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Is Cursive Handwriting a Needed Skill for the Twenty-First Century?

Margaret V. Ferris

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IS CURSIVE HANDWRITING A NEEDED SKILL FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

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
Margaret V. Ferris State University of New York College at Brockport Brockport, New York December 1997
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ABSTRACT

This study compared the attitudes of elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers on cursive handwriting. The investigation included secondary and elementary teacher requirements of cursive handwriting and special education students requirement of cursive handwriting. The subjects were educators from a middle sized urban school district in Niagara County in upstate New York. The results of the study came from a researcher prepared questionnaire. The research found secondary and elementary school teachers to have similar attitudes regarding cursive handwriting being a necessity for the upcoming century. The discussion includes technology as well as opinions to support the teachers' attitudes. The discrepancy between secondary and elementary teachers appeared with the requirement for special education students. Secondary teachers felt the requirement should be the same for all students regarding cursive handwriting. The elementary teachers, however, felt the need for making modifications in certain situations.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

There have been many reports and studies completed on handwriting which have included the controversy over print manuscript versus cursive script. The studies have focused on spacing, letter formation, speed, accuracy, pressure, and opinions on the types of forms that should be accepted. However, there is very little empirical research available to substantiate these studies. Also there are few data on educators' and employers' opinions on which style is the most advantageous. Graves (1979) theorizes in an article that, "Handwriting is one component of writing that illustrates the nature of children's decision making processes" (p. 16). Yet he does not specify one style over another. The research on classroom usage of the types of handwriting is extremely limited and dated. Educators' attitudes of handwriting research are also extremely outdated.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is three-fold beginning with the comparison of elementary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting to secondary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting. The second purpose being the comparison of cursive handwriting's requirement within the elementary
schools and the secondary schools. The third purpose being teachers' attitudes on whether or not special education students', mainstreamed or self-contained, requirements should be the same regarding cursive handwriting.

**NEED FOR STUDY**

Elementary teachers vary with great diversity on the topic of cursive handwriting. Teachers in favor of requiring all students to use cursive support this opinion by stating that secondary school teachers require students to use cursive. It would appear that these teachers seldom interact and are unaware of each other's attitudes and requirements. All students are required to learn cursive handwriting beginning in second or third grade. Students with disabilities, whether in self-contained classrooms or in inclusive classrooms, have the same requirement. These students struggle with academics regardless of which type of class setting they are in, however cursive handwriting still bears significance with some teachers. There is limited research on cursive handwriting as being a necessity for life. Research is needed to bring understanding to elementary and secondary school teachers as well as attitudes on special education students learning the skill.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions addressed in this study include:

1.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers have the same or differing attitudes regarding cursive handwriting?

2.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers require the same type of handwriting on assignments?

3.) Should special education students be required to learn cursive handwriting and use it regularly?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Mainstreaming: The process of integrating a student with disabilities into the general population.

Elementary Teachers: Includes classroom and special education teachers grades kindergarten through fifth.

Secondary Teachers: Includes classroom and special education teachers grades six through twelfth.

Consultant Teachers: Teachers who consult with classroom teachers regarding the special education students mainstreamed into the classroom. They team teach or work one on one with students within the mainstreamed classroom.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study should be considered in view of the following limitations. The respondents include only those teachers who voluntarily returned the questionnaire, rather than all of those who work in the elementary and secondary schools. There were no questions regarding the respondents' demographic factors which may have influence over their perceptions. Finally, all of the subjects were from the same urban school district. Teachers in rural or suburban districts may have differing opinions. While the results of this study are valid in this district, results may vary in other settings.

SUMMARY

This study attempted to ascertain the opinions and attitudes of elementary and secondary teachers on the subject of handwriting. The opinions on whether or not special education students should have the same requirements were also investigated.
CHAPTER II

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is three-fold beginning with the comparison of elementary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting to secondary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting. The second purpose being the comparison of cursive handwriting's requirement within the elementary schools and the secondary schools. The third purpose being teachers' attitudes on whether or not special education students', mainstreamed or self-contained, requirements should be the same regarding cursive handwriting.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

"Writing is the most important means of safe guarding the achievements of individuals or a succession of generations from being forgotten..." (Jensen, 1969, p. 17). However, the dual program of teaching manuscript and cursive handwriting has been the source of considerable controversy concerning the role of each style in today's elementary school curriculum in handwriting (Plattor & Woestehoff, 1971). There have been many reports and studies completed on handwriting which have included the controversy over print manuscript versus cursive script. The studies have
focused on spacing, letter formation, speed, accuracy, pressure, and opinions on the types of forms that should be accepted. However, there is very limited empirical research available to substantiate these studies. Also, there are few data on educators' and employers' opinions on which style is the most advantageous. Graves (1979) theorizes that, "Handwriting is one component of writing that illustrates the nature of children's decision making processes" (p. 16). Yet he does not specify one style over another.

**History**

Senner (1989) stated, "... writing is relatively new to man in contrast to spoken language" (p.1). Fairbank (1977) and Moorhouse (1953) in separate books described the history of writing that began with picture-writing that represented a scene to pictograms that represented signs to ideographs that represented ideas to the current system of the sound/symbol relationship. Before the creation of manuscript or cursive handwriting, there were many who used simple forms of the above mentioned techniques. Sumerian writing was the first language which was monosyllabic or simple pictures. Egyptian writing was broken down into three sections: hieroglyphics, hieratic, and demotic. Hieroglyphics were used for sacred writings on buildings and monuments. Hieratic writing was used as the beginning cursive-script and linking of designs. The Demotic writing was the most commonly used in everyday affairs which was more rapid flowing. The Chinese used calligraphy which began as pictures and evolved into letters. The Romans and Greeks began using it for religious purposes (Fairbank, 1970).
Penmanship began as an art form restricted to use by specially trained scribes. As education spread to the masses, the need for a simplified system of penmanship became apparent. The creators of such systems vied with one another to have their model script adopted by the schools. As these adoptions occurred, the systems became standardized and greater emphasis was placed on speed to meet the demands of a business and technological society. These changes moved penmanship from a craft to a process. (Eaton, 1985, p. 252)

The above quotation introduces the "craft to process" history of handwriting. Many believe that manuscript print came before cursive script, however the opposite is true. Cursive was the first form of handwriting used by the monks in transcribing holy documents. Connell (1983) states in his review of the history of handwriting, that when Charlemagne had discovered that each monastery was developing its own alphabet forms, he requested Alcuin to develop one alphabet for everyone to use. Before the Renaissance, "Charlemagne then decreed that the Alcuin's alphabet called Chancery Cursive should be used throughout his Holy Roman Empire, most of Western Europe" (Connell, 1983, p. 413). "The new 'chancery' script had the advantage of being compact, fast, and legible" (Osley, 1979, p. 72). In his book, Hooker concluded, "...holy books and books of philosophy were at last open to all" (p. 256). Since that time, various adaptations have been made to this style.

Connell goes on to state that, "In the Baroque period, following the Renaissance, extra curls and flourishes were added to Chancery Cursive, letters were joined into words, and an elaborate form of capitals was invented" (p. 413). "In 1922, a humane British educator, Margaret Wise,
invented a new alphabet for beginners" (Connell, 1983, p. 414). This method included only down strokes to avoid ink splashes. Two years later, Wise altered her opinion stating that her alphabet had led to many reversals. Her recommendation was to switch back to Chancery Cursive. All English speaking countries did so except American publishers who stayed with the "ball-stick manuscript" (p. 414) The D'Nealian alphabet has now been introduced as a cross between manuscript and cursive script, however it resembles Chancery Cursive.

In one study by Petty (1964), there were found to be sixteen commercial programs for cursive handwriting in use and ten partial programs. "The various handwriting programs show considerable divergence in letter forms, sequencing in the introduction of letters and recommended teaching practices" (Petty, 1964, p.840). In a review of literature, Briem (1979) criticized yet another variation of handwriting, "We inherited a great deal of our continuous trouble with handwriting from the copperplate model and the pen it was written with" (p.52). The copperplate model was the beginning of the print form for books.

Manuscript print was employed long after the use of cursive handwriting. "Acceptance of the manuscript alphabet in America was not immediate, as educators during the first few decades of the current century were staunch supporters of continuous stroke 'business hands' that were in use in commerce and personal correspondence" (Barbe, Milone, & Wasylyk, 1983, p. 397). Hence the beginning of a great debate, cursive or printing.

The beginning of the debate centers around when to transition from manuscript print to cursive handwriting. Currently the transition is made
between second and third grades, and manuscript strokes are separately formed using circles and straight lines, whereas cursive strokes involve the more complex French curves (Trap-Porter, Gladden, Hill & Cooper, 1983). In an article by Plattor and Woestehoff (1971), they stated the fundamental issue should not be when is transition best, but rather, is there a need to provide instruction in two different styles. It is their opinion that instruction of handwriting should consist of the development and maintenance of one writing style throughout the child's educational career and the advantages of manuscript outweigh those of cursive.

**Opinions from research and others**

In a research article, Hagin (1983) discussed the manuscript versus cursive writing debate. At the present time there is no standard accepted handwriting form for teaching beginners. She lists many reasons to support manuscript writing and also reasons to support cursive handwriting. These claims have not been supported by educational research.

Children are excited when they are first taught writing through manuscript and are just as enthusiastic when they advance to cursive. The two forms are separate yet complementary, and there are compelling reasons why both should be included in the academic repertoire of school children. (Barbe et al., 1983, p. 404)

The above quote is one of an immense selection of contradictory opinions. Lehman (1979) suggested that, "Handwriting is a craft that must be learned and practiced carefully to be made well" (p. 5). Within his article, Lehman reiterated this by arguing, "The commercial cursive now generally taught—if the schools give any attention to handwriting skills at all—is a
hindrance. By the time many students are in the seventh grade, the teachers cannot read their illegible scrawls" (p. 6). Groff (1975) stated his opinion in "Can Pupils Read What Teachers Write?" with "Manuscript handwriting should replace cursive handwriting as the style used by teachers for classroom writing" (p. 32).

Enstrom's (1960) opinion, "We should add cursive when careful study shows that the child is ready" (p. 307), seems to be an educationally sound view, however there are many that disagree with the introduction of cursive at all. In Connell's review of literature, she states that "Voorhis (1931) reported that manuscript was superior to a continuous stroke style of writing in its influence on beginning reading" (p. 403). In an article, Moore (1986) shared her opinion, "Cursive writing is more difficult to read than manuscript and more subject to variations of style which interfere with the message" (p. 139). Hagin (1983) also supports this by stating, "It resembles the print in books, so that the child does not have to accommodate two graphic styles" (p. 267). Manuscript is required through life in applications and documents. It also promotes the independence of letters within words in teaching spelling (Hagin, p.267).

In Moore's (1986) article, she stated "...research comparing the speed at which manuscript and cursive writers produced words has found that manuscript is just as quickly written as cursive" (p. 140). Another statement made by Moore (1986) is that when children are finally able to print with automaticity, they are told they will be starting all over again with a different type of handwriting. Western (1977), a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, discussed the difficulties of his son with handwriting.
Finally his son mastered the manuscript print. After his mastering the skill, he began to write stories without as much of a struggle. He thought that the teachers would be able to begin working with him on a host of important composition skills. However, the teachers began stressing cursive writing where his son began to struggle again. Western (1977) wanted to know when then did they begin teaching him how to write using correct compositional skills.

"Proponents for the cursive-only approach were unable to effectively counter evidence that manuscript writing is more legible than cursive writing, leads to greater gains in reading achievement, can be written faster, and is easier" (Graham & Miller, p. 15). There are multitudes of people who support these opinions or share similar ones.

To support cursive writing, there are an equal number of people that share this point of view. "A widespread belief among teachers is that manuscript writing is easier for young children to learn than cursive writing. Many experts in the field of special education, have come to realize that, in practice, the reverse is true" (Kaufman & Biren, 1979, p. 209). George Early (1973), in a paper he published, wanted to enter the ranks of those who were strong advocates for teaching cursive. "My experience with learning-disabled children is that cursive writing, if properly taught, is a powerful tool for upgrading academic achievement" (p. 107). In her article, Hagin (1983) explains the reason learning-disabled children may benefit from cursive as the connected style of the words permit the learner to deal with words as units. The individual letters are difficult to reverse, in contrast to the
manuscript letters. Along with these, Early (1973) stated, "For many children cursive writing involving a modification of the Fernald method typically results in rapid improvement in spelling and reading achievement" (p.108). However, Early (1973) stated one note of caution, that in teaching cursive writing, it is essential to teach the process of the orderly and rhythmical flow of those movements which cursive writing naturally encourages. "If the teacher does not exploit this built-in aspect of cursive writing, then cursive writing alone probably will not help"(p. 108). Early, Nelson, Kleber, Treegoob, Huffman, and Cass (1976) stated that cursive is better for students with learning disabilities because the words hold together and there is a certain rhythm, continuity, or wholeness to the words. They also found that manuscript writing demonstrated more transposition errors in spelling than does cursive writing.

When durability of the two styles was tested by Enstrom (1964) he found that printing by hand has no durability over long periods. "Lowered speed, poor quality, and serious fatigue set in. Cursive held up beautifully when compared with manuscript under pressure" (p.876). In an article by Early et al. (1976), they stated that the rhythmic flow of movement taught by cursive writing enhances fine-motor control. Kaufman and Biren (1979) listed four reasons that cursive writing is beneficial to students with learning disabilities. Cursive writing is continuous, connected, highly motivating, and in cursive, commonly confused letters no longer look alike (p. 210-211). There are also spatial considerations such as there is only one staring point for all cursive letters. Manuscript writing has nine positions. There are half
as many initial strokes for cursive than manuscript. This leads Kaufman and Biren to their final conclusion that, "The striking simplicity of cursive writing for the spatially disoriented child has not been fully recognized" (p.218).

In Watt's book, *Writing Systems and Cognition* (1994) he discussed each person's handwriting being different due to each neurological circuit being different. Handwriting, in either manuscript or cursive, will be done to each individual's own style and you cannot force people to write like the example. There are many who support this view. Fairbank (1970), and Petty (1964) both suggested that since every person is different, every person's handwriting is different even though the style of writing might be the same. "Throughout the grades, uniformity of handwriting style should be maintained. Exposing children to two or three different styles within a six-year period is comparable to making them learn various alphabets" (Lauriana, p.854). In both styles of handwriting, speed is extremely vital to handwriting efficiency (Enstrom, p.875). These are not entities that can be discussed separately.

There is a diverse group of opinions that are contradictory. Some experts say cursive is faster, where others say printing is faster. There are some experts who say printing is more legible than cursive while others disagree and state the exact opposite. Opinions are, as we know, neither right or wrong as long as they are considered opinions and not fact.
Empirical Research

In a research study by Groff (1964), he asked sixty-one directors of elementary education in central cities of metropolitan areas in the United States, why their school districts changed from manuscript to cursive handwriting. Forty-one percent stated cursive was the better style because it was "better preparation for an adult occupation," and 91.8% saw it as the traditionally accepted form. The purpose of this study was to see what employers had to say about the two styles of handwriting. Only 14.3% believed cursive handwriting better satisfied occupational need. Thirty-three percent believed manuscript handwriting better satisfied occupational need, and the remaining 52.7% said either style was acceptable as long as it was legible (pp. 863-865). Educators and employers seem to hold differing opinions as far as handwriting goes. This proposed research study on the opinions of elementary teachers versus the opinions of the secondary teachers resembles the above mentioned study.

Keeping tradition in mind, educators and business people seem to need to discuss these issues on usage and importance. Reasons to support these opinions when dealing with children, should be educationally researched and sound decisions. "Poor teaching of handwriting is the most expensive time waster in schools today (Enstrom, 1964, p. 306) is one opinion that has led us to seriously investigate how and why we are teaching what we are teaching. Communication is a key ingredient within schools and this study hopes to clarify teachers' opinions from one large urban school district.
CHAPTER III
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the opinions and attitudes of elementary and secondary teachers regarding the requirements, usage, and necessity of cursive handwriting including general education and special education students.

Questions

1.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers have the same or differing attitudes regarding cursive handwriting?
2.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers require the same type of handwriting on assignments?
3.) Should special education students be required to learn cursive handwriting and use it daily?

Methodology

SUBJECTS

The 151 subjects in this study were teachers from grades kindergarten through twelfth grade in the elementary, middle, and high schools of an urban district in upstate New York. The subjects included in this study were both general classroom teachers and special education teachers.
INSTRUMENTS

The study used a questionnaire developed by the researcher (see Appendix). A draft of the questionnaire was examined by a group of regular and special education teachers in order to gain feedback to complete the final draft. As a result, the questionnaire was clarified before the actual questionnaire was distributed. The questionnaire included questions on the teachers' years of experience, background, and opinions on cursive handwriting regarding general and special education students. The questionnaire also invited other comments or suggestions for qualifying their opinions or the questionnaire.

PROCEDURES

To initiate this study, contact was made to the Director of Student Services and Special Education and the ten building contacts for distribution. These contacts introduced the study, requested permission, and identified the teachers who would participate in the study. The examiner delivered the bundled questionnaires to the contact person in each building which were then delivered to the teachers. A cover letter explained the study and requested the subject to complete and return the questionnaire by a specified date. The subjects received a thank you note the day before the questionnaire was due stating appreciation to those who had completed it and to encourage those who had not yet completed it to do so.
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results from the questionnaire were quantitatively calculated to compare the elementary teachers' versus the secondary teachers' opinions. Data collected were compared by percentages of the total responses. Qualitative analysis was also employed to look for trends in teachers' attitudes of cursive handwriting and students.

Summary

This study attempted to ascertain the opinions and attitudes of elementary and secondary teachers on the subject of handwriting. The opinions on whether or not special education students should have the same requirements were also investigated.
CHAPTER IV

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is three-fold beginning with the comparison of elementary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting to secondary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting. The second purpose being the comparison of cursive handwriting's requirement within the elementary schools and the secondary schools. The third purpose being teachers' attitudes on whether or not special education students', mainstreamed or self-contained, requirements should be the same regarding cursive handwriting.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

To determine the opinions of elementary and secondary teachers toward cursive and manuscript handwriting, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. A questionnaire was distributed to 160 secondary teachers and 143 elementary teachers with questions requiring a choice of answers and short answer questions. (See Appendix.) Percentages and mean scores were formulated to compare secondary to elementary teachers' opinions on cursive and manuscript handwriting.

From the 160 questionnaires sent to the secondary teachers, 75 (47%) were returned. From the 143 questionnaires sent to the elementary teachers, 76 (53%) were returned. The total number of years teaching experience was
calculated. (See Table 1.) For both secondary and elementary education, the percentages and mean scores were relatively close across the years. It was interesting to note the similar years of teaching experience across the secondary and elementary grades.

Table 1
Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number Returned</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 5 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 years</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question #1 of this questionnaire investigated the type or types of handwriting teachers require students to use within the classroom. The participants had four choices to choose from:

Cursive writing   Manuscript Printing   Both   No Preference

Table 2
Handwriting Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cursive</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Preference</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of secondary teachers had no preference for students' usage of a specific style of handwriting. Secondary teachers also recorded students using both styles as the second highest requirement. It was interesting to note that together, these two responses, added up to 91% of all of the returned questionnaires. Only one teacher or 1% recorded manuscript only and six or 8% stated cursive only. The comments made included, "both for classwork, but cursive for essays," and "depends on the particular assignments."

The elementary teacher responses were extremely close in two categories. Manuscript only requirement was 39% whereas both cursive and manuscript being the requirement, was 44% which made up 83% of the responses from the elementary teachers. Only three or 4% of the elementary teachers surveyed require cursive only and ten or 13% indicated having no preference. The comments made included, "depends on the assignments," and "depends on the time of the year...manuscript in the fall and cursive in the spring."

It was interesting to note that both elementary and secondary teachers did not require cursive writing only. The requirement of manuscript had a wide discrepancy between the elementary and secondary teachers, most likely due to the age ranges of the students. A large discrepancy was apparent with the choice of no preference. It seemed that the secondary teachers did not feel strongly about either style whereas elementary teachers felt strongly about both styles being used at specific times. Secondary teachers seemed to feel that handwriting was stressed in elementary school and that they have,
"more important things to teach." Both secondary and elementary teachers indicated using both styles was important in the classroom, "depending on the assignment."

**Cursive in a Student's Career**

Question #2 of the questionnaire investigated secondary and elementary teachers' opinions on whether or not they think that cursive handwriting should be taught at some point of a student's career. The participants had five choices to choose from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Necessity of Cursive</strong></td>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>Percentages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Unnecessary</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unnecessary</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Necessary</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelming majority of secondary teachers felt that the teaching of cursive handwriting was from somewhat necessary to vital. The highest percentage was in the vital range for the secondary teachers. Only 8 or 11% of the 76 respondents felt cursive handwriting to be a somewhat unnecessary to a completely unnecessary skill.
The elementary teachers' opinions fell within the same ranges. The elementary teachers' responses totaled 83% in the somewhat necessary to vital range. The responses were about even in each of the three categories. Only 13 or 17% of the elementary respondents felt that cursive handwriting was a somewhat unnecessary to a completely unnecessary skill.

**Special Education Students' Requirements**

Question #3 of this questionnaire investigated whether or not the requirement for special education students should be the same as general education students concerning cursive handwriting. The participants had only two choices, yes or no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEPENDS</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of secondary teachers indicated that they felt special education students should have the same handwriting requirement. Although there were only two answers to choose from four or 5% of the secondary teachers felt it necessary to add a third category. The comments made included, "depends on the severity of the handicapping condition," and "only if a physical disability is apparent."

The elementary teachers were almost evenly split with their opinions on the requirement of cursive handwriting for special education students.
Only six more of the teachers felt that special education students should not have the same requirement which made the "no" percentage 51%. The elementary teachers also felt a third category needed to be added. Their comments included, "there are more important skills that need to be learned," and "depends on the disability."

The secondary teachers and elementary teachers differ in opinions on this topic. The secondary teachers expect the special education students to have the same requirements including cursive handwriting. The elementary teachers felt that there were more important skills to stress for special education students.

**Student Choice**

Question #4 of this questionnaire investigated whether or not teachers would accept assignments in either style of handwriting, giving the students the right to choose. The participants were again given only two choices, yes or no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelming majority of secondary teachers stated that they would give the students the freedom to choose. Teachers commented, "students are old enough to choose their most legible style," and "whichever is the neatest." Only nine or 12% stated they would not give the students the
choice due to "the students not being mature enough to make that decision," and "essays should always be written in cursive."

The elementary teachers had a wider margin of opinions, however, 65% would give the students the right to choose. Of those, some comments included, "only on some assignments that I choose," and "only in fifth grade when they have had experience with it." The 35% that felt students should not have the choice commented, "students are too young to make that decision," and "need more practice...would always choose to print."

Is cursive handwriting a needed skill for the twenty-first century?

Question #5 of this questionnaire investigated whether or not teachers felt that cursive was a needed skill for the twenty-first century. The participants were given lines to write short answers. The data gathered were calculated in yes and no answers as well as with the most common reasons to support opinions.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cursive and the Twenty-First Century</th>
<th>Secondary Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEPENDS</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of secondary teachers felt that cursive writing is a necessary skill for the twenty-first century. The secondary teachers qualified their opinions with a diverse group of reasons. For the most common reasons, see Table 7. One teacher felt strongly, "this (cursive) is part of our heritage. We study other cultures and are losing our own by continually
Other secondary teachers stated, "Cursive is an art form, a way of expression." Another teacher felt cursive to be, "a left brain (language) and a right brain (spatial skills) interaction." Secondary English teachers felt cursive handwriting to be necessary, "for writing English papers, and essays like the authors of earlier decades." Two secondary teachers felt, "Cursive gives a note that personal touch. Writing a thank you note on the computer is very impersonal." Some secondary teachers believed, "Cursive provides fluid thought and organization."

The 30% of secondary teachers who stated no, mostly cited the computer age as their reason for not finding cursive necessary. Some felt that, "there is no link between the ability to write cursive and how a person functions in society." The remaining secondary teachers chose to write depends and stated, "Legibility is of biggest concern here. Communication is the key. The vehicle is not that important."

Elementary teachers' opinions on cursive being a necessary skill for the twenty-first century was a small percentage more than secondary teachers, but consistent with the secondary teachers' opinions. Elementary teachers that support cursive stated, "It helps with fine motor skills. It helps students define these fine motor skills." Two teachers stated their opinions come from parent expectations, "Parents expect their children to learn cursive. It seems to indicate a higher level of maturity." A special education teacher felt that cursive is, "a fluid connection which helps students with dyslexia. Cursive helps with spatial problems as well." One teacher felt, "Cursive teaches self-discipline which the children of today do not have." Another teacher linked cursive to abstract thinking.
The teachers who felt that cursive was a necessary skill stated computer use as their reason to support their opinions. One teacher stated, "Let's get back to the basics--Reading, Writing, and (A)Rithmetic." One administrator stated, "Let's stress the important 'stuff.'" Another teacher stated, "There are too many other important things to teach. Children today can't read or write one proper sentence." The small percentage of teachers who stated depends as their opinion supported that decision with, "Students should be able to read it, but not necessarily write it." Like the secondary teachers, these elementary teachers felt, "Legibility is our main concern."

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequent Responses</th>
<th>Secondary and Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signatures</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows the most common responses from both secondary and elementary teachers. Almost half of all teachers who responded recognized computers to be an important part of the upcoming century. Those who mentioned computers were both for the instruction of cursive and those who felt cursive to be not a necessary skill. Teachers for the instruction of cursive stated, "For students to become proficient computer users, they need to learn cursive. The thinking caused by cursive will stimulate higher level thinking skills needed for computer use." Teachers who felt cursive was not necessary stated, "With computers becoming a large part of the workplace, cursive will
become obsolete." "Computers are the future and will take over all forms of expression."

Some teachers, secondary and elementary, whether they felt cursive to be necessary or not, felt that a signature was necessary in cursive. A majority of teachers who answered "no" to the necessity of cursive did qualify their opinion with the need for a signature. Out of both, secondary and elementary teachers, 20% felt that cursive is a way of communication. One teacher stated, "This is what is wrong with society today...lack of communication. You see, with our high divorce rate and crime, people do not know how to communicate. This is one form we need to use to improve our society." The last most common response is that cursive is faster. There have been research studies that have investigated this theory and discounted it. One teacher wrote, "This is my opinion, cursive is faster. I have no evidence to support my opinion, but this is how I feel."

Summary

The data from this questionnaire indicated that a majority of secondary and elementary teachers feel cursive is a necessary skill for the twenty-first century. They cited students' needing to write a signature, communication, and speed to be cursive handwriting's major benefits.

A discrepancy between secondary and elementary teachers' opinions appeared with the question regarding special education students having the same requirement in cursive handwriting. The majority of secondary
teachers felt the requirement should be the same to promote equality. The majority of the elementary teachers felt the opposite, citing learning to read and getting the basic skills as more important.

A smaller discrepancy appeared in giving the students the right to choose a style of handwriting on classroom assignments. Most secondary teachers felt they give the students the right to choose. However, elementary teachers felt these students' maturity levels did not lend themselves to being able to make an appropriate choice. On classroom assignments, students in grades kindergarten through second are required to print, and grades three through five are required to write in cursive.

The secondary and elementary teachers stated the use of computers in the next century will change the way we look at the education of handwriting. A teacher stated, "I hope computers do not make all handwriting obsolete with students all using lap-tops."
CHAPTER V

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is three-fold beginning with the comparison of elementary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting to secondary school teachers' attitudes on cursive handwriting. The second purpose was the comparison of cursive handwriting's requirement within the elementary schools and the secondary schools. The third purpose was teachers' attitudes on whether or not special education students', mainstreamed or self-contained, requirements should be the same regarding cursive handwriting.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions addressed in this study include:

1.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers have the same or differing attitudes regarding cursive handwriting?
2.) Do elementary and secondary school teachers require the same type of handwriting on assignments?
3.) Should special education students be required to learn cursive handwriting and to use it regularly?
Conclusions

From this investigation, it can be concluded that elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers have similar attitudes on the necessity of cursive handwriting sometime in a student's career. For both sets of educators, more than eighty percent believe cursive to be a needed skill. Attitudes about teacher required style within the classroom varied. The majority of secondary school teachers had no preference for either style and accepted the students' neatest handwriting samples. Elementary school teachers were divided between manuscript and requiring both styles. Most elementary teachers felt students should use cursive in these grades as it is taught in third grade, students need continued practice. The high number of elementary teachers requiring manuscript only were in grades kindergarten through second, before cursive is introduced.

Student choice of a handwriting style created a more diverse group of attitudes among the secondary and elementary school teachers. Secondary teachers' attitudes were strongly for giving the students the right to choose their most legible style. A larger number of secondary teachers felt this due to the students having more experience with handwriting and being able to make an educated choice. Elementary school teachers were for the majority similar, however they would like to direct the students to the assignments for which they may choose a style. The elementary teachers felt that students would always choose manuscript and never learn cursive.

The special education requirement brought a difference of attitudes between secondary and elementary school teachers. A strong majority of
secondary teachers felt special education students should have the same requirements regarding handwriting. These teachers felt strongly that every aspect of education needed to be the same for "all" students. Contrary to this, a small majority of elementary teachers felt an exception should be made in handwriting for special education students. The elementary teachers were nearly split in half with this question. The elementary teachers who felt that an exception should be made, felt that requiring cursive handwriting would be a hindrance to an already frustrated student. The elementary teachers who felt cursive should be expected, felt that cursive is an added strategy to help benefit the special education students.

Secondary and elementary teachers' attitudes were the most similar in regards to the question, "Is cursive handwriting a needed skill for the twenty-first century?" Both groups of teachers felt that cursive handwriting is a part of our culture and heritage. The majority of teachers expressed the importance of cursive even though computers are becoming an integral part of instruction and learning. Teachers felt strongly that students should still be able to sign their name in cursive.

Overall, secondary and elementary teachers agree that cursive handwriting is a needed skill. The opinions to support their attitudes varied across grade level, subject area, and specialties. The participants were aware of the upcoming technology, however, they supported their attitudes with well thought out opinions.

As students progress through this school system, they are allowed to make more informed choices regarding handwriting. Secondary teachers held a slightly higher expectation for special education students, requiring the
same style of handwriting from all students. The elementary teachers were more apt to make modifications. However, a majority of this school district felt cursive handwriting to be a necessity for students.

**Implications for Educators**

Through this investigation, teachers from both groups made comments on the lack of communication across the grade levels. Some secondary teachers and elementary teachers were not aware of the grade levels that taught cursive handwriting. A school wide curriculum may need to be explored so that a unified system of teaching cursive handwriting could be used. While teachers felt a lack of communication, the educators of this district held similar attitudes. These educators may investigate other school districts to compare attitudes and policies.

Educators supported their reasons for their attitudes with information that has been proven false in research studies. Educators could explore this topic in relation to other school districts or educational research. The educators felt strongly about their opinions so they should become aware of the current research.

Educators should include parents in this discussion. As well as parents, employers may be considered due to the demands of jobs after graduation from school. Employers should have a voice in what students are learning since they are being prepared to become competent citizens to enter the work force.
The area of special education students' cursive handwriting requirements especially needs further discussion among teachers. For this issue, special education educators could support their colleagues with available research regarding special education students and cursive handwriting. Educators in this field also need to communicate due to the great diversity of attitudes among special education teachers. Communication is the key.

**Implications for Further Research**

Further investigation into the attitudes of educators on the subject of cursive handwriting is warranted. The low number of questionnaires returned may not show an accurate account of teacher attitudes across the grade levels. There were also three elementary schools and one middle school within this district that declined participation in this study.

Further investigation of the impact of technology on handwriting could become useful. A study of computer usage and its effects on handwriting, may change the attitudes of some educators.

Research on the benefits or overall effect of cursive handwriting on special education students would be extremely beneficial. Many diverse opinions on this subject warrant continued investigation. An investigation into the background of the special education teachers who had such a diverse selection of opinions may be advantageous. The background could consist of years teaching, educational background, philosophies, and teaching strategies.
Parental attitudes, as well as employer attitudes would be an advantageous area for educators to explore. As educators, we prepare students for the work force. To provide adequate training, employers' standards should be considered.

Further investigation across school districts, states, and countries could also provide important information regarding cursive handwriting. Comparisons of the curriculum and policies would provide school districts with important information regarding their students as compared to others.

An investigation into how school districts provide current research to teachers would also prove to be beneficial. Educators need to keep abreast of current trends and fields of study.
References


Appendix A
Hello Colleague!

My name is Margaret Ferris and I am the intermediate consultant teacher at Washington Hunt. I am completing my Master's Degree Program in Reading at SUNY Brockport by writing a thesis. My thesis is entitled, "Is Cursive Handwriting a Needed Skill for the Twenty-First Century?"

I need your assistance to complete my program. If you could take five minutes out of your busy schedule to fill out the attached five question questionnaire and return it to __________________ by October 31, 1997, I'd greatly appreciate it. While you are filling out your questionnaire, I've included this piece of candy for you to enjoy. The questionnaire is totally anonymous so please feel free to give your honest opinions. To be able to analyze data gathered, please record your grade level, subject taught, and student population. I would appreciate any comments you would like to make.

Thank you in advance for assisting me in finishing my Graduate Studies! Have a great school year!

Sincerely,

Margaret V. Ferris
Please answer all of the following questions.

Grade level: ______  Subject: __________________

Number of years teaching experience: ______

Number of Students: special education students _____
                      non-special education students _____

1.) What type or types of handwriting do you require your students to use?
   cursive writing  manuscript printing  both  no preference

2.) Do you think it is necessary for cursive handwriting to be taught at some point in a student's career?
   1 completely unnecessary  2 somewhat unnecessary  3 necessary  4 somewhat necessary  5 vital

3.) Do you think the requirement for special education students, mainstreamed or self-contained, should be the same?
   yes  no

4.) Would you accept assignments in either style giving all of the students the right to choose?
   yes  no

5.) Is cursive a needed skill for the twenty-first century? Why or Why not?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

**Please feel free to make any comments or explain any answer on the back of this sheet. Thank you again for your time and assistance.**
Thank you for your speedy return of my questionnaire! If you have not returned it, please do by tomorrow--October 31, 1997. I appreciate your effort in assisting me in the completion of my thesis!

Sincerely,

Margaret V. Ferris