

# Literacy Environment Quality in Preschool and Children's Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines young children's attitudes toward reading and writing as it relates to the literacy environment in which they had been enrolled. Children ( $N = 201$ ) attending magnet schools (schools established to address desegregation mandates) in a large urban, midwestern school district were given a reading and writing attitude survey the first week of school. The survey results were compared to the children's literacy development measures as well as quality ratings of the literacy environment in which they had participated. Results indicate attitudes toward reading and writing varied significantly depending on the quality of the classroom literacy environment. Children's attitudes became more positive as the quality of the literacy environment improved. In addition, children's literacy development and attitudes toward reading and writing were strongly related. Variables such as race and gender were not related to children's attitudes; however, economically at-risk children had more negative attitudes toward reading and writing than children from more-advantaged families. The data further reveal that attitudes toward writing were more negative than attitudes toward reading.

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## INTRODUCTION

Understanding the importance of attitude in the development of successful readers and writers seems a worthwhile endeavor given the magnitude of the emphasis placed on early reading success and its bearing on later academic achievement. A goal of every classroom teacher, administrator, and reading specialist is to promote the love for life-long reading. Attitude plays a vital role in establishing this habit (Estes, 1975; McKenna & Kear, 1990). Smith (1988) observed that “the emotional response to reading...is the primary reason most readers read, and probably the primary reason most nonreaders do not read” (p. 177).

Attitude is generally defined as learned predispositions to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Alexander and Filler (1976) provide a reading-specific definition which states that attitude can be conceptualized along a continuum with positive and negative extremes. They suggest that reading attitudes are “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (p. 1).

The focus of much of the recent reading research is on comprehension and not on attitude. The demand for rigorous research (No Child Left Behind, 2001) in the area of reading has limited the progress of measuring and understanding attitude and its relationship to achievement. However, understanding the role of attitude in the development of readers is important for two reasons. McKenna, Kear, and Elsworth (1995) state that attitude may affect the level of ability ultimately attained by a given student through its influence on such factors as engagement and patience. Second, poor attitude for the fluent reader may cause a child not to read when other options are available.

## BACKGROUND

Not all children will arrive at school with the kinds of literacy skills that help them succeed academically. They will need more time, more assistance, and additional opportunities at school to acquire the kinds of literacy experiences that are crucial for later academic success (Fields, Groth, & Spangler, 2000). Increasingly, school districts are offering preschool programs for children 3–5 years old to provide opportunities that will prepare them to be successful upon school entry.

Because of the variation in support for literacy development in different home settings, many children need high-quality preschool environments to be sure of later reading success (Dickinson & Sprague, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Quality preschool programs are defined as those that provide “rich opportunities to learn and to practice language and literacy related skills in a playful and motivating setting” (Snow et al., p. 171). The quality of an

early childhood program has been found to be an important factor for positive effects on language and literacy skills (Cunningham, 2005; Snow et al.). Enriched environments seem to stimulate more challenging activity, with a greater repertoire of behaviors such as questions, responses, and complexity of language interactions (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Several studies indicate that a quality literacy environment—one that provides many opportunities and materials to promote language and literacy development—is linked to later reading success (e.g. Dickinson & Sprague; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995).

As in every domain of learning, motivation is crucial. Although most children begin school with positive attitudes and expectations for success, by the end of the primary grades and increasingly thereafter, some children become disaffected (Parker & Paradis, 1986). The majority of reading problems faced by today's adolescents and adults are the result of problems that might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood years (Snow et al., 1998).

Of the many conditions that appear to contribute to successful reading by school children, Snow et al. (1998) state that among the more important are each child's (a) intellectual and sensory capabilities, (b) positive expectations and experiences with literacy from an early age, (c) support for reading-related activities and attitudes so that he or she is prepared to benefit from early literacy experiences and subsequent formal instruction in school, and (d) instructional environments conducive for learning (p. 100).

An example of how the instructional environment can impact literacy development was demonstrated in a study by Cunningham (2005) that explored relationships between preschool quality and children's language and literacy development in a large, urban, midwestern school district. Participants of this study included 24 preschool classrooms of 428 children (206 boys, 222 girls). Seventy-four percent of the children were Black and 19.6% were White, with 346 students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals.

The findings from the Cunningham (2005) study indicate that quality of the literacy environment and preschool children's language and literacy development are positively and significantly related. In addition, the findings suggest that the language and literacy development of preschool children are significantly different depending on the quality of the preschool environment in which they are enrolled. The highest proportion of economically at-risk students (students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals) was found in classrooms that were rated as *deficient* in literacy environment quality, which had a negative effect on language and literacy scores. Students in deficient-rated classrooms had the highest proportion of language and literacy scores at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. It was also determined that the highest proportion of language and literacy scores above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile was found in classrooms that were rated as having *exemplary* literacy environments. The exemplary-rated classrooms also exhibited the most developmentally appropriate activities.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To ensure that young children would benefit from early literacy experiences and later formal instruction, Snow et al. (1998) stated that positive attitudes toward literacy were critical. Most attitude assessments survey students after they have formally begun the reading process, usually first grade and later (McKenna & Kear, 1990; Parker & Paradis, 1986). However, most children have been exposed to written text since infancy—at home, in their daily environment, in day care, in preschool. By the time they are enrolled in kindergarten they have already begun to develop an attitude toward reading and writing. In our efforts to prevent later reading difficulties, an investigation of these young emergent readers' attitudes seems especially important. To understand the impact of the quality of the literacy environment on children's attitudes toward reading and writing, the current study addresses the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the reading and writing attitudes of children from classrooms rated *exemplary*, *basic*, and *deficient* in the support of literacy development?
2. What type of literacy environment do children with the most positive attitude toward reading and writing come from—exemplary-, basic-, or deficient-rated classrooms?
3. Is there a relationship between children's attitude toward reading and writing and their level of literacy development?
4. What is the relationship between race, gender, at-risk status, and children's attitudes toward reading and writing?
5. Is there a significant difference between children's attitudes toward reading and their attitudes toward writing?

## METHOD

### Participants

The 201 students who participated in this study were selected from 11 magnet schools (schools established to address desegregation mandates) in a large, urban, midwestern school district which had been part of the 2005 Cunningham study investigating preschool quality and children's language and literacy development. A subset of children from the earlier study was used rather than the full sample for several reasons including (a) high attrition rates in non-magnet schools, (b) district decisions to close non-magnet schools in the new school year, (c) lack of support from administrators and teachers in non-magnet schools, and (d) a commitment by the magnet school administrators and literacy coaches to utilize research findings from the two studies.

Of the 201 students between 5 and 6 years old who participated in the study, 104 were girls (51.7%) and 97 were boys (48.3%). Racial representation in the study was Black, 124 (61.6%); White, 58 (28.8%); Hispanic, 8 (.039%); Asian, 6 (.029%); and Other, 5 (.024%). These proportions reflected the total student population of the school district. More than 73% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, which was one of the major criteria used by the district to identify students at risk for school failure.

In late spring, preschool students were assessed by their teacher using the Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL; Dickinson, 1997). Of the 201 children in this sample, 120 (59.7%) scored at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. In addition, the preschool classrooms had been assessed using a standardized literacy environment rating scale – the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO; Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2003). Of the current study's sample, 38 children had attended classrooms that were rated as having exemplary literacy environments (2 classrooms), 115 had participated in basic-rated classrooms (6 classrooms), and 48 had been enrolled in classrooms rated as deficient (3 classrooms). In the following fall these 201 students were assigned to kindergarten classrooms in the same magnet school as they had attended preschool.

## Procedure

During the first week of the school year, students were surveyed by their kindergarten teacher or literacy coach assigned to their school. The Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing Survey (refer to Appendix A; Trehearne, Healy, Williams, & Moore, 2003) was administered to groups of two or three children. To ensure students understood the meaning of each of the four faces on the survey, pretest reliability checks were conducted with each group of children. Each face was discussed. The first face was described to the students as showing a *very happy* feeling; the second face as showing not quite as happy as the first face but still *happy*; the third face, which depicts neutrality, as *so-so*—not happy and not sad; and the fourth face as feeling *sad* or *not-good*. The adult asked students to point to each face as the feeling was identified. For example, if the adult asked for the children to point to the face that looked *happy*, the children would point to the second face.

Students were told they were going to answer some questions about reading and writing. To ensure they were responding to the correct question, students were instructed to put a finger on the appropriate row, and then the question was read aloud by the adult. Students were asked to color the face that represented their feeling toward the question.

## Instruments

### Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO)

The ELLCO Toolkit (Smith et al., 2003) was used to assess the quality of the language and literacy environments of the preschool classrooms in which the students had been enrolled for preschool the previous school year. The ELLCO Toolkit provides a comprehensive set of observation tools for describing the extent to which classrooms provide children optimal support for their language and literacy development. Three separate tools are provided: (a) Literacy Environment Checklist, (b) Classroom Observation, and (c) Literacy Activities Rating Scale. The Classroom Observation can be used in research concerned with indicators of classroom quality and the enacted curriculum focusing on the area of early language and literacy development. It contains 14 items conceptually grouped into two dimensions: (a) general classroom environment and (b) language, literacy, and curriculum.

Table 1 presents the domains and items of the Classroom Observation. A 5-point scale using the descriptors of 5 = *exemplary*, 4 = *proficient*, 3 = *basic*, 2 = *limited*, and 1 = *deficient* accompanies each item of the Classroom Observation.

Six literacy coaches and early childhood educators were provided training by a certified ELLCO trainer, and inter-rater reliability was established

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**Table 1. Classroom Observation Domains and Items**

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General Classroom Environment	Language, Literacy, and Curriculum
Organization of the Classroom	• Oral Language Facilitation
Contents of the Classroom	• Presence of Books
Presence and Use of Technology	• Approaches to Book Reading (preschool) or Writing Opportunities and Instruction (school-age)
Opportunities for Child Choice and Initiative	• Approaches to Children's Writing (preschool) or Writing Opportunities and Instruction (school-age)
Classroom Management Strategies	• Approaches to Curriculum Integration
Classroom Climate	• Recognizing Diversity in the Classroom • Facilitating Home Support for Literacy • Approaches to Assessment

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following the training. A coefficient of .97 for exact agreement and .99 for within-one-point agreement was established (Cunningham, 2005). These coefficients were well within the recommendations of the ELLCO authors (Smith & Dickinson, 2002). Classrooms were observed by one trained observer, and quality ratings were determined for each classroom.

The 14-item Classroom Observation was scored according to the 5-point rubric. The item scores were summed and a mean score from the total points was determined. To receive an exemplary rating, a classroom must attain a 4 or higher on the Classroom Observation. To be classified as basic, an overall mean score of 3 must be attained. Mean scores below 3 were classified as deficient for supporting language and literacy.

### **Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL)**

The TROLL (Dickinson, 1997) was created to measure critical skills identified in the New Standards for Speaking and Listening (New Standards, 2000). In 5–10 minutes and without any prior specialized training, teachers can assess an individual child's current standing with regard to skills that research has designated as critical for literacy acquisition—language, reading, and writing abilities.

The TROLL was normed using low-income, high-risk children; therefore the norms should be regarded as provisional (CIERA, 2001). However, Dickinson (1997) argues that the well-known academic disadvantages of low socioeconomic status (SES) preschool children make this norming sample important in its own right, especially for those who work with low-income children. If a child from a low SES family scores at the 10th percentile, for example, this result cannot be dismissed as simply due to economic disadvantages; such a child is scoring very poorly related to his or her economic peers.

A certified teacher completed a TROLL for each student enrolled in her preschool classroom. The literacy coach assigned to the school was available for support and assistance in the administration and/or scoring of the assessment. The TROLL relies on a teacher's professional judgment of a child's development rather than formal testing of actual development. TROLL ratings of children by teachers are largely consistent with those obtained through formal assessment (CIERA, 2001).

### **Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing Survey**

The Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing Survey (Trehearne et al., 2003) is a modified Likert scale. The form is a Blackline Master included in the *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Kindergarten Teachers* (Trehearne et al.) as a self-reported assessment. (See Appendix A.) The survey asks four questions:

1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?
2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?

3. How do you feel about sharing a book with a friend?
4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?

Participants have four faces to choose from to represent their feelings; one is a very big smiley face (*very happy*), one is a smiley face (*happy*), one is neutral, and one is a frown (*sad*).

## RESULTS

The Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing Survey was administered to small groups of two to three children during the first week of the school year. Students' TROLL scores from May of the previous year were used to establish literacy abilities. The preschool environments of these students were also assessed in the spring using the ELLCO. Means and standard deviations for all instruments are presented in Table 2.

### Literacy Environment Quality and Student Attitudes

Quality ratings from the ELLCO and questions from the Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing Survey were compared using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis suggests there is a significant difference between the attitudes of students from classrooms that differ in literacy environment quality (see Table 3).

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**Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for All Instruments**

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Instrument	<i>N</i>	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
TROLL	201	33	98	72.15	16.42
ELLCO	11	32	57	44.52	8.06
Q1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?	201	1	4	3.60	.70
Q2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?	201	1	4	2.31	1.09
Q3. How do you feel about sharing a book with a friend?	201	1	4	3.17	.98
Q4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?	201	1	4	2.54	1.17

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**Table 3. Analysis of Variance for Classroom Quality**

Question	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	Sig.
Q1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?	2	13.97*	6.08	.000
Q2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?	2	24.12*	23.40	.000
Q3. How do you feel about sharing a book with a friend?	2	65.16*	37.89	.000
Q4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?	2	45.96*	43.75	.000

\**p* < .05

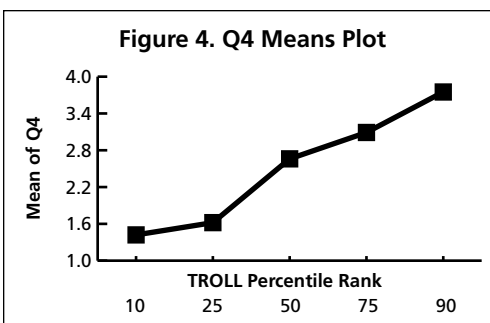
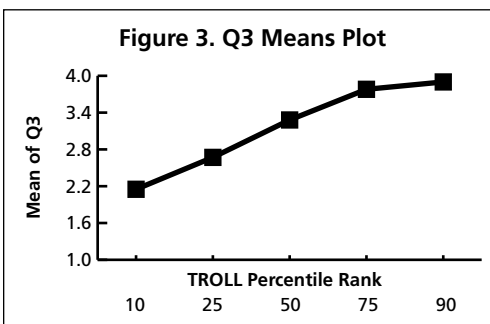
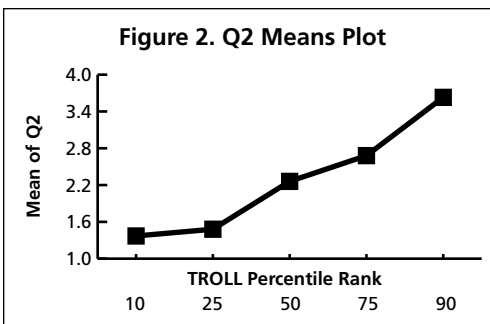
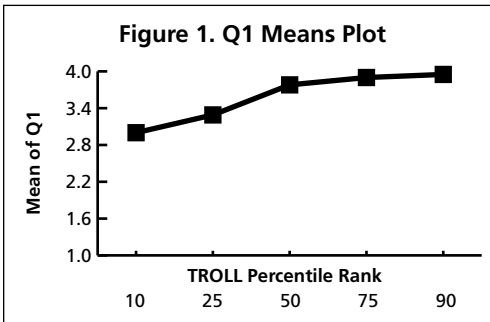
A posthoc test (Tukey) indicates the attitude differences were significant between all three quality ratings (exemplary, basic, deficient) and for all questions pertaining to reading and writing attitude.

It appears that children have more negative attitudes toward reading and writing when they have participated in literacy environments with low quality (deficient). Student attitudes become more positive with the increase of quality. Therefore, the most-positive attitudes toward reading and writing are found in classrooms that are rated exemplary in their support of literacy development.

### **Student Attitudes and Level of Literacy Development**

A Pearson-*r* was used to analyze the relationship between students' attitudes toward reading and writing and their level of literacy development. There was a significantly strong correlation between the questions of the attitude survey and the TROLL scores of the students (Q1  $r(201) = +.48, p < .01$ ; Q2  $r(201) = +.61, p < .01$ ; Q3  $r(201) = +.61, p < .01$ ; Q4  $r(201) = +.65, p < .01$ ).

A one-way ANOVA was used to establish if there were significant differences between the mean scores of the attitude survey and the percentile ranks of the TROLL. A significant difference was indicated (Q1,  $F(4, 196) = 62.77, p < .05$ ; Q2,  $F(4, 196) = 42.34, p < .05$ ; Q3,  $F(4, 196) = 66.74, p < .05$ ; Q4,  $F(4, 196) = 19.54, p < .05$ ). A posthoc test (Tukey) was calculated to determine if there were significant differences among all groups. The analysis indicates there are significant differences found throughout the various TROLL



scores. (Refer to Figures 1–4.) These analyses suggest there is a strong relationship between a student’s attitudes and their literacy abilities. As TROLL scores increase students’ attitudes tend to become more positive.

### Attitudes Compared to Race, Gender, and At-Risk Status

Independent *t*-tests were calculated to determine if there were significant differences between student attitudes and gender, as well as student attitudes and at-risk status based on SES. There were no significant differences between student attitudes and their gender (see Table 4). However, significant differences were found between student attitudes and at-risk status (see Table 5). These data suggest that students who received free or reduced-price meals had more negative attitudes toward reading and writing than students who were not considered at risk for school failure based on SES.

To analyze the relationships between race and student attitudes, a one-way ANOVA was calculated. Racial categories used in the school district were Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, and Other. No statistical differences were found in any of the racial categories with any of the survey questions (see Table 6).

**Table 4. Independent t-Test for Student Attitudes and Gender**

Question	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>t</i>	Mean Diff.	Sig.
	M	F	M	F			
Q1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?	3.50	3.68	.79	.59	-1.80	-.17	.073
Q2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?	2.18	2.42	1.07	1.10	-1.54	-.23	.124
Q3. How to you feel about sharing a book with a friend?	3.10	3.24	1.01	.93	-.99	-.13	.321
Q4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?	2.45	2.60	1.17	1.17	-.85	-.14	.394

$p < .05$   
N = 97 male (M); 104 female (F)

**Table 5. Independent t-Test for Student Attitudes and At-Risk Status**

Question	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>t</i>	Mean Diff.	Sig.
	Free	Full	Free	Full			
Q1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?	3.50	3.97	.75	.39	-3.44*	-.37	.000
Q2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?	1.05	2.10	1.04	2.85	-4.47*	-.74	.000
Q3. How to you feel about sharing a book with a friend?	3.04	3.54	.99	.99	-3.27*	-.50	.000
Q4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?	2.31	3.17	1.15	1.00	-4.86*	-.86	.000

\* $p < .05$   
N = 147 free (free or reduced-price lunch); 54 full (full pay lunch)

**Table 6. Analysis of Variance for Race**

Question	Race	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	Sig.
Q1. How do you feel when someone reads to you?	Black	4	.60	3.54	.659
	White			3.68	
	Asian			3.83	
	Hispanic			3.50	
	Other			3.60	
Q2. How do you feel about writing a message or story?	Black	4	1.27	2.23	.283
	White			2.51	
	Asian			2.66	
	Hispanic			2.00	
	Other			1.80	
Q3. How to you feel about sharing a book with a friend?	Black	4	1.29	3.11	.277
	White			3.32	
	Asian			3.66	
	Hispanic			2.75	
	Other			3.00	
Q4. How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?	Black	4	1.67	2.41	.157
	White			2.79	
	Asian			3.16	
	Hispanic			2.25	
	Other			2.20	

$p < .05$

$N = 124$  Black; 58 White; 6 Asian; 8 Hispanic; 5 Other

### Differences Between Reading Attitudes and Writing Attitudes

A paired-samples *t*-test was used to determine any significant differences between students' attitudes toward reading and their attitudes toward writing. The four questions were paired and the means compared (see Table 7). The analysis revealed a significant difference exists between students' reading attitudes and their writing attitudes. Students' writing attitudes are significantly more negative than their attitudes toward reading.

**Table 7. Paired Sample *t*-Test Comparing Reading and Writing Attitudes**

Pairs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1 and Q2	1.29	.88	20.73*	.000
Q1 and Q3	.42	.64	9.30*	.000
Q1 and Q4	1.06	.94	16.05*	.000
Q2 and Q3	-.87	.78	-17.56*	.000
Q2 and Q4	-.28	.55	-5.95*	.000
Q3 and Q4	.64	.68	13.28*	.000

\**p* < .05

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate if literacy environment quality is related to students' reading and writing attitudes. The results of this study, in conjunction with others cited earlier, suggest the influence that quality has on the total development of emergent readers and writers is substantial.

Students had significantly different attitudes toward reading and writing depending on the quality of the literacy environment from which they had participated in preschool. Students who came from preschool classrooms rated as deficient in their support of language and literacy had the most negative attitudes. Students who had participated in classrooms that were exemplary in their support of literacy had the most positive attitudes. If attitude is a significant factor in developing literacy learners, this study's results would indicate that the environments in which our young children are involved should be of the highest quality. Economically at-risk children are more likely to be slow in the development of oral language skills, letter knowledge, and phonological processing skills prior to school entry (Snow et al., 1998). Although excellent formal reading instruction can influence success in literacy even for high-risk readers, substantial efforts to provide high-quality early literacy environments could provide a major *prevention* effort for later reading difficulties rather than focusing on remediation after a reading problem has developed.

A significant relationship was found between students' attitudes and their level of literacy development. Students scoring below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on the TROLL had more negative attitudes than those scoring above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Student attitudes tended to improve as their TROLL scores increased. It is not possible to discern from this study whether ability affects attitude or attitude affects ability. However, we do know that the relationship between ability

and attitude grows stronger over time (McKenna et al., 1995). This relationship implies a cumulative impact of undesirable experiences on the attitudes of poor readers. Therefore, examination of variables that address both attitude and ability is crucial. The current study suggests a focus on the quality of the literacy environment is supported.

Analyses regarding relationships between race, gender, and at-risk status indicate a student's economic level was the only variable that revealed a significant relationship to reading and writing attitudes. Although some studies (e.g., McKenna et al., 1995) have suggested gender and race may influence literacy ability, this association was not found in regards to student attitudes in this study.

Snow et al. (1998) state there are four aspects that contribute to successful reading by school entry: (a) intellectual and sensory capabilities, (b) positive expectations and experiences with literacy from an early age, (c) support for reading-related activities and attitudes so that he or she is prepared to benefit from early literacy experiences and subsequent formal instruction in school, and (d) instructional environments conducive for learning. A classroom that is rated exemplary in its support of literacy appears to address three of those four factors. First, exemplary-rated classrooms provide positive literacy experiences. These experiences were assessed and rated using the ELLCO (Smith et al., 2003). Classrooms that provided developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) in the literacy curriculum received higher ratings on the ELLCO. Classrooms that were rated as exemplary support these positive, developmentally appropriate literacy experiences which tend to have positive effects on children's language and literacy development, thus addressing a second factor of the conditions for successful early reading. In addition, the current study suggests that students who have participated in high-quality classrooms have a more positive attitude toward reading and writing than do children from lower quality classrooms. Finally, the instructional environment in an exemplary classroom provides materials, activities, and physical features that promote literacy learning throughout the day.

This study suggests three variables that may be associated with a student's attitude toward reading and writing: (a) the quality of the environment to support literacy, (b) the student's level of literacy development, and (c) the student's at-risk status. Although school administrators and classroom teachers cannot affect a student's economic level, variables associated with at-risk status can be addressed in a number of ways including providing high-quality preschool environments, home-school relationships, and parent education. Professional development regarding developmentally appropriate literacy curriculum, as well as physical environment design features, can provide the necessary information for teachers to create a rich literacy environment. Improving the quality of the environment in which children participate, in turn, improves the students' literacy ability and their attitudes toward literacy in general.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

This study indicates that students in this school district possess a more negative attitude toward writing than they do toward reading. This raises the question, "What are we doing in preschool to negatively impact emergent writing?" If children have a negative attitude toward writing upon entry into kindergarten and attitudes seem to decrease as students progress through elementary school (McKenna et al., 1995), what impact will these negative attitudes have on long-term writing ability? This study opens another avenue of investigation into effective literacy methodologies.

In addition, it is beyond the scope of this study to identify what the causal relationship is between environment and attitude. However, it has been established that a positive and significant relationship does exist. Additional research investigating causal factors would provide additional information for the improvement of the instruction and physical environments provided to young children in our effort to prevent reading difficulties.

## CONCLUSION

The results from this study provide further evidence that the quality of the child's environment during preschool plays an important role in developing attitudes toward reading and writing and addresses questions about the potential impact of quality on patterns of development during the early childhood years. One policy implication of this study is that public school early childhood programs for children, especially those from lower income homes, need to focus on the quality of the program offered to the children. The results of this study, in conjunction with the other work done by researchers in regard to quality programs and literacy development, suggest that school districts and other policymakers must ensure that all children, particularly those from low-income families at risk for developing academic deficiencies due to poverty and its associated problems, will receive high-quality literacy programs. This study suggests attention to the physical environment and the curriculum in the early childhood years can reduce the likelihood of school failure due to reading difficulties.

In conclusion, this study reveals that children's attitudes toward reading and writing tend to be markedly more positive if they attended a high-quality preschool classroom than if they were enrolled in a classroom of lesser quality. Literacy environments of low quality may impair a student's literacy learning ability as well as contribute to negative attitudes that interfere with successful literacy development. The growing evidence linking these findings to similar associations between the quality of classroom environments, literacy ability, and attitudes toward reading and writing should help school district administrators and policymakers design early childhood programs in our public schools that will enhance—not impair—children's development.

## APPENDIX A

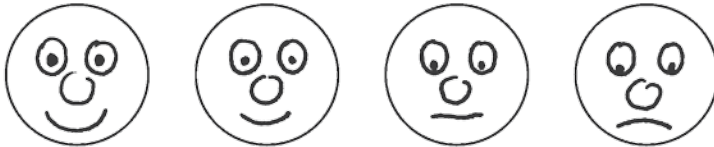
### ASSESSMENT

### Student Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing

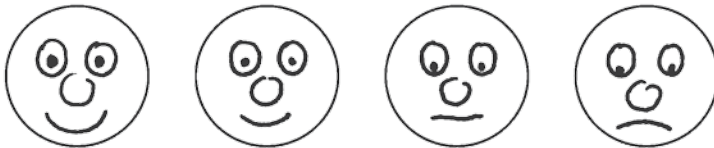
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Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

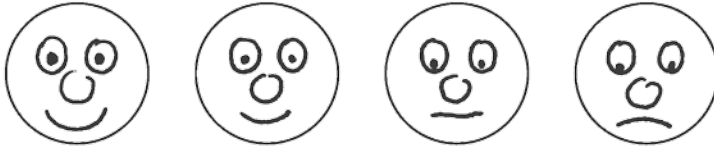
- How do you feel when someone reads to you?



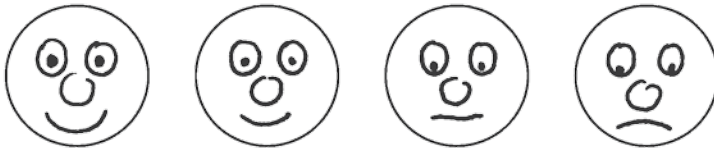
- How do you feel about writing a message or story?



- How do you feel about sharing a book with a friend?



- How do you feel about sharing your writing with a friend?



**Blackline Master 15**

◆ 99

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