A Comparison of Written and Oral Responses in the Silent Reading Comprehension of Fourth Grade Students

Maria Roides

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A COMPARISON OF WRITTEN AND ORAL RESPONSES
IN THE SILENT READING COMPREHENSION
OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

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
Maria Roides

State University of New York
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Brockport, New York
December, 1989
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the written and oral responses in the silent reading comprehension of fourth grade students of high-, average- and low-reading ability levels. Thirty students, enrolled in grade four of a suburban school in Western New York State constituted the subjects of this study.

The specific question to be answered was:

Does a statistically significant correlation \( r^2 \geq .50 \) exist between the written and oral responses to comprehension questions of fourth grade students of high-, average- and low-reading ability levels?

Students silently read three reading passages and responded to a set of comprehension questions developed for each passage. Each set of questions was answered twice, once in writing and once orally. A total written score and a total oral score was obtained for each subject. Each written response score was compared to its corresponding oral response score using a Pearson Product - Moment Correlation.

Results revealed that a statistically significant correlation did exist between the written responses and the oral responses to postquestions for fourth grade students.
SUBMITTED BY:

Maria Reidel

APPROVED BY:

[Signatures]

Date

[Signatures]

Date

[Signatures]

Date
Acknowledgments

This investigator gratefully acknowledges those professors of the State University of New York, College at Brockport, who aided in this research, especially Dr. Robert Ribble and Dr. Arthur Smith.

Deepest appreciation is extended to Dr. Gerald Begy, of the State University of New York, College at Brockport, for it was through his continued encouragement and generous giving of time and advice this study was made possible.

Appreciation is expressed to all the students who participated in this study.
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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension is a process which involves actively constructing meaning among the parts of the text and between the text and personal experience (McNeil, 1984).

Of all the strategies teachers may use to help students better comprehend printed texts, thinking-out-on paper is one of the most effective. Writing can help reading comprehension when it is used as an ongoing, integral part of the instruction, as well as a supplement to it.

The one most commonly taught comprehension lesson in school consists of the students answering questions on a short piece of prose or poem which they have read. These responses are often part of a written, independent assignment. Yet, how effectively does this procedure measure what the student knows? Are we measuring his/her knowledge of the topic or his/her written expression ability? When given the task of writing answers to questions, many students will produce responses that are short. They do not elaborate or produce work that reflects what they have comprehended. The writing task itself may be the obstacle. Given the opportunity to express oneself in an alternate mode may result in a more accurate measure of reading comprehension ability.
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if a statistically significant correlation existed between the written and oral responses to selected reading comprehension questions. Students enrolled in grade four from a suburban school in Western New York State constituted the subjects of this study.

The question to be answered was:

Does a statistically significant correlation \( r^2 \geq .50 \) exist between written and oral responses to comprehension questions of fourth grade students of high-, average- and low- reading ability levels?

Need for the Study

Reading teachers must remember that questioning is the heart of comprehension instruction. The success of other instructional efforts is largely dependent upon the success of the teachers' questioning strategies (Klein, 1988).

Much of the research in the area of postquestioning to monitor reading comprehension has taken the form of silently reading a short prose passage, followed by the student answering several multiple choice questions. Although this technique may prove to be the most effective and make the most efficient use of teacher and student time, this is not
the type of comprehension check that occurs in the typical intermediate grade classroom. Students at this level are frequently expected to read a selection from a basal reader and are assigned the task of answering a series of postquestions. Often these questions are to be answered independently, in complete sentence format.

These students often have a difficult time expressing themselves on paper. Therefore, the results of their written responses may not accurately measure the knowledge the student has about the selection. There is a need to compare written and oral responses to discover if there is, in fact, a discrepancy in the resulting information obtained from the student.

**Definition of Terms**

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

**High Reading Comprehension Ability** - students who have achieved reading comprehension scores at the 64th percentile or above based on the Stanford Achievement Test given by their school.

**Average Reading Comprehension Ability** - students who have achieved comprehension scores between the 41st and 63rd percentiles based on the Stanford Achievement Test given by their school.
Low Reading Comprehension Ability - students who have achieved reading comprehension scores at the 40th percentile or below based on the Stanford Achievement Test given by their school.

Adjunct Postquestion - a statement asked following the reading of a passage which is not a part of the text itself.

Limitations of the Study

The subjects for this study consisted of thirty students enrolled in suburban schools in Western New York State. Results may have varied with a larger sample. Students were enrolled in grade four. Results may have varied if a different age group had been studied.

This study is limited to the items represented on the instrument employed.

Summary

This study was a comparison of written and oral responses in the silent reading comprehension of fourth grade students. The question to be answered was: Does a statistically significant correlation ($r^2 \geq .50$) exist between written and oral responses to comprehension questions of fourth grade student of high-, average- and low- reading ability levels?
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Research has clearly shown the importance of the relationship between reading and writing, and the benefits of correlating them (Cooper, 1986; Devine, 1986; Klein, 1988; McNeil, 1987). Reading lessons need to include summary writing, paraphrasing, written reports, news articles, written responses and other paper-and-pen activities (Devine, 1986).

It is important that educators view the writing system as only one component of the reading situation. The other two components are the writer and the reader. The quality of reading, of the effectiveness of reading, or the level of comprehension achieved by the reader depends greatly on the interrelationship of these three components (Hodges and Rudorf, 1972).

The process of answering a question provides the reader with an additional opportunity to interact with the textual information. The integration of old and new information that occurs during this interaction results in an adjustment in the reader's existing schematic state.

Research findings are consistent in indicating that when questions are posed about the content of a text, readers recall more of that content than when no questions are asked (Anderson and Biddle, 1975). Information that is directly
questioned is better recalled than information that is not questioned, but there also seems to be some facilitating effect on the recall of unquestioned information. It appears that readers who encounter questions will begin to process the text more thoroughly in order to be able to answer succeeding questions. Anderson and Biddle hypothesized that asking questions that require understanding of a text will promote deeper processing, and therefore more learning and better remembering, than questions that require recall of specific facts only.

In the area of postreading questions, views of the effectiveness of such questions are mixed. Several researchers have found that postquestions provide an occasion for review of recently read materials, which strengthens memory of the information activated during review (Anderson and Biddle, 1975; Frase, 1967; Rickards, 1979). Nungester and Duchastel (1982) found that postreading questions were more effective than text review. Meyers (cited in Klein, 1988) found postquestions stimulated more general learning from text. Other researchers have found that postreading questions are not effective or can even be restrictive in some cases (Sagaria and DiVesta, 1978; Wixson, 1983). Several authors have warned that because questions have the ability to shape processing and recall, they should be asked only about the important content of a text (Durkin, 1981; Rothkopf, 1982; Wixson, 1983).
Heilman (1972) states:

A commendable practice in the intermediate grades is the use of teacher-prepared comprehension questions over the various subject materials covered. Such tests can serve two purposes. They are diagnostic from the teacher's standpoint, and they can provide excellent guidance (p. 425).

The use of adjunct postquestions has been studied by Ellis, Koneske, Wulfeck and Montague (1982). It was reported that adjunct postquestions can have two types of effect. First, there is a "direct effect;" that is, postquestion groups perform better than read-only control groups on final test questions that are informationally similar or identical to the adjunct postquestion. In addition, there is often an "indirect effect," whereby subjects receiving postquestions perform better than control subjects on final test questions that are unrelated or incidental to the adjunct questions (Anderson and Biddle, 1975; Rothkopf and Bisbicos, 1967). The indirect effect is important because it shows that adjunct questions that follow sections of instructional materials can help the student learn information other than the information covered in the questions.

Many investigators have hypothesized that the indirect effect occurs because the practice questions focus the student's attention on the type of question and/or type of information that will be included on the final test (Frase, 1967; Rothkopf, 1966; Wixson, 1983). Focusing is hypothesized to occur in two ways. First, the adjunct postquestions can alert the student to the type of
information to study. This is called the "forward effect," and results in increased attention to the text following the questions (McGaw and Grotelueschen, 1972). Secondly, if the student mentally reviews what s/he has just read in order to answer an adjunct postquestion, then s/he might also review, and perhaps learn material in the topico-spatial neighborhood of the directly questioned material. This is called the "backward review effect" (McGaw and Grotelueschen, 1972; Rickards and DiVesta, 1974; Rothkopf and Billington, 1974).

The use of inserted questions is one method that seems to be an effective aid in children's learning textual material. Moreover, post-passage questions have been shown to facilitate test performance more than prequestions (Frase, 1970; Seretny and Dean, 1986).

In a study conducted by Seretny and Dean (1986), second grade students were instructed using an interspersed postquestion technique. Although there was no statistically significant difference in the results for above average students, it was found that both average and below average readers profited significantly from instruction with interspersed postquestions. These results replicate the Swenson and Kulhavy (1974) study in terms of the comprehension and retention effects of postpassage questions with children.

Ellis, et al. (1982) conducted a study using college level students. Subjects silently read a short passage and then completed a written short answer test that required
recall of verbatim factual information presented in the passage. It was found that students who received the postquestion instructional approach scored significantly superior on the final test that those who did not receive postquestions. In a second phase of the study, it was found that paraphrased comprehension questions (Anderson, 1972) given during instruction leads to better performance on tests of meaningful learning. This finding is supported by others (Andre and Sola, 1976; Andre and Womack, 1978).

Sundbye (1987) conducted a study with third grade students. It was found that when students were questioned about material after reading, they were able to produce a higher percentage of added logical inferences than students who had not been questioned about the material.

Results of studies conducted in the area of postquestions may have been influenced by the mode the student uses to respond to such questions. In a study conducted with sixth grade good and poor readers, McConaughy (1985) found that regardless of reading ability oral recall conditions produced summaries with more explicit and implicit information than conditions requiring written recall. This finding is consistent with other evidence that school-aged children's oral language is usually more advanced than their written language (Graves, 1983; Smith, Goodman and Meredith, 1976).

Danes (cited in Spiro, Bruce and Brewer, 1980) found similar results for college sophomores. For these students,
oral responses, when compared to written ones on the same topic, were longer and contained more complex idea units.

Johnston (cited in Calhoun, 1974) and Nelson (cited in Calhoun, 1974) considered the relative effectiveness of testing versus interviewing as a means of examining college level students. In Johnston's study half of the students responded orally to fill-in items and half responded by writing out the fill-in items. Nelson compared performances as a function of thirty minute oral or thirty minute written examinations. Both studies measured the relative effectiveness of the different methods on two instructor scheduled essay course examinations and on attitudes by students. Both studies reported no difference in the effectiveness of the methods on either the academic or the attitude criteria. Calhoun (1974) conducted a similar study with college students. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in academic performance as the result of having taken written or oral examinations. However, subjects did report having a preference for oral examinations, finding them easier than the written examinations.

In Smiley, Oakley, Worthen, Campione and Brown's study (1977) of seventh grade good and poor readers, stories were presented under conditions involving listening and reading. Subjects were required to write their responses to story questions in both conditions. Although it was found that poor readers had more difficulty responding to questions, it
is not known if these difficulties represented a general comprehension problem or whether the difficulty resulted from the written expression requirement. It is also unknown whether these findings would carry over to oral expression.

Wixson (1983) found that when students were asked to read a passage silently and respond in writing to a selected set of questions, question-type did positively influence recall of non-narrative material. Wixson notes, however, that it is unknown whether similar results would occur if students responded to questions orally.

Hansen and Lovitt (1976) conducted a study with seven learning-disabled boys, ages nine to twelve. In this study the students were required to answer comprehension questions in brief written statements. It was found that comprehension of orally read material was generally higher than comprehension of silently read material. Hansen and Lovitt state that the mode of responding may have been an influential factor and further research is needed to investigate pupil performance using alternate modes for responses to comprehension questions.

Many reading comprehension lessons consist of a short selection followed by several multiple choice questions that test recall of specific information. Students often just have to locate the information and mark the correct response. Durkin (1978-1979) points out that these materials test comprehension, rather than teach it. In addition, the multiple choice format is the least effective way to assess a
student's comprehension (Wallen, 1972). The standardized reading tests employed by most schools use the multiple choice format. Guszak (1967) states that as these standardized reading tests tend to measure literal comprehension skills, it is difficult to make wide assessments of pupils' abilities in various reading-thinking skills.

Baumann's study (1983) further supports the finding that multiple choice format tests may not accurately assess reading comprehension skills. Third and sixth grade students were required to write a gist statement after silently reading a passage. In a second part of the study the students were required to select an appropriate gist statement from a list of seven. It was found that only 30% of the third graders and 40% of the sixth graders were able to produce an accurate written gist statement. For the multiple choice test, both third and sixth grade students were successful in recognizing the appropriate gist statement 70% of the time. Baumann's study indicates that children, in a natural school setting, after reading unaltered content area textbook passages are unable to consistently produce a statement that captures the gist or theme of the entire selection, but are capable of successfully selecting a similar gist statement from a list of choices.

Anderson and Biddle (1975) state that, in general, teacher constructed questions facilitate learning from prose. The effects are greater when the question comes after the
reading and when students respond freely rather than in multiple choice format. Having students create their own written accounts of silently read material is supported by Taylor (1982). She states that requiring students to produce their own written topic sentences, main idea statements and supporting details requires students to reflect on the material. They must process the text more deeply than they would if they were simply copying. Gipe (1978-1979) suggests that all learners be required to respond either in writing or individually, as opposed to using multiple choice measures, to be assured that learning has taken place.

**Summary**

A great deal of research has been conducted in the area of reading comprehension. This chapter has reviewed the use of postquestioning as a means of evaluating one's comprehension of material read independently.

Findings have been inconclusive and contradictory. Many researchers have found postquestions to be effective and provide the learner with an additional opportunity to interact with the text. Others believe them to be ineffective and in some cases restrictive.

In much of the literature reviewed, researchers have warned that the mode of response may have influenced the results of their studies. Of the few studies comparing written and oral responses to questions, most have involved students at the college level. As students at the elementary
grade level are often required to respond in writing to postquestions, it is necessary to study whether a written response to postquestions accurately measures the knowledge the student has about the text.
Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to determine if a statistically significant correlation existed between the written and oral responses to selected reading comprehension questions of fourth grade students.

Hypothesis
The following null hypothesis was investigated:
There will be no statistically significant correlation between the written and oral responses to comprehension questions for fourth grade students of high-, average- and low- reading ability levels.

Methodology

Subjects
The sample selected for this study consisted of thirty fourth grade students, fifteen girls and fifteen boys, from a suburban school in Western New York State. Students were divided into three groups: high-, average- and low- reading ability levels, consisting of eleven, nine and ten students, respectively.
Instruments

The second, third, and fourth grade level reading passages used were obtained from the Ekwall Reading Inventory - Form B. (1979). For each passage a set of seven postquestions to measure comprehension was developed by the researcher.

Procedures

The first step was to develop the postquestions for the second, third and fourth grade level passages from the Ekwall Reading Inventory - Form B (1979). The questions developed were designed to require the students to use factual and inferential information to answer each set of questions.

The next step was to gather the reading comprehension scores obtained on the Stanford Achievement Test from the participating students third grade records. Using these scores, students were divided into three reading achievement levels: high, average and low. The high achievement level group consisted of eleven students. Nine students were in the average achievement level group. Ten students made up the low achievement level group. This provided the researcher with a heterogeneous sample of fourth grade subjects.

The researcher then met with students individually. Before testing began students were told to provide complete sentences for their written and oral responses. For written responses, students were instructed to try to spell words as
well as they could. Students were also informed that their oral responses would be tape recorded.

Each student began by silently reading the second grade level passage. The student then answered the corresponding set of questions twice, once orally and once in written format. This procedure continued for the third and fourth grade level passages. In order to minimize the order effect, a counter balanced designed was employed. Subjects from each ability level were randomly divided into two groups. Subjects assigned to Group One answered each set of questions first orally, then in writing. Group Two subjects answered each set of questions first in writing, then orally.

Each testing session lasted approximately thirty minutes. If students became fatigued before completing all the testing, the first testing session ended and the researcher and student met again and completed the testing during a second meeting.

**Statistical Analysis**

A holistic scoring method was employed to rate responses. The written and oral responses were scored by two independent readers. Students' correct responses were given a rating of one, two or three points each. One point was awarded for responses which were correct but were not in complete sentence format. Two points were awarded to each correct response given in a complete sentence, but contained no additional information. Responses which were correct,
answered in complete sentences and for which the subject further elaborated on his/her response, received three points. If there was a discrepancy of three or less points for any set of responses, the scores were averaged. If the discrepancy was greater than three points, the set of responses in dispute were read by a third independent reader. The two closest scores were then averaged.

Each subject's total oral response score was then compared to his/her total written response score using a Pearson Product - Moment Correlation.
Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to determine if a statistically significant correlation existed between the written and oral responses to selected reading comprehension questions of fourth grade students.

Findings and Interpretations
This study was undertaken on a pool of thirty fourth grade students from a suburban school in Western New York State. The relationship between the students' written responses and the students' oral responses was moderately strong. The coefficient of determination was $r^2 = .53$ (see Table 1). This means that 53% of the variation in the students' oral responses was explained by the students' written responses; 47% of the variation remained unexplained. This finding runs contrary to the contention of the experimental null hypothesis that there would be a low relationship between the students' written responses and the students' oral responses.
Table 1
Student's Scores on Written and Oral Responses to Comprehension Questions

<table>
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<th>Oral Response Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>
For variable #1
Student's Written Responses
n = 30
mean = 30.2500
variance = 83.1164
standard deviation = 9.1168

For variable #2
Student's Oral Responses
n = 30
mean = 29.9167
variance = 53.9670
standard deviation = 7.3462

*****************************************************************************

 Pearson Product - Moment Correlation
*****************************************************************************

 Pearson r = .7273
 Degrees of Freedom = 29 (n-1)
 Coefficient of Determination = .5290
Summary

The relationship between the students' written responses to comprehension questions and the students' oral responses to comprehension questions was moderately strong. The coefficient of determination was $r^2 = .53$. The results demonstrated that a statistically significant correlation did exist between the students' written and oral responses to reading comprehension questions.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if a statistically significant correlation existed between the written and oral responses to selected reading comprehension questions of fourth grade students.

Conclusions

The results of this investigation demonstrated that a statistically significant correlation did exist between the written and oral responses in the silent reading comprehension of fourth grade students.

Implications for Research

In the past, much research has been conducted in the area of postreading questions. The area of written versus oral response has not been extensively explored. This study attempted to explore the relationship between written and oral responses. Future research involving subjects from a variety of grade levels may be valuable to explore more deeply the relationship between written and oral responses.

Other researchers have found that expository texts often pose comprehension difficulties for intermediate grade level students. Future research involving the use of content area
passages might prove valuable to explore more extensively the relationship between written and oral response.

Question type has been explored in many research studies. Future research investigating response mode may include comparing the quality of written and oral responses to various types of questions (e.g. factual, inferential) to further evaluate the relationship between written and oral response.

Effective research instruments designed to measure and compare written and oral responses might be developed. Validation studies on such instruments would be indicated.

Through the use of refined measurement instruments this study could be replicated, possibly on a larger scale, to explore more closely the relationship between written and oral responses to post-passage questions.
References


Bibliography


Appendix A

Ekwall Reading Inventory Passage - 2B

Kay was waiting by the door for the postman to come. Her father had promised to write her a letter. He told Kay the letter would have a blue stamp on it.

Kay saw the postman walking toward the house. The man was carrying a big bag on his side. The man reached in his bag and gave Kay some letters. One of the letters had Kay's name on it. When Kay read the letter she was very happy. She was so happy when she read it that she began to jump up and down. In the letter Father told Kay he was going to buy her a pony.

Questions: (researcher generated)

1. Whom was Kay waiting for by the door?
2. What made Kay think there would be a letter for her?
3. Why do you think Kay's father wrote her a letter?
4. Why did the man have a large bag on his side?
5. What made Kay jump up and down?
6. What makes you think Kay likes animals?
7. How would the story's ending have changed if Kay had not received a letter?
Dick and his father liked to go camping. Dick asked his father if they could go camping in the woods. His father told him they would go the next Saturday.

When Saturday came they got up early and rode in the car until they found an excellent place to camp. Father decided that they would put up their tent by a small river. They put up their tent and then gathered some wood to start a fire. After the fire was burning, Father got some food ready and Dick helped him cook it over the fire.

After they finished eating the watched the fire until it was time to go to sleep. When Dick and Father had gone to sleep something made a terribly loud noise and woke them up. Dick was afraid but Father laughed because it was only an airplane flying over them.

Questions: (researcher generated)

1. Why did Father and Dick go camping?
2. What did it mean when the story said they found an "excellent" place to camp?
3. Why do you think Father decided to camp near a river?
4. What type of equipment do you think they brought on their camping trip?
5. Why did they gather wood?
6. Why was Dick frightened by the noise made by the airplane?

7. What did Father do that would make you think he was not afraid?
Ekwall Reading Inventory Passage - 4B

One of man's best friends in North America is the bird. Birds are valuable to the farmer and gardener because they eat insects and weed seeds. Birds are also important to the hunter because they provide meat for his table.

When man first came to this country there were many game birds. However, when the white man started hunting birds for sport some kinds of birds were nearly all killed off. We now have much smaller numbers of wild turkey than we had in the past. In fact, some birds such as the passenger pigeon had all been killed or died by 1914.

In England a man might have been put in prison for taking wild birds' eggs from land owned by another man. A man might have been hanged for killing a deer on someone else's land. The Indians in North America only killed wild game to eat.

Questions: (researcher generated)

1. What is one of man's best friends in North America?
2. What does the word "valuable" mean in this reading passage?
3. In what ways are birds used by people?
4. Why have many birds in North America died?
5. Why do you think England had such strict laws for protecting wild animals?
6. What makes you think the Indians took better care of wild birds than the white man?

7. What do you think would happen if all the birds in North America died?