white

Table 1

Chapter One Reading by Grades, 1981

	Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4		
	R	S	%	R	S	%	R	S	%
Black boys	150	120	80	72	57	79	134	97	72
White boys	133	106	80*	91	70	77	108	68	63
Black girls	102	71	70	55	48	87	97	70	72
White girls	98	60	61*	66	50	76	112	77	69
Total boys	283	226	80*	163	127	78	242	165	68
Total girls	200	131	66*	121	98	81	209	147	70
Total Blacks	252	191	76	127	105	83	231	167	72
Total Whites	231	166	72	157	120	76	220	145	66

*p<.05 R = Referred S = Served

boys, 77%; white girls, 76%) However, this difference did not reach significance.

Numbers of students referred to and served by Chapter One Reading in 1982 are reported in Table 2. At fourth grade, a significant difference ($p<.05$) appeared between referred white boys served (64%), as compared to black boys (80%), and black girls (83%). There was also a significant difference ($p<.05$) at fourth grade level between total numbers of referred Blacks served (81%) and referred Whites served (69%).

In 1982, 61% of students referred for remedial reading were boys, and of these referred, 77% were served. Compared to this, 39% of students referred were girls, and of that number, 78% were served. A significant difference ($p<.05$) was found between the races: 82% of referred Blacks were served, whereas 73% of referred Whites were served. A significant difference ($p<.05$) also appeared between black and white boys: 82% of referred black boys were served, while only 70% of referred white boys were served. These findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Chapter One Reading by Grades, 1982

	Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4		
	R	S	%	R	S	%	R	S	%
Black boys	124	96	72	135	121	90	132	105	80*
White boys	116	78	67	94	76	81	91	58	64*
Black girls	81	58	72	65	58	89	83	69	83*
White girls	89	60	67	65	57	88	65	49	75
Total boys	240	174	73	229	197	86	223	163	73
Total girls	170	118	69	130	115	89	148	118	80
Total Blacks	205	154	75	200	179	90	215	174	81*
Total Whites	205	138	67	159	133	84	156	107	69*

*p<.05 R = Referred S = Served

Table 3

Chapter One Reading Totals

	1981			1982		
	R	S	%	R	S	%
Black boys	356	274	77	391	322	82*
White boys	332	244	74	301	212	70*
Black girls	254	189	74	229	185	81
White girls	276	187	68	219	166	76
Total boys	688	518	75	692	534	77
Total girls	530	376	71	448	351	78
Total Blacks	610	463	76	620	507	82*
Total White	608	431	71	520	378	73*

*p<.05 R = Referred S = Served

In 1981, significant differences ($p < .05$) were found at second grade between total number of boys served (88%) as compared to total number of girls served (74%) as a result of teacher recommendation. Also in 1981, a significant difference ($p < .05$) appeared at fourth grade level between Blacks served (79%) and Whites served (64%) on teacher recommendation. These findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Chapter One Reading by Grades, 1981
Students Referred by Teacher Judgment

	<u>Grade 2</u>			<u>Grade 3</u>			<u>Grade 4</u>		
	R	S	%	R	S	%	R	S	%
Black boys	48	41	85	24	18	75	40	30	75
White boys	43	39	91	44	38	86	50	31	62
Black girls	36	27	75	17	16	94	33	28	85
White girls	33	24	73	32	28	88	37	25	68
Total boys	91	80	88*	68	56	82	90	61	68
Total girls	69	51	74*	49	44	90	70	53	76
Total Blacks	84	68	81	41	34	83	73	58	79*
Total Whites	76	63	83	76	66	87	87	56	64*

* $p < .05$ R = Referred S = Served

Table 5 shows the findings for teacher evaluation data for 1982. No significant differences within grades were found in this data.

Discussion

In reflecting on the numbers of students both referred and served in special reading classes in Calcasieu Parish in 1981 and 1982, girls were definitely underrepresented. Blacks were served at a higher percentage when comparing students by sex. Black boys were referred in greater numbers, and were served at a higher percentage rate across the board than were white boys, black girls, or white girls. White girls were referred for remedial reading in equal or greater numbers than white boys and black girls.

Table 5

Chapter One Reading by Grades, 1982
Students Referred by Teacher Judgment

	Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4		
	R	S	%	R	S	%	R	S	%
Black boys	13	11	85	27	22	81	10	6	60
White boys	23	19	83	35	28	80	14	11	79
Black girls	11	10	91	12	10	83	5	4	80
White girls	15	11	73	28	25	89	8	6	75
Total boys	36	30	83	62	50	81	24	17	71
Total girls	26	21	81	40	35	88	13	10	77
Total Blacks	24	21	88	39	32	82	15	10	67
Total Whites	38	30	79	63	53	84	22	17	77

*p<.05 R = Referred S = Served

However, a smaller percentage of white girls were served in special reading classes across the board.

Looking at the effect of teacher evaluation on referrals, more white boys were referred than black boys, black girls or white girls, at all levels except in second grade in 1981, when more black boys were referred. Percentages of those referred who were served did not favor either sex or race. Percentages of those served who were referred because of teacher evaluation were high.

In 1982, the numbers of students served in the remedial reading program as a result of teacher recommendation dropped drastically. In 1981, 36% of boys served were there as a result of teacher recommendation; in 1982, only 18% fit the category. Data on girls were similar: in 1981, 35% served were there as a result of teacher judgment; in 1982, the number was 18%.

Racially, findings were similar. In 1981, 32% of Blacks and 39% of Whites were there as a result of teacher recommendation. In 1982, these percentages dropped to 13% of Blacks and 24% of Whites being referred as a result of teacher recommendation. Since referral forms were the same

for these two years, no reason for this variance is apparent.

Summary, Implications

In summary, this study examined the role of teacher judgment in the pupil placement process, and the ratio of black and white boys and girls referred to those served in an attempt to determine whether either sex or race was disproportionately represented in special reading programs in Calcasieu Parish.

The significant findings ($p < .05$) of the study regarding teacher judgment included: (a) More referred boys than referred girls were served at second grade in 1981. (b) More referred black students than referred white students were served at fourth grade in 1981.

Other significant findings were: (a) More referred boys than referred girls were served in 1981 at grade two. The group receiving the least amount of service were the white girls. (b) In 1982, at fourth grade level, a greater number of referred black boys as compared to referred white boys were served. (c) In 1982, at fourth grade level, a greater number of referred black students were served than referred white students served. (d) In 1982, more referred black boys were served than referred white boys. (e) The total number of referred black students served was significantly greater than the total number of referred white students served in 1982.

Since these findings show that both boys and Blacks are disproportionately represented in special reading programs in Calcasieu Parish, teachers should be made aware of possible sex and racial biases in the referral process.

One outgrowth of the study has been revision in the Calcasieu Parish Chapter One student eligibility form. The Teacher Judgment section of the form was changed from a nonspecific "Degree of Need" section to one that includes assigned points for specific areas of reading deficiency.

A follow-up study should be conducted in order to determine whether changes in the eligibility form have had an impact on student referrals since 1982, and whether possible biases regarding sex and race have been affected.

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