

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Gender Differences and Writing:
Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Attitudes, Preferences
and Perceptions**

**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (Education)
Massey University**

Sally E. Hansen
2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all the students who so willingly participated in this project and the teachers who clearly care so much.

Thanks also to my supervisor, Professor James Chapman, whose unquestioning trust in my academic and professional judgements and encouragement to extend beyond the known, allowed me the freedom to be bold, and the confidence to complete this study. His willingness to share his expertise, and humbly guide is greatly appreciated.

To Helen Sneddon, a big thank you for patience and generosity beyond the call of duty in providing superb desktop publishing skills and more!

Thanks to my family and friends, who listened for endless hours to my philosophical ramblings about the whys and wherefores of the teaching of writing, and the achievement of boys, and my hopes and dreams of increasing their chances of success.

Thanks to all the boys I have ever taught, who constantly reminded me that language is about living, loving and laughing, and that the joy of writing is a treasure to be shared by all.

And lastly to a special student, Craig Ranapia, who thanked me for opening some doors, and showed me that some boys read and write to live, and live to read and write.

Let us never forget that.

A POEM OF THANKS

Thank you Charles Dickens

You gave me the past.

Thank you Janet Frame

You gave me a heart.

Thank you Ray Bradbury

You gave me a world.

Thank you Brian Aldiss

You taught me that science fiction was like alcohol

Addictive but not in moderation.

I thank the legions through time and worlds who taught me,

Supported me.

All this and more.

I am Claudius Tiberius

This, that and the other.

I am Doctor Zhivago.

I am Janet Frame and more.

I have walked so many roads.

The roads to Mordor,

The seas of Earthsea

The valleys of the Lana,

The endless Steppes of Siberia.

So far.....

Reading and writing are not passive.

They are searching for gems among the sand.

Thank you for giving me the gems.

(Craig Ranapia, 1986, aged 14)

FOREWORD

Author's Note

The urge to pursue this research topic was more a compulsion and an obligation, rather than an educational or academic decision or whim. Having spent 17 years of my teaching life as an English teacher working with male students, I wanted to formalise some of my ongoing concerns, frustrations, and possible insights.

Over those years I watched many boys in my classes struggle and flounder with written expression. I also watched many of those same boys grow in confidence as writers, and begin to relish experimenting with language, in much the same way as they would hurl and pass a rugby ball. They liked to take language and throw it around and see how they could 'play' it and 'drive' it, and hopefully be winners in the classroom.

The real sadness for me, and I am sure for the students, was despite their best efforts to be competent writers, the examination system always managed to put them back in their place. Any daring moves or exploits could be swiftly, and heartlessly, extinguished by a poor examination or test mark.

So for me as an English teacher, my experience was not one where the boys were always poor achievers in writing, but one where they were often poor achievers in writing in the examination system where they had to produce a piece of writing on demand.

There is always that indescribable pain a teacher feels for a student when he receives a 'stink' mark, particularly for a piece of writing that has arisen from the heart of the child, combined with the courage and daring to put words on paper. I have often seen boys close up, turn off and 'batten down the hatches' to protect themselves against the onslaught of future failure.

My years of watching this inevitable retraction, combined with the constant laments of fellow colleagues, and the recent Ministry of Education reports and subsequent media attention, compelled me to look a little closer at what the students themselves were saying about writing: to look at how they saw themselves as writers, how they felt about writing, and how writing was presented in the curriculum, and in the classroom.

We glibly speak of the underachievement of boys in English as if the problem lies with them, and is somehow inherent in their 'boyiness'. Perhaps the real problem lies with a complexity of factors beyond the control of boys, but not beyond our capacity to examine, explore, and improve the lot for them, so that boys' self-beliefs about themselves as writers can be realised in practice with a positive level of confidence and satisfaction.

ABSTRACT

This present research investigated gender differences in students' writing self-efficacy beliefs, writing attitudes, writing preferences and gendered perceptions about writing in the New Zealand School Certificate English classroom. The aim of this study was to determine whether boys and girls differ in their writing self-beliefs, writing attitudes, writing preferences and gendered perceptions about writing, and to identify factors which may adversely contribute to the negative affect and poor performance of boys in writing in the English classroom at year 11. Participants were 215 students from 10 School Certificate English classes, attending eight secondary schools in the Manawatu, Hawkes Bay and Wellington. A questionnaire was developed and included selected items from the Daly and Miller Writing Apprehension test and the Shell et al., Writing Skills Self-Efficacy Scale. Qualitative data comprised students' comments on their writing attitudes and beliefs. These were included to enrich the interpretation of the questionnaire data. The results indicated a gender difference in writing attitudes, with boys reporting a higher level of negative writing satisfaction, and less writing enjoyment in the English classroom. Gender differences were also indicated in terms of the writing genres boys and girls prefer to engage in. Boys and girls reported distinct differences for their first and second preferred writing options. No significant gender differences were reported in students' self-efficacy beliefs or predicted confidence judgements to perform specific writing competencies. No significant gender differences were reported in students' perceptions about writing as an inherently gender-biased activity. Results indicated the students in this study did not

perceive writing to be an inherently feminine or masculine activity. However, they did indicate an awareness of differential outcomes for boys' and girls' writing in the way in which their respective discourses were regarded and valued by others. The findings are discussed in terms of gender-based attitudinal writing differences and writing preferences. The possibility that the types of writing girls prefer hold more value in the English classroom and in School Certificate, and the possibility that this could be contributing adversely to the writing satisfaction of many boys, is discussed. An examination of qualitative data and frequency of response to individual questions indicates that students expect the writing of boys and girls to be differentially valued in the English classroom and in School Certificate. Finally, the need to examine if boys' writing dissatisfactions and negative attitudes in English are connected with the way writing elements and activities have been pedagogically and ideologically constructed, is considered. Further research focusing on how writing is presented and measured in the English classroom and beyond is recommended.

Table of Contents

Chapter I	Introduction and Overview	1
	The Problem	1
	The Wider Context	3
	The Current Discourse and Emerging Issues	6
	The Focus	11
	The Aim	12
Chapter II	Literature Review	14
	English in the New Zealand Curriculum	15
	Social-Cognitive Theory	20
	Theory of Self-Efficacy	20
	Self-Concept	23
	Sources of Self-Efficacy	24
	Self-Efficacy and Academic Achievement	27
	Value of Outcomes	27
	Motivation, Choice and Persistence	28
	Locus of Control	29
	Self-Regulation	30
	Critical Self-Efficacy Factors	31
	Teacher Influence	32
	Summary of Self-Efficacy and Implications for Education .	33
	The Predictive Utility of Self-Efficacy	33
	Self-Efficacy for Performance and Self-Efficacy for Learning	34
	Magnitude, Strength and Generality	34

Self-Efficacy and Task Specificity	37
Self-Efficacy and Writing	38
Previous Studies	38
Writing Self-Efficacy and Writing Performance.....	38
Writing Apprehension	39
Perceived Value of Writing.....	40
Writing Confidence and Writing Competence.....	40
Writing Attitudes.....	43
Verbal Persuasions	44
Gender and Writing.....	45
Gendered Perceptions.....	47
Writing as a 'Feminised' Practice	48
Writing Preferences.....	50
Classroom and Curriculum Constructs	52
Teacher Feedback in the Classroom.....	52
The English Curriculum	53
Summary	54
Chapter III Hypotheses	57
Overview	57
Hypothesis 1	58
Hypothesis 2.....	59
Hypothesis 3.....	59
Hypothesis 4.....	60

Chapter IV	Method	61
	Data Source	61
	Sample.....	61
	Year Level Selection	63
	Timing	64
	Instrument.....	64
	Scale Structure.....	64
	Pilot Process	65
	Composition of the Writing Questionnaire	65
	Writing Apprehension	65
	Writing Preferences.....	65
	Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs	66
	Writing Attitudes.....	66
	Gendered Perceptions.....	67
	Reading Behaviour.....	68
	Teacher Feedback/Assessment.....	68
	Anecdotal Comments	68
	Justification of Instrument and Methodology	69
Chapter V	Results	70
	Teacher Rating of Student Writing Competence	70
	Student Writing Questionnaire.....	71
	Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs	77
	Writing Attitudes.....	78
	Gendered Perceptions.....	83
	Writing Preferences.....	85

Summary of Results	89
Chapter VI Discussion	91
Chapter VII Conclusion	100
Recommendations for Future Research	104
References	106
Appendix	118
Appendix B	119
Appendix C	120
Appendix D	121
Appendix E.....	123
Appendix F.....	124
Appendix G	125

List of Tables

Table 1	Comparison of school certificate candidates 1996: Percentage gaining A or B grade in selected subjects	2
Table 2	Distribution of SES decile ratings across the total sample	62
Table 3	Gender distribution across the total sample	62
Table 4	Ethnic distribution across the eight schools	63
Table 5	Student Writing Questionnaire Item Factor Loadings.....	72
Table 6	Item characteristics for the Writing Questionnaire scale	74
Table 7	Item characteristics for the Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs subscale	75
Table 8	Item characteristics for the Writing Attitudes subscale.....	75
Table 9	Item characteristics for the Gendered Perceptions subscale.....	76
Table 10	Means and standard deviations for the Writing subscales as a function of gender	77
Table 11	List of writing activities to test writing preferences.....	86
Table 12	Writing preferences showing gender rankings	86

List of Figures

Figure 1	1998 School Certificate grade distribution by gender (NZQA) ..	3
Figure 2	Written Language: Achievement objectives – reading functions Level 5 and 6 (EINZC)	19
Figure 3	Written Language: Achievement objectives – writing functions Level 5 and 6 (EINZC)	19