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A Comparison of the Perception which Third-Grade Students and Sixth-Grade Students have of Themselves as Writers

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A COMPARISON OF THE PERCEPTION WHICH THIRD-GRADE
STUDENTS AND SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS HAVE OF THEMSELVES AS
WRITERS

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

It's a common scenario captured in a frequently used cliché; you can't see the forest for the trees. How many times have you seen the student at a piano recital surrounded by proud parents, a somewhat attentive audience, and an eager instructor? The setting is complete, the piece is memorized, the performance is given. The pianist shares a skill, which ultimately receives a positive, neutral, or negative critique. Suggestions may be made for improvements, new equipment purchased, new techniques applied. The "trees" are many. But the question of the forest remains, "How does the pianist feel about being a pianist?" It's easy to miss the forest for the trees.

Or perhaps you have witnessed a portrayal of this cliché on the field where a Little League baseball game is being played. Children are clad in matching uniforms. Various routines are followed by coaches and parents as they play their perspective roles. Some children excel, some hold their own, others have difficulty. The reasons for this varied achievement are numerous; the trees are many. But what about the

question of the forest? "How does the child feel about playing on a Little League team?" It's easy to miss the forest for the trees.

The same idea holds true, to a certain extent, when examining children as writers. There is no doubt that it is important for children to be involved in the writing process. The research is abundant in regard to analyzing various aspects of the writing process, exploring certain teaching techniques, and determining the influence of peers and teachers on a student's writing performance. Researchers have even looked into what motivates students to write, how they respond to frustration, and how they deal with writing apprehension. The trees are many and varied. But the question of the forest has been asked by very few. "How does the child feel about being a writer?" It's easy to miss the forest for the trees.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to survey a group of third-grade students and a group of sixth-grade students in order to investigate and compare their writing attitudes.

Questions

1. What percentage of the third-grade students who were surveyed have either a positive or a negative writing attitude?
2. What percentage of the sixth-grade students who were surveyed have either a positive or a negative writing attitude?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of the third-grade students who were surveyed and the sixth-grade students who were surveyed?

Need for the Study

"Children learn to write by writing, no doubt about that" (Fueyo, 1989, p.145). Researchers have spent much time and effort examining ways in which it is best to teach writing, analyzing the relationships between students and teachers, considering the issues involved in receiving feedback on written work, dissecting the writing process into parts and then seeking to integrate those parts back into a whole. The research on the writing process is extensive and important. Much can be learned by the wealth of what has been examined in the past.

Yet the fact remains that if there is concern

about children learning to write, then it might be beneficial and certainly fascinating, to begin with the children themselves. How does the child feel about being a writer, and is there a significant change in that attitude as children grow older and make their way through the educational system? Perhaps it might prove useful to answer these questions by asking those who would know best, the children.

Definition of Terms

Writing Attitude In this study, Writing Attitude will be defined as the score obtained on the Linn Writing Attitude Scale (W.A.S.).

Positive Writing Attitude In this study, a positive writing attitude will be defined as a score of 61 or greater on the W.A.S.

Negative Writing Attitude In this study, a negative writing attitude will be defined as a score which is less than 39 on the W.A.S.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations serve to restrict the generalization of the conclusions and implications of this study to different groups and situations.

1. The sample population used to develop the reliability and validity data for the W.A.S.

was college aged elementary education majors who were predominantly female.

2. In this study, the researcher altered the wording of some of the statements of the W.A.S. so that they would be understandable to elementary students.
3. The sample population of this study was derived from suburban public and private schools in western New York.
4. There were no data collected regarding the gender or specific age of the participants in this study.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

"Children learn to write by writing, no doubt about that" (Fueyo, 1989, p.145). But the research which deals with the topic of writing is as varied and extensive as that; statement is short and simple. If children learn to write by writing then when, and how, and where to begin are key questions for researchers and teachers alike. Since it is the children who are involved in doing the writing, it seems reasonable to maintain the focus of the research on the children themselves.

The Beginning of Writing

Many researchers suggest that writing begins long before a single word is ever captured in written form (Eisner, 1982; Emig, 1983). These same researchers state that teachers would do best to "...abandon the unimodal approach to writing and show far greater generosity in the width of writing invitations to all students" (Emig, 1983, p. 46). According to Fueyo's (1989) observations in a New Hampshire elementary school classroom, some of the students were quite ready

to respond to this unimodal approach. However, at least one of the students seemed to be expressing the idea that it was not necessary for him to put his thoughts into writing. He was perfectly content to draw elaborate illustrations of airplanes and to construct paper airplanes as a tangible dimension to accompany his pictures and diagrams. Fueyo (1989) raises an interesting issue by stating:

So what was the problem? There was none - unless we created it by molding this child into one of our versions of the writing process. Once we used his needs - to construct models and move through the experience in the writing classroom - he initiated print when he felt a need for it. (Fueyo, 1989, p. 143)

Fueyo (1989) does not presume to say that such a method is to be used for each child in every classroom, but she does indicate that as educators there is a need to explore new directions within the writing classroom. The fundamental issue behind her research invites teachers to consider more seriously the role which the child plays in the writing process itself. According to Brand (1987), the research on the writing process must examine this role from both a cognitive as well as an affective viewpoint. Brand concludes by stating:

Historically, the field of composition looked first at the what of writing,

the product. Over the last two decades, it has added the how of writing, the process. It follows that the field look next at the why of writing, affective content and motivation. Understanding the collaboration of emotion and cognition in writing is both fundamental and far-reaching. It is in cognition that ideas make sense. But it is in emotion that this sense finds value. (Brand, 1987, p. 442)

Defining Writing Attitude

Many researchers express the idea that the writing process is closely linked with the concept of learning. Collins (1985) summarizes the research of Emig (1977), Hawkes (1967), and Macrorie (1970) by saying:

...for it is through writing, particularly through expressive, reflective, or personal writing, that students begin to hear their inner voices, begin to discover and develop their own writing voices, begin to evolve their personal prose styles, begin to give order, sense, and meaning to their lives, and begin to learn. (Collins, 1985, p.48)

However, students are not restricted to learning only the steps and procedures which are involved in the writing process. The concept of writing attitude is commonly thought to be learned as well. Linn (1989) states, "The attitude concept is a learned one. Attitudes don't just happen; they evolve" (Linn, 1989, p.1).

Over the past 50 years of attitude research, various definitions for the psychological construct of

attitude have been offered. Many researchers have come to the conclusion that to define attitude is to involve some type of an evaluation process. Seeing a need to study specifically writing attitude and its measurement, Linn (1989) designed a reliable, valid Likert-type scale which measures three factors of writing attitude: context, process, and evaluation.

The theoretical rationale behind Linn's scale is based on the Social Learning Theory of attitude change. Linn summarizes the research of Zimbardo, Ebbesen, and Maslach (1977) to explain this particular theory:

This theory is based on the assumption that attitudes are shaped by situational influences and that there is a continuous and reciprocal interaction among a person's behavior, thoughts, expectations, and so forth, and the environmental consequences of resulting behavior. (Linn, 1989, p. 8)

Therefore, to define writing attitude, and to be able to measure it, one must likewise view writing attitude as a construct which is learned, shaped, and ever-changing. It seems best to define writing attitude in terms of how it is developed and measured, rather than as a stagnant, quantitative concept alone. Linn narrows the Social Learning Theory of Attitude change to develop a working definition of writing attitude when he states that, "...a person's attitude about writing is shaped by constant and reciprocal

interaction between the person's writing behavior and the environmental consequences of that behavior" (Linn, 1989, p. 9).

Relationship Between Writing Attitude and Writing Behavior

Just as there exists a close and intriguing relationship between the general concepts of attitude and behavior, the same relationship holds true when studies are made of these concepts as they pertain specifically to writing.

In a discussion of the writing behaviors of senior high school students, Stallard (1974) expresses the idea that, "Essentially, the complex question of what happens when good writers attack a writing task remains unanswered" (Stallard, 1974, p. 206). However, in his study, Stallard attempts to analyze the behavior of a group of "good" senior high school student writers (as determined by the STEP Essay Writing Test). His conclusions divide the writing behaviors of his subjects into four general categories: the amount of time spent on a writing task, the amount and nature of revisions which are made, the tendency to stop and reread what has been written, and the ability to write with a clear purpose in mind. Stallard finds that

those students who are good writers spent more time completing their writing tasks, make more single word revisions and significant changes within paragraphs, frequently stop writing in order to reread what they have accomplished up to that point, and finally, are able to express that they thought about the purpose of their writing before beginning to write and during the writing process itself (Stallard, 1974).

Even though Stallard's research deals only with the behaviors exhibited by good writers, his final conclusions still seem to turn inward: focusing back on the writer rather than merely defining behaviors as he states:

...writing may in itself be an act of perception conceptualization. The writer feels the need to take note of what is evolving on the page, to experience it for himself. Such experience might influence the writer's perspective of the message and exert some control over what comes next. (Stallard, 1974, p. 218)

This act of conceptualizing perceptions, or having writing attitudes relate directly to writing behaviors, is not merely limited to the writing experiences of senior high school students. Researchers tend to find a positive relationship between writing attitudes and writing behaviors in elementary students as well, especially in the lower elementary grades. Shook,

Marrion and Ollila's (1989) research shows this relationship with 108 children in Grade 1 and Grade 2 in British Columbia. Their research uses a survey of open-ended interview questions and their data are analyzed descriptively. Their conclusion states:

The attitudes of these Grade 1 and Grade 2 children were positive. They understood that writing is important for many reasons....They observed other writers and were able to perceive their own strengths and weaknesses in the writing process. They enjoyed writing and had much more information to teach us about learning to write than we currently have. These findings indicated that children's viewpoints are crucial in understanding how young writers develop. (Shook, Marrion, Ollila, 1989, p. 137-138)

McPhillip's (1985) research shows similar positive findings with fifth-grade students. Her research is based on a classroom project involving seven student writers. She provides quotes from these students which show how the beginnings of a positive "writer's conscience" affect the decisions which are made in the writing process.

I want the reader to come inside my story and feel they've been somewhere.
(Arista)

I try to hook myself. That makes me feel comfortable with what I write.
(Vicky)...

My kind of writing is, I try to put my feelings in certain ways that show the point of me. I always think how I will react to my own words; I want to show who I am. (Ruth)...

I do a lot of thinking about the reader, but I put myself first. If it satisfies someone else but not me, then it's still not good. I am influenced with writing.
(Emily)
(McPhillips, 1985, p. 618)

Solsken's (1985) classroom research provides additional insight into the relationship between writing attitudes and behaviors among first-grade students. As a participant observer in a first-grade classroom, Solsken's research includes highlights from the learning biographies of four first-grade students as they interact with the texts of various published authors and ultimately become authors themselves. Solsken's summation of her work shows how the attitudes of the students influence their writing behaviors.

We saw that children's motivations and self-perceptions as readers and writers were the ground of meaning making and thus of authorship. The connections children made to texts in reading and writing were related to their motivations and self-perceptions, their strategies and competence with written language. Children were authors of their own learning. (Solsken, 1985, p. 497)

However, not all children have such a positive relationship between their writing attitudes and behaviors. Shook, Marrion and Ollila (1989) comment in the introduction of their study that "Research has shown,...that as writing abilities improve with age and experience, students' enjoyment of writing declines"

(Shook, Marrion & Ollila, 1989, p. 133). McLeod (1987) provides a confirmation of these findings in her observation of college freshmen.

Beliefs are convictions that are not necessarily provable. Our students come to us with a great many beliefs about writing which diminish their perception of their own skills as writers. Some of these are general cultural beliefs: good writers do not struggle but wait until inspiration visits; writing skills equal editing skills; the study of grammar will make you a better writer. But they also come with beliefs about themselves as writers. One interesting avenue of exploration is the issue of locus of control - some students perceive their successes and failures in writing as controlled by outside forces, such as luck or the teacher (an external locus), while others see the same results as stemming from their own capabilities (an internal locus). (McLeod, 1987, p. 429)

Though the causes of a negative writing attitude may vary, researchers point out that such an attitude ultimately affects writing behavior. In fact, Daly and Miller (1975) define a highly apprehensive individual as one who "...will avoid communication situations or react in some anxious manner if forced into them because he foresees primarily negative consequences from such engagements" (Daly & Miller, 1975, p. 243).

In a study involving 246 undergraduate students who were enrolled in either basic or remedial composition courses, Daly and Miller (1975) compare the

subjects' scores on their writing apprehension measure with the subjects' SAT-Verbal scores. The researchers believe both scores to be related to the subjects' expectations of success in writing as well as their willingness to take advanced courses in writing. Daly and Miller (1975) find that writing apprehension, as determined by their writing apprehension instrument, correlates with these two variables significantly more than do the scores obtained from the SAT. Daly and Miller (1975) conclude:

...students voluntarily enrolled in advanced writing courses were significantly lower than others on writing apprehension. This lends support to our suggestion about the effects of apprehension. Not only do high apprehensives report an unwillingness to take more course work in writing, but indeed they seem to indicate this in their behavior. (Daly & Miller, 1975, p. 255)

Faigley, Daly, and Witte's (1981) research involving 110 undergraduate students shows that writing apprehension as determined by the Daly-Miller writing apprehension instrument affects writing competency and writing performance. Eight standardized measures were used to assess the writing competency of the subjects in this study. On all but two of these measures, the subjects who were "high apprehensives" scored lower than those who were "low apprehensives". Faigley et al. conclude that:

Apprehension also played a significant role in writing performance. Highly anxious writers produced essays significantly shorter and less syntactically "mature" or "fluent" than their low-apprehensive counterparts. These findings provide insight into how writing apprehension may relate to actual writing behavior. (Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981, p. 19)

Wolcott and Buhr's (1987) research on writing attitudes involves the use of a different writing attitude questionnaire. This instrument received a rating of .79 with the Pearson Product Moment Correlation when assessed for reliability. On the basis of this questionnaire, 100 undergraduate students who had received SAT scores below 840 were labeled as having either a "high", "medium", or "low" attitude toward writing. To determine the writing growth of these students the researchers collected data from pre-post performances on two measures, multiple choice tests of editing skills and timed expository essays. While the findings do not show a significant relationship between writing attitude and improvement on the editing test, there is a significant relationship between writing attitudes and improvement on the written essays. Wolcott and Burr state:

Thus, students with very positive writing attitudes received significantly higher post-test essay scores than did those with low writing attitude scores... These results confirm the findings of

Daly, Miller, and others concerning the negative effects of apprehension on writers. For us, these results reinforce the need for basic writing teachers to recognize the impact apprehension may have on students in basic writing classes. (Wolcott & Buhr, 1987, p. 6)

Brand (1987) expresses a similar desire to see further research which would make knowledge about the affective processes of students available. She states that students as well as teachers would find such knowledge to be useful. To reinforce this point, she summarizes the work of Murray (1978) by stating:

Students should know what their emotions can and cannot do during writing. They should become familiar with the emotional as well as intellectual cues that tell them they are ready to do a number of things in between. (Brand, 1987, p. 441)

In the introduction to her research on the relationship between expressive writing and reading comprehension, Collins (1985) states that in order for learning to be significant it is imperative to keep the student as the focal point. While her research does not specifically involve writing attitudes, she still manages to capture the essence of the relationship between attitudes and behavior as she maintains her focus on the child. She states:

...learning may be either effective or less than effective, depending upon

its significance to the learner. Less effective learning can be as perplexing and meaningless as a list of nonsense syllables while, in contrast, significant or experiential learning requires personal involvement, is pervasive, and makes a difference in the behaviors and attitudes of the learner. Significant learning must be regarded as the only possible goal of education. (Collins, 1985, p. 48)

Scales Used to Measure Writing Attitude

Informal Scales

Different teachers and researchers develop various informal methods which can be used to assess the writing attitudes of students. Depending on the intent of the research, such informal scales and methods can be interesting and thought provoking, although lacking in statistical validity and reliability. Collins (1985) asked the students in her reading course to write for ten minutes to express how they felt about writing. Her intent was not to merely assess writing attitudes, but to make a response to these attitudes, as in a letter, which was then returned to the student.

Many researchers develop open-ended questionnaires or conduct interviews to informally assess writing attitudes. Shook, Marrion & Ollila (1989) developed an unstructured survey of open-ended interview questions to be used with first and second-graders in order to

study primary children's concepts about writing. Their data were reported descriptively using percentages and were arranged into three categories: the student's perception of the general purpose for writing, the student's personal preferences, and the writer's self-concept. Barbieri (1987) prepared a questionnaire which was administered to her seventh-grade male students. Her purpose was to determine why seventh-grade students write. Her data were also reported descriptively in a journalistic type of narrative, one entry for each student who had been surveyed. Crenshaw (1985) used informal interviews with kindergarten students in order to describe the influences that affected literacy within a kindergarten classroom.

Other researchers use informal surveys which include some assessment of a writing attitude as a basis for making a comparison between two issues. Jeffery (1981) developed an open-ended questionnaire to be used in comparing the perceptions which teachers and students have regarding the writing process. He reported his data descriptively, using direct quotations and categorizing the responses of his subjects. Rasinski and Deford (1987) developed a forced-choice questionnaire which was used to assess students' perceptions, interests, and behaviors toward

writing. Their data compare the writing attitudes of third and fourth-grade students who were involved in a basal reading series and a "traditional" writing program to those students who were involved in a "more informal or open approach to literacy education" (Rasinski & Deford, 1987, p. 4).

Other researchers use informally developed surveys for the sole purpose of assessing writing attitudes. While these surveys may prove useful or interesting to the individual researcher, they are not statistically reliable or valid. Giordano (1989) devised his own tool to assess the writing attitudes of elementary students. In his "Attitude Toward Writing Inventory" students respond to ten statements of preference from which a cumulative score determines whether the student has one of three attitudes in regard to writing: positive, mixed, or negative (Giordano, 1987).

Another teacher, McGuire (1988), informally assesses writing attitudes from a slightly different perspective. Instead of assessing student attitude in regard to the writing process in isolation, she examines the reaction of her students immediately after they have been involved in an in-class writing activity. McGuire has a series of questions which she

personally presents to each student in her class. As a result of using this informal survey, she has found three categories of reactions to be exhibited by her students: "anxiety," "euphoria," and "normal." McGuire states that most of her students exhibit a reaction which falls somewhere between anxiety and euphoria; which is what she refers to as "normal."

Formal Scales

While the research on writing attitudes contains numerous examples of informal scales used to measure this construct, there are also some examples of scales which are more formalized. Wolcott and Buhr (1987) developed a questionnaire which was used to measure the writing attitudes of undergraduate students. The researchers provide information of the scale's reliability, but nothing is mentioned about the statistical validity of the scale. Blake (1975) developed a scale to measure attitudes toward writing skills, varieties of writing, and types of writing. Once again, there is information provided on the scale's reliability but not on the scale's statistical validity. Emig, as cited by King (1979), developed scales which would assess the writing attitudes of both teachers and students. Again there is no information

given on the validity of either scale (Linn, 1989).

Perhaps the most commonly known writing attitude scale is the one developed by Daly and Miller (1975). This scale was originally used to measure writing apprehension in undergraduate students. Research provides information on the scale's statistical reliability. In addition, "Daly and Miller's scale appears to have predictive and face validity" (Linn, 1989, p. 3).

Linn (1989) also has developed a scale to measure writing attitudes. This scale was determined to be both statistically valid and reliable. The scale involves seventeen statements which the subject must respond to by selecting one of five choices: strongly agree, agree, undecided/neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. As a result of completing the survey, the subject is placed into one of three categories: those who have a positive writing attitude, those who have an ambivalent attitude toward writing, or those who have a negative writing attitude. While Linn's scale was originally developed and tested using undergraduate students, he was able to approve some slight variations in the wording of the statements which enable the scale to be used with elementary school students as well.

The Impact of Teacher Attitudes & Behaviors

The writing attitudes of students are influenced by numerous forces from within and without. Yet, current research points to the teacher of writing as being one who has a significant impact on students' attitudes and behaviors. In discussing the results of a study which showed that a class instructed through experiential learning (a non-cognitive process) displayed twice the growth in writing skills as those in a control group, Denman (1978) states:

The premise behind the use of non-cognitive processes is that most of what goes on in any classroom is emotional or affective, rather than cognitive, and that this non-cognitive component of the classroom experience profoundly affects every student, either enhancing or inhibiting his growth and performance. And this is particularly true in respect to teaching writing. (Denman, 1978, p. 43-44)

Numerous teachers give personal testimony of the importance of the interaction which exists between teacher and student as they have witnessed it within their own classroom or the classrooms of others. In describing a writing program which can be used for poor readers and writers, Gaskins (1982) summarizes by stating, "Teachers, not textbooks, workbooks, or skillsheets, hold the secret to student improvement in writing" (Gaskins, 1982, p. 860). Jackson, Tway and

Frager (1987) point out that one of the reasons that students resort to plagiarism may be their fear of not having their own work being worthy of their teacher's acceptance. "...too much emphasis on the writing product often makes a child fear that his or her own work is unworthy....a teacher must receive a child's writing before commenting on it" (Jackson, Tway & Frager, 1987, p. 23).

Jensen (1984) stresses the importance of studying journals as an approach to experiencing self-awareness. His closing statement draws attention to the relationship between students and teachers. He states that:

...by providing opportunities to witness the internal struggles of others, educators can remind students that we are indeed more similar than different - and that this fact makes communication in all its facets worth studying and sustaining. (Jensen, 1984, p. 241)

Numerous researchers examine the interaction which occurs between the writer, a teacher, and the feedback which a writer receives. Gee's research (1972) shows how students are affected by praise, negative criticism, and an absence of any comments. His conclusions show no significant difference in the quality of what is written. However, those students who receive negative comments or no comments write less

than those students who receive positive comments. The recipients of the negative comments or lack of comments also display more negative attitudes about the writing experiences involved in the study than do those students who receive praise (Gee, 1972).

Hillocks, Jr.'s (1982) research also examines the effect of teacher comments. His study does not focus on student attitude, but rather on the quality of the students' written work. He finds that short comments which are positive and which focus on a particular aspect of the written process can be effective in producing better quality from student writers (Hillocks, Jr., 1982).

Brimner (1982) cites numerous studies which give conflicting results as to whether positive or negative comments make a difference in students' written work. In order to eliminate the limitations of many of these previous studies, Brimner conducted his research over an eight week time period, which is longer than that of many of the aforementioned studies. Brimner's work divides eleventh and twelfth-graders into two groups, one group receiving positive reinforcement, the other group receiving negative reinforcement. The results show that both groups improve in the content of their writing. However, there is an observable difference

in the attitudes of the students as a result of this interaction with teachers. Brimmer states that, "Students receiving negative reinforcement were more apt to respond affirmatively that comments on the paper made them feel angry with themselves" (Brimner, 1982, p. 59). He concludes by emphasizing the importance of maintaining a positive relationship between the teacher and the student of writing.

Students receiving negative criticism over a period of years may develop unhealthy attitudes about writing, about their work, or worse yet, about themselves, which may be irreparable. (Brimner, 1982, p. 59)

Ellis (1988) simplifies Brimmer's research by forming a checklist of ways in which children can be encouraged in their writing. Ellis states that teachers should urge students to continue writing, urge them to try different styles, urge them to read, prod them toward revision, and finally, teachers should tell students that they are loved regardless of whether they write or not. This last item on Ellis's checklist may seem insignificant and yet, once again, teachers are reminded that it is not sufficient to merely throw an assortment of procedures at a student and expect success. When dealing with children, it is important to actually deal with the children.

A published writer and instructor of prospective teachers, Fox's (1988) writings search for an answer to the question of why writers write. In her paper she too makes a list to be used by teachers of writing. While her list contains several practical suggestions, it is her concluding statement which sums up the main idea of her article. In this statement, Fox displays her concern for both the teacher's and the student's perception of themselves as teachers, learners, and writers. She writes:

I don't mind if you forget everything that I have written in this paper except for one phrase: "to ache with caring." If we as teachers ache with caring it will, perhaps, be possible for us to create classroom communities within school communities in which writing matters because it's done for real reasons by real writers who "ache with caring" for a real response. (Fox, 1988, pp. 124-125)

Lee (1987) mirrors this perception in her paper which contains personal reflections on teaching a class of undergraduate pre-teachers of writing. In this class, Lee models the establishing of a positive relationship between teacher and students. In her comments on future implications she states:

Teacher trainers should be concerned about pre-service teachers' attitudes toward writing since they may be passed along to the children who will one day be in their classrooms. (Lee, 1987, p.13)

Ultimately, researchers stress the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student in order to more finely focus attention on the child's attitude and growth as a writer. McGuire's (1988) concluding statements in her classroom research on students' reactions to writing deal with the issue of teacher-student interaction by clearly illustrating this focus on the child. She states:

Psychotherapists have known for a long time that bringing unconscious processes and thoughts into the conscious mind encourages personality integration and opens the door of self-development and growth....Making time for students to reflect on their own development and giving them a form in which to do it, it would seem, helps them to assume responsibility for their own growth. Creating more time for teachers to observe and reflect on their students' learning processes and behavior encourages student (and teacher) growth. (McGuire, 1988, p. 36)

This growth process as a result of observation, reflection, and personalization is encouraged and supported by numerous researchers dealing with varying aspects of the writing process. When examining the topic of written fluency, Bruton and Kirby (1987) are quick to focus on the writer as an individual in addition to offering suggestions for successful teaching techniques. They state, "Though such procedures may work for some students on some papers,

not all students think, work, or create alike..." (Bruton & Kirby, 1987, p. 90). These researchers express their opinion that the best methods are those which involve the writer at a personal level so that the writer has more of a sense of control and ownership. Barry's case study (1985) shows how a third-grade student who had achieved a sense of control in his reading behaviors was able to transfer that same motivational attitude in order to apply it in new situations which required him to write.

Brooke's research (1988) dealing with the integration of literature and writing in the writing classroom also stresses the importance of the student taking ownership in the writing process. In fact, Brooke's research goes beyond assuming ownership. Brooke focuses on the student's identity as a writer, and the student's perception of this identity. Having organized a course of study which enables students to focus on modeling the identity of a writer, Brooke forms his conclusions by stating:

To be exploring why people write and to be trying to act as writers themselves was more worthwhile than imitating forms...students feel they learn more by imitating identities rather than imitating forms or processes. Imitating an identity gives students a reason for the behavior - they perceive a model of someone they'd "like to be

like", and try to copy it. Imitating a form or process is only a forced exercise, divorced from the identity and life of the student. When students perceived a "writer" as something they were or would like to be, they strove to act appropriately. (Brooke, 1988, p. 37)

To "divorce" writing from "the identity and life of the student" is a futile endeavor which will inevitably lead to very limited success. Guilbault states that, "...children cannot leave their lives, like rain boots, at the door to the classroom to be retrieved on their way home" (Guilbault, 1988, p. 464). As vital as it is for teachers to be aware of successful procedures for instruction, as important as it is for children to "learn writing by writing," research also implies that it is equally vital for all parties involved to remember that it is essential to focus on the child's personal perception of him or herself as a writer. Perhaps an eighth-grade teacher sums up this idea most succinctly when she states:

Thus, in our former view, the underlying belief that, if the teacher did the right thing, the student would learn the right way....But if we think of teaching in a different way, as leading the students to discovery or guiding them to opportunities for understanding, we might instead become more interested in learning. To find out more about how students learn, we need to investigate the students - not by testing them, but by conversing,

observing, questioning, listening,
and reading their writing. As
classroom teachers, we are in the
best possible position to do this
type of research. My belief in the
importance of classroom inquiry has
led me to use it....(Warawa, 1988, p. 31)

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to survey a group of third-grade students and a group of sixth-grade students in order to investigate and compare their writing attitudes.

Research Questions

1. What percentage of the third-grade students who were surveyed have either a positive or a negative writing attitude?
2. What percentage of the sixth-grade students who were surveyed have either a positive or a negative writing attitude?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of the third-grade students who were surveyed and the sixth-grade students who were surveyed?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study were approximately 50 students drawn from two third-grade classrooms and two sixth-grade classrooms. To eliminate the possibility

of having the method of instruction affect the results of this study, one of the third-grade classrooms and one of the sixth-grade classrooms was located in a school district which uses Whole Language for reading and writing instruction. The other third-grade and sixth-grade classrooms were located in a school district which does not use Whole Language for reading and writing instruction. All of the classrooms were located in suburban schools in western New York.

Materials

1. The Writing Attitude Scale (W.A.S.) developed by Linn (1989) as a valid and reliable scale to be used to measure writing attitudes.
2. One letter, addressed to the teacher, as a brief form of introduction and explanation containing some simple instructions.
3. One stamped, self-addressed envelope in which the completed surveys were returned to the researcher.
4. One letter of introduction which was read to the subjects.

Procedure

This study was conducted through the distribution, administration and analysis of surveys which were designed by Linn (1989). Each participating classroom received a packet which included the

following materials:

1. a letter of introduction, explanation, and instruction to the teacher
2. a supply of surveys which were given to the students
3. a stamped, self-addressed envelope in which the completed surveys were returned
4. a letter of introduction to the students

These packets were given to two third-grade and two sixth-grade teachers in four suburban schools in western New York. Since the nature of the writing program which was being used may have had an effect on the results of the surveys, a counter balance was employed to eliminate this possibility. The surveys were sent to two classrooms (one per grade level) which used a Whole Language approach to reading and writing instruction and to two classrooms (one per grade level) which did not use a Whole Language approach.

A deadline for which the surveys were to be returned was established and communicated to the teacher in the letter of introduction. The researcher did not specify the exact day or time at which the surveys were to be administered. That detail was left to the discretion of the participating teachers. However, the teachers were instructed to have the

students complete the surveys independently in one sitting which should have taken no longer than thirty minutes at sometime during the school day.

Survey Pilot

In order to adjust the use of the W.A.S. from college aged elementary education majors to third and sixth grade elementary students, the researcher conducted a pilot study. Before administering the W.A.S., the researcher altered the wording of a few of the statements so that the vocabulary would be more likely to be comprehended by third-grade and sixth-grade students. It was determined by the scale's designer that this alteration did not change the content of the scale. The researcher also typed the W.A.S. so that the students were able to indicate their opinion about each statement by circling a letter which corresponded to the following categories: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree. This "altered W.A.S." was then administered to a group of 17 third-grade students and 24 sixth-grade students. These students were involved in a writing program which was based upon a basal series and supplemented with journal writing. First, the researcher orally presented the W.A.S. to the group of third-grade students and encouraged them to ask

questions about any statements which didn't make sense or to ask for clarification on statements which were confusing. From their input, the researcher made additional changes to the wording of the W.A.S.

The sixth-grade students in the pilot study were able to complete the altered W.A.S. independently. None of these students offered suggestions for clarification. However, even though the sixth-grade students in the pilot study were able to complete the W.A.S. without having it read to them, the researcher decided to keep the procedure consistent between the two grades. Therefore, in the letter of introduction and instructions to the teacher, the researcher requested that the teacher read each of the seventeen statements on the W.A.S. out loud for the students to think about and then indicate their opinion. This consistency in procedure was intended to eliminate the necessity of considering a student's reading ability in reference to his or her capacity to complete the W.A.S.

Analysis of Data

The first two questions in this study were analyzed descriptively using numbers and percentages. The final research question was answered statistically through a chi-square analysis.

Summary

This chapter has described the subjects, materials, and procedures which were used to compare the writing attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students. In this study, the data were analyzed both descriptively and statistically.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to survey a group of third-grade students and a group of sixth-grade students in order to investigate and compare their writing attitudes.

Findings and Interpretations

In this study, the third-grade students' scores on the W.A.S. fell between 40 and 83. The sixth-grade students' scores fell between a score of 33 and 82. Scores derived from the W.A.S. may be placed into three general categories: scores which indicate a positive attitude toward writing (score > 61), scores which indicate a negative attitude toward writing (score < 39), and scores which must be classified as ambivalent ($39 > \text{score} < 61$). Summaries of the data as organized into these three categories are indicated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Number of Students with Positive, Ambivalent and
Negative Writing Attitudes

	Positive	Ambivalent	Negative	Totals
3rd Grade	23	13	0	36
6th Grade	17	22	4	43
Totals	40	35	4	79

From these data, the researcher calculated the percentage of students for each grade level who obtained scores within the three specified categories. These data are indicated below.

Table 2

Percentage of Students with Positive, Ambivalent and
Negative Writing Attitudes

	Positive	Ambivalent	Negative
3rd Grade	63.89%	36.11%	0.00%
6th Grade	39.53%	51.16%	9.30%

The data show that 63.89% of the third-grade students had a positive attitude toward writing as determined by the W.A.S. Only 39.53% of the sixth-grade students had a score which indicated a positive attitude toward writing. None of the third-grade

students had a negative attitude toward writing as determined by the W.A.S. However, 9.30% of the sixth-grade students had a score which indicated a negative attitude toward writing.

Analysis and Interpretation of Hypothesis

In order to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students, a chi square analysis was completed. This analysis began with the establishment of a null hypothesis. In this study, the null hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students.

Table 3

Contingency Table for the Chi Square Study

Attitude Grade	Positive >61 C1	Ambivalent <61 >39 C2	Negative <39 C3	Column Totals
Third R1	23 18.228	13 15.949	0 1.823	36
Sixth R2	17 21.772	22 19.051	4 2.177	43
Raw Totals	40	35	4	79

The critical chi square value for retaining the null hypothesis is 5.99 for two degrees of freedom at 95% confidence level.

Table 4
Chi Square Table

Cell I.D.	fo	fe	(fo-fe)	$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$
R1C1	23	18.228	4.772	22.772	1.249
R1C2	13	15.949	-2.949	8.697	0.545
R1C3	0	1.823	-1.823	3.323	1.823
R2C1	17	21.772	-4.772	22.772	1.046
R2C2	22	19.051	2.949	8.697	0.456
R2C3	4	2.177	1.823	3.323	1.527
Totals					6.646

The data reject the null hypothesis because the value for Chi Square was equal to 6.646, exceeding the critical value of 5.99.

Summary

In order to compare the writing attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students the data in this study were analyzed both descriptively and statistically. The first two research questions were answered descriptively using numbers and percentages. The final question was answered statistically using a

chi square analysis. The data obtained from this analysis indicate that the null hypothesis must be rejected. There is a statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare the writing attitudes of third and sixth-grade students.

Conclusions

To achieve the purpose of this study, three specific questions were formulated and answered. The answers to these questions represent the conclusions.

In this study, the third-grade students displayed writing attitudes which were more positive than those of the sixth-grade students. This finding confirms current research which states that while young children frequently have positive attitudes toward writing, this attitude often becomes increasingly negative as students increase in age and experience. (McLeod, 1987; Shook, Marrion & Ollila, 1989; Solsken, 1985).

In this particular study 63.89% of the third-grade students who were surveyed were found to have a positive writing attitude. The scores which these students received on Linn's Writing Attitude Scale were greater than 61. Of the third-grade students who were surveyed, 0.00% were found to have a negative writing

attitude. A negative writing attitude means that the student scored less than 39 on Linn's Writing Attitude Scale. While the scores of the third-grade students were distributed between the categories of "positive writing attitude" and "ambivalent writing attitude", not one of these students was found to have a negative attitude toward writing.

This was not the case with the sixth-grade students. When the sixth-graders were surveyed it was found that only 39.53% had a positive writing attitude. In addition, 9.30% of the sixth-graders received a score which indicated that they had a negative writing attitude.

To answer the final question presented in this study, the researcher completed a chi square analysis to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the writing attitudes of the third-grade and sixth-grade students. The critical chi square value for retaining the null hypothesis was 5.91 for two degrees of freedom at a 95% confidence level. Since the chi square obtained was 6.646, the null hypothesis must be rejected. There was a statistically significant difference between the students within this study.

Based on the conclusions of the current study, it is the opinion of this researcher that more teachers should be involved in assessing the writing attitudes of students as they progress through their academic career. However, the assessment process should not be left in isolation. It is not enough to note that students seem to lose a positive attitude toward writing as they move through the system. Rather, teachers need to use the assessment to plan and implement programs which deal not only with an improvement in the skills of writing, but programs which also enhance the self-concept of each student as a writer. For in reality, teachers don't merely teach writing, they teach writers.

Implications for Research

1. In 1989 Dr. Jeffrey Linn developed a reliable and valid scale to measure writing attitudes. Linn conducted his research among elementary education majors who were predominantly female. In this particular study, the researcher adapted Linn's scale to be used with elementary age students. Further research might seek to prove that this adapted survey is a reliable and valid scale to measure writing attitudes among children who are in elementary school.

Likewise, an additional study could test the reliability and validity of this same scale among junior high and high school students.

2. In this study, the researcher surveyed students from both a Whole Language writing program as well as a basal-based writing program. The intent of this study was to compare the writing attitudes of students based on grade level, not based on the program of writing instruction. Additional research is needed to compare the writing attitudes of students within both types of writing programs; both at the same grade level, and as the students progress to higher grade levels.

3. In this study, the researcher surveyed students only. Additional research is needed to compare the writing attitudes of teachers with the writing attitudes of their students.

4. In this study, the researcher did not inquire into the students' family background. Additional research is needed to compare the parents' writing attitude with the writing attitude of their child. Likewise, research could be conducted to compare the writing attitudes of siblings to see if there is a statistically significant degree of consistency within a family.

5. In this study, the researcher compared the writing

attitudes of third-grade and sixth-grade students from a suburban population. Additional research is needed to include students from rural and urban populations or to compare the attitudes of students within the three various types of communities.

6. In this study, the researcher did not introduce or suggest any strategies for improvements in writing ability or attitudes. Additional research is needed to assess whether such an intervention would significantly alter the writing attitudes of elementary age students.

Implications for Classroom Practice

1. In his doctoral dissertation, Linn stated:

When teachers look at their students' writing attitudes, they could be looking at themselves. Christianson (1983) found teachers a major source from which student self-perception is derived. She reports that students can sense an underlying cynicism a teacher may have about a subject matter. Teachers of writing need to discover that improving their writing attitudes may help make their students confident and competent writers. (Linn, 1989, p. 131)

Thus, before beginning to assess the writing attitudes of students, it seems to be advisable to assess the writing attitudes of their teachers. In order to be able to be the most successful at developing a positive attitude toward writing among students, a teacher needs to possess such an attitude

to use as a model. Identifying teachers with negative attitudes toward writing could be the first step in changing those attitudes.

2. Obviously the Writing Attitude Scale could be used to help assess the writing attitudes of students at various age levels. In the lower elementary grades, the wording of the scale might need to be further adapted to adequately accommodate lower readability and comprehension levels. Identifying a student with negative writing attitudes could lead to a further investigation of the strategies which that student uses in the writing process. Further research could study the influence which significant others have had in that student's life which also may have affected the student's present attitude toward writing. Once a student has been identified as having a negative attitude toward writing, numerous strategies could be employed in an effort to change that attitude.

3. Identifying those students who have positive, ambivalent, or negative attitudes toward writing could be useful to a teacher who is planning a specific writing program for a school year. Different instructional strategies could be used for the various student groupings in an effort to provide a

challenging, successful, instructional experience which would foster or help to maintain a positive attitude toward writing.

4. A teacher could use the results of the Writing Attitude Scale to match students up in a peer tutoring or cooperative learning experience. Those students with positive writing attitudes could be used to motivate the others.

5. Finally, a teacher could use the Writing Attitude Scale to assess the attitudinal growth of students over the course of a period of instruction. In the beginning of the year, the scale could be administered as a type of pretest. In the course of planning instruction, the teacher could develop attitudinal objectives from the content of the survey. At the end of a specified time period, the scale could be administered again to assess the degree of growth in the development of positive attitudes toward writing.

A great deal of research has involved the development and use of strategies to improve writing ability. For a long time, there was not much attention given to the question of a student's writing attitude. Perhaps, researchers and teachers alike, though well intended in their efforts, were falling into the trap

of that well known cliché; they were missing the forest for the trees. But now the time has come to deal with the forest; for the sake of the trees.

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Appendix A

Letter to Teachers

Dear Teacher,

I am a graduate student at S.U.N.Y. College at Brockport in Brockport, New York. I am currently conducting research in preparation to write my thesis on the perception which third-grade students and sixth-grade students have of themselves as writers.

It would be extremely helpful to me if you would set aside one specific time period during the school day (approximately 15 - 20 minutes) to administer the accompanying survey to your students. You may encourage the students to answer the questions as completely and honestly as possible reassuring them that these surveys will have no effect on their grades at school.

I am enclosing a letter of introduction which you may read orally to your class before beginning to work through the surveys. Once each student has received a copy of the Student Writing Attitude Survey, you may read the directions below and then proceed to read each of the 17 statements on the survey orally. Allow approximately 10 - 15 seconds between each statement to give the students time to circle their

response.

DIRECTIONS: TODAY YOU WILL BE COMPLETING A STUDENT WRITING ATTITUDES SURVEY. I WILL READ 17 STATEMENTS OUT LOUD FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT. AFTER I READ THE STATEMENT, CIRCLE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CHOICES TO SHOW HOW YOU FEEL: STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, NOT SURE, DISAGREE, OR STRONGLY DISAGREE.

Feel free to answer any questions which your students may have or to clarify any words which they have difficulty understanding. Please return the completed surveys to me by _____.

I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

Thank you for your time and for your participation in my project.

Sincerely,
Anne Shafer

Appendix B

Introduction to be Read to 3rd Grade Students

Dear Students,

I am a teacher who is going back to school. Part of my homework is to work on a project. I decided that I wanted to find out how students, like yourselves, feel about being writers. Your teacher has volunteered to help me by setting aside some time for you to be able to complete a survey for me.

These surveys will not count as part of your grade in school. After you finish answering the questions, your teacher will send the surveys back to me so that I can finish my project. Please answer each question as honestly and as completely as you can. Your teacher will read each question out loud for you and may answer any questions which you have.

Since each of you play an important part in my project, please work on your survey by yourself. Thank you for all your help. I really do appreciate your time and your hard work.

Sincerely,

Anne Shafer

Appendix C

Introduction to be Read to 6th Grade Students

Dear Students,

I am a teacher who is currently studying to receive my Master's Degree. Part of my final project is to write a thesis. I decided that I wanted to research how students, like yourselves, feel about being writers. Your teacher has volunteered to assist me by setting aside some time for you to be able to complete a survey for me.

These surveys will not count as part of your grade in school. After you finish the survey your teacher will send them back to me so that I can complete my thesis. Please answer each question as honestly and as thoroughly as you can. Feel free to ask your teacher any questions which may arise as you work.

Since each of you play an important part in my thesis, I'm asking that you work on these surveys independently. Thank you for all your help. I really do appreciate your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Anne Shafer

Student Writing Attitudes Survey

Grade: 3rd 6th
 Class: A B C D

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the letter that best describes how you feel about each of the following questions.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NOT SURE	DIS- AGREE	STRONGLY DIS- AGREE
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 scare me.	A	B	C	D	E
7. Writing assignments make me feel uncomfortable.	A	B	C	D	E
8. Writing for fun helps me to understand what I'm thinking.	A	B	C	D	E
9. I don't like doing fill-in-the-blank tests or short answer 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 relaxing activity.	A	B	C	D	E
14. It is not difficult for me to start writing a paper.	A	B	C	D	E
15. I feel sure of myself 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 is not very interesting to me.	A	B	C	D	E