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PREPARED ORAL PRESENTATIONS AND ACCOUNTABLE LISTENING  
ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE  
CALIFORNIA ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS FRAMEWORK

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Interdisciplinary Studies

---

by  
Thomas J. Hollihan  
September 1995

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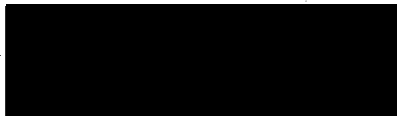
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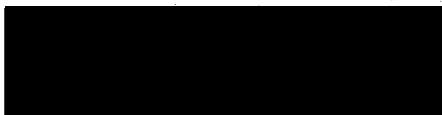
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6-21-95

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## ABSTRACT

The author examines to what degree and how well San Bernardino City Unified School District teachers follow the Oral Language Skills directives of the California State Board of Education's English-Language Arts Framework. The author, a high school English teacher in this district, surveyed three levels of teachers: elementary, junior high and high school to determine the type, quantity, benefits and effectiveness of oral presentations and accountable listening activities in various classrooms.

From the data collected, it appears teachers in the San Bernardino City Unified School District are working hard to meet the state mandate on oral presentations and accountable listening activities in their classrooms. Teachers are incorporating many unique strategies as to the use of oral presentations and accountable listening activities at various grade levels.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the teachers of the San Bernardino City Unified School District for their assistance in completing and returning the classroom surveys necessary for this Master's Project.

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## THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Through effective English-language arts programs, we must offer students multiple opportunities, formal and informal, to develop their speaking and listening skills because talking and listening are the primary tools by which they will learn from today and the past and communicate with each other (Quinby, 1987).

The above quote from the California's English-Language Arts Framework, revised in 1987, was designed to better prepare students to function fully in a democratic society, to become informed and effective professionals and to attain personal fulfillment. This is a noble effort to teach our students to become better communicators when all around them technology is constantly changing the ground rules. Why learn how to write letters when a telephone is much more accessible and immediate? Why write a rough draft on a sheet of notebook paper when composing original text on a classroom or home computer produces picture-perfect, publishable text? Why visit a library in search of encyclopedias when we can access the same source through a cd-rom?

We interact through cellular phones, computers, fax machines and modems that remove the uniqueness of the individual and replace it with a sterilized form of communication. Spell checkers, software for correcting grammar and tutorials that do not even



require the presence of a teacher seem to suggest that we need less traditional instruction in keeping with our changing times.

Recent studies tell us a different story. We have become a nation that cares little about reading and writing, relying instead on passive learning through videos, movies and prerecorded books.

Students report being bored with school and with class size increasing; teachers have less and less time to be innovative educators. These grim facts led to a reassessment of goals, practices and fundamental principles and are outlined in the new English-Language Arts Framework (Quinby,1987).

To touch students' lives and to stimulate their minds and hearts, we need a literature based English-language arts curriculum that engages students with the vitality of ideas and values greater than those of the marketplace or the video arcade (Quinby, 1987).

Most tables serve us best when they have four legs, equal in strength and similar in importance. Reading and writing are essential skills, but the focus of this report is on the other two components of the English-Language Arts Framework table, oral and listening skills. To assume students have innate knowledge of these skills is a grave mistake. Through oral language, we learn how to communicate and participate with other members of the human community. Through listening, we improve our ability to learn from others and discover

unique concepts different or similar to our own.

The first acquired knowledge is handed down from one generation to another and is known as the oral tradition. However, to receive this oral information, a lesson in listening still needs to accompany it. These are the primary tools for all human beings in communicating with one another and, by far, the most pervasive means of learning about our world.

The English-Language Arts Framework states “oral language is at the heart of of a literature program in the classroom, both formally and informally” Oral language brings to the classroom, a depth and breadth of involvement not possible with silent, passive students. Classroom discussions help students to listen attentively to what others are saying, to evaluate and respond. Group discussions aid students in stating opinions honestly, precisely and tactfully, while discovering various viewpoints on controversial issues in an effort to reach a common ground. Indeed, the California English Language-Arts Framework credits oral language experiences as an integral factor in producing students who will “enter a society prepared for the kind of cooperative work needed in the adult world today...” (Quinby, 1987).

Further, the state framework encourages “teaching strategies that allow students to take active roles in their learning, share ideas

with partners and groups...write and discuss and make presentations for the class..." which help develop skills they must take from school and "into the rest of their lives" (Quinby, 1987).

It is this "active" area of prepared oral presentations and accountable listening that this paper addresses. The means of reaching this goal are through careful examination of the historical precedents that has brought us our present day pedagogy and the help of professional educators.

### Overview of Research

The curriculum for every school in California is impacted by two state publications: The English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Standard-Grades Nine Through Twelve and The English- Language Arts Framework. For this research paper, these publications were carefully examined for their relevance in today's classrooms. Related literature, by prominent educators, also received close scrutiny as it applied to the question of oral presentations and accountable listening activities in the classroom.

The historical significance of yesterday's expert opinions was compared to the latest pedagogy. The evolution of oral presentations and accountable listening activities as it relates to classrooms of today were evaluated in light of the present needs of high school graduates.

One of the goals of this research was to assess the teachers in the San Bernardino City Unified School District in how well they have integrated the state's mandated curriculum in their classrooms. The survey was distributed to all schools in the district and was designed to apply to elementary, junior high and high schools.

The results showed a significant proportion of teachers in the district were complying with state mandates as they apply to oral presentations and accountable listening activities in the classroom.

The data from the various levels of education; elementary, junior high and high school were compared as well as the innate differences were extrapolated to show similarities in teaching strategies, as well as differences in needs across the grades. The actual survey is included along with the correspondence sent to each school(See Appendix).

The findings from this research and strategies outlined in the state's framework show that continued efforts are needed to include oral presentations and accountable listening activities in all school curriculums. New technical advances in individual assessment, through the use of computers, demand that teachers equip their students with the necessary tools to present themselves at their best before the impersonal eye of the video camera.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This research project delved onto two different areas for support from related literature. First, the pedagogy supplied by the California State Board of Education as outlined in two of their publications: The English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Standard-Grades Nine Through Twelve and The English- Language Arts Framework and the successful strategies devised by prominent educators working in the field of oral presentations and accountable listening activities

The second area looked at was the historical research and writings that led to the modern belief in the need of oral presentations and assessable listening activities in the classroom. The evolution of today's strategies is based on solid thinking that shows a willingness to adapt to the changing needs of our world, while retaining the proven principles of the past. The essence of this project was stated succinctly by Oliver Wendell Holmes in The Poet at the Breakfast Table. He said, "Knowledge is to speak and wisdom is to listen."

The two state publications, mentioned above, have included rationale for issuing guidelines for the inclusion of oral communication and effective listening or assessment strategies into California classrooms, as well as an exhaustive list of related

material, nearly 700 publications, written by teachers, school administrators and college instructors.

The English-Language Arts Framework was the work of 47 educators of various job descriptions, plus the staff of the State Department of Education. This helped to insure a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience in proven educational strategies. A teacher can confidently adapt these guidelines put forth by the California Department of Education and benefit from the best minds in education. Rather than accept the ideas of a few, the advisory committee was made up of teachers with practical experience, school administrators with knowledge of curriculum and college instructors putting to use new research findings to adapt new and innovative strategies. Combined together, this group can have a significant impact on education.

The other publication, The English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Standard-Grades Nine Through Twelve was written under similar circumstances, with 52 teachers, administrators and college instructors serving as an advisory committee. This is an example of the advisory committee's timely thinking:

With the variety of oral language experiences based on the vast resources of literature and the arts, sciences, or social studies, students who have been involved in their own learning through listening, speaking, reading and writing

will enter a society prepared for the kind of cooperative work needed in the adult world today (Templeton, 1991).

### Oral Presentations; Teaching Strategies

Support for including oral presentations and accountable listening or assessment activities in classrooms goes far beyond the California State Board of Education.

In the primary grades, one strategy for oral presentations is Reader's Theater, where students use literature, poetry, musical lyrics or original material and become immersed in role playing by acting out a story line. One of the experts in the field of Reader's Theater is Shirlee Sloyer, assistant professor of Speech, Arts, and Science at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. Sloyer states:

Used in the classroom, Reader's Theater becomes an integrated language event centering on an oral interpretation of literature. Children adapt and present material of their choice. A story, a poem, a scene from a play, even a song lyric, provide the ingredients for the script. As a thinking, reading, writing, speaking and listening experience, Reader's Theater makes a unique contribution to our language arts curriculum (Sloyer, 1982).

In her book, Reader's Theater: Story Dramatization in the Classroom, Sloyer states that Reader's Theater is active learning, that places strong emphasis on motivational forces that encourage students to think. Preparing and presenting material in front of an

audience is a powerful incentive for many children. It creates a natural motive for reading (Sloyer,1982).

Reader's Theater, like writing, is a process. A process of doing, of producing, script writing, casting, rehearsing and delivering to an audience. Students become actively involved in making decisions, evaluating literature and in the process, bring enthusiasm to the classroom.

Reader's Theater improves oral skills and develops better listening strategies. Improved listening habits occur for both performers and their audiences. Performers interact with each other and must listen for cues. The audience can be instructed to listen for specific information and be assessed on this knowledge or simply learn the social skills of becoming a polite audience.

Oral skills improve because Reader's Theater is only a suggestion requiring most performers to develop vocal abilities in portraying various characters in different situations.

Reader's Theater is just one strategy of oral presentation and is used primarily in grades kindergarten through sixth to help students develop confidence, poise and in working as part of a team.

Becoming immersed in literature, a requirement for Reader's Theater, serves as the best possible form of learning.

Sloyer's Reader's Theater supports California's State Board of



Education and its effort to promote the development of speaking and listening skills as part of an integrated learning experience.

Strategies of teaching oral presentations in our high schools were addressed by Northwestern University's Kathleen M. Galvin, writing in the Speech Teacher (Sept,1974). She pointed out the need for high schools to teach career communication and should be adopted as part of their curriculums. She believes students should be trained in how to answer questions posed to employees daily in the work place. How do employees: deal with customers?; ask for a raise?; cope during interviews?; express themselves to older employees? Schools should develop a business communication curriculum to place greater emphasis on developing a wide range of verbal and non-verbal strategies appropriate to a variety of occupational situations (Galvin, 1974).

What is appropriate in a business situation? The use of a natural language free of slang and verbal put-downs is of vital importance. As is the need to understand non-verbal communication as it affects the image people want to project in their business roles. The use of dress, hairstyles, habits, jewelry, voice quality, facial expressions and body positions communicate an image, either positive or negative, in the work place.

All of these situations can be experienced by students in a

classroom situation. Teachers may set up a variety of problem-solving exercises to allow students to try different group roles and interaction patterns in a safe environment.

This goes far beyond the normal public speaking classes . It incorporates speaking and other skills needed in the work place. What better place than a classroom for students to learn how to handle an obnoxious customer, give constructive feedback to other employees, receive and give complicated directions and feel at ease talking to the boss.

Too many of today's employees never had an opportunity to learn business communications in a friendly setting, instead they were forced to learn the hard way in the hostile work place.

In an another publication on oral presentations in the classroom Galvin states:

Our ability to communicate touches every part of our lives. It influences our success as family members, friends, students, workers and citizens. Competent communicators have strong speaking and listening skills and know how to apply them in all areas (Galvin, 1988).

Galvin believes everyone should be able to address a group of people and competently express him or herself. It could be a short thank you, speaking up at meetings or explaining a process to fellow workers. If taught throughout the school years, oral presentations

become no more difficult than finding France on a map of Europe or solving an algebraic formula.

There has been a blurring of the line between speech and English classes, with most experts concluding that speech should not be a separate class but incorporated into all classes, and especially English.

### Listening Skills

Irene Poole, writing in the Quarterly Journal of Speech (June, 1934), stressed the importance of assessment by training students to listen. She suggests teachers look at listening as a separate act, rather than combining it with speaking and approach it not from the view of the speaker, but the listener. Listening tends to be a favor students extend to other speakers so that they may have listeners when they speak (Poole, 1934).

Listening is the most ignored of four; reading, writing, speaking and listening. Poole suggests it is because it is not classified as a skill although one half of our communication is listening. People remember learning to read, write and speak. These milestones are documented, recorded and imprinted on the minds of the individuals involved, while most cannot recall when taught to listen (Poole, 1934).

One listening strategy used was the assessment of speeches in

training students to listen. Students are forced to take notes and report on a speech are more apt to listen for the sake of learning. A student who assess the different approaches a speaker might have taken with other points of view is an active listener. Most students think faster than speakers speak, so in addition to recalling the speech, related thoughts can be expressed and explained as part of a total recall. This leads to active listening that can more adequately evaluate speakers and what they have to say.

A more modern view of oral presentations and active listening was expressed by the University of Cincinnati's Rudolph F.

Verderber, author of several textbooks on oral language and active listening. He states:

Throughout the centuries, famous speakers have changed the history of the world: Pericles, Demosthenes and Cicero in classical times; Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony and Booker T. Washington during the early years of our nation; and John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr, Billy Graham, Betty Friedan and hundreds of other in our recent history (Verderber, 1982).

Verderber also recognizes the importance of listening as well as oral language and has defined the difference between listening and just hearing. Hearing is the ability to process the sound vibrations that are transmitted. But, listening involves making decisions so

sense can be made of what a person hears. The average student operates at about a 25% listening efficiency (Verderber, 1982).

If students process only one-fourth of what they hear, there is a definite need for listening to be taught in our schools. Of the three types of listening, enjoyment, understanding and evaluation, the last two require students to prepare themselves: sit upright, eyes on the speaker, focus mentally on the words and withhold judgment until the speaker has finished. Listening is not a passive activity, but requires hard work, concentration and making decisions. Active listening includes repeating, questioning, paraphrasing and note taking (Verderber, 1982).

Today, assessment has become the method for evaluating students' work, progress and areas of need. Listening for assessment by both instructor and fellow students requires this active listening. Just as we would teach Holistic grading for people evaluating the writings of others, we must teach active listening for assessment purposes.

### Historical Teaching Traditions of Oral Presentations and Listening Skills

The benefits of teaching oral presentations in our high schools are by no means a new phenomenon, but were outlined in communications publications dating to the early part of this century.

Bertha Forges Herring, writing in The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, (Jan.1917) urged teachers of English to undertake the teaching of reading, voice culture and the techniques of speech. She stated that these were legitimate fields for the teacher of English(Herring,1917).

In the early part of this century, artificial means of amplifying the voice were not practical or readily available and much training was centered on improving volume, enunciation and mouth positions for the greatest clarity. Some of these aspects in teaching oral presentations required teachers to understand anatomy, muscle training, physiology and an interesting phrase, “the hygiene of the voice and speech organs.”

Herring also stated that the time to begin speech training was not in high school but kindergarten or even earlier, in the home. It was Herring’s belief that the adolescent student upon entering high school experiences tremendous changes in body, mind and spirit. It becomes the problem of both parent and teacher to provide rational opportunities for wholesome self-expression during this most exciting period of an adolescent’s life. The ability to adequately express thoughts and emotions are of enduring social importance(Herring,1917).

One point she emphasized was that teachers recognize that

writing and speaking are simply two forms of one mental act.

Language is basically oral in its origin and appeals to the ear, not to the eye. It is necessary to speak before learning to write and school lessons in oral practice should accompany written exercises (Herring,1917).

Included here is a list of Herring's immediate aims for high school students in oral expression and may be summed up with the ability:

1. To answer questions intelligently and fully
2. To converse agreeably
3. To collect and organize material for oral discourse
4. To present effectively in a natural environment, material already organized
5. To join courteously and pertinently in informal discussions
6. To read aloud in such a way as to present the writer's thought and spirit
7. For those who have or hope to develop qualities of leadership, the ability to address an audience or to conduct a public meeting(Herring,1917).

Herring concludes her article with sample lesson plans for activities to teach oral expression in grades seven through twelve. An example from these lesson plans, grade seven: vocalization in

unison, in soft, even, resonant tones, beginning with a hum, ending with e, o, a, and viz. A twelfth grade example included studying professional speakers gestures and facial expressions (Herring, 1917).

Not everything easily translates into lesson plans for today's student, but much of what she wrote is still applicable for use in classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A few years later, Irene Poole, writing in the same Quarterly Journal of Speech, (June,1934) expounded on her "Five Finger Rules for Effective Speaking for high schoolers. These were devised as a simple device to be used by teachers in teaching the criteria for preparing and delivering oral presentations.

The thumb indicates the content of a speech and works with the four remaining fingers for an effective presentation. The little finger stands for bodily activity- posture and gestures. The whole body is needed for complete communication. The ring finger represents the voice, clear, loud enough to be heard, of a pleasant quality and pitch and with varied and appropriate inflections. The rate of speaking should reflect the size and type of the audience. The middle finger is for diction and pronunciation, avoiding colloquial usage. A teacher's first duty is to provide the student with a consistent example of accepted diction and pronunciation and be



stimulated to accept her example. The index finger stands for correct English construction or free from glaring deviations of grammar and the child-like speech of running thoughts together with connectives such as “and-a”, “uh”, “an” and “then”. Good speech connects ideas with inflection and separates thoughts with pauses (Poole,1934).

This proves to be an interesting concept, but seems a bit overly concerned with accepted language usage and less concerned about what speakers have to say and how they say it.

#### Conclusion of Related Literature

The history of education is one of constant fluctuations, changing ideas, new strategies, conflicting concepts, radical research, rethinking and revolution. It is a field where keeping abreast is a constant struggle. “Literature Based”, “Whole Language”, “New Math” “Pathways”, “Immersion” are but a few of the concepts bantered about today, but new ideas just beyond the horizon will lead to newer programs, newer strategies and newer methods. In light of this, it is surprising to find so few changes in the thinking of experts on oral language and assessable listening over the last 75 years. The differences are centered on technical improvements that make fewer demands on the voice because of levels of amplification and sound enhancement.

Students and schools need support from the business

community to properly train future employees. In order for schools to train, they must be shown the needs, the expectations and the rewards for such training. Schools, together with business, can be the training ground for successful employees.

California has recognized the importance of oral language and assessable listening and have included them in their curriculum framework. Every school and every teacher is required to include these concepts into his or her teaching program, but is this, today's reality?

With new methods of student assessment requiring students to display their pedagogical growth through oral presentations, schools must prepare their students to perform their best under these conditions. Parents, teachers and school administrators have a responsibility in equipping today's students to do tomorrow's tasks. History supports it, while California's curriculum framework demands it

## PROJECT DESIGN, GOAL AND LIMITATIONS

The goal of this project is to obtain information from classroom teachers in the San Bernardino City Unified School District about oral presentations and accountable listening activities in their classrooms. Oral presentations are defined in the survey as any presentation by students to their class, a segment of their class or to another class, that requires these students to rehearse either self-written or existing material and present it alone or in groups. Accountable listening activities were defined as those that would require students to either evaluate a presentation (assessment) or answer questions about the content of a speaker's remarks. (see Appendix: Survey)

The data collected will be compared to the state framework as it pertains to the reading, writing, listening and speaking elements outlined in the English-Language Arts Framework (1987) and English-Language Arts Model Curriculum (1991).

Further, this study will examine additional reasons beyond the state framework from recognized experts, for incorporating oral presentations and accountable listening activities into elementary, junior high and high schools. It is hoped that incorporating such activities will make teaching more pleasurable, learning more enjoyable and the interaction between the two more meaningful.

The survey was designed to be generic so that the same

questions were asked to elementary, junior high and high school teachers, realizing there are differences in educational strategies at the various levels, but choosing instead to collect different answers from identical questions.

Question 1 Asked the participants in the survey if they used prepared oral presentations in their classes.

Question 2 of the survey, the time spent doing prepared oral presentations in the classroom, is the most critical assessment of the worth a teacher places on this strategy. This answer should reflect more time spent in the elementary grades because of the number of students in elementary classrooms(30 to 35) as compared to junior high teachers(80 to 160) and high school teachers(150 to 200). This should be factored in when calculating the time element. The types of prepared oral presentations, question 3, will also vary with grade level with elementary grades doing more plays and story retelling, while the upper grades will center more on reports, poetry and speeches. The common ingredient for all levels of classes would be "original student material" even though the content of this category may vary greatly.

Most classrooms contain students who appear to have some reluctance in performing in front of others, but was this a factor in elementary classes as well as in the higher grades? This question,

number 5, was one of the most important in the survey to determine whether students become fearful of performing in front of others or questions whether teachers quit requiring students to participate in oral presentations?

The survey questions, numbers 4 and 6, seeks to discover the benefits of successful oral presentations and enlists teachers in assessing their reasons for incorporating these strategies into their curriculum, justifying the time devoted to them.

The final questions of the survey, numbers 8, 9 and 10, asks about the introduction of a strategy to aid oral presentations in the classroom, accountable listening activities. This strategy validates the reasons for sharing educational materials among peers by measuring the amount of learning that has taken place. Furthermore, there are important social skills addressed when students learn to respect another speaker, derive information from the content of the material presented and evaluate the quality of the presentation.

Many of the questions were not restricted to pre-printed answers, but were listed as "other" and it was from these responses that generated many answers not predicted in the survey.

All research projects, no matter how carefully they are monitored or how well they are designed, have limitations. This

survey is no exception.

It was limited to the teachers of the San Bernardino City Unified School District, who share a common curriculum with a similar focus, written by people with a comparable mind set and with district approval. Results may have been different if cross-district or even cross-county polling had been conducted.

The elementary school sample was smaller than the junior high and high schools and several elementary schools were not represented at all. A total of 336 survey forms were sent to 37 elementary schools, but only 13 elementary schools responded with 36 completed forms. The total enrollment for elementary schools is 27,538 or nearly three times the 9,898 enrollment for high schools and four times the 6,663 student population for junior high schools. Even so, elementary schools responded with the smallest percentage of returned survey forms (10.7%) and only a third of all elementary schools in the district are represented.

The survey has limitations in the junior high and high schools as well. Not surprisingly, the over representation of language arts-English teachers is evident in both secondary level schools. Oral presentations and listening strategies are not the sole domain of these teachers, but they were the overwhelming majority of respondents. The junior high school teacher breakdown of

respondents was: one-teaching learning handicapped, one-physical education, two-math, one-science, two-social studies and ten-language arts teachers. In the high school sampling, it was even more pronounced with: one-career education, one-Spanish, one-math, two-science, five-social studies and 38-English or E.S.O.L. [ESL] teachers.

Summarizing, these are the limitations of this survey and could skew the findings. One, the people who responded were interested and more likely to be participating in oral presentations and accountable listening activities. Two, in the middle and high schools, more language arts and English teachers responded than other disciplines. Some may perceive that oral presentations and listening skills are germane to these subjects. Third, the sample from the elementary schools could have been larger, including more schools.

These are the limitations in the survey on oral presentations and listening strategies that seem to be prominent and may have affected the study's final results.

## PROJECT RESULTS

A survey was prepared (see Appendix: Survey) which was sent to all grade level and subject area teachers in the San Bernardino City Unified School District. The following demographics were supplied by the school district to describe the population of the study. There are a total 27,538 elementary students, 6,663 junior high school students and 9,898 high school students, taught by 1580 certificated teachers in 52 separate sites(1992-93)(See figure 1).

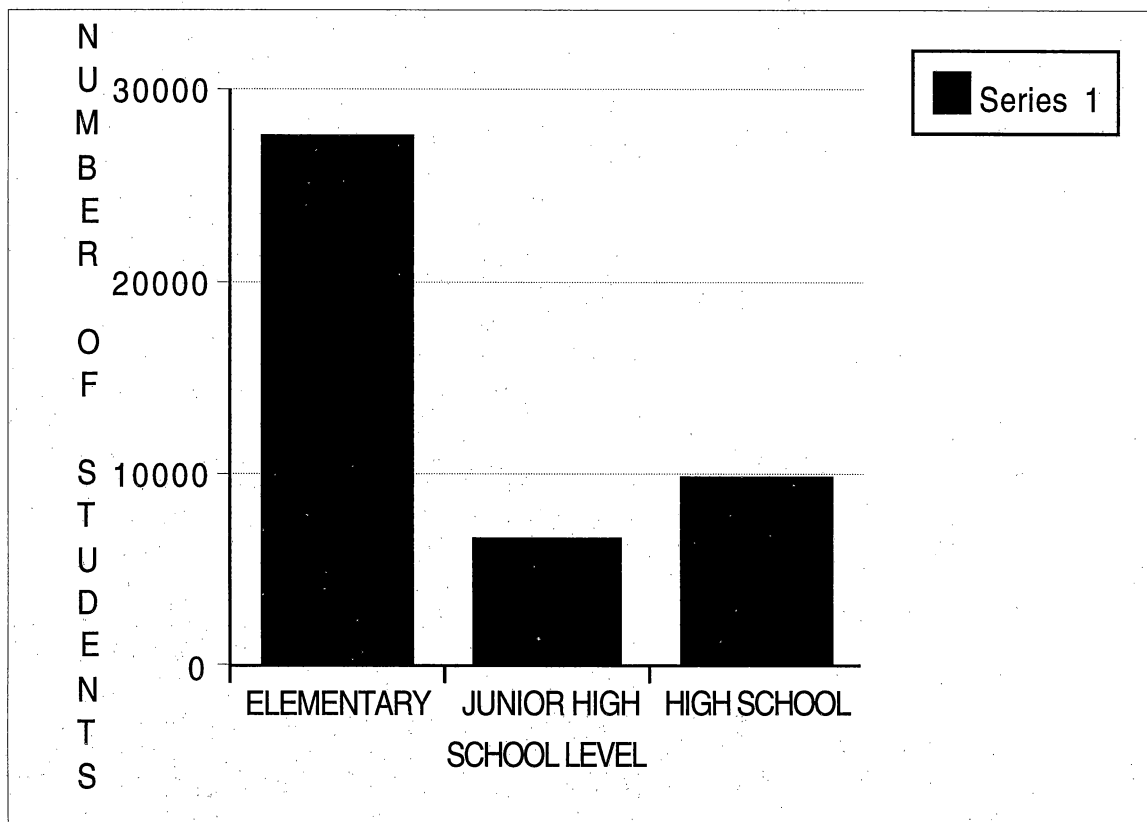


Figure 1. Breakdown of student population in the San Bernardino City Unified School District.



A total of 525 survey forms were sent to all elementary, junior high and high schools. Elementary schools received 336 forms, junior high schools 102 forms, and high schools received 87 forms(See figure 2).

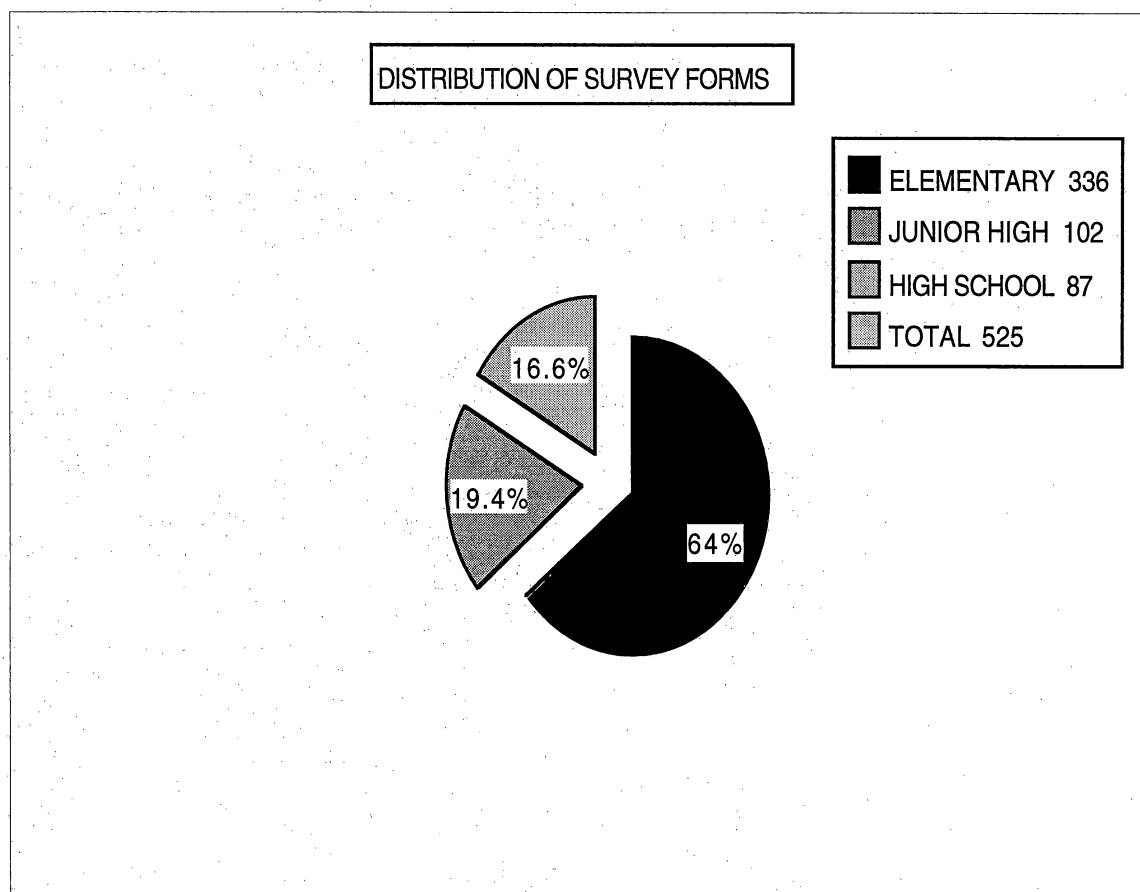


Figure 2. Distribution of the surveys to the various types of schools.

Elementary schools filled out and returned 98 forms, but one school returned all forms, unanswered and said they did not wish to participate. There are 37 elementary schools of which 13 responded with 36 forms; eight junior high schools of which five responded with a total of 17 survey forms and six high schools, all responding with

45 survey forms.

The elementary school return rate was 10.7%, the junior high school was 16.7 % and the high school, 51.7%. This calculates to 18.7% returned, filled out with usable data, for all grade level schools (See figure 3).

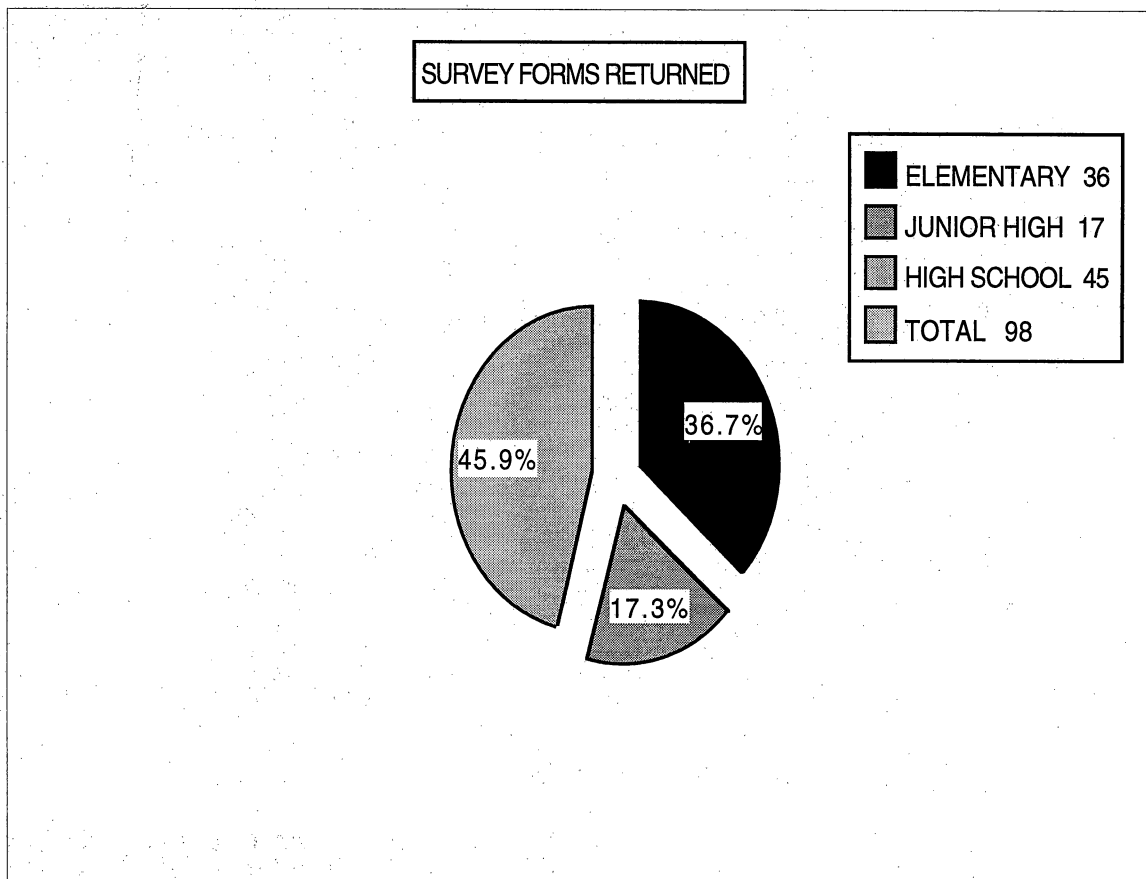


Figure 3. Distribution of returned survey forms from the various types of schools.

### Elementary Schools

Respondents from the 36 elementary schools included all grades, first through sixth. The breakdown included five teachers

from first grade, six from the second grade, nine each from third and fourth grade, seven teachers of fifth grade and six responded for the sixth grade. The total represented is greater than the 36 responses because several teachers work in combination grade classes.

The total years of teaching experience was 252 years with the highest being 26 years and the lowest, just a quarter of a year. This calculates to about seven years per teacher. There appears to be no correlation in years of teaching experience and the willingness to use oral presentations in their classrooms.

Most teachers responding, 22, spent 30 plus minutes for each student on prepared oral presentations. Six teachers each responded in the 5 plus to 15 minutes and the 15 plus to 30 minutes categories. Two teachers responded in the 0 to 5 minutes survey answer. All responding teachers said they spent time doing oral presentations in their classes.

The type of oral presentation activities varied with the majority using original student material, closely followed by Reader's Theater, plays and drama and, finally, poetry. These four represented 85% of all oral presentations although several responded in the "other" column with book reports, current events reports, journal responses and musical presentations.

Some of the unexpected benefits of oral presentations were

included in the blank marked "other" (#4) on the questionnaire.

Survey replies included, "students retain more information" and

"students are more willing to participate" received 24 and 27 responses respectively. However, "other" (#4) response received 21 various answers including, "builds self-esteem", "it's fun", "speaking part of whole language", "opportunity for oral students", "brings out leadership skills" and "works well in bilingual situations." Teachers appeared to be using oral presentations in order to teach in one of the best possible modes of learning.

The main concern in using oral presentations in the classroom is "students are fearful of speaking in front of others". This was by far the chief response indicating a difficult problem to be overcome. This was followed distantly, "as too time consuming" and "difficult in grading". One response echoed a familiar concern shared by many teachers. Students had worked very hard preparing for a play, learning lines, building sets, sending invitations and only two parents were in attendance.

An overwhelming number of teachers stated that having a classroom where risk-taking is encouraged is essential. They seemed to be equally divided on whether all students are required to participate or if students are free to participate. All but two teachers thought oral presentations should be part of the elementary

school curriculum.

Coupled with oral presentations are accountable listening activities. Good speakers need good audiences. These listening activities require students to listen and evaluate or listen and use the information in a measurable way. Thirty four, of the 36 teachers who responded, use some form of listening accountability. Most (31) asked students to evaluate other students, 19 required note taking and 14 tested in the basis of listening to other student's presentations. There were

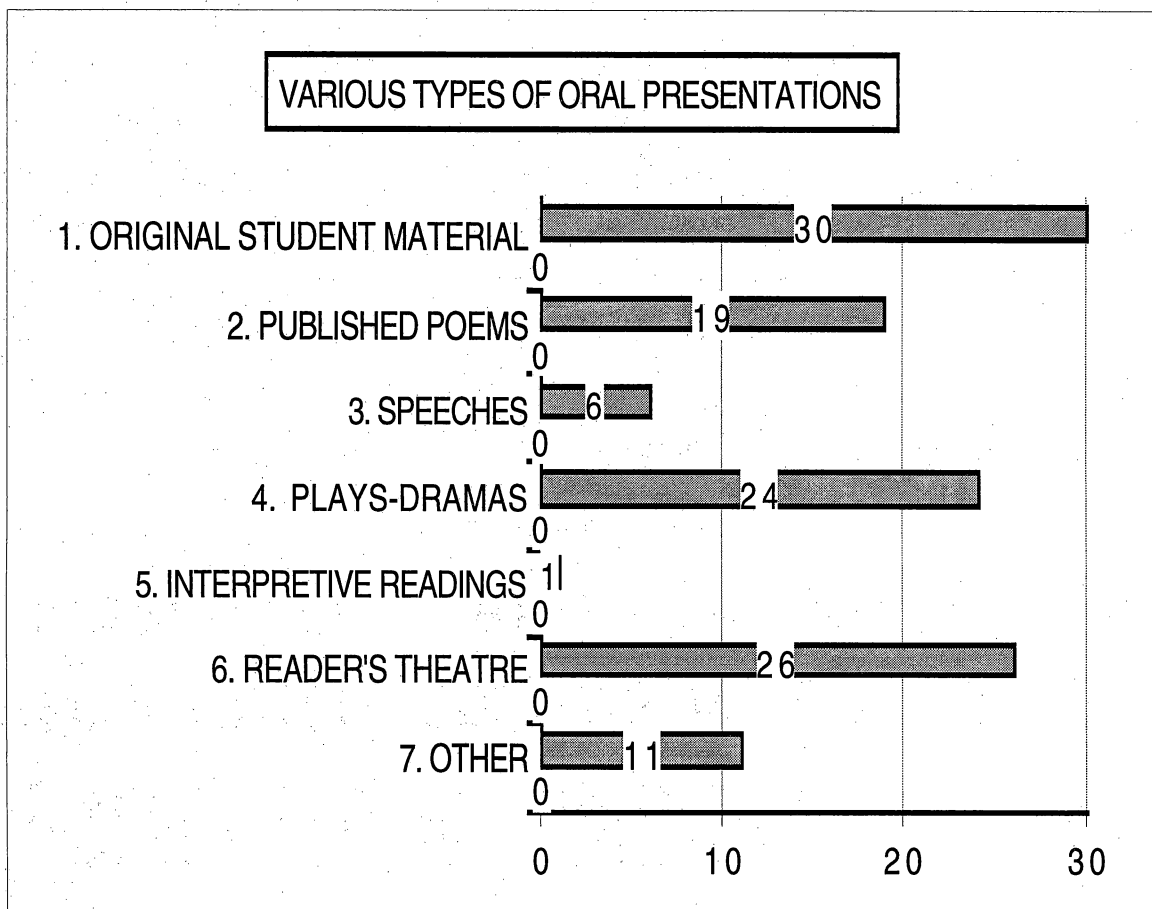


Figure 4. Breakdown of the different types of oral presentations done in elementary classrooms

several responses written in that included using accountable listening with music, a writing topic, retelling what was heard and formulating questions to ask other students.

The elementary teachers who answered the survey seem to use oral presentations in their classrooms and many in ways I had not considered when structuring the survey form. Original material, stories, poems, plays and skits, written by students appears to be the major type of oral presentations done in elementary school classrooms.(See figure 4)

#### Junior High Schools

Junior high or middle schools represent 6,663 students in grades seven and eight. Out of the eight junior high schools in San Bernardino City Unified School District, five responded with a total of 17 survey forms. The percentage of returned forms was higher than for elementary schools, 16.7% compared to 10.7%. Language art teachers numbered ten, math and social studies, two each and one each from physical education, science and learning handicapped teachers. Of the 17 responders, 14 stated they used prepared oral presentations. The three who said oral presentations were not part of their teaching, include a physical education teacher, a first year language arts teacher and a five year veteran teaching learning handicapped.

The amount of time devoted to class presentations showed five spending 15 plus minutes to 30 minutes, six, more than 30 minutes and two each in the 0 to five and five plus to 15 minutes range. It would appear that most teachers in junior high spend a considerable amount of time on oral presentations.

The types of presentations varied greatly with original student work garnering 13, followed by ten for dramas and skits, seven using poetry, five each for reader's theater and speeches and some very interesting others, such as: group projects, book reports, group songs and investigative reports.

The question of benefits of oral presentations for junior high schools are impacted by the total number of students' work each teacher must read, comment on and grade. Junior high school teachers are dealing with nearly 160 students in various levels and classes. Teachers felt the benefits were: "students retain more information" (12) or "students are more willing to participate" (10) and several had their own reasons such as: "improves self-esteem, great to motivate, develops oral language, peer modeling" and an unusual response of "forces learning", an interesting concept. Because of the paper load, we see teachers admitting (6) "fewer papers to grade".

The major concern, once again, is (12) "overcoming students'

fear of speaking in front of others” and (5) “too time consuming”.

One response shared a concern of how does a teacher measure oral presentations? It is no more subjective than grading writing, where content was more important than mechanics.

Teachers are assuming the success of oral presentations by stating they must provide “a classroom climate where risk-taking is encouraged” (14) and are equally divided (10) on whether “students should be required to participate” or if “students are free to participate”. One teacher stated that best results were when groups presented and each member had an important segment he or she was responsible to present to the class.

When asked if oral presentations should be part of the curriculum, 14 stated “yes” This was the same number of teachers who were in favor of combining oral presentations with accountable listening activities. Asked if they included accountable listening in their teaching, especially for oral presentations, again, 14 responded positively. How teachers would incorporate accountable listening was shared equally by 1. evaluating other students, 2. testing on the content and 3. note taking.

From the information gathered from junior high school teachers, most classrooms use oral presentations and accountable listening activities. The only difference between junior high schools



and elementary schools would be the increase in papers a teacher must correct and many are using oral presentations to cut this work load, while still providing good education. This would translate into working smarter, not harder(See figure 5).

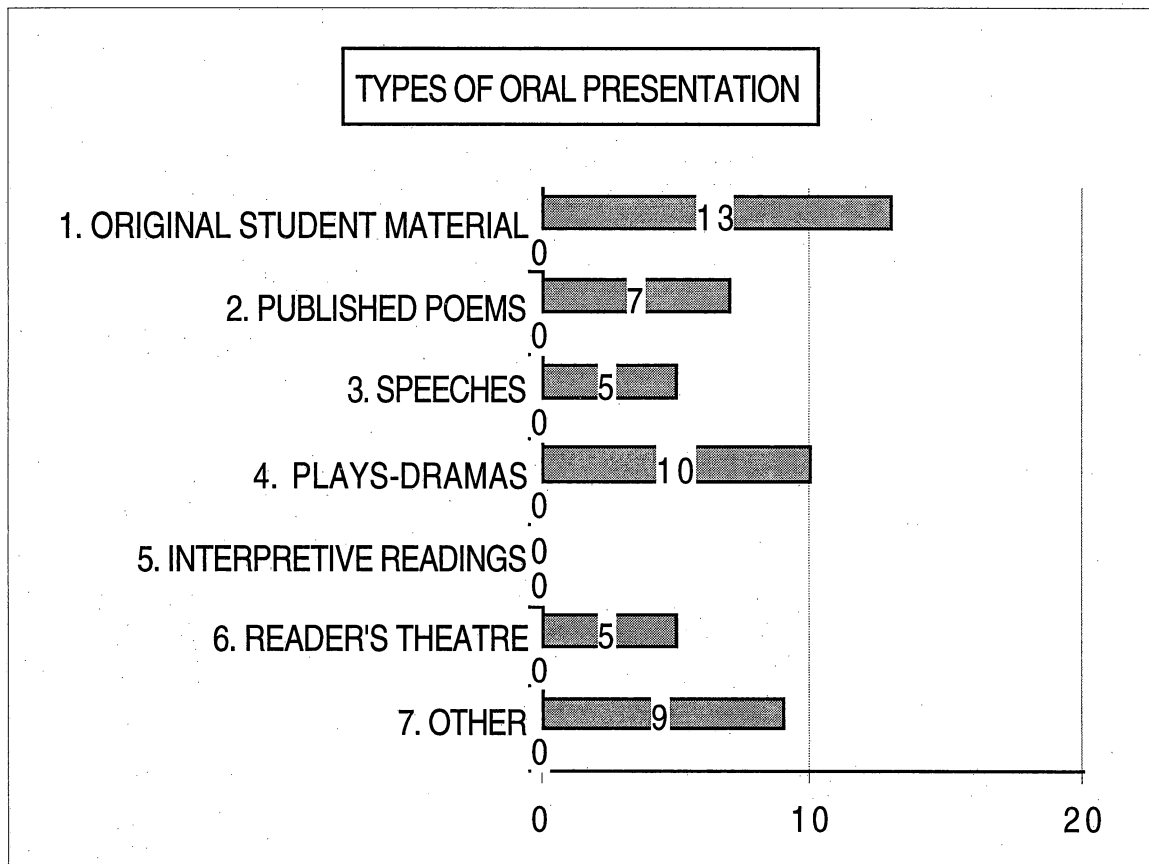


Figure 5. Breakdown of the different types of oral presentations done in junior high school classrooms.

### High Schools

The surveys were sent to the principal at each school site without instructions on who was to receive the forms, hoping for a cross section of disciplines, but this was not the case, especially in the

forms returned from the high schools. English teachers responded with 29 forms with all but one answering to using oral presentations. Social Studies had eight forms with one who stated non-use of oral presentations, science had two, both using them, math, one returned form stating that math doesn't use oral presentations, career education and Spanish each had one and both were using oral presentations and finally, three responses from E.S.L. (English as a second language) teachers who report using oral presentations in their classrooms. This group had the highest percentage of returned survey forms with all six high schools responding and returning 51.7% or 45 forms for the 87 sent out. It is also with this group that there was a departure from the printed answers with many electing to write in answers that were more in keeping with their teaching techniques.

The results were startling with 42 out of 45 responses stating that they used oral presentations in their classrooms and 23 claiming 30 minutes or more per student. There were only two who answered 0 to five minutes, seven, in the five plus to 15 minutes per student and ten in the 15 plus to 30 minutes range.

In the next question is where we see the respondents write in answers beyond the ones listed. "Original student material" was the first selection with 30 responses, plays, dramas and skits with 23,

speeches with 21, followed by poetry with 16, interpretive readings, ten, reader's theater, nine, but 15 included other oral presentations such as: sharing research papers, book reports, debate, employment interviews, group presentations, personal heritage, and historical characterizations. This is truly an impressive list.

The responses to the next question added even more answers than the ones listed. When asked the benefits of oral presentations, 28 said "students retain more information", but 28 also wrote in a personalized response that expressed ways to improve life skills such as: the ability to speak in public, thinking on one's feet, become better at job interviews, bolster self-esteem, classroom diversity, improve student interest, peer teaching and some one even stated the obvious, it's required in the state curriculum framework. Other benefits were (19) "students more willing to participate" and (16) "fewer papers to grade", but remembering, high school teachers have up to 200 students who write multi-page reports and essays. It isn't doing less, but it could mean "freeing up" time to do more.

The major concerns appear to cross all grade levels, (36) "student fearful of speaking in front of others" and (10) saying it's "too time consuming." Four responses were concerned with individual assessment and accountability in group presentations.

When asked "what was most important for successful oral

presentations?”, the responses ranged from “a classroom climate that encouraged risk-taking” (29), “all students required to participate” (25), which is a departure from elementary school thinking, “counts high in grading” (9), “so students take it seriously, prepare and deliver engaging presentations” (9), “should be relevant and reflect real life situations” (11) and a few, felt “students should be free to participate” (5).

Those who felt oral presentations should be part of the curriculum numbered 41 with two-negative and one-maybe.

This was the same number (41) who thought oral presentations would be more effective if used in conjunction with accountable listening activities, two-maybe’s and one-negative. Only 33 said accountable listening was one of their teaching strategies, with seven-negatives and four-maybe’s.

When questioned on how teachers would incorporate accountable listening into their classes, the responses appeared to be equally divided between “evaluate other students’ presentations”, “test on contents of presentations” and “have students take notes of presentations”

Some of the comments written on the survey forms bear repeating.

“Speaking and listening activities in the classroom are the most

dynamic tools a teacher possesses”, “I have long felt that listening skills are the most neglected element of the curriculum” and “These activities prepare students for life’s challenges”.

In the three different classrooms; elementary, junior high schools and high schools, original student materials is the number one type of oral presentations in all of these classrooms, while other types vary with grade level. (See figure 6)

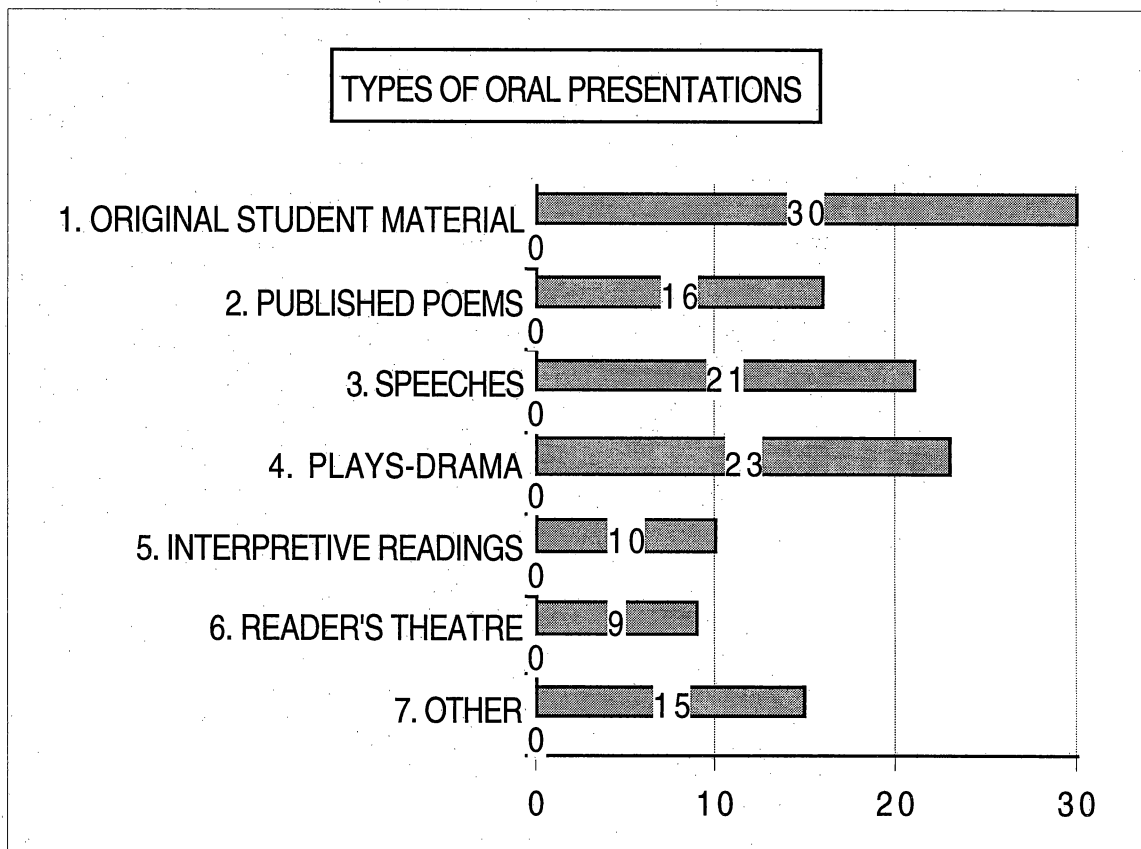


Figure 6. Breakdown of the different types of oral presentations done in high school classrooms.

## ANALYSIS OF PROJECT RESULTS

What do all the survey forms, questions, speculations, hypotheses and correlations have to do with our schools, teachers and students?

First, oral presentations and accountable listening are part of the educational framework, mandated by the California State Board of Education. Teachers should embrace reading and writing, while including listening and speaking skills. It needs to be a four-pronged attack, each equal in importance and effort.

The teachers participating in the survey appear to utilize oral presentations and accountable listening strategies far more than was postulated at the onset of the project. In addition, they came up with a wide variety of reasons beyond the ones mentioned in the survey for including these strategies in their classrooms, such as: "students become more creative, improves speaking skills and oral development, helps increase self-esteem, causes students to think on their feet and allows for students to try on actual life skills such as job interviews and sales- persuasive speaking."

The range of activities that was done in the respondent's classrooms was far greater than laid out in the survey and included: group presentations and skits, book reports, debate, historical enactments, research projects and demonstrations on cultural

differences. On many of the forms, teachers wrote detailed strategies for successes they have had in their classrooms involving oral presentations.

Secondly, most educators would agree that oral skills can be learned if begun early, continued throughout elementary, junior and high schools and culminating upon entering the work world or academia. This, in itself, is merit enough to encourage teachers to use the strategies for oral presentations and accountable listening activities in their classrooms, but beyond the obvious benefits, technology has introduced another reason for the teaching of oral presentations in the classroom. That reason is authentic assessment or portfolios through a computer software program. This type of portfolio would allow for teachers to have students read, do a group presentation or present an art project into a video camera. Students' writing could be scanned, teachers can comment on the progress of their students and the paper load reduced dramatically.

Incorporated into this type of authentic assessment portfolios are the students' actual reading of their written assignments or other school work deemed important, presented into a video camera that will be stored on a hard drive of a computer. Presently, the software is available for Apple Macintosh computers and is called the Grady Profile.

The Grady Profile is a portfolio assessment tool that uses graphics, audio and video to help school personnel manage the record keeping and overwhelming amount of paper work needed to get a complete overview of a student's work. It is a file drawer of folders including both general information, about family, emergency and medical data and assessment cards for each student. Each student card contains birth date, grade, teachers, attendance data, scholastic history and a snapshot of the student.

The assessment cards deal with academic proficiencies of reading, writing, math, art and oral communications. This could include students' oral reading, presentations, participation in cooperative groups. Students can read into a microphone or be photographed or performed for a video camera. Students' work can be stored in the computer through a scanner. This allows the student to retain his or her work, while still placing this "best piece" in the student's file.

There are spaces for teachers to make remarks and personalize each students' file. Besides this, student behavior can be noted, as well as special or standardized test results and counselor or principal remarks included for each student. All of this will be safe because it is password protected.

The newest version on the market is in color and sells for about



\$150.00. The state of Minnesota was instrumental in helping to develop the Grady Profile and has purchased statewide rights (Aurbach,1992).

The cost of the hardware would range from about \$3000 to \$4500, including computer, camera and scanner.

By far the greatest reason for this type of authentic assessment is its authenticity, assessing an actual student delivering his or her work to a video camera. Not far behind is the ease of storage and distribution without keeping volumes of paper and trying to match the student to the new teacher. This would allow for a progression of students' work over the course of their schooling. The various years could be sequenced to demonstrate the progression or lack of for each student.

Oral presentation, authentic assessment, the Grady Profile, all tied together for the best in education.

**APPENDIX**

**Letter to Administrators**

**The Classroom Survey**

April 15, 1994

Dear Administrator:

The enclosed survey is part of a Master's project on oral presentations in our classrooms. I need your help in having teachers at your site fill out this survey. It should take only a couple of minutes to complete the form.

I have approval for gathering this information from the district office and the use of the district mail service for returning these forms to Cajon High School.

I want to express my gratitude for your assistance in helping me collect this data, having these forms filled out and returned to me as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Tom Hollihan  
Cajon High School

Encls.

## CLASSROOM SURVEY

As a fellow teacher in the San Bernardino City Unified School District, I need your help in collecting data from your classroom so I can better understand a segment of the teaching process. The data needed involves prepared oral presentations and accountable listening activities in your classroom. This would be defined as any presentation by your students to your class, a segment of your class or to another class that requires your students to rehearse either self-written or existing material and presented alone or in groups. Accountable listening would require your students to either evaluate a presentation or answer questions about the content of a speaker's remarks.

Please do not identify you or your students, but include your grade level and subject taught if applicable.

The data collected will be used in formulating a Master's thesis, incorporating actual classrooms, like yours.

Thanks: Tom Hollihan, Cajon High School

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE LEVEL \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT TAUGHT \_\_\_\_\_ YEARS TEACHING \_\_\_\_\_

Underline the most applicable answer or answers

1. Do you use prepared oral presentations in your classroom?

A.yes B.no

2. How much time is devoted to prepared oral presentation for each student in your class for an average school year?

A.0 to 5 minutes per student B.5+ to 15 minutes per student

C.15+ to 30 minutes per student D.30+ minutes or more.

If more than 30+ minutes, how much? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What type of prepared oral presentations do you use in your classroom?

A. original student material B. published poems C. speeches

D. plays or dramas E. interpretive readings F. reader's theater

G. other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you see as benefits of prepared oral presentations in your classroom? Underline all that apply.

- A. student retain more information      B. fewer papers to grade  
C. students are more willing to participate      D. there are none  
E. other \_\_\_\_\_

5. What has been your major concerns in the use of prepared oral presentations in your classroom? Underline all that apply.

- A. students fearful of speaking in front of others  
B. too time consuming      C. see no useful purpose or relevancy  
D. difficulty in grading      E. lack of good material  
F. other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What do you think is the most important for successful prepared oral presentations?

- A. a classroom climate where risk-taking is encouraged  
B. students free to participate      C. counts high in grading  
D. all students required to participate  
E. other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Should prepared oral presentations be part of the curriculum?

yes      no

8. Would prepared oral presentations be more effective if they were used in conjunction with accountable listening activities?

yes      no

9. Are accountable listening activities part of your teaching techniques?

yes      no

10. How would you incorporate accountable listening activities into your classroom? Underline all that apply.

- A. evaluate other student's prepared oral presentations
- B. tested on content of what is read in class.
- C. have students take notes on what is read in class.
- D. students are only accountable for what they read or write
- E. other \_\_\_\_\_

Any comment you have concerning the concept of prepared oral presentations or accountable listening activities, please comment on the back.

Thank you!

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