

# Girls and Boys Like to Read and Write Different Texts

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This study explored girls' and boys' (aged 10–11) attitudes towards reading and writing. Girls enjoyed reading significantly more than boys. Boys liked mostly comics and humorous books; adventure books were girls' favourites. Poetry did not appeal to pupils. Many boys did not enjoy typical school texts. Most pupils, especially boys, did not like to read aloud. Even many fluent and motivated readers felt embarrassed when doing it. Pupils' attitudes towards writing were more negative than those regarding reading. Boys were significantly more reluctant writers than girls. To interest boys the writing task should have a meaningful purpose or a communicative function. The results suggest that pupils' interest should be a key factor in the selection of reading material; otherwise, many students will avoid reading and may develop a lifelong aversion to it.

**Keywords:** *Attitudes towards reading; Attitudes towards writing; Girls; Boys*

## Introduction

An important goal of literacy teaching is to awaken children's interest in language and literature. The aim is to give them, during their first school years, a lasting positive attitude towards reading and writing. Pupils' ability to read, interpret and use different texts should develop, and they should adopt a habit of evaluating and observing themselves as readers. They should learn to choose appropriate reading material for different purposes and to search for information from different sources. Furthermore, their writing skills should develop.

Attitudes towards reading and writing develop early. When home provides a rich reading environment that includes books and magazines, and when parents read to their children frequently, the children are likely to adopt a positive attitude. When children observe adults reading and writing, this can work to increase their awareness of the various purposes of the written text. It is possible that even before going to school they obtain a relatively rich vocabulary and a sense of story structure. Consequently they often learn to read without a struggle and for them reading can

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become a pleasant pastime. A pupil who reads fluently is likely to be an eager reader who also reads outside school. As a consequence, his or her reading skills continue to improve. A poor reader does not read voluntarily, and therefore the difference between the pupils' respective levels of reading skills becomes even more significant (Wallace, 1992, p. 7).

Pupils are very different as readers, and they are motivated to read very different books and texts. The reader should find the topic of the text interesting and possess enough previous knowledge related to its subject matter. Therefore it is crucial to offer pupils a wide variety of reading material. In other words, an array of books representing a variety of topics, levels of difficulty, and genres of literature is necessary (Cole, 2002, p. 335). It is, however, a very challenging task for the teacher to choose reading material for his or her pupils. They may have special personal interests, and the material available may not always meet their hopes. Furthermore, children's books regarded by adults as quality books do not always correspond to children's tastes. Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999, pp. 15–16) suggest that reluctant readers in sixth grade would prefer to read materials that are not available through school sources, including recently published series books, books based on films and television series, specialty magazines, comics, and cartoons. They suggest that the definition of school reading should be broadened to include the materials that students read outside school.

In PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment, of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]), Finnish children and teenagers showed significantly higher mean achievement in reading literacy than their peers in any other country. They showed particularly strong performance in retrieving information and interpreting texts. Their high level of interest and engagement in reading outside school corresponded to that of their reading skills. They borrowed books from the library more frequently than in any other OECD country and 41% of them reported that reading was one of their favourite pastimes. For girls the figure was 60%. Girls scored better than boys in all OECD countries but in Finland the gender gap was the widest. This was, however, not due to Finnish boys performing poorly but to Finnish girls doing exceptionally well. In fact, Finnish boys scored better than the boys of any other OECD country and better than the girls in many of them (Linnakylä, Välijärvi, & Brunell, 2003).

Reading skills are an important tool that pupils need to become academically successful. Good readers are better students than poor readers in every subject area. As Brozo (2002) stresses, it is especially important to motivate boys to read. In the USA, boys are significantly less successful in school than girls: boys are three to five times more likely to have a learning disabilities placement in school, boys score significantly lower on standardised measures of reading achievement, and they are 50% more likely to be kept down a year. In universities the number of female students is increasing while the number of male students is decreasing. Trying to motivate a reluctant boy to read is a difficult and often frustrating task for parents

and teachers. Boys are easily caught in a harmful cycle. Peer pressure discourages a boy from reading, an activity that is not considered “cool”. His reluctance to read leads to a decline in his reading skills. This, together with the consequent feeling of incompetence, causes (real or pretended) indifference towards reading, and this indifference catalyses the decline in the boy’s reading skills (Brozo, 2002, pp. 11–13, 154).

Moreover, children discover early, aided by the influence of peers, that one book is a “girl book” and another a “boy book”. Dutro (2002, p. 376) tells about a five-year-old boy who had picked up a book based on Walt Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* from the library shelf. The boy standing behind him saw the book in his friend’s hands and began making gagging noises. Other boys joined in with, “Oooh, you are going to read a girls’ book?” and “Ha ha, he’s a girl, he’s a girl.” The accused quickly slipped to the nearest shelf and exchanged the book. Most likely this boy would never again choose a library book without first checking and double-checking that he had made a suitably “masculine” choice. Boys are more apt than girls to closely guard the gendered boundaries of their reading, and girls cross gender boundaries more freely than boys (Dutro, 2002, p. 382).

Boys prefer texts that have a purpose: getting information, making things, and helping others. In order to encourage boys to read, schools should expand their view of what is worthwhile reading and connect literacy instruction to boys’ interests. (Wilhelm, 2000). There should be, from the beginning of school, a meaningful purpose for writing as well. Children should be allowed to use it in the same manner as adults, that is, as a means of communication. When a teacher selects writing tasks for boys, he or she should use his or her knowledge of their interests and hobbies. Sometimes the use of computers can motivate boys to write, especially those who find writing by hand difficult.

In Millard’s study (2001, p. 1) half of the boys questioned, including able writers, disliked almost all school writing. On the other hand, most girls enjoyed writing at school and chose to write for themselves at home. Kear, Coffman, McKenna and Ambrosio (2000, p. 15) state that as pupils become older their attitudes towards writing generally decline. They realise that skilful writing requires effort. They may have had unpleasant experiences with writing; it may have proved tedious or they may have received negative feedback. Teachers have a difficult task as they attempt to foster positive attitudes in their pupils.

Often boys who in school dislike literacy lessons nevertheless use reading and writing for many purposes outside school. They feel that knowing how to read is important but reading itself is not. For boys there is a contrast between school reading and “life reading”. School reading is unconnected to their interests and the texts are too long and too difficult; life reading is based on their interests and usually consists of short passages. Life reading can sometimes be challenging, but boys feel competent to read what they choose for themselves. In school students read mostly books and textbooks; life reading involves media, video, television, music lyrics, Internet sites, and popular culture magazines (Hyatt, 2002).

Alloway and Gilbert (1997) suggest that boys may not show their true literacy skills within the set of literate practices that school involves and values, but rather in other, for them more desirable, forms of literate practice. A big part of the problem is that many groups of boys have come to regard school literacy as “un-masculine” and thus undesirable, a threat to their masculinity. It is worth remembering that a student’s attitudes towards reading and writing affect not only his or her own engagement in literacy, but often the literacy environment of the whole classroom: negative attitudes are contagious (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993, p. 63).

Scieszka (2002) has initiated “Guys read” ([www.guysread.com](http://www.guysread.com)), a literacy programme that focuses on the needs of boys and that offers parents, educators, and librarians practical suggestions as to how to encourage boys to read. Boys enjoy books that have humour, short chapters and cliff-hanger endings, and “some funny or slightly gross things that make them feel what they’re reading is a bit subversive”. Once a boy is “hooked” it is easy to move him towards more sophisticated texts. The programme calls for men to act as role models for boys in regard to reading. The fact that most of the teachers and librarians who promote reading are women gives boys an impression of reading as an un-masculine activity (Scieszka, 2002, p. 23).

Some 30 years ago boys would move gradually from fiction to non-fiction books, but nowadays their non-fiction reading material consists largely of periodicals. Schools should include in their reading programmes the intention to help pupils become critical readers who understand that information in books and magazines is not necessarily true. Teachers should pay more attention to the reading choices that children make voluntarily, and help them develop into critical readers of, for example, popular culture, sports, and computer magazines (Hall & Coles, 1997, p. 65).

Figure 1 summarises factors that influence pupils’ attitudes towards reading and writing. The factors related to the pupil are age, gender, reading and writing skills, previous experiences, and interests. The purpose of reading or writing plays an important role. A pupil who is reluctant to read in school may read outside school, with great interest, texts that he or she considers of more importance. Home has a strong influence on a child’s attitudes. The development of his or her attitude towards reading and writing is based on the reading environment at home, that is how important a role reading and writing have in the lives of other family members. Furthermore, the availability of suitable and interesting reading material at home is significant. In school the quality of the instruction depends on the teacher’s expertise and the curriculum. The teacher’s love for literature, and ability to find reading and writing material that interests pupils, are crucial. As the child becomes older, the influence of peers increases.

## **The Problem**

Within the last few years there has been a growing concern about boys’ declining literacy performance. Due to their poorer reading and writing skills boys are less successful students than girls. Many previous studies have indicated that gender

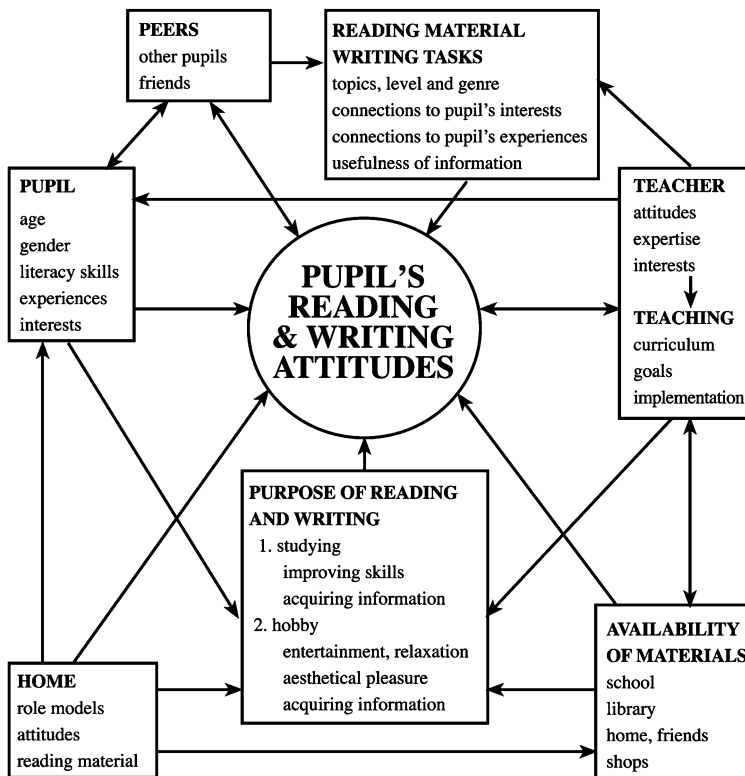


Figure 1. Factors that influence pupils' attitudes towards reading and writing

differences are strongly associated with boys' and girls' different reading attitudes. Therefore it was important to perform a study in order to find out what kind of texts would motivate boys to read and write.

## Method

In the study 145 fourth-grade pupils from a Finnish comprehensive school (aged 10 to 11) participated, of whom 67 were boys and 78 girls. The aims of the study were: (a) to explore fourth-grade pupils' attitudes towards reading and writing, (b) to find out what texts pupils would choose to read and write and which materials they did not find attractive, and (c) to find whether girls and boys enjoyed reading different texts.

### *The Instrument*

The instrument was derived from two sources: McKenna and Kear's Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (1999), and Kear et al.'s Writing Attitude Survey (2000).

In the present instrument the questions were, however, mainly different. It was designed to measure pupils' attitudes towards reading and writing. The instrument contained two 12-item sections. Responses were made on a 4-point scale to avoid the possibility that children would select a neutral alternative. The instrument was designed to be administered to an entire class in only a few minutes. It achieved a high degree of reliability. Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was .84.

The questions were worded in such a manner as to be unambiguous and easy to understand. When answering a question the pupil ticked the one of the four teddy bears' faces above the answer that best illustrated his or her opinion (see Figure 2). The expressions on the teddies' faces are easy to understand. The very happy teddy means that the pupil loves to do what he or she is asked about, the smiling teddy means he or she does it with pleasure, the tired and unhappy teddy means he or she would not want to do it, and the repulsed teddy means he or she would hate to do it. The very happy teddy is assigned a score of 4. The repulsed teddy receives a score of 1. In the study described in this article, in order to confirm that all pupils had understood what they were expected to do, the teacher and the class had previously talked about how the teddy felt in each picture. Moreover, the children answered, supervised by the teacher, one extra question before they started the questionnaire.

The answers to the questions in the first section of the instrument tapped into pupils' opinions about the reading of various types of reading material. Moreover they supplied information on how willing the pupils were to read aloud in the class or to visit a library. In the second part of the instrument pupils expressed their opinions

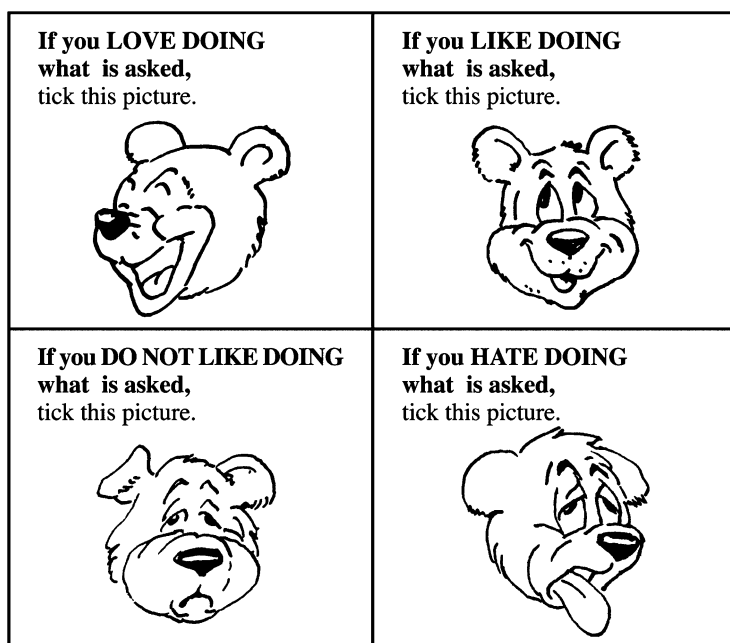


Figure 2. The four answer alternatives and the pictures related to them (pictures by Rauli Storm)

about the writing of different types of texts, the checking and correcting of their own texts, and the professions of a writer or a journalist. In addition they were asked how they felt when the other pupils read their texts. The focus of the reported results is on the questions to which the answers were exceptionally positive or negative or appeared clearly linked to the subjects' gender.

## **Results**

Most of the participants in this study (60%) took part in a previous study by the author (Merisuo-Storm, 2002) in which various aspects of their reading and writing skills were tested after the first and the second school year. After 2 years in school there was no significant difference in girls' and boys' reading skills, but the girls were significantly ( $t=-3.10$ ,  $p=.002$ ) more skilful writers than the boys. In the study described in this article the differences between boys' and girls' attitudes towards reading and writing were significant. In the fourth grade the girls enjoyed reading far more than the boys, and there was an even greater difference in the girls' and the boys' opinions concerning writing.

### *Reading*

Nearly all of the pupils said that they enjoyed reading books and visiting a library. None of them had ticked the most negative alternative ("It would be awful") as representing his or her opinion about them. Only three pupils said, "I do not like to read books" and six of them said, "I do not like to visit a library". All of these pupils were boys. The girls were significantly more motivated to read books ( $t=-2.77$ ,  $p=.006$ ) and to visit a library ( $t=-2.80$ ,  $p=.006$ ). It seems probable that the differences between the two genders become wider still when the pupils are older. According to a national survey carried out in spring 2000, in the sixth grade girls read twice as many books as boys (Korkeakoski, 2001, p. 90). The percentage distribution of girls' and boys' opinions about reading books is presented in Figure 3.

One has to know what texts appeal to pupils to be able to motivate them to continue reading. The study confirms that girls of this age usually read many types of texts, but boys are far more selective readers. The boys' first choice was a comic, although most of them said, as was mentioned before, that they liked to read books. Humorous stories and adventure books followed comics. The girls' favourites were the same, but in a different order. The girls liked adventure books best, although they have been traditionally regarded as "boy books". Their second choice was a humorous story and a comic was the third. The boys were significantly more interested in comics than the girls ( $t=3.06$ ,  $p=.003$ ). They also chose humorous stories more often than the girls, but there was no significant difference between the two genders.

Most boys said they would hate to read poems, but stories and fairytales were nearly as unpopular as poems. Non-fiction and poetry were genres that least

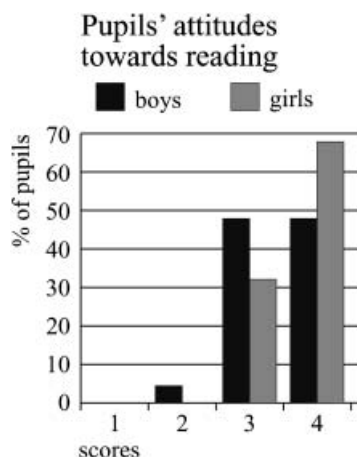


Figure 3. The percentage distribution of girls' and boys' opinions about reading books

appealed to most girls. In fact for Finnish 10- or 11-year-old pupils poetry seemed to be the least interesting genre of literature. One quarter of the pupils said that "It would be awful to read them". The girls' opinions about poems were, however, significantly more positive than the boys' opinions ( $t = -3.30$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Likewise, boys' attitudes towards fairytales were significantly more negative than the girls' attitudes ( $t = -3.82$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

Many pupils said they would have been delighted if there were a sequel to a book they had read or if a book were part of a series. Boys were even more interested in series of books than girls. It is easy to pick up a book that belongs to a familiar series from the library shelf; one can predict what the story will be like. Moreover, as it is important for boys to know that the book they choose is not a "girl book", a series of books is a safer choice. When asked for their opinion about series of books, 81% of the girls and 93% of the boys ticked one of the two happiest teddies.

Pupils at the age of 10 or 11 did not appear to like to read aloud in class. Girls liked it little, but boys found it significantly more often ( $t = -4.40$ ,  $p = .000$ ) unpleasant. Almost one quarter (22%) of them found reading to other pupils horrible. One of the two unhappiest teddies had been ticked by 70% of the boys and 38% of the girls. Eriksson (2002, p. 406) found similar results in her study in Sweden. Most Swedish pupils in the fourth grade were frightened of reading aloud in class. When they were allowed to choose a page to read aloud, they chose the shortest in the book. Some pupils did not want to read anything at all. Gambrell's results (1996, p. 19) in the USA were similar: 45% of the pupils reported that when they read aloud they worried about what other pupils thought about their reading, and 17% reported that when they read they felt embarrassed and sad.

Pupils who most clearly rejected reading aloud did not, on the basis of the answers to other questions, appear to differ from other pupils. In this group there are both eager readers and pupils who do not enjoy reading. From the results of the author's previous study, mentioned above (Merisuo-Storm, 2002), it was possible to check



what level of reading skills those pupils who took part in both studies had at the end of the second school year. Those who in the fourth grade most disliked reading aloud possessed reading skills of varying levels at the end of the second school year. In this group there were pupils who read fluently, making few errors and understanding the content of text very well, and on the other hand there are pupils who then had very insufficient reading skills. It appears that a pupil can feel uncomfortable when reading aloud in class even if he or she is a skilful and eager reader. The percentage distribution of girls' and boys' opinions on reading aloud in class is presented in Figure 4.

It is also interesting to examine the opinions of those pupils whose attitudes towards reading were the most negative: 12 pupils chose the most negative answer to three or more than three questions. Their favourite reading choice was a comic. Humorous stories and adventure books came next, but in the opinion of this group the number one position of comics was far stronger than in the general opinion of all participants. In our society comics are not a highly valued genre of literature; therefore many teachers do not allow their pupils to read them at school. On the other hand, in Finland, for example, the Finnish editions of Walt Disney's Donald Duck magazines have received the "Language Gem of the Year" award from the Department of Finnish at the University of Helsinki for their translations (University of Helsinki, 2001). They are of a high quality and use ingenious language, the reading of which both children and adults enjoy. It is worth considering whether it would be possible to give poor readers a chance to improve their reading skills reading comics; then, guided by a skilful teacher, they might gradually learn to enjoy more sophisticated literature as well.

### Writing

There is quite a strong correlation between the reading and writing sections in the measure ( $r=0.62$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The same pupils were interested in reading and in

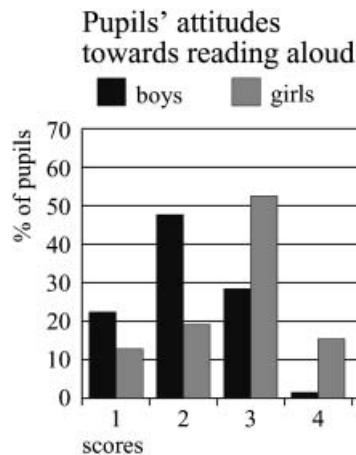


Figure 4. The percentage distribution of girls' and boys' opinions about reading aloud in class

writing. However, pupils enjoyed writing far less than reading. In the reading section of the questionnaire, there are six questions that more than half of the pupils answered with the most positive option. In addition, there are five questions to which over 90 percent of the pupils chose one of the two most positive answers. Not a single question in the writing section of the questionnaire received equally positive responses.

In the reading section the girls' aggregated scores are slightly higher than the boys' but the difference is not significant. However, in the writing section the girls' aggregated scores are significantly higher than the boys' scores ( $t = -6.61$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The percentage distributions of girls' and boys' aggregated scores in reading and writing sections are presented in Figures 5 and 6.

According to the results, both boys and girls would like writing to a pen friend the most. For the boys the second best choice would be writing a story, or a letter to an author of a book that they have read. The second best in the girls' list was keeping a diary and the third writing stories. The girls' opinions about writing to a pen friend are significantly more positive than the boys' opinions ( $t = -5.10$ ,  $p = .000$ ). However, most boys were willing to start a correspondence. As a reply to the correspondence question, 85% of the pupils ticked one of the two happiest teddies.

It is worth mentioning that many of the pupils who gave negative answers to most questions were, nevertheless, willing to start a correspondence: 14 pupils gave the most negative answers to five or more questions. These pupils found writing to a pen friend the best and the writing to an author the second best purpose of writing. A clear communicative function to the writing motivates them to write. Furthermore, a strong incentive for the writing of letters is receiving a response (LeVine, 2002, p.234). Email is an excellent medium for letter-writing because it makes the receiving of a quick reply possible; this is something that teachers ought to keep in mind when pondering how to activate poor and reluctant writers. The percentage

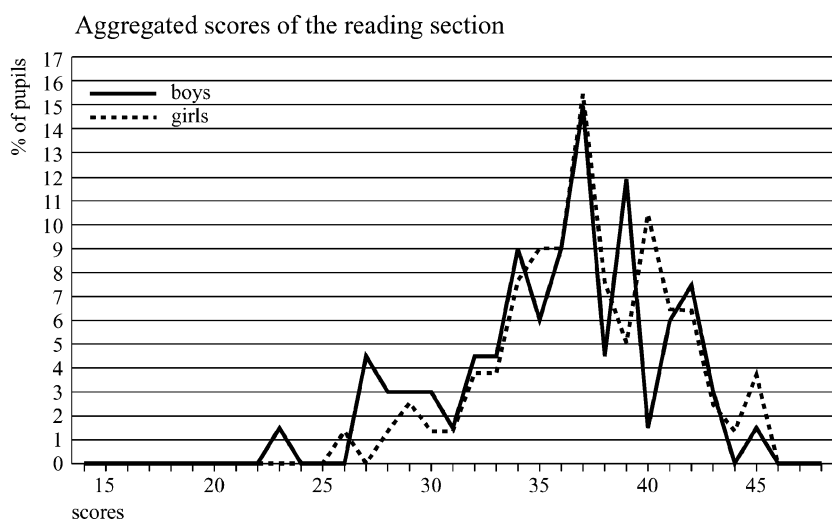


Figure 5. The percentage distributions of girls' and boys' aggregated scores in the reading section

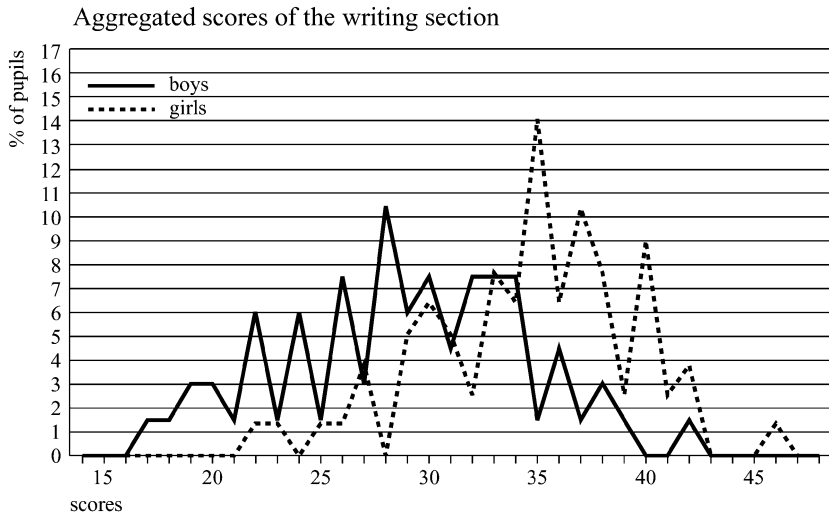


Figure 6. The percentage distributions of girls' and boys' aggregated scores in the writing section

distribution of girls' and boys' opinions about writing to a pen friend is presented in Figure 7.

The answers to the question "Do you like to write stories?" were relatively positive as well. Pupils had been writing stories in school from the first grade onwards and the process was familiar to all of them. "I love it" or "I like it" were the answers given by 81% of the pupils. The boys were, however, not as eager writers as the girls. The difference between the two groups is significant ( $t = -2.78$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Nevertheless, the girls enjoyed writing in a diary even more. More than half of them (54%) answered the diary question by ticking the happiest teddy. "Would you like to keep a diary?" is the question in the questionnaire that divided the opinions of the two

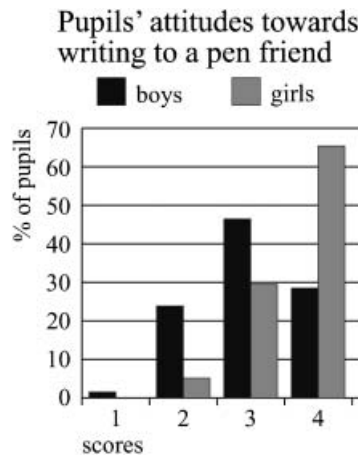


Figure 7. The percentage distribution of girls' and boys' opinions about writing to a pen friend

genders the most clearly. “I would hate it” replied 34% of the boys, and 30% of them said, “I would not like it”.

Both boys and girls found poetry the least attractive genre of writing. However, girls’ answers were significantly more positive than boys’ answers ( $t=6.23$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The pupils who were eager readers of poetry were eager writers of poems as well; there is a strong correlation between the two questions ( $r=0.64$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

Pupils were asked if they liked to check texts that they had written and correct errors in them. Evidently school children have grown used to the idea that one has to check and correct everything that one writes because the pupils’ attitudes were fairly positive. However, the girls were even more willing to do it than the boys, and the difference between the two groups is highly significant ( $t=-3.27$ ,  $p=.001$ ).

It was mentioned above that the pupils were not eager to read aloud in class. In the writing section of the questionnaire they were asked how they would feel if the other pupils read their texts. This was not a pleasing thought either; pupils appear to fear other pupils’ criticism. Only 11% of them said that they would love it. However, nearly half of them noted that they liked it. The pupils who said, “I would hate it” were mainly boys. That was the opinion of one quarter of them. The percentage distribution of girls’ and boys’ opinions about a situation where other pupils read their texts is presented in Figure 8.

## Conclusion

One of the main goals of literacy teaching is to awaken children’s interest in language and literature and to give them a lasting positive attitude towards reading and writing. The results of the study described in the article revealed that schools have not been able to reach this goal, particularly with regard to boys. The age from 10 to

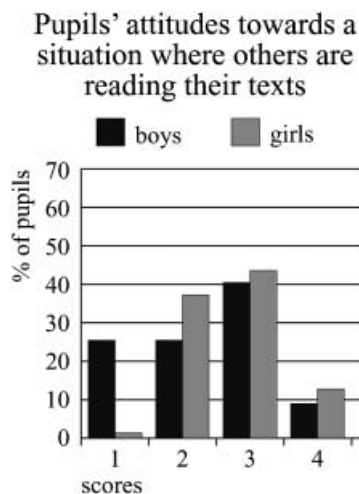


Figure 8. The percentage distribution of girls’ and boys’ opinions about a situation where other pupils in the class are reading their texts

11 is usually a period when children are eager readers and it is probable that a few years later they, especially boys, will spend less time reading and writing. The international PISA survey mentioned earlier (Linnakylä et al., 2003) showed that the girls' scores were higher than the boys' scores in every OECD country, but in Finland the gender gap was the widest. Therefore it is important to reflect how it would be possible to motivate young boys to read and to continue reading when they reach their teens. It is important regarding the development of writing skills as well. Fluent readers are usually skilful writers and struggling readers are usually poor writers. Habitual reading has a positive effect on writing skills as well as on reading skills.

As pointed out earlier, boys are less successful students than girls due to their poorer reading skills. Brozo (2002, p. 11) suggests that poor reading skills and the learning difficulties caused by them often predict unemployment, crime, homelessness, and drug problems. Therefore it is crucial to pay serious attention to boys' literacy needs. Teachers should find out what their pupils' interests are and use that information when planning their literacy teaching. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that boys are afraid of being labelled un-masculine if they enjoy reading and writing. The approval of their friends and peers is important for them. Schools should offer boys reading material that they can regard as interesting and "masculine". Boys are not, in most cases, as interested as girls in the texts that are commonly used in school. According to the results of this study, boys and reluctant readers are interested in comics and humour.

Scieszka (2002), for example, has come to a similar conclusion. He states that teachers should keep in mind that magazine, websites, comics, and so on are reading material as well as books. Worthy (1996) stresses that pupils who are not interested in schools' reading material never engage in reading at all, and often develop an aversion to reading that may be lifelong. She points out that despite the wealth of children's literature available, it is difficult to find reading material that would interest pupils who have already developed a dislike for reading. On the other hand she found out that students who had a negative attitude towards reading would read comics, series books or magazines if they were available in school. However, many schools and libraries do not have enough of this type of "light" reading material in their collections because the teachers prefer their students to read literature of a higher quality. Yet it is important to engage pupils in reading. The primary factor in selecting reading material must be interest. Otherwise many pupils will not read at all outside school. Moreover, authors and publishers should produce high-quality books that interest boys. A good example are J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, which have been a great success all over the world and which even reluctant readers enjoy.

Often pupils who avoid reading evaluate themselves as poor readers and prefer to do something in which they succeed better. Many pupils find reading aloud frightening and embarrassing. They worry about what other pupils think about them and are afraid of making a fool of themselves. Even an eager and skilful reader may feel uncomfortable when reading aloud. Boys especially would like to avoid it; 70%

of them ticked one of the unhappiest teddies to describe what they felt when they were asked to read aloud. Possible explanations for this are that the pupil is shy or that he or she has previously received negative feedback from other pupils or a teacher. If pupils rarely read aloud, they do not regard it as a normal everyday routine. Behind the fact that boys suffer even more than girls in reading aloud may lie their strong involvement in the peer group whose approval is important for them.

The results that give most cause for concern are the ones related to boys' writing attitudes. Writing interests them far less than reading. Girls, however, enjoy writing nearly as much as reading. As Millard (2001, p. 1) states, the difference between primary school boys' and girls' writing attitudes becomes apparent at an early stage: even boys who are skilful writers do not find school writing interesting.

The study supports the idea that writing without a purpose does not interest boys. Many of them have already found out that writing requires great effort, and they do not start writing without a good purpose. As was mentioned earlier, often boys who in school dislike writing nevertheless use it for many purposes outside school. Therefore it is important that the teacher pays attention to his or her pupils' interests when planning writing exercises. A pupil finds exercises that are connected to his or her interests meaningful. Pupils can feel that they are "experts" when writing about their own hobbies, whereas this is not the case when the topic of the writing task is unfamiliar.

Moreover, if writing has a communicative function, this motivates pupils to write. Most of them, reluctant writers as well as eager writers, would prefer to write letters and a strong incentive for letter-writing is receiving a reply. It is not difficult to encourage a boy who knows how to use a computer to start writing email "letters" to a pen friend of his age. The quick receiving of a reply via email further strengthens the motivation to write. Although pupils enjoy writing letters to a pen friend, they do not want other pupils in their class to read their texts. The opinions of other pupils are of great importance to them and they are afraid of their critical comments. One quarter of the boys would hate showing their texts to other pupils.

It is crucial that the teacher gathers information about his or her pupils' interests. With interesting reading material it is possible to encourage even the most reluctant reader to read. It is not impossible, either, for even reluctant, poor readers to experience success, or to gradually start to enjoy writing if the writing exercises are related to their interests. Furthermore it is important that there is, from the very beginning of the first grade, an approving atmosphere in the class so that each pupil can feel comfortable when reading aloud or allowing other pupils to read his or her texts.

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