Benefits of Choice on Writing Performance Between Genders

Significance of the Research Project

In recent decades, the gap between male and female academic performance has widened, specifically within the areas of language and writing performance (Garcia, 2002). One study showed that females significantly outperformed their male counterparts in grades three through eight when achievement and language were examined (Garcia, 2002). This gender gap highlights a need to examine the elements that may contribute to this deficit and a feasible intervention to bridge the gap. Choice-intervention models have shown positive results in improving and/or increasing academic performance and productivity (Kern, 1998; Garcia, 2002). More recently, Panahon, Hilt-Panahon, and Arbolino (2012) found providing students a choice of story starters produced positive effects. That is, students wrote more words when presented with a choice of writing prompts as opposed to only one story starter. While much research has been conducted pertaining to gender gaps and choice intervention separately, less has been done to study whether choice-intervention is beneficial to academic performance between genders. Exploring gender differences is important, because male students are at risk of being over identified with writing performance problems when there may be other underlying causes for this deficit (Fearrington et al., 2014).

Another contributing element to academic performance is self-efficacy, or one’s own belief in their abilities to complete a given task (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). When one has low self-efficacy in writing, he or she is likely to show lower performance than someone with higher self-efficacy (McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985). Self-efficacy is important to choice interventions, because if confidence levels significantly contribute to academic performance, then the availability of a choice selection accommodates confidence, and thereby performance.
Through conducting this research, we will attempt to understand gender differences in writing performance and perform a preliminary investigation of the impact of a choice intervention in writing. If gender differences do exist under choice interventions, this may prompt further research in the degree of differences, how to overcome them, and to provide a level playing field within writing across genders.

**Proposed Methodology for Attaining Project Goals**

This study will examine the use of a choice intervention on writing. Participants will include both male and female students who attend a public school district in Southern Minnesota. All students in the classroom will be administered curriculum-based writing probes on a weekly basis. Male and female participants will be randomly assigned to either the choice or no choice groups. Participants assigned to the choice group will be presented with two writing prompts at the beginning of each session. Students will then be asked to choose which story starter they would like to write about for that day. Participants assigned to the no choice group will be provided one writing prompt (e.g., “It was a hot, dry day out while I was walking and when I came to…”) at the beginning of each session. Each session will last about 5 minutes and be conducted twice a week for approximately 12 weeks. The total words written by both males and females will be compared in both conditions to investigate any potential gender differences.

**Anticipated Project Outcomes**

*The project outcomes are as follows:* We hypothesize that female participants will display higher writing levels than the male students participating in the study. In addition, we hypothesize that participants will show increased writing productivity within the choice condition. When the gains attained by providing the choice intervention are compared across male and female participants, we hypothesize that male students will demonstrate a greater increase in writing than females.
If the hypotheses are confirmed then we will potentially be able to identify areas for improvement in both genders’ writing performances. Findings of the project could also lead to the awareness of identifying gender specific writing interventions, which may be beneficial and socially relevant to accommodate the uneven growth between genders.

**Timeline**

To complete the proposed project, the following timeline will be closely followed. In October, relevant literature will be collected and reviewed to determine previous and current assumptions of gender differences within the area of writing. From November through December we will seek approval to conduct the study in a local school district. Next, we will collect parental consent forms and student assent forms. Following this, the collection of data will begin in January and continue through March. From there analyses will be conducted and interpreted at the beginning of April to identify whether or not gender differences exist in writing. A presentation for the 2015 Undergraduate Research Symposium will be submitted and prepared if accepted.

**Budget**

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Travel expenses for student researchers to make 24 visits to a local school to collect data. Travel to the school is 10 miles roundtrip</td>
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References


