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**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**

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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.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

No-one can be unaware that boys are in trouble at school. If our classroom experiences, and the signs coming through in diagnostic testing and examination results have not wakened our consciousness to the situation, then the media and recent educational publications will have done so. (Rathgen, 1998, p. 4)

The New Zealand Ministry of Education Research Unit's report *Gender Differences in Achievement and Participation in the School Sector - A review of information held by the Ministry of Education 1986-1997* (April, 1999) claimed that: "With few exceptions, females outperformed males at all levels of assessment in the areas of language and literacy" (Praat, 1999, p. 5). The New Zealand Education Review Office Report, *The Achievement Of Boys* (1999), using data from national examination results, confirms that the most significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls at School Certificate level (Year 11) is in English. One of the greatest gender disparities is in the domain of writing.

Praat (1999) found that girls were achieving better than boys in obtaining A, B, and C grades in School Certificate English from 1992 to 1997. The 1996 School Certificate results indicated a 15% disparity between girls and boys gaining an A or B grade in English. That result has become a consistent pattern for English School Certificate since at least the mid 1990s.

Table 1 indicates the disparity between males and females in English in comparison to Mathematics and Science. In Science, females outperform males by only 2% and in Mathematics males outperform females by 2%, but in English females outperform males by 15%. The fact that 33.5% of girls relative to 27.5% of boys receive an A or B grade in all papers is distorted by the large difference in English performance. Figure 1 shows that across all subjects, the gender disparity is not so wide as it is when English is considered on its own, but a national gender distribution disparity pattern continues to emerge.

Table 1

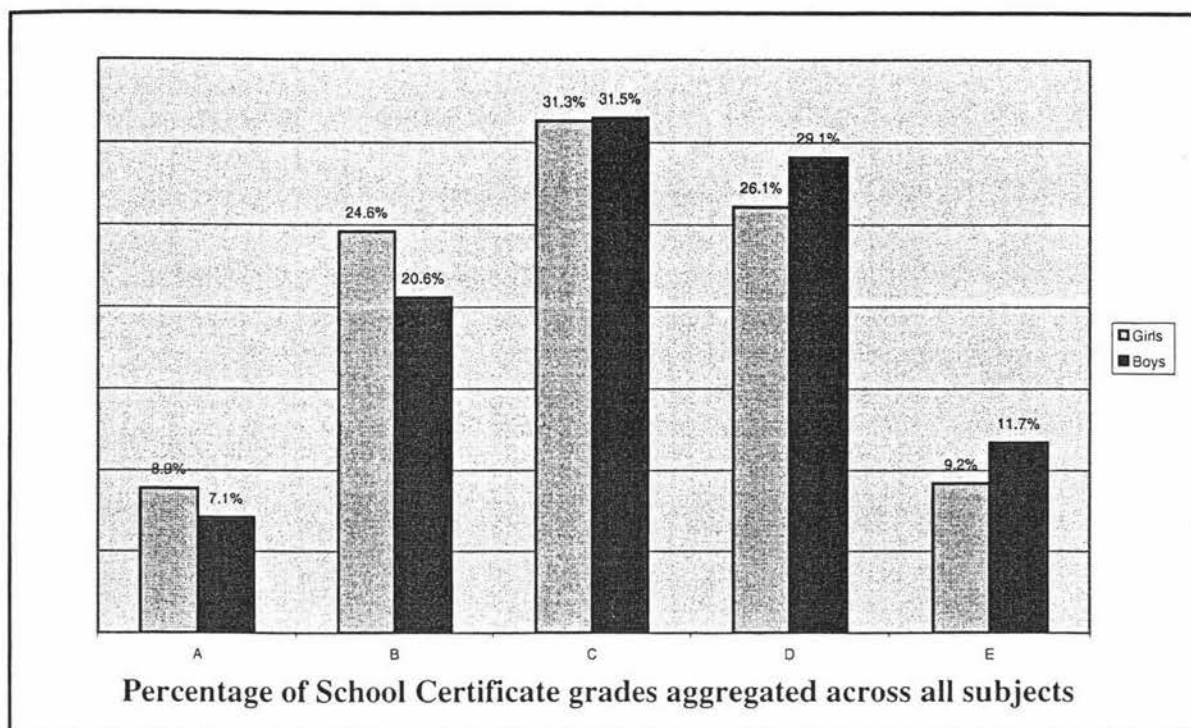
Comparison of School Certificate candidates 1996: Percentage gaining an A or B Grade in English, Mathematics and Science¹

	English		Mathematics		Science		All Papers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All candidates	17.2	32.2	36.8	34.7	30.4	32.5	27.5	33.5
Maori	5.7	13.3	15.3	13.8	12.4	12.6	10.6	14.1
Pacific Islands	6.2	10.7	12.2	11.3	9.8	8.9	9.9	11.4
Asian	16.9	27.2	50.2	47.7	38.8	42.7	37.1	42.1

¹Ministry of Education (1996) School Statistics

Figure 1

School Certificate grade distribution by gender (1998)¹



¹New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 1999

The Wider Context

In her study of New Zealand schools, *The Gender Differential in Reading: Are Boys Failing the System or is the System Failing Boys?* Rutledge (1997) reported that in the primary sector, boys predominated in special education classes, comprised two-thirds of Reading Recovery programmes, and constitute about 90% of pupils assisted by Resource Teachers of Reading. Elley (1993) claimed that boys in Reading Recovery programmes may suffer a loss of self-esteem that is irrecoverable. Chapman, Tunmer and Prochnow (in press) reported that failure to make progress in RR was associated with declines in reading self-concept. Such a view is consistent with Stanovich's (1986) notion of negative "Matthew Effects". This concept holds that failure has negative

spinoff effects that go beyond impeded development in a particular subject or skill, and includes poor motivation and sometimes poor classroom behaviours. Furthermore, this loss may contribute to the ongoing patterns of boys' literacy failure in secondary school.

In the International Educational Achievement (IEA) research report *Writing Performance in New Zealand Schools*, Hillary Lamb (1987) examined gender as a factor which influenced performance in writing. This study found that girls performed better in a range of written tasks than boys, although this varied according to school type. Crooks and Flockton (1998) in the *National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP): Writing*, reported that in years 4 and 8, girls performed better than boys on a very high proportion of the writing tasks (79% of year 4 tasks and 86% of year 8 tasks), and also displayed more positive attitudes to writing. At the year 4 level, girls scored higher than boys on 19 of the 24 tasks. This report also found that girls were more positive about their learning, and boys appeared to be less enthusiastic about learning as they got older.

The Achievement of Boys (ERO, 1999) concludes that the achievement of boys is influenced by a variety of factors at home, in the community and at school and that there are school-wide factors that can have a positive or negative impact on boys (p. 41). The Ministry of Education (1999) has charged schools with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining strategies which address boys' underachievement. The obligation on schools to provide equal educational opportunities for boys is implicit in the National Educational Guidelines, which require schools to identify and remove barriers to achievement (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 42).

Overseas research is consistent with the New Zealand gender disparity in English, and particularly in writing. *The New South Wales Inquiry into Boys' Education* (1994) in Australia, and the subsequent *O'Doherty Report* (1994), found that English is a subject in which females are likely to score more highly than males in both public examinations and school assessment. In the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Inspectors' Report (HMI) *Boys and English* (1993) reported differences in boy's and girls' attitudes to reading and writing. Furthermore, this report claimed that boys did not perform as well as girls in English, and the majority of pupils experiencing difficulties with reading and writing were boys. The greatest gender disparity was reported in the domain of writing. The response to the literacy underachievement of boys in the United Kingdom has been the implementation of the National Literacy Project, (see Stannard, 1999) which focuses on literacy strategies believed to assist boys to achieve in reading and writing.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's official statement on English curriculum design and delivery, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, (1994) states that:

Although girls are more successful than boys in English, their attainments in English are not always transferred into the full range of vocational and employment options. Boys, on the other hand, may be restricted because of lack of achievement in English. (p. 13)

While the English Curriculum acknowledges gender differences in English achievement, and encourages teachers to develop programmes which deal with and critically examine gender stereotyping in English texts, it offers no close

examination of the construction of the curriculum objectives in terms of gender. Performance outcomes in the English Curriculum are described in relation to a homogeneous student group. Differences are described in levels of expected performance attainment but not in gender differences.

The Current Discourse and Emerging Issues

Recent research evidence exploring boys' literacy underachievement suggests that reasons for boys' apparent academic 'malaise' are deep seated, and have a base in entrenched and attitudinal behaviour (Lemon, 1997). Stephens (1996) found English to be particularly aversive to New Zealand secondary school boys, and research on boys' participation in literacy across countries, reveals that boys perceive literacy to be a feminine activity (Praat, 1999).

Many of the current views propose that boys' literacy underachievement is related to the dominant social and educational construction of masculinity, and what it means to be a boy (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Lemon, 1997; Martino, 1997; Newkirk, 2000). Moreover, many schools are significant influences in shaping masculinities by reinforcing hierarchical power models, male authority figures, discipline structures, and by placing different values on such activities as sport and literacy. Martino (1997), using data from Australian year 10 and year 11 students, found that there were marked differences in the ways in which boys and girls perceived English, which related to their position as gendered subjects, and which appeared to influence their performance along gender differentiated lines (p. 126).

English/literacy is often considered to be the major humanising curriculum site. Students are more likely in the English classroom to look at

issues of emotion, of morality, of sensitivity, and personal pain and joy in the English classroom than in most other classrooms. Therefore, activities in the English classroom require a more personal and expressive engagement with texts and writing tasks (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). Some researchers claim (e.g., Martino, 1995, 1997, 1998) that if boys fully engage with the emotional literacy emphasised in the subject English, and particularly in writing, they are at risk of having their masculinity questioned. Thus, boys may see English as a girls' subject.

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) believe that learning to 'do' literacy is very much about learning to 'do' school: learning what counts as an appropriate response; learning how to write within school-sanctioned discourse modes; learning when and how to speak, write and perform. Thus reading and writing become associated with conforming to school demands and conformity in this sense does not fit comfortably with the dominant hegemonic view of masculinity. Furthermore, boys may view reading and writing being in opposition to their masculine prowess, and this is often reinforced because girls seem to know how to 'please' the teacher and write and read in ways that are rewarded in the English classroom (ERO, 1999, p. 9). In addition, Newkirk (2000, p. 294) claims that boys often perceive school-defined literacy as excluding, or even dismissing, their narrative preferences and thus conclude early on that writing is more 'natural' for girls. This perception extends to writing in the English classroom and in national assessment models, such as School Certificate.

The Achievement of Boys (ERO, 1999) also suggests that girls and boys position themselves differently in the English classroom. Given a writing task,

girls tend to be better able to produce what the teacher had in mind, while boys tend to need more help with structuring, and they benefit from short term goals. Further, boys are the classroom risk-takers, hazarding opinions and guesses, while girls are more fearful of getting the wrong answer (p. 9).

With regards to gender differences in writing styles, Graves (1973) found some consistent patterns in the types of writing boys and girls prefer to do. Recent research (Dyson, 1989; Millard, 1997) suggests that boys' preferences in reading and writing narratives are more closely aligned with visually mediated storytelling. The type of action narrative stories boys like to read and write involve the intersection of multiple worlds. Peterson (1998) also found that boys' writing dealt consistently with action and physical violence, while girls' writing was more concerned with personal detail and relationships. The National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) and International Educational Association (IEA) findings (as cited in Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000) show boys' literacy attitudes to be consistently less positive than those of girls, and the types of books boys and girls like to read to be different. Girls preferred romance and poetry while boys preferred science fiction, technology, sport and adventure. Bardsley (1991) also found significant differences in reading habits, attitudes and interests, with boys preferring to read science fiction, sport and adventure.

Some researchers (Peterson and Bainbridge, 1999) suggest that teachers' gendered perceptions may narrow the lenses through which they assess writing. A General Secondary Certificate of Education (GSCE) study in the United Kingdom (1992) cited in *The Achievement of Boys* (ERO, 1999 p. 10), found that teacher bias and writing preference can affect the relative achievement of

boys and girls. Ferguson, Lloyd and Harwood (1991) reported that teachers evaluated the scholastic performances of girls more highly than that of boys, over and above the actual gender differences they found. The gender difference in teacher-rating appeared to be most marked for ratings of performance in reading and writing (p. 160).

Some research also suggests that there is an inherent prejudice in the assessment of writing reinforced by teachers and the English Curriculum. Certain writing styles and writing models are rewarded more highly than others for elements other than technical skill, vocabulary level and accuracy. The 1992 government study in the United Kingdom (as cited in Bleach, 1998) which scrutinised 300 English examination scripts, found boys to be more sophisticated writers and better spellers than girls, despite their poor performance at English General Secondary Certificate of Education (GSCE). The report claims that boys are outclassed in English writing exams because they write short, action-based stories and include less detail and explanation than girls. Further, Orange and Horowitz (1999) found that teacher misconceptions about students' writing preferences are a contributor to student boredom and disengagement.

Much of the current research then, focuses on barriers to success for boys which spring from a masculine positioning. However, there is a danger in the present educational climate, that apparent gender differences could be turned into deficits (Newkirk, 2000), and to some extent this may already be happening. One school of thought believes that it is a mistake to aim for gender equality of performance in English. Thomas (1997) contends that boys and girls are 'differently literate' and are best dealt with by identifying

their respective discourse and gender strengths. Such an identification requires an examination of the English Curriculum and the Writing Achievement Objectives described for Levels 5 and 6 (Year 11).

The model of expressive/poetic writing promoted in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1994) which emphasises personal thoughts and feelings and sensory awareness may not be appropriate for boys' preferred writing genres or allow for a range of writing discourses. It is possible that the ideological construction of the English Curriculum, and traditional beliefs about 'good' writing, are prejudiced against the types of writing preferred by boys, so that there may always be a hidden disadvantage for boys' writing in the English classroom. The present English Curriculum structure may not allow for equal reward for gender differentiated discourse strengths because of its fixed descriptors pertaining to preferred stylistic writing qualities. Furthermore, current views regarding boys' writing underachievement have not considered the possibility that barriers to learning may be inherent in the English Curriculum construct itself.

However, the New Zealand Education Review Office report *Promoting Boys' Achievement* (March, 2000) targets effective school systems and structures, as a means of improving chances of success for boys, rather than examining the way curricula are delivered and measured. This report stresses the need for schools to have effective discipline processes, supportive environments, and interesting and engaging programmes for boys.

Thus the current context is one where boys are underachieving in English, especially in writing, in comparison to girls. While this gender disparity in English is not a recent development, the growing disparity in other academic

and non academic areas, and associated negative behavioural and attitudinal outcomes are certainly growing educational and social concerns. Neither education nor gender are neutral constructs, and contemporary discourses emphasise the fact that dominant masculinities do exist within mainstream society, and have an influential role in policing attitudes towards learning – both for males and females.

The Focus

There is growing evidence that self-efficacy plays a central role in accounting for academic performance and attitudes (Pajares & Valiante, 1997^a; Shell, Bruning & Murphy, 1989; Williams, 1994). Self-efficacy theorists (Bandura, 1982; Schunk, 1989; Pajares, 1996^a) propose that what a person believes about his/her capabilities influences their motivation and, as a result, determines the instigation, direction, effort and persistence of future actions. Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by a range of affective variables. In the English classroom, the beliefs students hold about their writing capabilities help determine what they will do with the knowledge and skills they possess. While academic performances are, in a large part, the result of what students actually come to believe they can accomplish, they are more likely to have self-efficacious beliefs when their affect is positive (Maddux, 1995). Bandura (1986) claims that while many boys may feel highly efficacious in writing, without the corresponding feelings of self-worth, they may realise little satisfaction from accomplishing in that area.

However, self-efficacy is not the only influence in educational settings. Achievement and attitudinal behaviours also depend on knowledge and skills, outcome expectations, and the perceived value of outcomes (Schunk, 1986).

Learners are motivated to act in ways they believe will result in outcomes they value. Further, learners will be more likely to be engaged in the learning if it contains elements of interest and value, and they believe they have control over their achievements. Scott (1996) and Skinner, Wellborn and Connell (1990) refer to the cyclical nature of perceived control, self-efficacy and performance outcomes. The cycle begins with perceived control over outcomes which results in enhanced performance. A successful performance, then, reinforces the student's perception of control and thus enhances self-efficacy.

The relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement has been well established (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991) and a few studies have examined the relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing achievement (Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Pajares & Valiante, 1997^{a,b}). Very little research however, has been conducted in the area of other affective factors such as value of writing outcomes, the perceived usefulness of writing, attitudes to writing, and levels of writing satisfaction and enjoyment.

The Aim

Although gender-differentiated patterns of writing achievement and writing behaviours have been established, research up to this time has not established clear relationships for boys' underachievement in writing, compared to girls. The aim of the present research is to explore boys' and girls' beliefs about writing tasks and outcomes, in the School Certificate English classroom. Further, the present study aims to isolate the possible source of boys' negative writing affect, and critical factors which may be barriers for them in writing.

Findings from this study should offer a basis for exploring how, and from where, writing beliefs are developed, and how students perceive these writing beliefs influence their writing attainments. Findings may also offer a direction for writing ideology and pedagogy to be examined in terms of a gender-differentiated equity. Such findings could be used to inform writing curriculum content, design, delivery, and assessment in ways that will reposition boys for writing success in the secondary English classroom.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In line with the concerns of the present study, the review of literature will cover the following topics. First of all, the New Zealand English Curriculum will be described to provide the subject area context of the present study. Following that, the underpinning elements of Bandura's social cognitive theory with an emphasis on self-efficacy, will be discussed. Attention will be drawn to self-efficacy theory as it applies to educational contexts in general, and the findings from previous research in this area.

The predictive utility of self-efficacy theory will be briefly discussed as a frame of reference for identifying, and measuring writing self-efficacy beliefs in relation to writing achievement and writing beliefs in the present research. Affective dimensions of interest such as self-concept, self-regulation, locus of control, perceived usefulness and value of writing, teacher feedback, and outcome expectancy are then considered as contributors to writing attitudes and behaviours. How the findings of previous studies, which have focused on the relationships between affective variables and self-efficacy beliefs, have informed and shaped the present research, will also be indicated.

The current theories pertaining to gender disparities in writing achievement and writing behaviours will then be explored, noting that many of the contemporary views are emerging and still in a process of debate and discussion, rather than grounded in extensive empirical research. The idea that gender is not a neutral concept, but is a social, political, and educational construct, is implied. Previous studies that have focused on gender writing

differences will be also be reported in terms of how they have informed this study, and the ways in which they indicate directions for future research.

By way of concluding, a brief statement is made about the ideological and pedagogical construction of writing, as described in the English Curriculum, and presented in the English classroom, and associated beliefs about writing assessment in terms of possible inherent gender bias, which may be contributing to the gender differentiation in literacy, particularly in writing.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

A summary of the Writing substrand of the Written Strand in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, is included here to indicate the Ministry of Education's (1994) statement on the expectations of year 11 students, in terms of written expression and various writing skills. The national School Certificate English examination is based on this statement, and it is the gender disparity indicated in the outcomes of this exam that is causing such current concern.

More specifically, boys seem to be rejecting writing practices which are considered 'feminine'. The elements of the English curriculum where this seems most problematic are the substrands of *expressive* and *poetic* writing. There is a tendency for boys to reject personal/creative writing and not consider it as a masculine activity, and see it as more naturally suited to girls. For example, personal writing which focuses on character and relationship detail or emotional responses, may not be viewed by many boys as being naturally appropriate for them.

English is categorized in the area of Language and Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (NZCF) (1994). Language and Languages is included in the NZCF as one of the seven essential learning areas:

Language development is essential to intellectual growth. It enables us to make sense of the world around us. The ability to use spoken and written language effectively, to read and to listen, and to discern critically messages from television, film the computer and other visual media is fundamental both to learning and to effective participation in society and the workforce ... all students will need to develop the ability and confidence to communicate competently in English, in both its spoken and written forms. (EINZC, p. 6)

The English Curriculum is divided into three strands - Oral, Written and Visual. Within each strand the curriculum document sets out a clear and structured progression, describing achievement objectives which span all levels of schooling. These objectives are two types: language functions and language processes. The language functions specify what students are expected to be able to do as they use, and respond to the English language. The language processes underpin the functions, and are considered crucial for students' language development.

It is stated that in writing students should develop:

an explicit knowledge of the steps of writing process, such as forming intentions, composing, drafting, correcting and publishing.

They should learn to understand and use accurately the conventions of written language, especially in formal contexts, and

to write confidently, clearly and appropriately, in a range of styles and for a variety of purposes. (p. 33)

The functions of writing are categorised as expressive writing, poetic writing and transactional writing.

Expressive writing is personal, spontaneous, and often unstructured, reflecting the ebb and flow of thoughts and feelings, and is frequently the source for other writing. Poetic writing is shaped to convey sensory and artistic qualities, and includes fiction in its many forms. The term 'poetic' highlights the crafted quality of such writing. Transactional writing conveys factual information, persuades, or argues a point of view objectively. It, too, is characterised by crafting and shaping, as in report writing or scientific language. (p. 33)

The curriculum describes achievement objectives in the language strands and substrands, and in doing so implies expected performance level indicators and assessable outcomes. The levels specified in this document indicate approximate parallels between levels of achievement and age and class bands. At year 11 (form 5), which is the focus of this study, the levels 5 and 6 apply. The national School Certificate English examination (both the internally assessed and externally assessed), and the recently developed Achievement Standards in English (level 1) for the proposed National Certificate of Educational Achievement (2002), are derived from levels 5/6 of the English Curriculum.

For the purposes of this study, students will be asked about their confidence to perform writing tasks in the areas listed (see Figures 2 and 3).

These tasks include reading functions (e.g., select and read fluently and independently a wide range of contemporary and historical texts beginning to adapt reading processes and strategies for difference purposes), and writing functions (e.g., write regularly and confidently to respond to a range of experiences, ideas, observations and texts, developing a personal voice).

Teachers in the study are also asked to rate their students on specific writing and language competencies using level 5/6 achievement objectives as a guideline. Because self-efficacy is best assessed in terms of very specific tasks (Pajares, 1996), using tasks as defined in the English Curriculum statement should enhance the ecological validity of the study.

Figure 2

Written Language: Achievement Objectives – Reading Functions
Level 5 and 6 (EINZC)

WRITTEN LANGUAGE: ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Reading Functions

	Personal Reading <i>Students should:</i>	Close Reading <i>Student should:</i>
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> select and read fluently and independently a wide range of contemporary and historical texts, beginning to adapt reading processes and strategies for different purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discuss language, meanings, and ideas in range of contemporary and historical texts, relating their understandings to personal experience, purposes, audience, and other texts
Level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> select and read fluently and independently a wide range of contemporary and historical texts, including some with established critical reputations, confidently adapting reading processes and strategies for different purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discuss and analyse language, meanings, ideas, and literary qualities in a range of contemporary and historical texts, taking account of purpose, audience, and other texts

Figure 3

Written Language: Achievement Objectives – Writing Functions
Levels 5 and 6 (EINZC)

WRITTEN LANGUAGE: ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Writing Functions

	Reading <i>Students should:</i>	Personal Reading <i>Students should:</i>	Close <i>Students should:</i>
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write regularly and confidently to respond to a range of experiences, ideas, observations and texts, developing a personal voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing and reworking texts in an extended range of genre, selecting appropriate language features and using conventions of writing accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write coherent, logical instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and argue a point of view, lining main and supporting ideas, and structuring material in appropriate styles in a range of authentic contexts
Level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write regularly, confidently, and fluently to reflect on a range of experiences, ideas, feelings, and texts, developing a personal voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing, and reworking texts to express experiences and ideas imaginatively in an extended range of genres, choosing appropriate language features and using conventions of writing accurately and with discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write clear, coherent instructions, explanations, and factual reports and express and justify a point of view persuasively, structuring material confidently, in appropriate styles for different audiences, in a range of authentic contexts

Social-Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory proposes that individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, motivation and actions. This self-system provides reference mechanisms and a set of sub-functions for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behaviour, which results from the interplay between the system and environmental sources of influence. Thus a self-regulatory function occurs, by providing individuals with the capability to influence their own cognitive processes and actions, and alter their learning environments.

Theory of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1986) as "the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986) is one of the more recent theories in a long tradition of personal competence or efficacy theories. The underpinning notion is that the initiation and persistence at behaviour, and courses of action, are determined primarily by judgements and expectations concerning behavioural skills and capabilities, and the likelihood of being able to successfully cope with educational and environmental demands and challenges. Virtually all experiences of learning, choice-making, and conscious motivation, are affected by the individual's perception of their own ability to succeed.

According to Bandura (1989), this perception requires bringing self-influence to bear on every aspect of a student's learning experience

(p. 21). Self-efficacy theory helps explain why some people chose to behave one way, while others choose to behave in another way; why some are willing to invest much effort into a task, while others expend little, and why some demonstrate considerable persistence even when the odds seem against them, while others give up on tasks (Bandura, 1986).

Personal agency refers to the notion of individual influence over outcomes; the beliefs or perceptions that an individual can be instrumental in determining and influencing outcomes. People's self-evaluations of the results of their behaviours inform and alter, both their environments and their self-beliefs, which, in turn, inform and alter subsequent behaviours. Bandura's conception of triadic reciprocal determinism is based on the notion that personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events on the one hand, behaviour on the other, and environmental influences create interactions. Because personal agency is socially rooted, and operates within socio-cultural influences, individuals are both products and producers of their own environments, and of their social systems (Pajares, 1996^a).

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory rejects the dichotomous conception of self as agent and self as object. Bandura believes that "acting on the environment and acting on oneself entail shifting the perspective of the same agent, rather than reifying different selves regulating each other or transforming the self from agent to object" (p. 118). Furthermore, Bandura (1989) claims that the conception of self-regulation expands in two directions. First, it incorporates a larger set of self-regulatory mechanisms governing cognitive functioning. Second, it encompasses social and motivational skills, as well as cognitive ones.

Knowledge structures are translated into proficient performances through a conception-matching process that includes both transformational and generative operations. In academic learning, this process involves comparing what one knows against the level of understanding one seeks, and then acquiring the requisite knowledge.

The process of creating and using these self-beliefs is an intuitive one: individuals engage in a behaviour, interpret the results of their actions, use these interpretations to create, and develop beliefs about their capability to engage in subsequent behaviours in similar domains, and behave in concert with the beliefs created. In school, for example, the beliefs that students develop about their academic capabilities, help determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they possess. Consequently, their academic performances are, in large part, the result of what students actually come to believe that they have accomplished, or can accomplish.

This theory helps explain why students' academic performances may differ markedly even when they have similar ability (Pajares, 1996^a). Moreover, it is this human capability for self-reflection that Bandura considered to be the form of self-referent thought which enables people to evaluate, and alter their own thinking and behaviour. Bandura (1989) proposed that "If there is any characteristic that is distinctively human, it is the capability for reflective self-consciousness" (p. 21).

Thus self-efficacy theory encompasses the beliefs in one's ability to perform tasks and to control outcomes. The complex relationship between the concepts of mastery, control and competence has been explored in many studies

(e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maddux, 1995). While the exact relationship is not clear, Schunk (1996^a) believes that the numerous notions and terms can be reduced to a fairly small number of basic social-cognitive building blocks, including causal attributions/ explanations, agency/self-efficacy beliefs, mean send beliefs/outcome expectancies, goals or desired outcomes, and goal/outcome value. Efficacy beliefs are influenced by the acquisition of cognitive skills, but they are not merely a reflection of them. Children with the same level of cognitive skill development differ in their intellectual performances depending on the strength of their perceived efficacy (Schunk, 1991^a).

Self-Concept

Self-efficacy differs from self-concept in that self-efficacy is a context-specific assessment of competence to perform a certain task, that is “an individual’s judgement of his or her capabilities to perform given actions” (Schunk, 1991, p. 207). Self-concept judgements are more global and less context dependent. Marsh, Walker and Debus (1991) saw the distinction between the two constructs as a difference in the source of an individual’s judgement. Self-concept judgements are based on social and self-comparisons where individuals use external and internal comparisons to determine their self worth. These are referred to as “frame of reference effects” (Marsh et al., 1991). Self-efficacy judgements, on the other hand, focus on the specific ability to accomplish a task where frame of reference effects do not play a prominent role. Bandura (1986) saw this as an arguable difference between the two constructs. For example, Chapman and Tunmer (1995) found that the reading performance

of beginning readers during their first year of schooling had a stronger effect on their subsequent self-efficacy than on their reading self-concepts.

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) believes that efficacy beliefs are “multifaceted and contextual,” and perform a mediational role in human functioning. The four sources from which these beliefs are developed are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Pajares, 1996^b). Mastery experiences (performance experiences) are the results of purposive performance, where individuals gauge the effects of their actions and achievements, and these interpretations help create their efficacy beliefs. Success raises self-efficacy and failure lowers it. *Vicarious experiences* (observational learning, modeling, imitation) influence self-efficacy beliefs when people observe the behaviour of others, see what they are able to do, note the consequences of their behaviour, and then use this information to form expectancies about their own behaviour and its consequences (Maddux, 1995). The effects of vicarious experiences depend on such factors as the observer’s perception of the similarity between the model and the observer, the number and variety of models, the perceived power of the model, and the similarity between the problems faced by the observer and the model (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1986).

According to Schunk (1991^a), students who watch others succeed tend to believe they too are capable, which can, in turn, motivate them towards attempting a task. Schunk and Hanson (1985) found that the observation of peer models enhanced self-efficacy and skill development more than an adult model,

or no model at all. It is possible, according to these findings, that boys who observe girls succeeding at writing and boys not achieving, may learn a pattern of performance behaviour in writing that is continually reinforced. If boys consistently observe other boys not achieving in writing this can exert a powerful influence on writing self-efficacy beliefs.

Verbal or social persuasion influences self-beliefs through messages conveyed by others. Teachers and peers can often exert influence on learners through the use of positive or negative persuasion. It is a less potent source of change in self-efficacy expectancy than mastery or vicarious experiences, but some experimental studies have shown that verbal persuasion is a moderately effective means for changing self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., Maddux, Norton, & Stohlberg, 1986; Maddux & Rogers, 1983; Newman & Goldfried, 1987; as cited in Maddux, 1995).

Physiological and emotional states influence self-efficacy when people associate adverse physiological or emotional states with poor performance, perceived incompetence, and perceived failure. Moreover, people are more likely to have self-efficacious beliefs about performance when their affect is positive, than when it is negative (Maddux, 1995). According to Scott (1996), these four factors “work in an overlapping and interactive manner” (p.199). This suggests that one factor on its own is unlikely to make an independent contribution. The four factors form an integrated pattern of influence. Schunk (1996^a) also supports the notion that self-efficacy judgements involve a careful weighing and combining of various factors. Information acquired from these four sources does not automatically influence self-efficacy; rather it is cognitively appraised (Bandura, 1986). In appraising efficacy, learners weigh

and combine their perceptions of their ability, the difficulty of the task, the amount of effort expended, the amount of external assistance received, the number and pattern of successes and failures, the perceived similarity to models, and persuader credibility (Schunk, 1989).

People's beliefs in their efficacy to achieve a certain behaviour or performance can have diverse effects. These beliefs then influence the choice of behaviours in which individuals will engage, and the courses of action they will pursue. Self-efficacy beliefs also influence how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations, whether their thoughts and emotions are helpful or hindering, how much stress they experience in coping with environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (Pajares, 1996^b).

Linked with the sources of efficacy beliefs is the process of mediation. Self-efficacy beliefs influence behaviour through four mediating processes: (a) goal-setting; (b) affect; (c) cognition; and (d) selection of environments and activities (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 1991). They influence the goals people set for themselves; they influence the plans or strategies people envision for attaining these goals; they influence the development of rules for predicting and influencing events, and self-efficacy for problem-solving influences the efficiency, and effectiveness of problem-solving (Maddux, 1995).

Self-Efficacy and Academic Achievement

Self-efficacy beliefs have received increasing attention in educational research, primarily in studies of academic motivation and of self-regulation (e.g., Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). There is growing evidence that self-efficacy plays a central role in accounting for academic performance (Pajares & Valiante, 1997^{a, b}; Shell, Bruning, & Murphy, 1989; Williams, 1994). According to Bandura (1982), an individual's perceived self-efficacy is a stronger predictor of future behaviour than performance attainment. Scott (1996) claims that "self-efficacy does not reveal what a person can truly accomplish but what they think they can accomplish" (p.7).

Value of Outcomes

High self-efficacy does not automatically produce competent performances if students are lacking positive outcome expectations or beliefs concerning the probable outcome of actions (Schunk, 1986). Learners are motivated to act in ways that they believe will result in outcomes they value. Self-efficacy is dependent primarily on the task at hand, independent of its culturally assigned value. There is no fixed relationship between one's beliefs about what one can or cannot do, and whether one feels positively or negatively about oneself. Some students may feel highly efficacious in a subject but without the corresponding positive feelings of self-worth, they may take no pride in accomplishing in this area.

Furthermore, Bandura (1986) observed that there are a number of conditions under which self-efficacy beliefs do not perform their influential predictive, or mediational role in human functioning. In prejudicially structured

systems, students may find that no amount of skillful effort will bring about desired outcomes. There may be cases where students may possess the necessary skill and high self-efficacy required to achieve a certain outcome, but they may choose not to because they lack the necessary incentives. Bandura also states that self-efficacy will have no bearing on performance if schools lack effective teachers, necessary equipment, or resources required to assist students in the adequate performance of academic tasks. ERO's report (1999) *The Achievement of Boys*, examines the influence of some of these above factors and concludes that the school context, the teaching style, the curriculum delivery and the resources, may all be critical success factors in influencing the academic performance of students.

Motivation, Choice and Persistence

Schunk (1996^b) states that the relationship between the three indexes for motivation (choice, effort and persistence) must be altered when applied to a context where learning is taking place. Choice is not an effective index of academic motivation in a school situation because students have little choice about participating in learning activities which are dictated by teachers.

However, it has been found that cognitive effort can be an appropriate index of academic motivation. Bandura (1982) contends that the amount of effort a student invests in a task is related to their perceived level of self-efficacy.

Furthermore, Schunk (1991^b) suggests that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to expend effort and engage in activities such as the use of strategies to comprehend information. Conversely, low self-efficacy students will show less employment of effort because of self-doubt. According to Bandura (1989)

highly efficacious students think and feel differently from inefficacious students. They are often the risk takers and initiators in a classroom learning environment. They question, challenge, and are self-directed.

Locus of Control

Bandura (1982) believes that self-efficacy is a component of personal control. Locus of control theory is based on an individual's tendency to perceive control over outcomes as either internal or external (Schunk, 1991^a). Skinner et al. (1990) found that a student's perceived control over academic outcomes is an important contributor to school achievement. Scott (1996) claims that efficacious students believe they have control over achievement, and their actions have a primary impact on achievement. Conversely, inefficacious students believe their actions have a limited effect on achievement, and they can do little to control achievement outcomes. That is, when students believe they can control academic achievement they perform at higher levels on cognitive tasks.

Skinner et al. (1990) developed a model of perceived control based on three sets of beliefs: strategy beliefs, which refer to the effectiveness of certain actions in producing outcomes; capacity beliefs, which refer to whether the individual is capable of acquiring effective actions; and control beliefs, which concern producing the desired outcome without reference to specific actions or causes. Children vary in how they interpret, store and recall their successes and failures, thus differing in how much self-efficacy they derive from similar attainments. They also evaluate the social influences that contribute to efficacy beliefs independently of skills. Academic performances are the products of

cognitive capabilities implemented through motivational and other self-regulatory skills. The efficacy beliefs that children form affect how consistently and effectively they apply what they know. Therefore, it follows that self-efficacy is a better predictor of intellectual performance than skills alone.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is defined as an individual's ability to regulate his/her own behaviour. Self-regulating students actively employ strategies in order to improve skills in learning situations. Efficacious self-regulators invest activities with proximal challenges on their own by adopting goals of progressive improvement when they get feedback on how they are performing (Bandura, 1989). A high sense of academic efficacy is accompanied by extensive use of self-directed learning strategies (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Bandura (1989) claims that "people regulate their level and distribution of effort in accordance with the effects they expect their actions to have" (p. 129). As a result, their behaviour is better predicted from their beliefs than from the actual consequences of their actions. Moreover, self-efficacy is promoted when a student is taught to apply learning strategies because it instills a sense of control over performance outcomes (Schunk, 1989).

Research has demonstrated that self-efficacy and self-regulation work in tandem to empower students. For example, Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent and Larivée (1991) not only corroborated the independent contribution of efficacy beliefs to cognitive performance, but also identified some of the self-regulative processes through which they do so.

They found that regardless of whether children were of superior or average cognitive ability, those with a high sense of efficacy were more successful in solving conceptual mathematical problems than were children of equal ability but with lower perceived efficacy.

Self-regulation performs a critical role in successful writing practice. Writing is an activity which requires self-discipline, reflection, selection, and the ability to proof-read and edit. Bandura (1989) claims that students will only apply self-regulative skills in taxing situations when activities hold little interest for them, if self-efficacy beliefs are high. This has important implications when examining gender differences in writing. Students may have self-regulative skills but without a high degree of confidence or task engagement they may perform poorly.

Efficacy beliefs, then, play an influential mediational role in academic attainment. The extent to which such factors as level of cognitive ability, prior educational preparation and attainment, gender and attitudes toward academic activities influence academic performance is partly dependent on how much they affect efficacy beliefs. The more they alter efficacy beliefs, the greater the impact they have on academic attainments.

Critical Self-Efficacy Factors

Schunk (1996^a) summarises the research of the role of self-efficacy in education. He looks at the factors affecting self-efficacy in an educational context and the predictive utility of self-efficacy in terms of measuring the relationship between self-efficacy and achievement outcomes. The important factors seen to influence self-efficacy are: goal-setting, information processing,

modeling, progress feedback and rewards. Schunk sees these five factors as being part of the self-efficacy/achievement outcome relationship.

At the start of a learning activity, students differ in their self-efficacy for acquiring the new material as a result of prior experiences and aptitudes (abilities, attitudes). As students work on the task, personal factors (e.g., goal-setting, information processing), and situational factors (e.g., rewards, teacher feedback) provide cues which signal how well they are learning, and which they then use to assess self-efficacy for further learning. Motivation will clearly be enhanced if students perceive that they are making progress. Higher motivation and self-efficacy promote task engagement and skill acquisition (Schunk, 1989).

Teacher Influence

Research also suggests that teachers play an important influential role in student achievement. In examining the role of perceived cognitive efficacy in creative thinking, Locke, Frederick, Lee and Bobko (as cited in Bandura, 1997), found that both the level of cognitive skills and strategy instruction, raised beliefs in cognitive innovativeness. The increased perceived efficacy promoted creative thinking, both directly, and by adoption of motivating personal challenges. Self-efficacy beliefs then, are beliefs of personal competence, not beliefs about personal value. It is these self-efficacy beliefs that are most predictive of students' choices, their work habits, their fear and apprehension, and their achievement.

Summary of Self-Efficacy and Implications for Education

Students develop their academic self-efficacy beliefs from varied sources, including the observations they make of others attempting similar tasks or the verbal messages they receive from teachers, parents, and classmates. By far the strongest source of efficacy information, however, is that which students obtain from the interpreted results of their efforts and the value of those outcomes. Students' confidence influences the choices they make, and the courses of action they pursue. Students engage in tasks in which they feel competent and tend to avoid those in which they do not.

Efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort students will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and achievement in many ways (Pajares, 2000). Efficacious students approach difficult tasks with confidence and resilience whereas students with low self-efficacy may believe that things are tougher than they really are. When students lack confidence in their capabilities, they are likely to attribute their failure to low ability which they perceive as inborn and permanent. Students who doubt their academic ability envision low grades and negative outcomes often even before they begin a test or examination, or even engagement in an activity.

The Predictive Utility of Self-Efficacy

Although self-efficacy is sometimes used to refer to one's general sense of competence and effectiveness (e.g., Smith, 1989), the term is most useful when defined, operationalised, and measured specific to a behaviour or set of

behaviours in a specific context (e.g., Kaplan, Atkins & Reinsch, 1984, as cited in Tripp, 1999). Most investigations of self-efficacy in academic settings have sought to determine the predictive value of self-efficacy beliefs on varied performances or motivation constructs.

Self-Efficacy for Performance and Self-Efficacy for Learning

Self-efficacy research has examined a wide range of human performance situations, however, self-efficacy researchers have drawn a distinction between self-efficacy for performance, and self-efficacy for learning (Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987; Schunk, 1989, 1996^{a, b}). When students are familiar with skills required to accomplish an academic task, they can interpret their prior attainments and identify the skills on which to formulate their self-efficacy for performance. Moreover, these interpretations and associated self-beliefs can vary in the level and size of their outcome expectancies.

Magnitude, Strength and Generality

Self-efficacy expectancies are viewed as varying along three dimensions: magnitude, strength and generality (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). *Magnitude* of self-efficacy, in a hierarchy of behaviours, refers to the number of “steps” of increasing difficulty a person believes him/herself capable of performing. *Strength* of self-efficacy refers to the level of resolve of a person’s convictions that she or he can perform a behaviour in question (Bandura, 1986). *Generality* of self-efficacy expectancies refers to the extent to which success or failure experiences influence expectancies in a limited, behavioural specific way, or whether changes in self-efficacy expectancies extend to other similar behaviours

and contexts. Success at a task, behaviour, or skill will strengthen self-efficacy expectancies for the same in the future, whereas perceptions of failure will diminish self-efficacy expectancy.

Thus a three-dimensional approach to judging writing efficacy assessment could follow a common process. First, there are different levels of task demands within any given domain of learning. In the case of written expression, these can range from the lower level of writing a simple sentence with proper punctuation and grammatical structure, to the higher level of writing compound and complex sentences with correct punctuation and grammatical structure, or organising sentences into a paragraph so as to clearly express a theme or idea. Students could then be asked to rate the strength of their belief in their capability to perform the various levels identified. If the relevant levels of writing an essay have been adequately identified, the efficacy assessment provides multiple specific items of varying difficulty that collectively assess the domain of essay writing. In this particular case, the items should be prototypic of essay writing rather than minutely specific features of writing. They should also be worded in terms of 'can,' a judgement of capability, rather than of will, a statement of intent. Because students' beliefs will differ in generality across the domain of writing, if these beliefs are to be compared with students' actual writing, the next task should be to select a writing task on which the levels were based, and on which the confidence judgements were provided.

However, students may not judge themselves efficacious across all types of language arts activities, or even across all types of writing. Self-efficacy beliefs may differ in predictive power depending on the task they are asked to predict. In general, efficacy beliefs will best predict the performances that most

closely correspond with such beliefs. Thus, understanding that beliefs differ in generality is crucial to understanding efficacy assessment (Tripp, 1999).

In considering self-efficacy theory as a useful way of explaining aspects of student achievement, Schunk (1996^a) believes that, because in educational settings the influence of self-efficacy on such motivational indices as choice, effort and persistence can be somewhat contrived and teacher driven, they may not be the most accurate indicators. Cognitive effort may be a better index of academic motivation. The most general self-efficacy assessments consist of an omnibus instrument that attempts to measure a general sense of efficacy or "confidence." Bandura (1986, 1997) argued that such general measures create problems of predictive relevance and accuracy, and can be obscure about what is really being assessed.

General self-efficacy instruments provide global scores that decontextualise the self-efficacy/behaviour correspondence, thus turning self-efficacy into a generalised personality trait, rather than the context-specific judgement Bandura suggests it should be. Such instruments tend to measure people's general confidence that they can succeed at tasks and in situations, without specifying what these tasks and situations are. Composite scores provided by multiple-scale instruments may have limited value if the object of research is to elicit discrete academic outcomes (see Pajares & Miller, 1995). The predictive utility and validity is likely to be enhanced if self-efficacy beliefs are measured in terms of item-specific task predictions.

Self-Efficacy and Task Specificity

Bandura (1997) has cautioned researchers attempting to predict academic outcomes from students' self-efficacy beliefs that to increase accuracy of prediction, self-efficacy beliefs should be measured in terms of particularised judgements of capability that may vary across realms of activity, different levels of task demands within a given activity domain, and under different situational circumstances. To be both explanatory and predictive, self-efficacy measures should be tailored to domains of functioning being analysed, and reflect the various task demands within that domain. The skills required to accomplish the performance attainments that form the outcome assessment should be clear to the participant. When students do not know with any degree of accuracy what it is they are expected to do, the judgements on which they will base their capability will be vague and lacking validity.

There is a danger, however, in being overly specific (Lent & Hackett, 1987). It is possible to define a construct so narrowly that it loses a sense of relevance. Pajares and Miller (1995) warn that using identical self-efficacy and performance indexes in an effort to closely match belief and criterion, may produce biased effects from self-efficacy to performance outcomes. They encourage researchers to use similar, rather than identical items or tasks, to assess self-efficacy belief and performance criteria, or to use structural equation modeling analyses to partial out the bias.

Self -Efficacy and Writing

Like reading, writing is a foundational skill, and understanding the role that self-efficacy may play in its development is a question of some import. (Pajares, 1999, p. 4)

Previous Studies

Over the last 30 years, researchers in the field of written composition have focused on the processes that writers engage in as they compose a text (Faigley, 1990; Hairston, 1990). Cognitive processes have received particular attention as researchers have tried to understand the thought processes underlying students' written compositions. Hull and Rose (1989) noted that the more that researchers learned about the relationship between cognition and writing, the more complex the relationship seemed to be. Recent researchers (e.g., Beach, 1989; Elbow, 1993) have become more interested in the connection between affective factors and writing performance and have addressed this complexity by investigating the affective factors involved in writing. These factors include the confidence with which students approach writing tasks; the writing apprehension that students feel as they attempt writing tasks; how useful they perceive writing to be; the self-regulatory strategies in which they engage; and the feelings of self-worth associated with writing.

Writing Self-Efficacy and Writing Performance

Researchers who have explored the effect of self-efficacy beliefs on writing agree that the two variables are related. For example, Meier, McCarthy and Schmeck (1984) reported that writing self-efficacy predicted the writing

performance of college students, but they did not explore the nature of the relationship among the variables such as self-efficacy, apprehension, aptitude and performance. McCarthy, Rinderer and Meier (1985) identified 19 writing skills and asked undergraduates whether they could demonstrate them. They also assessed anxiety, locus of control orientation, and cognitive processing.

Shell and his associates (Shell, Colvin, & Bruning, 1995; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989) reported that students' confidence in their writing capability is significantly related to their writing competence across academic grades. Students receiving high grades for written composition also reported high levels of writing confidence. The confidence students have in their competence to write is thus reinforced by the assessment, and becomes a source of information that influences self-efficacy beliefs.

Writing Apprehension

Writing apprehension, a construct developed by Daly and Miller (1975^a) that describes a form of writing anxiety, has been the focus of various studies (e.g., Daly, 1978; Daly & Wilson, 1983). Daly and Miller (1975^b) reported significant correlations between apprehension and Standardised Achievement Test (SAT) verbal scores, writing self-efficacy, and willingness to take part in additional writing courses. They also found that males were significantly more apprehensive than females.

However, findings on the relationship between writing apprehension and writing performance are inconsistent. Faigley, Daly and Witte (1981) found that the relationship was significant when writing was assessed using a standardised test, but not necessarily when an essay was used. More recently, researchers

have reported that writing apprehension typically correlates strongly with writing performances, but that when self-efficacy beliefs are controlled, the influence of apprehension diminishes or disappears (e.g., Pajares, Miller & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1997^b).

Perceived Value of Writing

Students' perceived value of writing has also been included in writing studies (e.g. Shell et al., 1989). According to expectancy-value theory, judgements of confidence and valued outcomes codetermine the tasks in which individuals will engage and the success they will experience (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Motivation is primarily a result of individuals' beliefs about the likely outcomes of their actions, and of the incentive value they place on those outcomes (see McClelland, 1985; Rotter, 1982). While expectancy-value theorists agree that self-efficacy judgements play an interactive role with valued outcomes in determining the tasks in which individuals will engage (see Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) they emphasise the more prominent role of value constructs. According to Bandura (1986), beliefs such as the perceived usefulness of activities are related to efficacy judgements because efficacy judgements, in part, determine the perceived value of such activities.

Writing Competence and Confidence

Cambourne (1984) claims that there are at least four things that successful writers have in common: *Firstly*, they are confident readers and writers -- reading and writing tasks rarely intimidate them. *Secondly*, they display high degrees of control over the processes which underpin reading and

writing. *Thirdly*, while they appreciate the communicative functions which reading and writing serve, they also know how to use reading and writing as media for enhancing thinking and learning. *Fourthly*, they continue to engage in, and enjoy reading and writing long after formal instruction has ceased. The kind of knowledge, skills and procedures needed for reading and writing overlap considerably.

Readers can read without necessarily being writers or knowing a great deal about writing and how it's done. But writers must be readers, and this creates a kind of language and thinking behaviour which is quite unique. (Cambourne, 1984, p. 8)

Students' self-efficacy for self-regulation, that is, the judgements of capability to use various self-regulated learning strategies, also correlates with writing competence (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Therefore, successful writing students in the English classroom are those who understand how to apply skills and strategies to a given task and, more importantly, have the confidence and self-belief that they can accomplish it.

Pajares and Valiante (1997^b) attempted to determine whether middle school students' writing self-efficacy beliefs make an independent contribution to the prediction of their writing competence, and explored grade level and gender differences in writing. Writing self-efficacy was the only motivation construct to predict writing competence in a model that included writing self-concept, writing apprehension, perceived value of writing, self-efficacy for self-regulation, previous writing achievement, gender and grade level. Girls were more competent writers than boys, but there were no gender differences in

writing self-efficacy beliefs. However, when students were asked whether they were better writers than their peers, girls expressed that they were better writers than other boys or girls in their class or in their school to a greater degree than boys did. Girls believed themselves superior writers to boys. The findings of this study support the tenets of social cognitive theory regarding the influence of academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), and confirm previous findings that also indicated the influence of self-efficacy in academic achievement and endeavour (e.g., Pajares & Valiante, 1997^a; Shell et al., 1989, 1995).

The study of the writing of fifth-grade disadvantaged children by Mavrogenes and Bezruczko (1994) is consistent with views regarding the relationships between writing confidence and writing competence. Analysis of 186 students' compositions indicated students were optimistic despite their writing difficulties. Writing achievement was low. Significant correlations appeared between affective characteristics and both structure and thinking. Girls outscored boys on seven variables indicating that girls remain more positive about writing and with higher levels of confidence. A negative affect was correlated with poor writing structure and ideas, and while self-efficacy theory accounts for the link between writing competence, this study does indicate a gender difference in levels of writing affect.

Pajares and Johnson (1993) used multiple regression analysis to find that a model with writing self-efficacy, outcome expectations, writing apprehension, personal self-efficacy, and writing performance at beginning of term predicted the writing performance of college undergraduates, and at end of term accounted for 68% of the variance in the model. Only writing self-efficacy and pre-performance, however, had significant effects.

Writing Attitudes

Other studies have been conducted to establish relationships between factors which influence writing performance and achievement. Pajares and Johnson (1996) tested the influence of writing self-efficacy, writing apprehension and writing aptitude on 181 ninth grade students. They used a path analysis model with relationships hypothesised from social-cognitive theory and prior research findings. The results indicated that students' self-efficacy perceptions are strong predictors of their writing performance. Girls and boys did not differ in aptitude or performance, but girls reported lower writing self-efficacy. Native English-speaking Hispanic students had lower aptitude and performance scores, lower self-efficacy, and higher apprehension.

This study demonstrated that competence in an area such as writing can be informed by exploring the self-efficacy individuals bring to that competency. Students' self-confidence in their writing capability had a direct effect on their writing apprehension and essay-writing performance, and partially mediated the effect of gender and writing aptitude on their apprehension and performance. Pajares and Johnson (1996) also found that, although self-efficacy was a strong predictor of writing competence, incongruities in the interplay between the two constructs occurred.

Pajares and Johnson (1996) believe that the self-efficacy perceptions of the Hispanic first-year high school students may provide additional insights as to why many of them become and remain 'at risk'. Once entrenched, negative perceptions of one's ability prove exceedingly resistant to change, and even subsequent academic success often fails to alter them (Bandura, 1986). The perseverance phenomenon is a concept that is used to explain why people

persevere at tasks. It is believed that once acquired, beliefs tend to persist even in the face of conflicting information (Pajares & Johnson, 1996).

In both of the studies by Pajares and Johnson (1996) and Pajares and Valiante (1997^{a, b}) referred to previously, the students' self-efficacy perceptions had a direct effect on their writing performance, and played the mediational role hypothesised by social-cognitive theory. Although writing apprehension and performance were correlated in both studies, results showed that the influence of apprehension on performance was largely a result of non-causal covariation with self-efficacy.

It is also interesting to note that the study by Pajares and Valiante (1997^b) detected no sex differences in confidence ratings that the students made relative to their confidence to accomplish various tasks related to the process of writing an essay. However, although boys and girls did not differ in their reported confidence, when asked to directly compare their writing ability with that of boys, girls expressed a greater degree of superiority in their writing relative to boys in their class or in their school.

Verbal Persuasions

Pajares and Valiante (1999) in a follow-up study, interviewed the four students from the Pajares and Johnson (1996) study who reported the highest and lowest scores along the self-efficacy/ performance dimensions. What emerged were stories whose interpretations were more compatible with the 'invitational theory' of Purkey and Novak (1984). This theory suggests that the beliefs learners hold are primarily influenced by the verbal persuasions they received as children about their predicted or potential ability to perform certain

tasks. In the Pajares and Johnson study the four students spoke of developing their beliefs about writing “not always primarily from their enactive attainments, as social cognitive theory would predict, but rather from the verbal persuasions (or dissuasions) they received as children” (Pajares, 1999, p.2).

The clear finding to emerge from this study was that the verbal persuasions that influenced the development of self-efficacy took the form of invitations or disinvitations that students had received as children. A model also emerged where the relationship between self-efficacy and invitations showed that the invitational levels of functioning identified by Purkey and Novak (1984) influenced the creation and development of self-efficacy and the relationship between confidence and subsequent competence.

Gender and Writing

The question of how much gender influences writing attitudes and writing self-efficacy beliefs about writing is a relatively recent research area. In New Zealand, Rutledge (1996) examined the gender differential in reading. She reported data from a long-term investigation carried out between 1983-1994, showing that boys had greater difficulties and poorer results than girls in the area of written composition, handwriting, spelling, school progress and promotion, and intelligence tests. This pattern is consistently reflected in both primary and secondary school language classrooms. Writing underachievement for boys is related to other aspects of literacy learning behaviours, attitudes and achievement.

The Achievement of Boys (1999) reported that there appears to be differences in the ways boys and girls present as learners in the classroom. Girls are often more attentive, more willing to learn, and keen to please the teacher. In the United States some studies show that even by middle school, boys also rate themselves more efficacious than do girls (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Rueman & Midgley (1991). These findings are consistent with those from the United Kingdom, where men consistently expect better grades on university examinations than do women (Erkut, 1983; Vollmer, 1986). It has been suggested (Noddings, 1991) that boys and girls may use a different 'metric' when providing confidence judgements, and that girls may perceive that their judgement represents more of a 'promise' to achieve than that of boys (Purkey, 1996).

Moss (1998 cited in Newkirk, 1999) conducted a reading research project with classes of seven to nine year olds. The research team divided the children into three categories: children who can and do read freely and in a self-motivated way (can/do); children who can read, but don't read voluntarily (can/don't); and children who can't yet read independently, and who don't choose to read (can't/ don't). The data showed that there were more boys than girls in both the (can't/ don't) and (can/ do) categories. Moss found that (can't/don't) boys were anxious to mask their failure as readers. They put a lot of energy into avoiding reading, especially in classrooms where teachers' judgements of reading proficiency were made highly visible. In contrast, girls in the (can't/don't) category reacted differently to proficiency judgements, accepted the materials they were assigned by the teacher, and were prepared to spend more time reading (and writing). Based on these findings, Moss (1998)

suggests that the current theories about boys as readers and writers may well be flawed.

The commonsense view of why boys do less well at reading (and writing) starts from the assumption that either boys' preferences in reading and writing are insufficiently represented in the classroom, or that boys see too few men reading and writing to aspire to being readers and writers themselves. Neither position is borne out by the project data. (Moss, 1998, p. 291)

Instead, Moss highlights the different ways in which girls and boys react to proficiency judgements about their reading and writing and the power of peer groups.

Gendered Perceptions

In examining the question of gender and literacy in Australia, Alloway and Gilbert (1997) examined factors associated with "growing up as a boy" that might make participation and performance in the literacy classroom seem unattractive and undesirable. They also examined special issues which could be possible factors with respect to boys from different social and cultural backgrounds. Alloway and Gilbert argue that the social construction of masculinity is strongly implicated in literacy learning, and that to understand boys' performance and achievement in literacy, it is critical that the interplay between the constructions of gender and constructions of literacy is understood.

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) emphasise the significance of gender differences in subject performance, arguing that gender, social class and race intersect in the construction of gender disadvantage. They stress the tension boys

must experience in negotiating “an acceptable position ... approved not only by teachers but also by other students - both male and female students in the literacy classrooms” (p. 207).

Literacy practices, and this includes writing, that are naturalised in the English classroom, are often ones boys may experience as incompatible with their understandings of appropriate masculine identity. Moreover much of the most familiar school literacy practices require that students accomplish the processes of self-disclosure, introspection, empathetic response and personalise any creative expression.

Writing as a ‘Feminised’ Practice

Anecdotal evidence based on extensive classroom observation, shows that from early years of schooling the focus in the literacy classroom is on personalised expression. Many boys have a negative response to the practices and processes of writing because they are seen as “feminised practices”, and are in opposition with what it means to be a man. Martino (1994) conducted a study which examined a group of adolescent boys’ perceptions of English. He found that what the boys said about English was linked to the ways in which they had learned to define their masculinities. Martino claims that, “through their involvement in sport and other leisure activities, many boys learn to establish a desirable heterosexual masculinity which comes into conflict with the feminised capacities that they perceive being required of them in studying English” (p. 32).

Alloway and Gilbert (1997) believe the dichotomy for boys comes about when outside the context of the school (and to a certain extent within it) boys are encouraged to understand themselves very differently.

Hegemonic or dominant masculinity is done not in terms of self-disclosure, introspection, personalised or creative expression, but rather in terms of an outside-of-self objectified expression ... outward looking, hegemonic masculinity prefers to concentrate on things outside of self, rather than on the self Affiliation with hegemonic standards of masculinity advances an identity that is more maverick, self-styled and independent than can be expressed within the processes of self-regulation. (p. 13)

Martino (1995) suggests that boys learn to define their masculinities through sport and other leisure activities, and through this learn to establish a desirable heterosexual masculinity "which comes into conflict with the feminised capacities that they perceive to be required of them in studying English" (p. 33).

Vicky McLennan's (1998) beliefs based on her experience of teaching boys at St. Andrew's College, Christchurch, and how they present as learners in the English classroom, are consistent with the observations of English teachers who have considerable experience teaching boys:

I am convinced that genetic differences mean the Adolescent Male English Student is a unique species. Boys are 'big picture' people. They regard minor details such as accurate spelling or punctuation marks as trivial. With reassuring male confidence they deem their first writing drafts to be sufficient ... boys are succinct to a fault ... if they can say it in one sentence they can't see the point of elaborating in a paragraph." (McLennan, 1998, p. 18)

Writing Preferences

Some studies have demonstrated that there are some traditional and universal gender differences in literacy preferences and performances. For example, Schick (1994) conducted a cross-national study comparing secondary school boys' and girls' (individual, attitudinal, and family) and linguistics (type/frequency of oral conversations and test related activities) experiences, and their relation to differential writing performance. Results indicated that, in all three countries in the study, girls and boys engaged in distinct literacy-related activities in their families, and girls' performance was superior to boys.

In examining gender differences in writing styles and preferences Gormley et al. (1992) investigated whether girls' writing differed from that of boys in the same classroom. The study also examined whether a classroom teacher responded differently to her children's journal writing based on gender or proficiency. Twenty student journals were analysed in terms of frequency of particular writing features that have previously showed evidence of gender difference. Results showed that girls were much more apt to write their internal responses as they read a novel than boys, and when the book had two strong main characters, one male and one female, girls made more entries about these characters than did boys. Girls also used more overall proper names than boys (suggesting perhaps a stronger sense of inclusion for their readers). Results further showed that boys received more teacher directives than girls, and that poorer readers were less likely to include scriptal information or to use characters' names than more proficient readers.

Furthermore, Thomas (1997) claims that boys and girls approach narrative writing quite differently.

Boys like expert status in command and control situations, and will use a computer to produce elaborate graphics and exciting font and border options rather than redraft language ... with boys its all maximum revs. Each incident is another gear change and acceleration. It makes for a bumpy journey, with lots of screeching tyres, hilltop chases and spectacular crashes. (p. 25)

He maintains that men prefer to control things like cars, computers, mobile phones. He believes that there is a similarity between the way men 'drive' these 'gizmos' and the way they 'drive' narrative. Boys' stories often have pace at the expense of everything else. And it is often this style of heroic narrative writing crammed with action, and lacking in content and structure which is the poor scoring piece in a classroom assessment or national examination.

Millard (1997) noted that a literature-based curriculum for teenage readers usually stresses novels which explore character and making sense of individual experience. In her interviews with boys, these books were often dismissed because "nothing of consequence ever happened" (p. 43). Yet realistic, introspective fiction is often considered 'better literature' than comedy, science fiction, crime novels, and non-fiction. In other words, genres that traditionally appeal to boys and could, and probably do, form the models for their writing.

Classroom and Curriculum Constructs

Teacher Feedback in the Classroom

Assessment and evaluation can be factors which help to shape attitudes and beliefs about writing for students. If students constantly receive negative feedback, then negative behaviour may ensue as a result. It is possible that for some students, a prolonged period of negative assessment for written work may become a barrier to progress to written activities in later life. Teachers and the classroom culture which they help create and shape, can be powerful arbiters of efficacy beliefs and academic achievement. In the English classroom, students collaboratively construct understandings about the nature of literacy, the values of literate activity, and the ways that individuals and groups participate together as the curriculum is enacted.

Thus, through participation and reciprocal interactions, individual students construct a sense of self as readers, writers and thinkers, within the culture of each particular English classroom. Moreover, the teaching of literacy practices, such as writing, is not grounded in a universal construct. Teachers develop their own unique even individual approaches to teaching and rewarding writing. Assessing writing can be open to subjectivity and personal interpretation by teachers, though nationally developed assessment schedules have been developed.

Cambourne and Turbill's (1994) project *Responsive Evaluation* was initiated by a common concern among their professional teaching colleagues that there was a marked lack of congruence between the way they thought literacy should be taught, and the way they were expected to assess it. They also felt uncomfortable with assessment instruments such as multiple-choice

comprehension and 'pick the mistake' type questions, which they considered invalid for the job they were supposed to do.

Teachers' evaluative reactions then can influence students' judgements of their capabilities and academic performances (Bandura, 1989). Moreover, teacher beliefs about what 'good' writing is, are influential factors in the English classroom.

The English Curriculum

The English Curriculum describes what 'good' writing is in the construction of achievement objectives for the three writing sub-strands. Combined with this are the traditionally accepted notions of good literature which must influence writing instruction and reward in the English classroom. Teachers are more likely to reward expressive/poetic writing that exemplifies effective use of personal voice than other types of writing, because it is described as an important performance indicator in levels 5/6 of the English Curriculum.

While the United Kingdom's National Literacy Project report (Stannard, 1999) and The New Zealand Education Review Office's report *Promoting Boys Achievement*, (2000), both make strong recommendations for developing school-wide strategies for enhancing literacy opportunities for boys, they do not suggest any close examination of the way the English curriculum constructs and evaluates writing.

Research in the area of gender literacy differences, especially in the domain of writing, indicates that there is a need to isolate contributing factors. The review of current literature reveals patterns of gender-based theories which

attribute the academic disparity between boys and girls to biologically and socially defined notions of masculinity and femininity.

Furthermore, studies in New Zealand and overseas, depict the emergence of a 'global view' of boys in the English classroom and other areas of the curriculum, as disinterested, disengaged, disruptive, and falling behind their female counterparts. This is particularly evident in the domain of writing.

Summary

In summarising the literature reviewed, the following underpinning themes emerge as salient ideas for this present study. Self-efficacy beliefs perform a central function in academic motivation, performance and achievement. Students' beliefs in their capabilities to perform certain tasks influence how, and with what determination, they will actually perform. Thus, the writing confidence a student has in the English classroom may be as powerful in determining writing outcomes as writing competence itself.

However, self-efficacy beliefs are not the only influential arbiters of academic performance and affect, nor are they necessarily directly related to aptitude and ability. Self-efficacy beliefs are informed and influenced by a wide range of factors. While mastery experiences provide the central source of efficacy information, students also need to feel that they have a certain amount of control over learning activities and outcomes. The negative or positive persuasive messages a student receives about his/her writing ability, and the level and quality of teacher feedback about writing achievement and performance, will be influential contributors to the development of writing attitudes and endeavours.

Linked to the idea of attitudinal development is the notion of perceived value or worth that a student attaches to an academic domain. If writing does not hold value for certain students, then high levels of self-efficacy may not be sufficient on their own to ensure writing motivation and achievement. The value of something is often established, and reinforced, through social and cultural norms. A popular current explanation for the underachievement of boys in writing is that it is a 'feminised' activity and thus in opposition with dominant 'masculine' social and cultural norms. Thus boys may develop negative attitudes towards writing practices based on social and cultural information, rather than on any reflected self-beliefs about writing ability or predicted performance.

Studies examining gender differentiated reading and writing trends, reveal that there are definite universal preference patterns in terms of what boys and girls like to read and write. Although less research has been conducted in the area of gender writing preferences than with reading preferences, the assumption exists that if there are gender differentiated preference patterns in reading, similar patterns probably exist with writing.

The construction of the English curriculum in terms of the writing sub-strand does not necessarily allow for these potential gender preferences in writing styles. For example, the achievement objectives for both expressive and poetic writing emphasise ideas, feelings, and the development of personal voice in writing. This stated emphasis highlights and encourages certain writing styles which reflect more the narrative preferences of girls rather than those preferred by boys.

All these themes are germane to the concern of the underachievement of boys in writing. Clearly the problem is not just lack of writing competence, but

the wider current picture of boys behaviour in school, suggests a complex interaction of factors which are causing many boys to display negative attitudes and poor performance in the English classroom in comparison to girls, particularly in writing. In line with this, the present study was undertaken with two main aims. Firstly to examine writing-related self-perceptions and beliefs where clear gender differences are signaled. Four emergent themes are indicated from previous research as possible independent contributing affective influences, and these are further examined in this study: writing self-efficacy beliefs, writing attitudes and perceptions, gender differentiated writing preferences, and perceptions about writing as a gender-biased activity. Secondly, to examine student beliefs about writing, as it is presented in the year 11 School Certificate English classroom, in order to clarify present, and potential, areas of anxiety in the ideological and pedagogical construction of writing in the subject English.

CHAPTER III

HYPOTHESES

Overview

Writing, like reading, is a form of language behaviour which involves both construction and comprehension of a text. Writers construct texts for potential readers to comprehend. In order to do this, writers, like readers, need to use certain kinds of knowledge, skills and procedures. Writers need to comprehend not only their messages, but they need also to comprehend the reasons or purposes for constructing them, and the audiences who they wish to read them. In order to achieve their ends, writers need to have certain semantic, syntactic, graphophonic, and other kinds of language knowledge. They need to have the confidence, motivation, and self-belief that they can put this knowledge into practice (Cambourne, 1984). Moreover, because writing is as much an emotional as a cognitive activity, affective components strongly influence all phases of the writing process.

According to self-efficacy theorists, people's judgements of their capabilities, or their self-efficacy beliefs to accomplish specific tasks, are influential arbiters in human agency and, as such, are powerful determinants of human behaviour (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy beliefs affect what students do by influencing the choices they make, the effort they expend, the persistence and perseverance they exert in the face of adversity, and the anxiety they experience. Believing that they are capable writers, for example, will serve students well when attempting an essay, not because the belief itself increases writing competence, but because it helps create greater interest in writing, more

sustained effort, and greater perseverance and resiliency when obstacles get in the way of the task. When students have confidence in their ability to write an essay, they will also feel less apprehensive about writing. Thus, if there is a reciprocally consistent relationship between academic performance and self-efficacy levels, then the consistent disparity in national examination results for English should mean that boys and girls will report different levels of writing self-efficacy beliefs. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1

Boys at year 11 in the English classroom display lower levels of writing self-efficacy beliefs than girls.

Affective factors, such as anxiety, associated with specific academic areas and attitudes, and how useful students consider the task itself, are considered common mechanisms of personal agency. Like self-efficacy beliefs, they also influence academic outcomes. According to Bandura (1986), beliefs such as the perceived usefulness of activities, are related to efficacy judgements, because efficacy judgements, in part, determine the perceived value of such activities. Bandura (1986) argued that the influence of these common mechanisms on academic performances is primarily due to the sense of confidence with which students approach academic tasks. In the area of writing in the English classroom, the confidence that students have in their capability, helps determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they actually possess. Furthermore, that confidence can be related to a variety of influences including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, modeled behaviour and

performance, prior feedback, verbal and social persuasion, and perceived values and usefulness of a task or activity, and the value of outcome expectations. Such affective factors will contribute to attitudinal behaviours, such as confidence, enjoyment, engagement and satisfaction. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2

The writing attitudes of males at year 11 in the English classroom will be more negative than those of females.

Recent research indicates that the failure of boys in literacy achievement, particularly in writing, can be linked to a perception by many male students of English as a 'feminised' subject. Dominant hegemonic masculinities are reinforced by the school system, so that language-related tasks such as writing do not hold value for boys. Martino (1997) claims that boys see writing as a girls' activity, and are reluctant to engage in writing tasks in the English classroom because of this notion. With these views in mind, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 3

Writing is perceived by year 11 students as having an inherent gender bias in that it is seen as more suitable for girls than for boys.

Recent research also suggests that boys and girls favour different writing activities and genres, and that the preferred boys' style is not always what is valued in the English classroom, or in assessment models. Boys prefer to write extended narrative pieces with the emphasis on action, adventure, sport and science fiction, and reject the 'personal voice' expressive writing of poetry and

romance, thought to be preferred by girls (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Martino, 1997; Millard, 1997; Thomas, 1997). Accordingly it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4

Boys prefer to engage in different writing discourses than girls at year 11 in the English classroom.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

DATA SOURCE

Sample

Participants were 215 year 11 students (10 classes) attending eight secondary schools, which included seven from the Manawatu and Hawkes Bay regions, and one from the Wellington region. All schools approached for this study agreed to participate. Principals and teachers from the eight schools expressed a common concern about the underachievement of boys, a willingness to participate in the study, and requested copies of the research report, and any ongoing evaluation resulting from the present study.

The total sample represented a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The eight schools, (as indicated in table 2), provided representation across seven decile ratings, from decile 2 to decile 9. Each student was identified by school, age, gender, ethnicity, and the SES decile rating of the school.

Table 2

Frequency and percentage of students within each decile rating

Decile	Frequency	Percent
1	0	0
2	18	8.3
3	39	18.1
4	25	11.6
5	69	31.9
6	15	6.9
7	0	0
8	20	9.3
9	29	13.9

Table 3 shows that there were 136 boys and 79 girls in the study sample. The greater number of boys was due to the fact that one single sex boys' school was included in the sample, and one class from a co-educational school was an all male English class.

Table 3

Gender distribution across the total sample

Valid	Frequency	Percent
males	136	63.0
females	79	36.6

As table 4 indicates, the sample was representative of a wide range of ethnic groups. Ethnicity was not a central factor in the study, but it was deemed important that the sample be fairly representative of the New Zealand secondary school sector.

Table 4

Ethnic distribution across the eight schools

Ethnic Background	Number	Percent
Maori	44	18.8
Pacific Islander	2	.9
European/Pakeha	166	70.9
Asian	12	5.1
Other	10	4.3

Year Level Selection

All of the 215 students in the sample were in English classes studying towards the National School Certificate English examination conducted in November, 2000. Year 11 (form five) was selected for this study because it is the National School Certificate English Examination which reports the greatest gender disparity in New Zealand academic achievement statistics. Competent performance in School Certificate English requires that teachers and students have a working knowledge of transactional, expressive and poetic writing. Even if students are not familiar with the terms, they will have been asked to write in a variety of styles for different situations and different audiences. It was an

underlying assumption of this study then, that Year 11 students could respond to specific questions about writing as a commonly understood English classroom and assessment activity.

Timing

The survey instrument was group administered in individual English classes during the months of June and July. Individual classroom teachers administered the survey during English classes at a time that was convenient for them in their conventional English programmes. Clear instructions were supplied to each teacher along with a complete package of survey forms and teacher ratings forms. The voluntary and confidential nature of the survey was emphasised by way of individual and personal contact with each teacher by letter and/or telephone.

INSTRUMENT

Scale Structure

A 51-item Writing Questionnaire was developed as the survey instrument for this study. Items relate to a range of factors including writing apprehension/anxiety, writing attitudes, writing perceptions and beliefs, writing self-efficacy judgements, and reading and writing behaviours and preferences. Focus statements for each of the factors were spread randomly through the instrument. A mixture of negative and positive item wordings was included.

Pilot Process

The Writing Questionnaire was piloted concurrently with a year 12 class of 20 students, and a class of 20 secondary trainee English teachers from the Massey University College of Education, Palmerston North. Readability and layout adjustments were made and one item was added following this initial pilot process. The item “I prefer to write at home rather than in class” was included, as it was suggested by the trainee English teachers pilot group that students often enjoyed writing in isolation from peer pressure and the classroom context. The instrument was tested a second time with the adjustments and found to be manageable and unproblematic.

COMPOSITION OF THE WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

Writing Apprehension

Writing apprehension included items adapted from the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975). Their original test was a 26-item inventory which was used extensively and generally regarded as a reliable measure of writing anxiety (sample item: “I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be assessed.”) Reed, Burton and Vandett (1988) found the instrument reliable, but suggested that the 5-point scale be reduced to 4 points, by removing the “uncertain” response. That adjustment was made for this study (also see Pajares & Johnson, 1996).

Writing Preferences

Item 51 on the Writing Questionnaire was a priority ranking task of writing preferences. A 10-item list of common writing tasks was given, and the

respondents were asked to rank them in order of their personal preference from most enjoyable to least enjoyable. The 10 tasks listed were derived from *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, and a knowledge of accepted classroom practices at year 11. The tasks were also selected to represent a range of writing activities across the three writing strands: poetic, expressive and transactional.

Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Writing self-efficacy beliefs were operationalised in the Writing Questionnaire as item-specific judgements in various types of composition, grammar usage, and mechanical skills. The Writing Skills Self-Efficacy Scale (Shell et al., 1989) comprising of 8 items that ask students to rate their confidence to perform certain writing tasks, provided the model for the self-efficacy items in this Questionnaire. (Sample item: "I can correctly punctuate a one page passage of writing.") The items dealing with specific writing skills are identified in the *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* as appropriate for levels 5/6 (form 5 year 11). (Sample items include: "I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors, correct grammar and sense;" "I can organise sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme.")

Writing Attitudes

Writing attitudes were operationalised in the Writing Questionnaire as writing enjoyment and satisfaction, and the perceived value or usefulness of writing. The notions of writing enjoyment and satisfaction were targeted in a range of items.

(Sample items are “I like to write down my ideas, and “Writing is a lot of fun for me.”) Two items were adapted from the Student Attitude Questionnaire (SAQ) (Eccles, 1983). Meece, Wigfield, and Eccles (1990) used the same questionnaire to gather data on students’ academic attitudes. Students rate how important it is to be good at writing and target the notion of the perceived usefulness and value of writing. (A sample item from this scale is “Writing is an important skill to have.”) One item was adopted from the Writing Outcome Expectations Scale (Shell et al., 1989). This scale consists of 10 items that assess students’ judgements of the importance of writing for successful academic and life endeavours, such as making a good living. (A sample item is “People who are good writers get the best jobs.”)

Gendered Perceptions

Gendered Perceptions were operationalised as perceptions and beliefs about the inherent gender bias associated with writing. Items were formulated to elicit clear responses about the attitudes girls and boys have towards writing both as a school-based activity and as a social function. The items were statements suggesting that writing was an activity which was more appropriate for a specific gender group. (Sample items included “Writing is an activity more suited to girls than boys,” and “Boys achieve just as well as girls in writing tasks.”) To avoid biasing responses towards one gender, a range and balance of items were included (e.g., “People seem to prefer the writing that boys do.”)

Reading Behaviour

Although the focus of the present research was on writing, it is commonly accepted that reading and writing behaviours are inextricably linked. Reading behaviour was assessed by four items which targeted reading confidence, enjoyment and preference (e.g., “I like reading in my own time”, “I consider myself to be a good reader”). These items were included to ascertain whether there was a correspondence between reading attitude/enjoyment/confidence and writing attitude/enjoyment/confidence.

Teacher Feedback/Assessment

Teacher feedback/assessment was referred to in three items in the Writing Questionnaire to provide an indication of the impact of feedback on performance, attitude, apprehension and anxiety. Assessment of writing is a factor in writing apprehension, but also contributes to attitudinal dispositions and self-beliefs about writing and students’ future predictions about themselves as writers. (Items include “I have no fear of writing being assessed”, “I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be assessed.”)

Anecdotal Comments

The final section of the survey instrument invited the respondents to make any additional comments about their writing attitudes and beliefs. Teachers were requested to encourage students to make a response, but not to influence the content or nature of that response.

Justification of Instrument and Methodology

Some researchers (e.g., Boekaerts, 1991) have observed that studies of the influence of gender on academic self-beliefs have typically tapped only domain-specific attitudes, and few studies have included motivational variables assessed at the task-specific level. In the present research, motivational and attitudinal constructs were assessed both at the domain level (perceived value, self-concept, apprehension) and at the specific task level (self-efficacy) using questions which targeted specific writing skills, for example, ability to punctuate, and write a piece using a starter sentence. The inclusion of selected items from existing scales, provided the foundation for a credible writing questionnaire. Items were spread randomly through the questionnaire, and there was an equal balance of negatively and positively phrased statements. A range of statements was used for each writing-related aspect to ensure balance and consistency.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

In presenting the results of this study, the teacher ratings of student writing competence will be reported first to establish the representative nature of the student sample in terms of writing ability and competence in the English classroom. Secondly, the development of the Writing Questionnaire will be described. The quantitative and qualitative findings for the Writing Questionnaire will then be presented.

Teacher Rating of Student Writing Competence

Teacher ratings of students' writing capabilities are acknowledged as a reliable measure for the assessment of writing competence (Hoge and Butcher, 1984; Hoge and Coladarci, 1987). Teachers were asked to rate their students in regard to writing capabilities on a 4 point scale, with 1 being *a very competent writer*, and 4 being a student who *found difficulty with writing*. Teachers were asked to form their ratings on the basis of classroom achievement, internal tests and exams, and anecdotal observation during the year from January until the survey in June.

The teachers were given the following statement to guide their ratings: "For the purposes of this study, writing achievement refers to fluency of expression and structure in composition, correct grammar usage, punctuation and spelling and an ability to self-correct and self-edit." These specifications linked directly to items students were asked to respond to in the Writing Questionnaire. This rating was made concurrently with the student Writing

Questionnaire in June when teachers had become familiar with students' writing capabilities and achievements (see Wigfield et al., 1991, for similar procedures).

Teachers' responses indicated that 17.2% of the total sample were rated by their teachers as *very competent writers*; 31.5% were considered to be *reasonably competent writers*; 36.6% were *developing some competence in writing* and 14.4% were rated as *having difficulty with writing*. Marginally more girls than boys were in the top rated band, and more boys than girls in the lowest category.

Student Writing Questionnaire

A principal components analysis of items that comprised the student Writing Questionnaire was performed. A number of varimax rotations were carried out in order to identify the most meaningful number of components in the questionnaire. A three factor solution appeared to adequately describe the items in the questionnaire.

Items that had a factor loading coefficient of less than .40 or that loaded on more than one factor, were deleted from the scale. This procedure resulted in the removal of 27 items. A further factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the remaining 23 items. The resulting factor structure indicated that the three factor structure was maintained, and that it explained 39% of the total variance. The item factor loadings are shown in Table 5. Factor 1 comprised 9 items; factor 2 comprised 8 items and factor 3 comprised 6 items.

Table 5

Item Factor Loadings for the Writing Questionnaire

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Q3	.46		
Q4		.61	
Q6			.43
Q12	.54		
Q15			.59
Q19	.46		
Q20		.63	
Q21		.36	
Q22	.63		
Q24			.63
Q26			.60
Q27	.62		
Q29		.43	
Q30		.45	
Q34	.50		
Q38			.59
Q40	.54		
Q41	.50		
Q42		.43	
Q43	.62		
Q46			.73
Q48		.50	
Q50		.53	

An examination of the content of items in each of the factor descriptors led to the following factor descriptions: Factor 1, *writing self-efficacy beliefs*; Factor 2, *writing attitudes*; Factor 3, *gendered perceptions*.

Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs items related to competencies and confidence in accomplishing writing-related tasks (e.g., “I can organise sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme”; “I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing”) (see appendix A).

Writing Attitudes included items that related to satisfaction, anxiety and value in writing (e.g., “I look forward to writing down my ideas”; “People respect you if you write well”; “I want to be good at writing”) (see appendix B).

Gendered Perceptions included items that assessed students’ beliefs about the extent to which writing in English classes was perceived as having inherent gender biases (e.g., “Girls do better at writing than boys”; “The writing tasks we do in English are more suited to boys”) (see appendix C).

Means, standard deviations and alpha reliability coefficients for the three factors and the total items are shown in the following tables. The full reliability coefficient of 0.67 for the student Writing Questionnaire indicates that the items on the scale have a reasonable degree of homogeneity.

Table 6

Item characteristics for the Writing Questionnaire scale¹

	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha (if item deleted)
2. Q3	2.3842	.7447	.6532
3. Q4	2.5123	.8346	.6324
4. Q6	2.6305	.9155	.6834
5. Q12	2.3054	.6256	.6410
6. Q15	2.8473	.9072	.6791
7. Q19	2.2660	.7500	.6501
8. Q20	2.4039	.7274	.6312
9. Q21	1.7685	.7902	.6417
10. Q22	2.3596	.7471	.6419
11. Q24	3.1034	.6247	.6532
12. Q26	3.1379	.5808	.6659
13. Q27	2.5567	.6969	.6421
14. Q29	2.2118	.9225	.6625
15. Q30	2.6601	.7364	.6537
16. Q34	2.5714	.7302	.6463
17. Q38	2.9704	.7306	.6688
18. Q40	2.2956	.6903	.6411
19. Q41	2.4729	.7127	.6383
20. Q42	2.6305	.8000	.6458
21. Q43	2.4483	.7182	.6998
22. Q46	2.9261	.7957	.6717
23. Q48	2.4877	.8044	.6536
24. Q50	2.2315	.9803	.6562

¹Full Scale $\alpha = .67$

Table 7

Item characteristics for the Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs Subscale¹

	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha (if item deleted)
1. Q3	2.4009	.7507	.6340
2. Q12	2.3208	.6317	.6198
3. Q19	2.2689	.7468	.6434
4. Q22	2.3821	.7543	.6340
5. Q27	2.5566	.7031	.6211
6. Q34	2.5755	.7408	.6315
7. Q40	2.2972	.6962	.6259
8. Q41	2.4623	.7177	.6343
9. Q43	2.4434	.7231	.8006

¹Sub-Scale $\alpha = .68$

Table 8

Item characteristics for the Writing Attitudes Subscale¹

	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha (if item deleted)
1. Q4	2.4333	.8482	.6393
2. Q20	1.7905	.7436	.6302
3. Q21	1.7905	.8030	.6605
4. Q30	2.6762	.7385	.6882
5. Q42	2.6476	.8064	.6763
6. Q48	2.5048	.8022	.6876
7. Q50	2.2381	.9882	.6816
8. Q29	2.2381	.9283	.7005

¹Sub-Scale $\alpha = .70$

Table 9

Item characteristics for the Gendered Perceptions Subscale¹

Reliability Analysis – Scale (Alpha)			
	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha (if item deleted)
1. Q6	2.6364	.9156	.7047
2. Q15	2.8373	.9053	.6346
3. Q24	3.1005	.6159	.6447
4. Q26	3.1292	.5781	.6493
5. Q38	2.9761	.7235	.6607
6. Q46	2.9187	.7894	.6162

¹Sub-Scale $\alpha = .69$

Of the remaining 27 Writing Questionnaire items, five were retained for separate analysis because of their content validity. It was considered that responses to individual items could supply additional information that might further clarify the results (see appendix D). Results for these are reported and discussed with the qualitative data pertaining to each of the factors.

Three two-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to test for differences on each of the three subscales of the Writing Questionnaire. Gender (males; females) was included to test the central question of the study regarding differences between boys and girls in their writing-related perceptions. Ethnic background was also included to determine whether Māori students held different writing perceptions than Pakeha students. Because Māori students typically perform at a level that is significantly below that of Pakeha students in

School Certificate English (Ministry of Education, School Statistics, 1998,1999)
it appeared relevant to include this factor in the analysis, even though it is not
central to the present study.

Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs

The results of the ANOVA for the Self-Efficacy Beliefs subscale
revealed no significant main effects or for the Gender X Ethnic Background
interaction effects. (Table10 below shows the means and standard deviations
for the three writing subscales as a function of gender.)

Table 10

Means and standard deviations of the Writing subscales as a function of gender

Scale	Boys		Girls		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Writing Self-Efficacy	22.76	2.64	22.38	3.04	0.48	ns
Writing Attitudes	20.13	2.65	21.06	2.80	6.52*	.01
Gendered Perceptions	16.00	1.94	15.67	1.72	0.54	ns

No significant gender effects were reported for writing self-efficacy
beliefs. Boys and girls at year 11 displayed similar positive levels in their
predicted confidence judgements to perform specific writing related
competencies. This pattern of positive response from both boys and girls was
consistent with the frequency of response to the statement "I consider myself to
be a good reader". Seventy percent of the total sample positively agreed with

this statement, suggesting a high level of reading self-efficacy beliefs from both boys and girls. None of the anecdotal comments from boys were related to issues about writing self-efficacy beliefs, whereas several of the girls' comments indicated a concern with spelling, vocabulary, and getting good grades.

In summary, girls and boys reported similar writing self-efficacy beliefs regarding both reading and writing. Only girls offered anecdotal evidence suggesting concern with item-specific writing competencies.

Writing Attitudes

For Writing Attitudes, a significant main effect for Gender was observed, $F(1,209) = 6.52, p = .01$. Girls reported more positive attitudes towards writing than boys (see Table 10). No significant effects were observed for Ethnic Background, or for the Gender X Ethnic Background interaction. Frequency of responses to two of the additional items from the Writing Questionnaire and the qualitative data (students' comments) helped clarify these results.

Many of the boys across a range of abilities commented about their dissatisfaction and disinterest with writing. Even boys rated as *very competent writers* (1) by their classroom teachers offered similar negative responses as those rated as (4) *having difficulty with writing*. The writing negativity of many boys was not always directly related to writing ability or competence but seemed to be associated with other factors. The following comment was offered by a boy who was rated by his teacher as being very competent in writing: "I find writing pointless and boring. I'm not too bad at it but don't like writing in school or out of it." This comment was fairly typical of boys' responses.

The negative attitudes reported by the boys seemed to be associated with the nature of writing tasks themselves, rather than with a lack of confidence in writing per se. Many of the anecdotal comments reported by the students indicated boys' dissatisfaction with writing in the classroom. Boredom, disinterest and disenchantment were frequently reported in their comments, a finding that is consistent with the statistically significant difference that was found between males and females on this factor. Further comments from boys continued to emphasise the male writing disaffection.

"Writing is only fun if you like the topic."

"I don't like writing."

"Writing is boring."

"I do not like writing in English or anywhere. It is very boring."

"I absolutely hate writing and it sucks and its boring and I have better things to do."

The writing attitudes reported by boys tended to be related to how they valued writing as an activity and how much satisfaction it engendered for them. For example, 85% of the total sample positively agreed that "Writing is an important skill to have", however only 16% of the total sample agreed that "People who are good writers get the best jobs". Clearly, many students recognise that writing is an important skill to have, but this does not always translate into to success in the employment or job market. This lack of the perceived usefulness or value of writing came through in several comments from boys:

"You never use anything in writing you would use in real life (unless you become an author)."

“English is my worst subject and I don’t see where my knowledge of poetic writing will help in programming computers.”

The gender disparity in attitudinal differences was further emphasised by what the girls chose to comment on in comparison with the boys. The girls’ dissatisfactions were more concerned with personal writing performance and an apprehension of not being able to meet the requirements of writing competencies demanded at year 11. Several of the girls commented:

“You shouldn’t get marked down for spelling mistakes - cause for people like me all the good words are hard to spell, making people like me not very good writers.”

“I don’t like writing and I can’t write well because I can’t spell half the words I want to write. All the descriptive words are hard to spell and that’s what the teacher wants to see.”

This response does concur with the findings of previous studies which indicate girls being more apprehensive about assessment, and being more concerned about meeting the criteria for success and ‘pleasing’ the teacher than boys.

Boys did not report a greater level of apprehension in terms of writing being assessed than girls, suggesting that for them, teacher feedback or prior assessment was not a significant affective factor. Girls certainly seemed to be more concerned about the issue of assessment, and it was mentioned frequently in the girls’ anecdotal comments. The issue of assessment was not mentioned by the boys. The total sample frequency response to the item “I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be assessed” showed that only 35% agreed that there were apprehensive about the assessment of writing. The two comments from girls below

suggest anxiety about poor spelling and consequently not being able to 'please the teacher'.

"I enjoy writing but I find it hard to organise my ideas and I am not good at spell. I am okay at writing though and am very good at expressing my feelings on paper."

"I personally feel that writing for English is made a lot harder when it is assessed and also a lot harder because we have to prepare our writing, but then write the story from our heads in test conditions. I strongly dislike writing. I find it difficult."

None of the boys' comments referred to specific writing competency anxiety in this way. This observation seems to be one of the clear differences between boys and girls. Strongly encouraged by parents and the wider society, young girls are often more compliant and people-pleasing than boys, and this characteristic may give girls both an advantage and added apprehension about detail in the present assessment system for writing.

The notion of male writing negativity is further amplified by the noticeable contrast with the overall positive tone of the girls' comments. Many girls took the opportunity in the last section of the Writing Questionnaire to report on their positive ability as writers. Only one boy reported a positive writing attitude and a sense of satisfaction, but he modified this by explaining that in his peer group he was considered "a bit weird."

Some of the girls commented:

"I enjoy writing stories and do my best work but never get very high marks with it."

“I am really good at writing and enjoy it heaps.”

“I really enjoy descriptive writing, letting out all my ideas on paper.”

“I enjoy writing to express my writing to others and friends ie. personal letters. I like to compose and listen to poetry as a way of expressing my feelings and listening to others. I feel confident about writing in class - writing short stories and transactional writing etc. I like to be able to write in my own time and not to be rushed in class and hand it in at a certain time. I always keep in touch with faraway friends by writing letters to let them know what I’ve been up to as I enjoy it.”

Boys’ reading attitudes seemed a little more positive than writing attitudes. One boy commented “I do not enjoy writing at all. I think it sux. Reading I enjoy but I loathe writing”. This response from one boy is representative of the trend across the whole sample, which suggested that reading was enjoyed by a large percentage of the students. It was interesting that 82% of the total sample agreed positively with the item “The books read in English class are more suited to boys.” Clearly, teachers appear to have responded to Ministry of Education, ERO (1999,2000) encouragements to provide more reading content for boys in the classroom. The results of this present study do not indicate, however, that reading ‘boy friendly’ books in the English classroom corresponds to improved writing interest or success for boys.

To summarise, comments from girls and boys reflected different attitudes towards writing. Whereas girls tended to express positive writing

enjoyment and engagement and a concern with achieving writing success, boys almost invariably stated that writing was unappealing and unrewarding for them.

Gendered Perceptions

Results for the Gendered Perceptions subscale revealed no significant main or interaction effects (see Table 10). The results did not indicate that students believed there is an inherent bias in writing making it a more appropriate activity for girls. However the qualitative data did suggest a belief that males and females performed and achieved differently in writing. This difference appears to be related to a gender difference in the perceived value and usefulness of writing as an English classroom activity, and the gender-differentiated outcome expectations of writing.

The response to specific individual questionnaire items did indicate that some gendered perceptions existed in relation to gender differences in achievement and writing task gender appropriateness. For example, there was an 88% (total sample) positive response to the statement "Boys achieve just as well as girls in writing tasks", but only 9% positively agreed with the statement "The writing tasks we do in English are more suited to boys". And 90% of the total sample disagreed with the statement "People seem to prefer the writing that boys do".

Although responses relating to gendered perceptions on the Writing Questionnaire did not reveal a tendency to regard writing as an inherently feminine activity, the students' anecdotal comments revealed a pattern of gender difference in both writing attitudes and behaviours in the English classroom.

The following comments were all made by boys :

“I think girls achieve better in writing, but guys don’t really try too hard.”

“I think that boys could write well if they didn’t want to be so big and staunch. They are normally ‘dissed’ if they do well at English.”

“Boys can write just as well as girls if they want to.”

“I don’t think girls are any better at writing than boys, its whether you want to be good at writing or not and whether you apply yourself.”

“I believe that an average girl tends to perform better than boys in English class but the top marks are picked up by both. Many boys also write very good descriptive work as well as girls but most guys write factual or stupid accounts.”

“Boys are more than capable of being as good as the girls in the class but the boys get easily distracted.”

“I don’t think girls are any better at writing than boys, its whether you want to be good at writing or not and whether you apply yourself.”

This latter comment was made by a student rated by his teacher as a *very competent writer* who clearly sees the gender issue of one of motivation and attitude. All these comments indicate something about gender differences in writing attitude and related application, and the girls reported similar notions.

One girl commented:

“In our English class it is hard to get on with work because the boys are immature, are a great distraction and are quite annoying at times.”

These findings suggest that while students do not see writing as being, by its very nature, more suitable for girls, they do acknowledge gender differences in writing behaviours, outcomes and perceived values. However, it is interesting that, although there was a high level of recognition from the total sample regarding the differential value accorded to the writing of boys and girls, boys did not report apprehension about assessment of their writing as a significant negative affective factor. In other words, they did not report a direct relationship between their diminished sense of writing satisfaction and prior, or potential, poor writing grades.

Writing Preferences

Writing Preferences were assessed by item 51 on the Writing Questionnaire which asked respondents to rank ten writing tasks in a 1-10 priority order of personal writing preference. This item was then analysed by number of frequency of responses using gender as a variable. The 10 activities were selected as representative of conventional tasks which are set in a Year 11 English classroom in response to the requirements of the three written strands of the English Curriculum (e.g., writing a narrative adventure story; writing a factual account about a school event; writing a poem; see Table 11). The results for gender rankings of the ten writing activities are presented in Table 12.

Table 11

List of writing activities to test writing preferences

Q51.1	Writing a narrative adventure story
Q51.2	Writing a factual account about a school event
Q51.3	Writing personal feelings about a poem or photograph etc
Q51.4	Writing a poem
Q51.5	Recalling and writing a childhood memory
Q51.6	Writing a book, film or TV review
Q51.7	Writing a prepared speech or debate
Q51.8	Writing a science fiction/fantasy story
Q51.9	Writing a clear set of instructions or explanation on a topic
Q51.10	Writing a description of a person, place, event or object.

Table 12

Writing preferences showing gender rankings

Activity	Male	Female
<hr/>		
Narrative adventure story	1	4
Factual account	9	8
Personal feeling	8	5
Poem	7	1
Child memory	5	2
Review	4	6
Speech/debate	10	10
Science fiction story	2	7
Instructions	6	9
Description	3	3

The most revealing gender difference is with the first and second options. Boys rank *writing a narrative adventure story* as their first preferred option, and *writing a science fiction story* as their second option. Girls rank writing a poem, as their preferred writing activity and *recalling a childhood memory* as their second preference. All four stated writing preferences fit within the poetic and expressive strands of the English Curriculum. These stated preferences are consistent with the boys' comments reported in the qualitative data. Such comments include:

"I find writing exciting if I can write a science fiction or fantasy story. But I don't like proof reading."

"We should be able to create more non-serious work ... I like writing long horror stories in preference to true life."

"I don't think we write enough stories in class."

These responses suggest that writing can be seen as exciting and engaging for boys if they are writing the stories they like to write.

Students' comments indicated that writing enjoyment was considered to be an important element in writing engagement and achievement. For example, one girl commented:

"I think writing, especially expressive and poetic writing is done best by people who enjoy it. Writing is a very important part of my life. I write all the time."

One boy commented in the last section: "Reading and writing are really cool until you get to a point that you do it over and over until you get sick of reading and writing." Recent research (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998) reports that this is a common complaint from boys. They do not like to revisit things over and

over again. Narrative adventure stories and science fiction stories have a pace and a movement which seems to fit comfortably with many boys.

A sense of reading enjoyment was reported by both boys and girls and both commented on the need to have more exciting adventure books in the English classroom. For example, one girl commented:

“I love reading books and have always had a reading age around three years higher than my age thus the reason why I read thick books.

E.g., Wilbur Smith, John Grisham, Bryce Courtenay ... writing can be fun if you enjoy what you are doing. If you are bored and don't enjoy it you don't try.”

One boy commented:

“We should read more adventure and interesting adult books by serious authors like Wilbur Smith and John Grisham.”

Both these comments indicate that the texts which teachers may rate as having high interest values and literacy value are not always in accord with students' beliefs and appreciations of texts in the English classroom.

To summarise, boys and girls did not perceive writing to be an activity more inherently appropriate for girls, however the anecdotal comments indicated an underlying student belief that there are differential writing styles and writing outcomes for boys and girls. Moreover, both boys and girls indicated an awareness of gender-differentiated writing behaviours and attitudes in the English classroom.

Summary of Results

In summarising the quantitative and qualitative findings of the present study, four salient points emerge. In terms of context and item-specific writing self-efficacy beliefs, boys and girls reported similar confidence levels, indicating that boys in this study did not have lower self-efficacy beliefs than their female counterparts in terms of their predictive writing abilities and skills. Based on these findings, item-specific self-efficacy beliefs do not seem to be responsible for the gender disparity in writing achievement. Boys in this study do not attribute any negative writing responses or outcomes to diminished self-efficacy beliefs.

In terms of attitudes and perceptions towards writing activities and writing outcomes, boys and girls in the present study reported a significant difference. Boys reported a tendency to have less writing satisfaction than the girls. Boys expressed a greater degree of disenchantment in terms of the perceived value of writing and gender differential outcomes of writing. Such a finding suggests that there may be a relationship between the way boys value writing and themselves as writers, and their writing effort and achievement in the English classroom, in comparison with girls.

Contrary to current views regarding boys' underachievement in writing, boys and girls in the present study did not perceive writing to be an activity inherently more suited to girls. However, both boys and girls reported an awareness that the writing styles of boys and girls were differentially valued in the English classroom, and in the wider community. The inference here is that the activity of writing itself is not perceived by students to be inherently gender-biased, but the selection of writing activities which are encouraged and

presented in the English classroom, and associated assessment models, may be more suited to girls than boys.

Boys and girls in the present study expressed some clear differences in preferred writing styles. The first and second options for both boys and girls included writing discourses generally accepted as expressive/poetic styles. Contrary to current views regarding gender reading preferences, boys did not select transactional or factual writing activities as their preferred options.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study indicate that many boys appear to be disenchanted with writing, and indicate a tendency towards more negative writing attitudes than girls, yet boys do not appear to have developed negative writing-related self-efficacy beliefs, and they do not generally view writing as an inherently feminine activity. Furthermore, the results of the present study suggest that boys' negative attitudes towards writing may be associated more with their beliefs about the nature of writing, rather than their perceptions of themselves as writers. Boys in this study believed themselves to be as efficacious as the girls in terms of their predicted ability to perform item-specific writing competencies, but they reported more negative attitudes towards writing than girls.

Results of the present study indicate that students at year 11 do not report fixed gendered perceptions about writing in the English classroom. They do not consider writing to be inherently more biased towards one gender than the other. They do, however, report an awareness of differences in boys' and girls' writing styles and behaviours, and an associated understanding that this difference translates into a hierarchical preference in the wider world beyond the English classroom. Students' comments indicated an awareness of the gender differential in terms of writing outcomes and rewards. Results indicated that they were very conscious that the type of writing preferred by boys is not the type of writing preferred by the wider educational or social community.

Boys and girls also indicated some clear differences in writing task preferences in the English classroom. It is possible that if there are unequal platforms for these writing preferences to be expressed in the English classroom, then a sense of dissatisfaction could ensue for those students whose interests are not being met. Furthermore, if the assessment of writing tends to favour certain writing styles and genres preferred by girls (e.g., personal recollections with a strong sense of personal voice), then boys could be at a distinct disadvantage.

This stated difference in writing preferences raises some questions about the balance of these in the writing curriculum content and design in the English classroom. Such questions include: Are there equal opportunities for a range of writing genres in the English classroom? Do all writing genres, particularly in poetic/expressive writing, hold the same value both in the classroom and in the national external assessment system? Do boys, through experience, know that the types of writing they want to do and prefer to do, are not as highly valued in the English classroom as some other types? And does this knowledge then negatively influence their motivation and their self regulation for learning in the English classroom?

Bandura (1989) believes that issues such as those raised by these questions, can exert a force on self-efficacy and cause negative self-confidence and subject dissatisfaction. In such situations, however, it becomes difficult to determine causality. Antecedent factors have been an important focus of many self-concept studies (e.g., Schunk, 1991), and the implications are equally relevant to self-efficacy research. Providing more opportunities for boys to read and write in the genres of their stated preferences, can only serve to close the

gender gap if the associated assessment practices also encourage equitable outcomes across a range of writing styles.

A high sense of efficacy may not result in behaviour consistent with that belief, if an individual also believes that the outcome of engaging in that behaviour will have undesired or unsatisfying effects (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1996). It seems that this is where there may be a problematic dichotomy for some boys. They believe they are capable of achieving in a specific writing task, but they also know from experience that certain tasks will not be rewarded or will have negative outcomes for them. This type of knowledge can lead to boys developing entrenched negative attitudes, and a sense of learned helplessness about the sense of control they have over writing outcomes and expectations.

At year 11 in English writing, the emphasis is on the controlled crafting of writing borne out of careful selection of words, sentences and images, preferably with a strong sense of personal voice. The Chief Marker's report for both the external School Certificate English Examination (1998) (see appendix E) and the internal School Certificate English Reference Test (1999) (see appendix F) clearly indicate that a sense of personal voice is included as one of the features of a good piece of writing, and thus is highly valued as an essential feature of effective writing.

An analysis of the *writing starters* in the 1999 School Certificate English examination (e.g., He leaned forward and pressed the button-again) in the Poetic/Expressive section (see appendix G) does show that there is a range of motivational starting statements, several of which clearly suggest narrative or science fiction/fantasy writing, but the fact that a sense of personal voice is seen as the priority descriptor for a grade A piece of School Certificate English

writing may, in fact, be making an inherent value judgement excluding these types of writing from gaining top marks. This type of implicit bias does not exist in the same way with transactional writing, which is not so open to favouring one type of genre over another.

Transactional writing requires a certain language skill base and an understanding of style, structure, organisation and ideas. The results of this study indicate that transactional type writing activities (e.g., factual accounts, reports, reviews) are not preferred by boys. Generally, transactional writing refers to factual, informative, persuasive writing which should, theoretically, be preferable to boys, if recent research that boys prefer to read information type texts in preference to fiction is accurate. (ERO, 1999, p. 9) This study does not support that assumed relationship. Boys prefer to write expressively, but select different genres to girls, which may in fact be one of the hidden biases preventing boys from achieving the same grades as girls.

All four transactional writing items in the list; writing a factual account, writing a review, giving a set of instructions and writing a speech or debate were rated as relatively low options for the boys. It was interesting that the boys selected *writing a description* and *describing a childhood memory* as their third and fifth options respectively, suggesting that they do not dismiss expressive personal writing. They just prefer to write adventure and science fiction stories a little more.

The first five choices made by the girls in their priority ranking order were all writing activities which fit within the poetic/expressive strand as described in the English Curriculum. Poetic/expressive writing by definition, includes narrative adventure and science fiction writing, but both the English

Curriculum and the School Certificate marking schedules, place a high value on a sense of personal voice in writing, thus possibly excluding these genres.

Science fiction writing, in particular, does not normally conform to the inclusion of personal voice, nor should the sense of personal voice necessarily be a criterion for an effective piece of narrative adventure or science fiction writing.

The contemporary English classroom encourages exposure to a wide range of verbal and written text. Science fantasy films such as *The Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999) with action-packed adventure narrative, are being used extensively in English classrooms in the belief that they provide high masculine interest. Such virtual reality films present a model of storytelling where the narrative structure moves rapidly across time and space, and often does not linger to establish detail of character, or place, or a sense of author's voice.

Linked to the development of these exciting visual narrative structures is the emergence of a new writing genre known as hyperfiction. This genre, which is the next step on from the basic twist-a-plot type adventure narrative moving rapidly through time and space, has developed in partnership with web technology and adds an exciting new dimension to writing. But again, it is a genre that may not be rewarded under the present assessment system with the criteria for expressive/poetic writing.

If such texts are to be used as teaching resources or literacy models in the English classroom, curriculum definitions and deliveries of writing should include and reward writing which draws on these models. Recent strategies in the United Kingdom (see Stannard, 1999) and in New Zealand (ERO, 1999, 2000) have urged English teachers to provide for boys' stated reading preferences in the English classroom. However, writing preferences have not

received the same attention or focus. While New Zealand national assessment schedules (e.g., School Certificate English) and the English Curriculum claim that 'a sense of personal voice' writing is considered the most effective, there remains a constant and potential critical barrier for students who prefer to write in other styles.

The English Curriculum clearly states the expectations for writing achievement, and implied with this is a statement about the 'style' of writing which will earn good marks. Knowledge and awareness of such writing style expectations serves no purpose if a student knows that he cannot reproduce what is required, and more importantly, that he is not motivated to do so. It is possible that some boys express negative writing attitudes, not because they dislike the act of writing, but that the act of writing does not reward them either in the classroom or in examinations. Moreover, writing styles preferred by girls may be more likely to realise reward in the English classroom.

This study indicates that boys do not consider writing to be a 'feminised' activity and, moreover, they express a desire to be good at writing. The real satisfaction gap for many boys seems to exist between the desire to achieve in writing and realizing a sense of satisfaction from that achievement. While many boys believe they have the requisite writing skills, they acknowledge that such skills do not translate into writing success and satisfaction. The boys in this study tended to attribute their writing negativity to writing-related factors such as lack of interest or perceived value, and not to a lack of self-confidence in their writing ability.

Based on the premises of Bandura's social-cognitive theory, it seems that for teachers to endeavour to prevent students from developing negative writing

perceptions and beliefs, they need to know with some clarity the origins of the negative affect. Moreover, Bandura (1986) claims that when academic difficulties and satisfactions erode student confidence in their capability or motivation, it is difficult to improve their capability without altering their confidence.

Educational practices should be gauged not only by the skills and knowledge they impart for present use but also what they do to children's beliefs about their capabilities, which affects how they approach the future. Students who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are well-equipped to educate themselves when they have to rely on their own initiative. (Bandura, 1986, p. 417)

Many self-efficacy researchers (see Hackett & Betz, 1989; Schunk, 1989, 1991^a; Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Schunk & Hanson, 1985; Pajares, 1996) have suggested that teachers would be well served by paying as much attention to students' beliefs about their competence as to their actual competence, because it is the *beliefs* that may more accurately predict student's motivation and future academic choices. This present study indicates that it is *attitudes* which are influencing writing academic achievement for some boys. These attitudes are boys' beliefs about the value of writing outcomes, and the sense of satisfaction writing engenders for them.

Discussions with both primary and secondary teachers during the course of the present study, revealed a concern that students as early as seven and eight years old, are making conscious decisions about what subjects are 'valuable' in the classroom and beyond. Several of the primary teachers reported that many

boys were articulating their negative beliefs about the value and relevance of language related activities such as written expression, in a very clear way.

The ERO report, (1999) *The Achievement of Boys*, stresses the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about the research on boys' and girls' preferred learning styles and behaviours of boys and girls and incorporate this into classroom practice.

Boys show greater adaptability to more traditional approaches to learning which require memorising abstract, unambiguous facts and rules that have to be acquired quickly. They also appear to be more willing to sacrifice deep understanding, which requires sustained effort, for correct answers achieved at speed. (Arnot, 1998 cited in ERO (1999, p. 9)

While highlighting differences in gender learning styles may be useful, there is a danger that some of the solutions for redressing the gender imbalance in literary achievement are based on stereotyped views of both boys and girls as readers and writers, and thus unlikely to lead to major change. The recent emphasis on critical literacy in the English classroom (EINZC, 1994, p. 13) encourages teachers to devote substantial time to examining gender stereotypes in text as a way of trying to address equitable classroom practice. While this may be a useful social exercise, and integral to effective literary text appreciation, it may not be the panacea to redressing the gender imbalance in either writing attitude or achievement.

Therefore, based on the findings of this present study it would seem useful and timely that a clearer understanding be developed of the negative writing affect of many boys. The current educational focus on boys' writing

underachievement needs to be examined concomitantly with boys' writing disenchantment in an attempt to unravel causal directions and complexities. The move towards a standards-based assessment model with the introduction of the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA, 2002) and away from a comparative norm-referenced one, may alleviate the tendency to measure gender groups against each other, and thus permit boys and girls to achieve independently. Findings also signal a need for the broadening of the English Curriculum statement on writing to embrace a wider range of styles that are, equally celebrated and equally rewarded.

Both *The Achievement of Boys* (ERO, 1999, p. 9) and *Promoting Boys' Achievement* (ERO, 2000) suggest that to be effective in meeting the learning needs of boys, teachers need to "review curriculum plans to ensure that the strengths of boys (and girls) are being sufficiently challenged and developed." The findings of this study confirm this stated need to review the English Curriculum with specific reference to the writing sub-strand, particularly the expressive and poetic writing functions. Moreover, in the conventional English classroom, many boys may be handicapped because the writing styles which they claim to prefer in this study are not those generally encouraged or valued in the English classroom.

As a final point, both ERO reports encourage teachers to "celebrate the achievement of boys and girls" (1999, p. 9). However, such a 'celebration' can only be realized in the English classroom, if the writing preferences of both boys and girls are validly and equally promoted, encouraged and recognized through teaching practices and associated curriculum activities and assessments.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In drawing together the findings of the present research, the following conclusions and educational implications emerge. Many boys in the English classroom at year 11 display negative writing attitudes in terms of enjoyment, satisfaction, perceived value and outcome expectations. This negative affect is not attributed by boys to a lack of writing confidence on their part, in terms of item-specific writing competencies, or to a belief that writing is a 'feminised' activity inappropriate for them. Rather, boys' writing dissatisfaction is related to the nature of writing activities themselves as they are presented in the English classroom. Furthermore, the findings do suggest that there is a link between writing attitudes and writing preferences.

Social-cognitive theory acknowledges that human behaviour is multiply determined, and requires an awareness and understanding of the interplay of the determinants that act as mechanisms of personal agency (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy beliefs operate in relationship with other socio-cognitive factors, such as outcome expectations or goals, in the regulation and manifestation of human behaviour. Thus some students may be highly confident of their academic ability, but situations can occur under which it is doubtful they will behave in a manner that is consistent with their efficacy beliefs. Conversely, low self-efficacy may be overcome by valued and desired outcomes, potential rewards or competing self-beliefs. Many boys may believe they have the requisite writing skills, but these self-beliefs about writing skills, may be tempered by the

knowledge that acting on those beliefs will not have a desirable outcome, nor will engaging in the writing task. The present study confirmed this notion, indicating that while many boys are self-confident about having specific writing skills, they may not be confident about having those skills realised in a rewarding or satisfying way in the English classroom.

Schunk (1991^a) claims that knowledge, competence and various forms of self-knowledge and self-belief act in concert to provide adequate explanations of behaviour (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1986). To fully explain human functioning, the role of each of these needs to be understood in a given context. It is possible that this complex interplay of factors may create situations where neither self-efficacy nor any other single motivational construct will exercise a defining influence, and where discordances between beliefs and actions may be likely to occur.

In learning situations, students attribute success or failure to different causal factors such as effort, ability or luck (Schunk, 1991^b). Individuals use these attributions as cues to appraise their self-efficacy. For example, students with high self-efficacy tend to attribute their failure to lack of effort and students with low self-efficacy tend to attribute their failure to lack of ability (Scott, 1996). Students may also use attribution to develop expectations for future performance (Schunk, 1989). For example, if students attribute past failures to stable factors such as ability, they will tend to have lower expectations for future success. Conversely, students who ascribe past effort to unstable factors such as effort will tend to have higher expectations. Findings from this present study suggest that boys attribute their diminished writing satisfaction to factors

inherent in the classroom construct of writing, and not to diminished writing self-efficacy beliefs.

Such a finding has important positive educational implications which need to be further examined. Damaged self-efficacy beliefs are much more difficult to alter than attitudinal beliefs. The results of this study suggest that the focus for future educational direction in writing practice and theory, needs to be on changing attitudes through enhancing and broadening writing opportunities, thus ensuring that boys' positive writing self-efficacy beliefs can lead to positive writing performance and outcomes.

Current views of writing that hold that boys underachieve in literacy related practices, such as writing, because such practices are in opposition to the ways in which boys define their masculinities, may be misleading. Boys in this present study recognised the importance of writing as a skill; wanted to be good writers; and reported a high level of reading enjoyment and reading competence. In contrast to the findings of previous research (e.g., Martino, 1997), boys in this present study did not report an aversion to reading and writing based on the notion of sex-inappropriateness. Certainly, many boys expressed a disenchantment with writing practices and outcomes in the English classroom, but this may be more closely linked to the genre exclusivity of writing ideology and pedagogy, than to a inherent bias in the nature of writing itself.

In its present form, the English Curriculum presents a writing dilemma; while encouraging an inclusive expansive range of written expression, it also prescribes a preference for an exclusive narrow 'personal voice' type of written expression. Thus it is possible that unconsciously (or consciously) a writing curriculum has been developed that, by its very nature, is more suited to the

preferred writing styles of many girls. Sensitivity to ideas and a sense of personal voice, are writing features that are traditionally encouraged and highly rewarded in the English classroom and in the School Certificate English examination, thus ensuring the predominance of certain styles of writing over others, and reinforcing the mythology that writing is 'for girls'. It is possible that this traditional definition of writing quality may no longer be as inclusive and appropriate as was once believed. Contemporary forms of written text have tended to explode the traditional boundaries in terms of what counts as effective writing. While many English classrooms have become the nexus for exploring and 'reading' these often dynamic and challenging visual and verbal texts, this expansion has not included an acceptance, or a celebration, of a wider range of student writing which may reflect the models the students are being exposed to in their English programmes.

In looking at ways to improve the chances of writing success for boys, Barrs (2000) believes that instead of trying to redress the balance between boys' and girls' achievement by introducing measures more likely to favour boys, we should look more carefully at exactly what it is that the girls seem to getting right as readers and writers, and what aspects of writing they are good at. He suggests that "we must look beyond questions of accuracy and fluency, and consider much more deeply what is involved in thoughtful and reflective reading and writing" (p. 288), and apply this knowledge, without prejudice and preconceived notions, to the range of written discourses presented by both boys and girls in the English classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

In concluding, the following directions for future research in gender writing differences in New Zealand schools are recommended: Firstly, there should be an examination of the ideological and pedagogical construction of writing, as it is defined by EINZC, and associated assessment policies and practices. The aim of such a study would be to identify any implicit prejudices pertaining to writing, and to ensure that all writing genres and styles are given equal consideration. Such a study would need to examine the compatibility between the encouragement to expose students to a wider range of literary models (ERO, 1999; 2000), and the assessment models used to measure students' writing responses and outcomes in relation to this exposure.

Secondly, students construct a sense of self as readers and writers within the culture of each particular classroom, and these constructions are salient to students' developments of motivation for literacy learning. English teachers play a pivotal role in informing and shaping the constructions students create about themselves as writers. For this reason teachers' perceptions and prejudices about writing, and the value they place on different writing styles should be examined in terms of the mediating influence teacher beliefs may have on how writing is presented, monitored, and rewarded in the English classroom.

Thirdly, there should be an examination of what boys are getting right in writing. Samples of boys' writing should be scrutinised and analysed in terms of writing competencies, effectiveness, and patterns and trends of writing styles. The introduction of The National Certificate in Educational Achievement (2002) with the use of Achievement Standards as a national assessment measure, could provide both a timely and appropriate platform for such a study.

Finally, a follow up study of students' writing preferences and beliefs about the perceived value of those preferences in the wider context of written expression would be useful to further substantiate, and extend the present research. In line with this is the need to examine and evaluate classroom writing practices in terms of how they translate into economic and social skill-based currencies in the wider world outside the English classroom.

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Appendix A

(Factor 1) Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs

1. I can correctly punctuate a one page passage of writing.
2. I can organise sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme.
3. I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors, correct grammar and sense.
4. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.
5. I can write on a variety of topics choosing the right style and words for each topic.
6. I can plan and organise ideas and facts in logical way for a piece of transactional writing e.g. report, factual account, arguing a point of view.
7. I can describe an event, place or person using vivid and interesting words and images.
8. I can write a story with a clear opening, middle and end.
9. I have a terrible time organising my ideas in writing.

Appendix B

(Factor 2) Writing Attitudes

1. I look forward to writing down my ideas.
2. I like to write down my ideas.
3. I want to be good at writing.
4. I enjoy reading.
5. People respect you if you write well.
6. The best pieces of writing in my English class are about people and feelings.
7. I enjoy writing in class but I am no good at it in exams or tests.
8. I prefer to write at home rather than in class.

Appendix C

(Factor 3) Gendered Perceptions

1. Girls do better at writing than boys.
2. People like the writing that girls do.
3. People seem to prefer the writing that boys do.
4. The books we read in English class are more suited to girls than boys.
5. Writing is an activity more suited to girls than boys.
6. The writing tasks we do in English class are more suited to boys.

Appendix D

Five additional items used to support factor analysis

Q7 – I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be assessed

	Frequency	Percent
1 strongly agree	23	10.6
2 agree	53	24.5
3 disagree	109	50.5
4 strongly disagree	31	14.4

Q9 – I consider myself to be a good reader

	Frequency	Percent
1 strongly agree	39	18.1
2 agree	110	50.9
3 disagree	51	23.6
4 strongly disagree	14	6.5
Total	214	99.1

Q11 – Writing is an important skill to have

	Frequency	Percent
1 strongly agree	122	56.5
2 agree	83	38.4
3 disagree	9	4.2
4 strongly disagree	2	.9

Q13 – People who are good writers get the best jobs

	Frequency	Percent
1 strongly agree	81	37.5
2 agree	190	50.5
3 disagree	20	9.3
4 strongly disagree	5	2.3

Q18 – Boys achieve just as well as girls in writing tasks

	Frequency	Percent
1 strongly agree	68	31.5
2 agree	102	47.2
3 disagree	39	18.1
4 strongly disagree	6	2.8

Appendix E

School Certificate Chief Markers Assessment Schedule (1998)

Park Five: Writing. 5A: Expressive/Poetic Writing.

A	Very Good 11-12	Striking, sustained personal voice Credible, convincing Commands attention Shows flair and creative skill Fluent controlled style Range of expression Well structured Few mechanical errors
B	Good 8-9-10	Interesting, perhaps not full sustained Credible, convincing (but less so than A) Some fluency, sense of style Controlled Structured Few mechanical errors
C	Reasonable 5-6-7	Could have some sense of originality and interest, BUT be weak mechanically, OR Sound mechanically, but not very interesting Pedestrian, straightforward
D	Weak 3-4	Simplistic, unconvincing Little sense of style Frequent fluency lapses Mechanically weak
E	Poor 0-1-2	Probably short Makes little sense Weak control Incoherent Mechanical errors intrusive

Notes (Poetic and Transactional Writing)

1. Prepared compositions
If the essay relates to the topic, but the link is a bit tenuous → NO penalty.
If the link to the topic is almost non existent → DOWN a Category (c2 marks).
2. Short compositions penalise themselves in terms of the criteria.
3. Always reward a sense of personal voice.
4. If a candidate does two pieces of writing from one section, mark the first and cross out the second.

Appendix F

School Certificate English Reference Test Assessment Schedule (1998)

Poetic/Expressive Writing Section C: Part Two

Category	Mark Range	General Criteria	Explanation
A	15 14 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong personal voice/imagination • Very fluent, compelling style • Excellent descriptive vocabulary • Discriminating use of language features 	Essays in this category will delight the marker with their vividness. They will have an unobtrusive but effective structure and striking but control vocabulary. The use of imagery and even sound features will add to a sense of originality and freshness.
B	12 11 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong personal voice/imagination • Flowing and interesting style • Very good, appropriate vocabulary • Good use of language features • Genuine, personal voice/imagination • Competent style • Good, solid vocabulary • Attempts some use of language features • Little sense of personal involvement/imagination • Laboured and uninteresting style • Stolid vocabulary • Little use of language features • No sense of personal involvement/imagination • Boring/incoherent style • Narrow/inappropriate vocabulary • No use of language features 	<p>Essays in this category will be vivid and interesting though perhaps lacking the impact of Category A essays. Some structure should be evident. Vocabulary will be appropriate if not 'striking'. Several successful attempts at imagery would be expected.</p> <p>Essays in this category will be 'well-meaning' if not always accurate. The style may be pedestrian, even occasionally boring, but will have continuity. Vocabulary, although not always vivid, should be largely appropriate and some attempt at imagery evident.</p> <p>Essays in this category are likely to be of an unconvincing nature. There will be a lack of fluency. Vocabulary is likely to be impoverished and/or inappropriate. There may be an attempt at imagery which is mostly unsuccessful. Essays may be short.</p> <p>Essays in this category are likely to be 'lifeless' and detached. They may consist of a series of observations which are loosely linked. There will be very few appropriate adjectives, verbs, adverbs and no attempt at imagery. May be incomplete.</p>

Appendix G

School Certificate English Examination Expressive/Poetic Writing Starters (1998)

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WRITING

QUESTION 5A: EXPRESSIVE/POETIC WRITING (12 marks)

Do **ONE** piece of writing for this question.

Choose from the topics numbered 1 - 10 on this page and page 29.

Your writing may be personal, imaginative, true or invented.

Use a style appropriate to your topic.

Imagine your writing is for a collection of creative writing by people your age for others of a similar age.
You should write at **least 200 words**.

You will be rewarded for:

- *imaginative and interesting writing*
- *careful spelling, word usage and punctuation*
- *writing that is clearly related to the topic.*

Select **ONE** of the following topics or photographs and use it to tell a story, describe an experience or memory or place, or write a description.

If you choose a topic from 1 – 8, include the line in your writing **AND UNDERLINE IT**.

1. It makes no difference who you are.
2. Dude. Got the message?
3. I've never been much for occasions.
4. He leaned forward and pressed the button - again.
5. The kuia's bright brown eyes twinkled with amusement.
6. Once bitten, twice shy - the old saying was true.
7. I was overwhelmed by their kindness.
8. The train pulled out right on time, 7 am sharp.
- 9.



10.



(Turn over