Investigating Label Use by Canadian Speech-Language Pathologists

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Introduction

- Children experiencing a delay in the development of oral language have variably been described as having a primary language impairment, specific language impairment, language learning impairment, and language disorder, among other labels
- Lack of consistent labels presents barriers to sharing information about children with similar profiles
- As a result of the “CATALISE” studies a consensus was reached for the label “developmental language disorder” (DLD) to describe children with a persistent language problem having a functional impact on communication or learning (Bishop et al., 2017)

Method

Participants
- 352 Canadian Speech-Language Pathologists
  - 49.5% practicing in school boards
  - 25.5% in private practices
  - 5.3% in hospitals
  - 3.5% in non-residential health care
  - 2.3% in residential health care
  - 13.9% in other settings (children’s treatment centres, public health, telehealth, preschool speech and language initiative, etc.)

Practice Locations
- Ontario: 235
- Alberta: 41
- New Brunswick: 28
- British Columbia: 26
- Saskatchewan: 12
- Manitoba: 6
- Nova Scotia, Quebec, Newfoundland: 4

Procedure
- Recruited in person at SAC 2018 and online through social media invitation
- A 25 question online survey through Qualtrics
  - 3 on personal practice
  - 4 on use of specific labels to identify children with communication disorders
  - 1-3 on constraints on label use presented by professional licensing/legislature
  - 3 on purpose of assessment in practice
  - 11 on knowledge and use of the specific diagnostic label “developmental language disorder”

Results

Frequency of Specific Label Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label Use to Describe a Child with a Significant Language Delay</th>
<th>Very Frequently</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Disorder</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Delay</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Language Impairment</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive Language Disorder</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive Language Disorder</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive-Expressive Language Disorder</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Language Disorder</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance of Assessment Objectives

- Establishing goals for intervention: 4.7
- Determining if eligibility criteria for services are met: 3.7
- Providing parents with a diagnostic label: 3.1
- Assessing the level of functional impact: 4.5
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses: 4.8

Do you feel the outcome of your assessments puts you in a position to provide a diagnostic label?

- Definitely Yes: 24%
- Probably Yes: 48%
- Might or Might Not: 24%
- Probably Not: 1%
- Definitely Not: 2%

Professional Limitations

- 72.4% reported limits by professional bodies in providing diagnostic labels
- 29.8% Extremely Likely, 30.0% Likely, 26.6% Neutral, 4.1% Unlikely, 0.5% Extremely Unlikely

For a child presenting with a language delay, how often would you use the following terms?

- Language Disorder
- Language Delay
- Specific Language Impairment
- Receptive Language Disorder
- Expressive Language Disorder
- Receptive-Expressive Language Disorder
- Developmental Language Disorder

Developmental Language Disorder

- 46.6% correctly identified DLD definition
- 55% felt DLD was an effective label
- 88.2% (strongly) agreed that having a consistent diagnostic label would provide better advocacy
- 77% (strongly) agreed that children would be better off if professionals were consistently using the agreed upon label DLD

How likely are you to use the label “Developmental Language Disorder”?

- Very Frequently: 19%
- Frequently: 48%
- Occasionally: 24%
- Rarely: 11%
- Never: 3%

Are you aware of the label “Developmental Language Disorder”?

- Definitely Yes: 58%
- Probably Yes: 44%
- Might or Might Not: 4%
- Probably Not: 2%
- Definitely Not: 0%

If there were an international consensus reached?

- Extremely Likely: 27%
- Likely: 41%
- Neutral: 15%
- Unlikely: 10%
- Extremely Unlikely: 7%

Conclusions

- Majority of Canadian SLPs are not consistently providing labels to children experiencing significant language delays
- Practice highly inconsistent
- Label “language delay” used most frequently
- Providing parents with a diagnostic label rated as the least important assessment objective (mirroring McGregor et al., 2017)
- Majority of Canadian SLPs feel that the outcome of their assessments puts them in a position to provide a diagnostic label
- Limitations in use of diagnostic labels imposed by their professional licencing body commonly reported
- About half of respondents were aware of the label DLD & could choose correct definition
- Awareness of international consensus may influence practice

References