

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS  
READING COMPREHENSION AND WRITING ATTITUDES

THESIS

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the correlation (high, medium, or low) between reading comprehension and writing attitudes of fifth grade students. There were 56 fifth grade students enrolled in an urban, public New York elementary school. The students were in an intense writing program for the school year to prepare them for the Writing PEP Test to be administered at the end of that school year.

The researcher compiled a list of reading comprehension scores obtained from each student's fourth grade Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) Test. During the twentieth week of school, each student was given the Linn Opinions about Writing Survey. The data were used to determine the nature of the correlation (high, medium, or low) between reading comprehension and writing attitude. The findings indicated a low correlation.

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## Chapter I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between fifth grade students' reading comprehension scores and their attitudes towards writing.

#### Need for the Study

Many educators feel that students who read well often write well, and that those who read poorly also write poorly (Pfeifer, 1983). Others believe that reading and writing are closely related and should be taught together (Miller, 1982). In the past, the natural way to learn language was in a predetermined sequence: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Karlin & Karlin, 1983). Karlin et al. (1983) suggested that reading and writing could be learned concurrently. Learning to read and write simultaneously can be used to reinforce the learning of each

other. Miller (1982) stated that children should learn to read and write naturally just as they learned to talk. He stated that they should learn these skills without an awareness of the skills being taught.

There have been many studies showing that there is a strong relationship among reading and writing. Evanechko, Ollila, and Armstrong (1974) found that there was a strong interaction between the receptive behavior of reading and the expressive behavior of writing and that both use language skills in like manners which result in better reading and writing performance. Eckhoff (1983) and Chall and Jacobs (1983) found a strong positive correlation between reading and writing. Eckhoff (1983) also found that second grade children's writing contained semantic features of their reading textbooks. She found that children who used basals that contained more semantically complex literary prose also used writing that was more semantically complex. Chall and Jacobs (1983) found that reading and writing follow a similar course of development. They stated that there was a strong relation of writing to reading and that the development of writing may have also enhanced reading.



Karlin and Karlin (1983) stated that both reading and writing share a common goal to make meaning and both can be learned concurrently. Another study by Pfiefer (1985) stated that experienced teachers were not surprised to find that students who read well also write well, and those students who write poorly also read poorly. Because poor readers and writers avoid reading and writing, practice, experience, and feedback are all denied. This in turn may increase the problem and promotes students to fear both reading and writing even more.

### Attitude

As writing becomes more important in school, we need to address what is affecting student attitudes towards it. Attitudes consist of satisfactions and dissatisfaction or likes or dislikes for people, groups, objects and ideas (Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977). Zimbardo et al. (1977) stated that they are a learned predisposition with an evaluation component that is shaped by both internal and environmental factors. They are important in any area and should be addressed in reading and writing.

Does a child's ability to comprehend what is read effect his/her attitude towards writing? Many educators believe that student performance does have an effect on students' attitudes.

Evidence shows that success in writing can be predicted by reading scores (Evanechko, Ollila, and Armstrong, 1974). Pfeifer (1983) stated that those students who read well also write well, and those who read poorly also write poorly. When a student reads and writes poorly, both practices are usually avoided. This denies student practice, experience and feedback. Does a high ability to comprehension ability affect a child's attitude towards writing?

In this study, the researcher intends to investigate the relationship between reading comprehension and writing attitudes.

### Question

Is there a correlation among fifth grade students' reading comprehension as measured by the Degree of Reading Power

Test and their attitudes toward writing as measured by the Linn Opinions About Writing Survey?

### Definitions

1. Reading Comprehension: In this study, Reading Comprehension is defined as the Reading Comprehension score on the Grade 4 Degrees of Reading Power Test.
2. Attitude: In this study, Attitude is defined as the score obtained on the Linn Attitude Scale.

### Limitations

1. This study is limited to reading comprehension that is measured by standardized testing only.
2. The researcher can not account for the writing attitude of the teachers which can be a factor in influencing students' writing attitudes.
3. The researcher can not account for differences in the teaching styles.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

When teaching a child to read, an educator develops the student's ability to read and make meaning from what is read. In doing so, educators hope to create enthusiastic readers who enjoy reading and consider reading an important part of life.

Oliver (1970) stated that the long range goal of the elementary school is to prepare children to read for enjoyment and for information. Stronks (1982) found that there is a deep concern that school should not only teach children to read, but also to love reading.

Furthermore, Sadoski (1980) suggests that the skill of reading needs practice. There should be a specific time in school set aside for silent reading when the students and teachers may read for enjoyment.

## Reading Comprehension Research

Throughout the elementary years, reading comprehension strategies are taught and practiced so that students can understand and remember what is read. Goldsmith-Phillips (1989) found that there is a developmental trend that a child followed when learning to comprehend what is read. She found that the use of context to facilitate word perception was characteristic of younger, less skilled readers. Older, sixth grade students, used more phonemic and graphic information to identify words. Also, the older students were found to use more effective comprehension monitoring strategies. Therefore, comprehension monitoring ability develops and grows during the elementary school years.

Shanahan (1981) stated that children's reading below third grade is best described as a word recognition-word production relationship. As students become more proficient readers, it can be described as a prose comprehension-prose production relationship. Increase in vocabulary diversity increased comprehension.

Vocabulary development is an important component of instruction in comprehension (Karlin & Karlin, 1983). Shefelbine (1990) examined how vocabulary knowledge, familiarity of concepts and analytic reasoning affect sixth grade students' ability to learn word meanings from context and therefore comprehend what was read. It found that students with higher levels of general vocabulary knowledge learned and therefore comprehended relatively more than low students. His study suggested that general and passage specific vocabulary knowledge are important variables influencing learning from context and comprehension.

To improve reading subskills, the skill of reading needs practice. Mork (1972) stated that if children are to become readers, they must practice reading and thus improve subskills and skills. Sadoski (1980) stated that there should be a specific time set aside in school for silent reading when students and teachers may read for enjoyment. Reading skills should improve during these reading times. As children's reading matures, reading attitude should also become more positive (Sadoski, 1980).

## Writing Research

According to Stotsky (1982), all writing is "a putting down on paper one's own thoughts or the thoughts of others" (p. 330). To improve language development, daily writing programs have become more evident in many classrooms. Collins (1981) found that not only reading comprehension, but the personal attitude of students toward themselves, as readers, writers, and learners improved during daily journal writing. She states, "Students who write expressively are thinking on paper" (p. 8). She noted that the students begin to see relationships and practice writing what is taught to them or what they have read. Collins also stated that journal writing is available to everyone and it can be used at any level of instruction.

Shanahan (1981) found that children in grades three and below were found to produce words that were familiar to them and were commonly used not only in their textbooks but also in the classroom. Furthermore, he found that writing looked like the ordinary language used in speaking for older children, in fifth

grade and above due to a higher vocabulary complexity obtained by the children from their textbooks.

Dyson (1983) stated that there are three components in writing. They are message formulation, message encoding, and message formation. These components enable writing to help transfer learned skills and also organize our world.

Graves (1978) feels that the problem with writing is that there is no writing. He believes that too much time is spent on reading and reading instruction while there is not enough attention given to language development through writing. Chall and Jacobs (1983) found that there is a definite need for more emphasis on writing for children through grade seven.

### Writing Attitude

Attitude is a state of mind that is attained. It can influence many aspects of our lives, and it can also be influenced by events in our lives. Mueller (1986) stated that attitude is presumed to be related to a person's opinion, beliefs or feelings. Zimbardo, Ebbesen and Maslach (1977) suggest that attitudes,



values and behavioral tendencies are gradually attained. We do not change, we grow (Linn, 1989). Attitude can change.

Attitude is a learned predisposition with an evaluation component that is shaped by both internal and environmental factors (Zimbardo et al., 1977). Attitude is important in any area. As writing becomes more important in school, we need to address what is affecting student attitudes towards it.

Many students' attitudes are evoked from their teacher. Christianson (1983) found teachers to be a major source from which student self perception is derived. She reported that students can sense an underlying cynicism a teacher may have about a subject matter.

Linn (1989) stated that a person's attitude about writing is shaped by the interaction between the person's writing behavior and environmental consequences of that behavior. Thus, the evaluation of a person's writing will shape a person's attitude about writing. Applebee, Langer and Mullis (1986) found that students with more positive attitudes about writing tend to be better writers. Writing attitudes can not be overlooked.

Educators seems to believe that attitudes do have some significant effect on student behaviors. Fishbien and Ajzen

(1975) concluded attitudes are related to behavior.

### Reading-Writing Relationship

It is the opinion of some educators that attitudes are affected by ability. Success in writing is well predicted by reading scores (Evanechko, Ollila, and Armstrong, 1974). Eckhoff (1983) and Chall and Jacobs (1983) found a strong positive correlation between reading and writing. Eckhoff (1983) found that children's writing contained features of their reading textbooks. Chall and Jacobs (1983) found that there is a definite need for more emphasis on writing not only to improve the writing skill itself, but also because of the strong relationship of writing to reading and language. They found that the development of writing may also develop reading.

Students are asked to write in school almost everyday. Some students enjoy writing while others find it an uneasy task. Many educators believe that those children who enjoy writing do

well in reading. Those who do not have a good attitude towards writing are not strong readers.

Pfeifer (1983) found that high reading ability contributes to low writing apprehension and low reading ability to high writing apprehension. This keeps anxious writers from effective writing. He also found that a student who has experienced failure, frustration or fear in reading will transfer the same to the writing process.

Children's reading and writing skills are also related to language skills. Zeman (1969) found significant differences in the syntactic complexities of writing samples compared to reading comprehension scores on standardized tests. He found that better readers produced more complex sentence structures in their writing. The opposite was found for lower readers.

Stotsky (1982) stated that meaningful processing must take place while any writing exercise is completed. Writing is an active way to practice comprehension.

In another study, Shuy (1982) stressed that the teaching of reading and writing should be integrated in a natural way. Miller (1982) also stated that children should learn to read and write just as they learned to talk, in a natural way. The learner should

come to think of reading and writing as a means of getting things done just as they talk to get things said.

Furthermore, Collins (1981) found that not only reading comprehension, but the personal attitudes of students towards themselves, as readers, writers, and learners improve in writing. She noted that the students begin to see relationships and practice writing what is taught to them or what is read.

### Conclusion

An examination of the literature tells us that there is a need to examine the relationship of reading comprehension and writing attitude. If such a relationship exists, educators can hopefully develop classroom programs which may contribute to more positive learning, attitudes and expectations.

## Chapter III

### Design of the Study

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between fifth grade students' reading comprehension scores and their attitudes towards writing.

#### Research Question

What is the nature of the correlation (high, medium, or low) among fifth grade students' reading comprehension scores attained from the Degrees of Reading Power Test and their attitudes towards writing determined by the Linn Attitude Writing Scale?

## Methodology

### Subjects

The subjects for this study were fifty-six fifth grade students enrolled in an urban, public elementary school district in Western New York. The fifth grade students were in an intense writing program for the school year to prepare them for the Writing PEP Test to be administered in May of that school year.

### Materials

The New York State Grade 4 Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) Test scores from May, 1993 were used to determine student reading comprehension. Students were given the Linn Attitude Scale between the first and second semesters to determine their attitudes towards writing.

### Procedure

The researcher compiled a list of students presently in the fifth grade. The list did not include those students who are repeating fifth grade for a second time. Reading comprehension scores were obtained and recorded from each student's fourth

grade DRP Test. The higher the DRP%ile, the higher the reading comprehension ability for that student whereas a low score indicates a low reading comprehension ability.

During the twentieth week of school, each student was given the Linn Opinions about Writing Survey. The students were told that their opinions will remain anonymous. The higher the score in this survey the more positive the student's attitude towards writing is. The Linn Opinions about Writing Survey has a reliability of 0.92.

### Analysis

The researcher analyzed and scored each student's Linn Attitude Survey. These data were compared with the data obtained for each student's reading comprehension. The data were used to determine the nature of the correlation (high, medium, or low) between reading comprehension and writing attitude.

## Chapter IV

### Analysis of Data

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between fifth grade students' reading comprehension scores and their attitudes towards writing.

#### Statistical Analysis

This study determined the nature of the correlation (high, medium, or low) among fifth grade students' reading comprehension and their attitudes towards writing.

The data collected for this study were established in terms of individual scores obtained on the May, 1993 Degrees of Reading Power test and the scores obtained from the Linn Opinions About Writing Survey. To ensure uniformity in administration, the researcher personally administered the Opinions about Writing Survey to all participants. The data were



evaluated to determine what correlation (high, medium, or low) existed.

### Findings and Interpretations

Table 1 lists and summarizes the findings of the analysis.

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Table 1

#### DATA

<u>DRP %ile</u>	<u>Opinions About Writing</u>
31	59
89	37
68	30
51	60
62	65
20	57
61	65
37	75
50	49
79	70
37	73
71	51
28	58

97	53
40	50
76	42
34	45
47	44
58	46
74	70
40	59
44	55
65	45
37	53
61	53
51	70
81	69
28	64
44	48
71	67
58	69
51	52
51	68
81	43
54	50
51	48
4	47
81	79
74	51
79	56
99	48
14	55
65	73

14	59
20	53
5	47
44	45
15	46
91	46
34	59
74	48
37	61
74	40
74	67
51	77
23	49

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$$r = -0.01$$

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The correlation of the data was determined to be -0.01. This study shows a low correlation between reading comprehension and opinions about writing.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Implications

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between fifth grade students' reading comprehension scores and their attitudes towards writing.

#### Conclusions

Attitude is a state of mind that is attained. Creating an environment where students have a good attitude toward their studies is something that educators need to address. Some feel that attitudes are affected by ability. Since reading and writing are thought to be interrelated, some teachers attempt to have students learn and practice them simultaneously. They believe that what is learned in reading will reinforce writing techniques, and what is learned in writing will reinforce reading.

The study conducted here examined the relationship that exists between reading comprehension and writing attitudes. In reviewing the results of this study, it was apparent that there is a very low correlation between a fifth grade student's reading comprehension and attitude towards writing.

One factor that may have had some influence is the timing of the study. Participants in this study were in the middle of their fifth grade school year. They were writing many different types of compositions and were going to continue to write others for the remainder of the school year. Perhaps testing their attitude at the end of fifth grade or even at the beginning of sixth grade, after they had finished their intense study of different types of writing, may have shown different results.

Also, each of the students have had several different teachers since they began school. Some teachers have used writing as a form of punishment. We've heard of writing "I will not chew gum in school" one hundred times used to punish children. Some programs on television that include school classrooms show students being punished by having them write a particular sentence on the chalkboard several dozens of times. This can also effect a student's attitude towards writing. Why should

someone want to write if that person looks upon it as a form of punishment?

New York State fifth grade students are in a comprehensive writing curriculum to prepare them for the NYS PEP Writing Test which is administered at the end of that school year. The fifth grade students in this study were studying and practicing writing intensively throughout the school year. Such intensive writing could have impacted on the results of this study.

### Implications for the Classroom

Many educators concentrate on improving a student's writing ability to prepare them for the New York State PEP Writing Test. Students with more positive attitudes about writing tend to be better writers (Applebee, Langer, and Mullis, 1986). Therefore, educators try to improve student attitude toward writing. Because reading and writing are thought to be interrelated (Chall and Jacobs, 1983; Eckhoff, 1983), some may feel that success in one subject area will create success in the other.

This study shows that there is a low correlation between reading comprehension and writing attitudes of fifth grade students. Because attitude is believed to affect student performance, we need to identify what affects attitude. Teachers need to know what does affect student attitudes toward writing to help the students become more successful writers. When doing so, the teachers can create an environment where attitude is good.

#### Implications for Further Research

Attitude is an area that warrants further review. Because student behavior is believed to be affected by attitude, it is important to understand what can improve a student's attitude. Researchers may want to examine the correlation between writing scores and attitudes toward writing at the end of the fifth grade. Scores of the New York State Writing PEP Test could be correlated with the attitudes of students completing fifth grade. This correlation could assist educators in evaluating the merit of an intensive year of writing instruction.

In reviewing this study, it may be more beneficial to test the student writing attitudes once at the beginning of the fifth grade and again at the end of that school year. This may give a better perspective on their attitudes toward writing and how it may change over the course of the school year.

It may also be interesting to determine how the correlation between reading comprehension and writing attitudes at the start of the school year and the correlation of reading comprehension and writing attitudes at the end of the school year compare. This may indicate if there are any changes in the relationship over the school year.



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APPENDIX A  
OPINIONS ABOUT WRITING  
JEFFREY B. LINN

**OPINIONS ABOUT WRITING**  
**Jeffrey B. Linn**

Please answer all of the items. Use the following scale. Circle the letter that pertains to your answer.

**A = Strongly Agree**  
**B = Agree**  
**C = Undecided or Neutral**  
**D = Disagree**  
**E = Strongly Disagree**

- =====
- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| A B C D E | 1. There are many things that I would rather do than write.  |
| A B C D E | 2. Writing is a good way to spend free time.                 |
| A B C D E | 3. I like to share my written work with others.              |
| A B C D E | 4. Writing is easy for me.                                   |
| A B C D E | 5. Writing makes me feel nervous.                            |
| A B C D E | 6. Writing assignments tend to intimidate me.                |
| A B C D E | 7. Writing makes me feel uneasy.                             |
| A B C D E | 8. Writing for fun helps me to develop my thoughts.          |
| A B C D E | 9. I dislike essay tests because of the writing.             |
| A B C D E | 10. Writing is a frustrating activity for me.                |
| A B C D E | 11. Sharing my writing with another person makes me nervous. |
| A B C D E | 12. I usually don't write unless I have to.                  |
| A B C D E | 13. Writing is a calming activity.                           |
| A B C D E | 14. It is not difficult for me to start a paper or report.   |
| A B C D E | 15. I feel confident when working on a writing assignment.   |
| A B C D E | 16. Sharing my writing with others is important to me.       |
| A B C D E | 17. Writing for enjoyment holds little appeal for me.        |