DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 447 CS 011 256

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TITLE The Relationship of Gender to Attitudes about Academic and Recreational Reading.
PUB DATE Dec 92
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Reading Forum (Sanibel Island, FL, December 9-12, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Elementary School Teachers; *Reading Attitudes; Reading Research; *Recreational Reading; *Sex Differences; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study investigated differences between males' and females' attitude toward recreational and academic reading. The study also analyzed similarities and differences between teachers' attitudes and the attitudes of male and female pupils, as well as the relationship between teachers' and students' attitudes. Subjects (280 pupils and 18 teachers in grades 1-3, and 315 pupils and 16 teachers in grades 4-6) completed McKenna and Kear's Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. Findings showed that: (1) teachers had a higher mean score than boys or girls in grades 1-3 on recreational reading attitude, but not on academic reading attitude; (2) boys' scores on both recreational and academic reading attitudes in grades 4-6 dropped significantly, as did girls' scores on academic reading attitude; (3) there were no significant differences in recreational or academic reading attitudes of boys versus girls in grades 1-3; and (4) there were significant differences between recreational reading attitudes of boys and girls in grades 4-6, all of whom had poorer academic reading attitudes than in grades 1-3. (Five tables of data are included.) (SR)

The Relationship of Gender to Attitudes About Academic and Recreational Reading

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The Relationship of Gender to Attitudes About Academic and Recreational Reading

As we approach the twenty-first century, traditional instruction and evaluation in reading are being challenged by more contextualized and "authentic" alternatives. One must say "whole language" and "portfolios" numerous times just to gain admittance to any important gathering of reading educators. Comparisons of any student with a norm group supposedly causes anxiety rather than serving as a veritable source of insight. This has led to a genuine drought of assessment instruments that have reliable and valid normative data.

There is one glaring exception. Few members of the American Reading Forum, if any, would fail to embrace the assessment of attitudes as a desirable source of useful data. More would doubt the conceptual basis of such an instrument and its likelihood of being a valid and reliable measurement of the construct. McKenna and Kear (1990) have helped ameliorate this problem. Jim Davis, creator of the Garfield cat, and United Features, the publisher of Garfield, have allowed McKenna and Kear to use Garfield in developing the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. This assessment instrument, supported by numerous validity and reliability studies (McKenna and Kear, 1990), gives a recreational and academic reading attitude score for grades 1-6.

The objective of this study was to administer this instrument to many different teachers and students, grades 1-6, from several different schools and analyze the difference between the attitudes of boys versus girls in recreational

and academic reading. We wish also to gain insight into whether or not teachers' attitudes are significantly different from the children's, and whether or not teachers' attitudes predict girls' attitudes better than boys.

Review of Literature

Weintraub (1990) reviews recent work by Knickerbocker (1989) who reexamines the relationship between gender and reading achievement in light of current findings. Knickerbocker suggests that we need to reevaluate the conclusion that girls are superior to boys in reading achievement. Knickerbocker also refutes the idea that teachers favor girls in the classroom.

The most recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that females at ages 9, 13, and 17 outperformed their male counterparts in each of the six NAEP reading assignments conducted from 1971 to 1990. These data (1991) also revealed that the reading proficiency of males still trailed that of females in 1990 at all five levels of difficulty. The gap between males and females was about the same in 1990 as in 1971. The national assessments have shown that across all age groups, students who frequently read for fun were likely to have the highest proficiency; those who never read recreationally had the lowest. One-tenth of the students in each age group reported that they never read for pleasure.

For writing proficiency, NAEP data show that females at all grade levels performed noticeably better than their male counterparts. NAEP (1991)

reported that their results for males and females support numerous studies that have revealed gender differences favoring females in reading and writing.

Ostling (1992) reviewed the most recent report compiled by the Wellesley College for Research on Women. This Wellesley report synthesized hundreds of studies of girls' achievement from preschool through grade 12. There was much male-bashing for scoring higher on both the verbal and math portions of the SAT in 1991, for outperforming girls in math, physics, and biology, and for a larger percentage of boys than girls choosing calculus. The report concluded that boys do well by intimidating girls into silence, by monopolizing discussions, and by stealing an inordinate amount of the teacher's attention.

But even the Wellesley authors admit that girls do better than boys in reading and writing starting in the elementary years and continuing through high school. In that respect, the Wellesley report and the NAEP date from 1971-1990 agree that boys do worse in language arts than girls.

Ross and Fletcher (1989) studied attitudes toward reading of 189 rural Tennessee children, 109 inner-city children, and 202 children from a school in a university town. The students were from grades three, four, and five. They discovered that rural children had the worst attitudes, followed by inner-city children. Students form the university town knew more about literature and had the best attitudes. Girls had better attitudes than boys.

Smith (1991) conducted a longitudinal investigation of reading attitude development from childhood to adulthood. Measures of reading attitudes were collected from 84 subjects when they were in grades 1, 6, 9, and 12, and when they were five years beyond high school. Females had significantly higher positive attitude scores than did males.

Dwyer and Reed (1989) studied the effects of sustained silent reading on attitudes of males and females in secondary school. While girls' scores in the experimental group gained slightly on the post test, boys' scores dropped. Boys had significantly poorer attitudes toward reading.

Cloer and Pearman (1991) researched the relationship of teachers' attitudes and classroom behaviors to students' attitudes about recreational and academic reading. They found that students in the primary grades had better attitudes than the middle grade students in relation to recreational and academic reading. They also found to the utter dismay of many, that time spent directing the basal was significantly and positively related to students' recreational and academic attitudes. In fact, teachers' time spent directing the basal lessons in grades 4-6 and silent reading of teachers for their own pleasure accounted for 62.4% of the variance in students' attitudes toward academic reading. The teachers' attitudes toward reading were also significantly related to students' attitudes.

Knickerbocker's (1989) admonitions notwithstanding, the research data do suggest rather convincingly that girls achieve better in language arts than

boys and have better attitudes. This current study is an attempt to investigate if this is true, and if true, why? Are females genetically superior to males in relation to variables predicting the reading process? Why do girls perform better at all grade levels in writing proficiency? What role does the teacher's attitude play? Do teachers' attitudes toward reading predict boys' attitudes? Is there a difference between boys' attitudes toward academic versus recreational reading? Is there a difference between teachers' attitudes toward academic versus recreational reading? Do attitudes change significantly in the intermediate grades (4-6) as opposed to primary grades?

These are a few of the questions that served as a catalyst for the current study.

Method

The current study attempted to determine the differences between males' and females' attitude toward recreational and academic reading. The study sought to analyze the differences between teachers' attitudes and the attitudes of male and female pupils. The study also examined similarities. The relationship between boys' and girls' attitudes for recreational and academic reading was analyzed. The relationship between the teachers' attitudes and the attitudes of male and female pupils was also analyzed.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 280 pupils and 18 teachers in 18 classrooms for grades 1-3, and 315 pupils and 16 teachers in 16 classrooms for

grades 4-6. The teachers were guaranteed anonymity by selecting a number that only they knew, and by submitting student data with the correct corresponding number. Children were also guaranteed anonymity and simply identified their gender with a "B" of "G" at the top of their attitude survey.

The study analyzed 18 classrooms, grades 1-3, and 16 classrooms, grades 4-6. There were 15 different schools and 34 different teachers. The findings of the primary grades were compared to the findings of the middle grades.

Procedure

The classroom means for students' recreational reading attitude, academic reading attitude, and total reading attitude as measured by McKenna and Kear's (1990) Elementary Reading Attitude Survey were computed. Classroom means for students were then compared to their teachers' scores.

The anonymous teachers marked a "T" by their number to distinguish their survey from the students. Teachers simply answered the same attitude instrument as the children with the explanation by the researchers that all items should be answered in relation to the teachers' attitudes. For example, consider the questions "How do you feel about going to a bookstore?" "How do you feel about spending free time reading?" or "How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?" These questions are as attitudinally appropriate for teachers to answer as for children.

Results

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 gives the means and standard deviations for all variables in relation to grades 1-3. The teachers had a higher mean score than the boys or girls on recreational reading. But, surprisingly, the teachers' attitude toward academic reading was not higher than the girls nor significantly higher than the boys.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 gives the means and standard deviations for the different variables in grades 4-6. Note that the mean attitudinal score for boys has dropped significantly for both recreational and academic reading, and that girls' attitude toward academic reading has dropped significantly.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 gives T test results for different variables in grades 1-3. When looking for gender differences, there is not a significant difference between the

recreational reading attitudes nor the academic reading attitudes of boys versus girls in grades 1-3. Neither is there a significant difference between the academic reading attitudes of boys and girls. Teachers do have a significantly higher attitude toward recreational reading than boys and girls, but not a significantly higher attitude toward academic reading. The teachers' academic reading attitude is significantly lower than the teachers' attitude toward recreational reading.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 4 gives T test results for different attitudinal variables in grades 4-6. As to gender differences, there is now a statistically significant difference between the recreational reading attitudes of boys and girls. Boys' attitudes in grades 4-6 toward recreational reading have dropped significantly. There is not, however, a significant difference between the academic attitudes of boys versus girls. Both boys and girls in grades 4-6 have poorer academic reading attitudes than boys and girls in grades 1-3. In grades 4-6, the teachers' academic attitudes are still significantly lower than their attitudes toward recreational reading, but teachers have higher recreational and academic attitudes than the pupils they teach. While girls' recreational reading attitudes in grades 1-3 are not significantly higher than their academic reading attitudes, this is not the case in grades 4-6. The attitude of girls toward academic reading in grades 4-6 is

now significantly lower than their attitude toward recreational reading. Boys, however, in grades 4-6 have dropped significantly in both recreational and academic reading and have significantly lower attitude scores than the boys in grades 1-3.

Insert Table 5 about here

The writers also looked at similarities. Table 5 gives product moment correlation coefficients for the different attitudinal variables. There were no significant relationships between boys and girls on any of the attitudinal variables for grades 1-3 or for grades 4-6. The teachers' total attitudinal score was significantly related to the girls' recreational reading score in grades 1-3, but not in 4-6. The teachers' recreational and academic reading attitudes were not significantly related in grades 1-3. The teachers' academic reading attitude was significantly related to the boys' low academic reading attitude in grades 4-6.

Discussion

Cloer and Pearman (1991) found that time spent directing basal lessons was significantly and positively related to students' recreational and academic attitudes. Time spent directing the basal was positively related to students' academic reading attitudes and accounted for 52.8% of the variance. Multiple regression demonstrated that in grades 4-6, time spent directing the basal and

the teachers' silent reading for pleasure accounted for 62.4% of the variance in students' attitudes toward reading.

The teachers' mean attitudinal scores for academic versus recreational reading in the current study were significantly lower. There was also a significant relationship between the teachers' academic attitude and the boys' academic attitude at grades 4-6.

In an age of restructuring, are the academic attitudes of boys and girls positively or negatively affected by basal lessons? If so, how does one account for this significant difference between recreational and academic attitudes.

The academic portion of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey focuses on pupils' attitudes when answering questions about what they read, how pupils feel about workbook pages and worksheets, and how they feel about reading aloud in class. It also has questions about using a dictionary, reading "your school books," and taking reading tests. All reading educators are familiar with the mind-numbing, interest-killing, and clock-watching activities related to each of these in reading classes when used inappropriately. The academic portion of the test tends to include the different activities that can be used, and frequently are used, incorrectly by many schools in an attempt to develop basic skills. Is it possible when basals are removed for some teachers to do poorly and to have even more mind-numbing activities?

A perceived discrepancy between Cloer and Pearman's (1991) earlier study that found a significantly positive relationship between time in basal and

attitudes, and the current study showing negative academic attitudes may not be a discrepancy at all. We are all familiar with classrooms void of basals that are imaginative, literature-based, and thematically organized with integrated curricula. But some of the teachers in the earlier study may have known how to use the basal correctly. The teachers may have used literature and writing in conjunction with the basal in a manner that fostered positive attitudes. The negative attitudes of students and teachers toward inappropriate and unsuccessful academic reading activities do not automatically, ipso facto, refer to users of basals. We are all familiar with basal classrooms that fail to produce positive attitudes toward reading. But the simple point the writers wish to make after analyzing these data is that basal classrooms may be accompanied by either positive or negative attitudes. In today's emotionally-charged evangelical revivalism of basal burning, we suggest this truth most timidly. The fact remains, however, that boys, girls, and teachers all have significantly lower academic reading attitudes than recreational reading attitudes.

It is disquieting to observe the decline in boys' attitude toward recreational and academic reading as they pass through the grades. The mind-numbing activities also infect the girls, but their recreational reading attitude remains relatively high through sixth grade. Boys don't seem to differ significantly from the girls in the primary grades.

Teachers' low academic attitude seems to relate more to boys than girls. Is it because more females have higher proficiency in reading and read more recreationally for pleasure? Girls simply may have discovered the magic of literature more so than boys. This may serve to insulate girls from more negative attitudes.

The relatively poor reading achievement of boys may be related to their more negative attitudes toward recreational and academic reading. It was gratifying to see that teachers, their low academic attitude notwithstanding, had more positive attitudes than the students they taught. The difference may be that teachers are getting paid and students aren't.

More research needs to be conducted on pupil and teacher attitudes as we approach the 21st century. We need to analyze whether or not attitudes are affected negatively or positively by different aspects of restructuring. As we attempt to focus on portfolio assessment, we must include more about attitudes in the developmental collection. Heretofore, little has been said about portfolio assessment or self-assessment including a good valid and reliable measure of attitude. While many of us disagree about what cognitive tests will be appropriate in the 21st century, few, if any, totally discount attitude assessment. We encourage other to assist us in generating research for further discussion and guidance.

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Table 1

Grades 1-3, N=18 classrooms

Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	SD
Boys Rec.	29.870	2.940
Boys Acad.	29.217	2.455
Boys Tot.	59.199	5.004
Girls Rec.	31.412	2.903
Girls Acad.	30.506	2.836
Girls Tot.	62.609	6.219
Tchrs. Rec.	35.280	4.400
Tchrs. Acad.	30.390	5.280
Tchrs. Tot.	64.330	8.280

Table 2

Grades 4-6, N=16 classrooms

Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	SD	p
Boys Rec.	26.230	*2.490	p<.001
Boys Acad.	25.860	*3.310	p<.001
Boys Tot.	52.710	*6.300	p<.001
Girls Rec.	30.982	3.428	
Girls Acad.	27.928	*3.059	p<.02
Girls Tot.	58.910	5.688	
Tchrs. Rec.	38.060	2.490	
Tchrs. Acad.	30.733	3.918	
Tchrs. Tot.	69.199	5.294	

*Significantly lower than grades 1-3

Table 3

T Test Results

Grades 1-3

N=18 classrooms

DF=34

Variable X	Mean	Variable Y	Mean	T	p
Boys Rec.	29.870	Girls Rec.	31.412	-1.580	=.12
Boys Acad.	29.217	Girls Acad.	30.506	-1.460	=.15
Tchrs. Rec.	35.280	Tchrs. Acad.	30.390	3.020	<.001*
Tchrs. Rec.	35.280	Boys Rec.	29.870	4.330	<.001*
Tchrs. Rec.	35.280	Girls Rec.	31.412	3.110	<.001*
Tchrs. Acad.	30.390	Boys Acad.	29.217	.85	Nonsig.
Tchrs. Acad.	30.390	Girls Acad.	30.506	-.08	Nonsig.
Girls Rec.	31.412	Girls Acad.	30.506	.95	Nonsig.
Boys Rec.	29.870	Boys Acad.	29.870	.72	Nonsig.

*Statistically Significant

Table 4

T Test Results

Grades 4-6

N=16 classrooms

Variable X	Mean	Variable Y	Mean	T	p	df
Boys Rec.	26.230	Girls Rec.	30.980	-4.220	<.001*	29
Boys Acad.	25.860	Girls Acad.	27.928	-1.800	.80	29
Tchrs. Rec.	38.060	Tchrs. Acad.	30.733	6.540	<.001*	30
Tchrs. Rec.	38.060	Boys Rec.	26.230	12.55	<.001*	30
Tchrs. Rec.	38.060	Girls Rec.	30.980	7.340	<.001*	28
Tchrs. Acad.	30.733	Boys Acad.	25.860	3.770	<.001*	30
Tchrs. Acad.	30.733	Girls Acad.	27.930	2.190	.04*	30
Girls Rec.	30.980	Girls Acad.	27.930	2.570	.001*	28
Boys Rec.	26.230	Boys Acad.	25.860	.34	Nonsig.	30

*Statistically Significant

Table 5

Correlation Coefficients for Attitudinal Variables

Grade	Variable X	Variable Y	r	p	r^2
(N=18 classes)					
1-3	Tchr. Tot.	Girls Rec.	.458	.05	.2104
1-3	Boys Rec.	Boys Acad.	.785	<.001	.6171
1-3	Boys Acad.	Boys Tot.	.932	<.001	.8686
1-3	Girls Rec.	Girls Acad.	.733	<.001	.5385
1-3	Girls Rec.	Girls Tot.	.840	<.001	.7056
1-3	Tchrs. Rec.	Tchrs. Acad.	.134	(Nonsig.)	
1-3	Tchrs. Tot.	Boys Tot.	.121	(Nonsig.)	
1-3	Tchrs. Tot.	Girls Tot.	.320	(Nonsig.)	
1-3	Boys Tot.	Girls Tot.	.247	(Nonsig.)	
(N=16 classes)					
4-6	Tchr. Acad.	Boys Acad.	.520	.03	.2704
4-6	Boys Rec.	Boys Acad.	.745	.001	.5563
4-6	Boys Acad.	Boys Tot.	.827	.001	.6839
4-6	Girls Rec.	Girls Acad.	.536	.05	.2872
4-6	Girls Acad.	Girls Tot.	.861	<.001	.7413
4-6	Tchrs. Rec.	Tchrs. Acad.	.575	.05	.3306
4-6	Tchrs. Tot.	Boys Tot.	.183	(Nonsig.)	
4-6	Tchrs. Tot.	Girls Tot.	.119	(Nonsig.)	
4-6	Boys Tot.	Girls Tot.	.333	(Nonsig.)	