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WRITING AS LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR LOW ACHIEVERS: THE
CASE OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the teaching of writing in English to secondary school students in Singapore. It first seeks to understand how sociocultural settings have ‘produced and reproduced’ a limited literacy experience especially for low achievers, such that they are reified as deficient and stereotyped for certain roles in society. Using the sociocultural perspective on writing which contextualizes literacy learning in the larger social, cultural and political dimensions, the study then explores possibilities for which classroom practices of writing can be made meaningful for low achievers.

Two classes of Secondary Three students (aged 15) in a Singapore government school were chosen for the study. The former belonged to the top end of the academic stream and the latter, the ‘bottom-rung’. Qualitative and quantitative methods were undertaken to collect and analyze the data for the study. A questionnaire was administered, and classroom observations along with interviews with focal students and their teachers were conducted over one entire school semester.

Quantitative findings show that students in both classes shared similar orientations towards five writing subscales, which are Task value and Interest, Self-Efficacy, Affective Feelings towards Writing, Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation, and Self-Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies. Discourse analysis of classroom data, on the other hand, found that contrary to the aims of the syllabus, there was little teaching of higher meta-cognitive and evaluative skills or personal construction of voice and meaning in writing in both classes. Rather, the influence of a ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ model of literacy serves to perpetuate

outcomes-driven pedagogical practices and deficient thinking towards low achievers and thus, obliterates larger structural issues that need to be addressed.

In response to the findings, an intervention task which was supported by the principles of the sociocultural theory of writing was implemented in the ‘bottom-rung’ class. Although results of the task showed that deliberate teaching of writing strategies helped to improve students’ scores, there was also evidence that teacher and students had filtered the task through the lens of the ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ model of literacy.

Apart from providing insights into the situated nature of second language writing in the context of the mainstream Singapore classroom, the study points to a need for curricular changes aimed at helping low achievers to enhance their experiences in doing writing at school, notably in teacher’s classroom practices. To this end, it is suggested that literacy be viewed as progressive, so that learning to write contributes towards the nurturing of voice and construction of meaning.

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*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
Psalm 139:9-10*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SAP	Special Assistance Plan
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Examination
JC	Junior College
ITE	Institute of Technical Education
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
E	Express
N(A)	Normal (Academic)
N(T)	Normal (Technical)
LEP	Language Elective Programme
GBP	Genre-Based Pedagogy
ESL	English as Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
SRSD	Self-Regulated Strategy Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
CoP	Community of Practice
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
NLS	New Literacy Studies
GCE 'O' / 'N' Level	General Certificate of Education Ordinary/Normal Level
SE	Self Efficacy
TVI	Task Value and Interest
ER	Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation
SRC	Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies
AFW	Attitude Towards Writing
COLT	Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
IRF	Initiation-Response-Feedback
MSG	Mean Subject Grade
SBA	School-Based Assessment

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Study

Expressing ideas meaningfully and coherently in writing is no easy task. School-based writing, for example, can be intellectually complex and cognitively demanding. Moreover, the acquisition of good writing skills is actually a recursive process that is time consuming. Often, the motivated writer needs to devote a lot of personal time and effort to planning and organizing ideas in order to achieve effective results.

As an insider in the Singapore school system, I found that teaching writing to an audience who is low-achieving and unmotivated with learning can prove especially challenging. When compounded by students' behavioural problems, it makes the entire exercise emotionally stressful for teachers. In addition, the institutionalized practice of teaching writing often serves to reinforce the idea amongst students that it is strictly an academic exercise unrelated to other school subjects (Boscolo & Hidi, 2006; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). Despite the fact that writing by itself can be a resource for "approaching, understanding, and analyzing problems in a more personal and gratifying way" (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p. 4), the issue of students taking ownership of their writing has also been questionable in Singapore's exam-oriented education system where writing for test performance often takes precedence over writing for the construction of personal meaning, or sharing of knowledge. Perhaps, what is also noteworthy is that anecdotal accounts by teachers, at the same time, cast low achievers in a deficit light; their weak foundation in English proficiency, lack of innate intelligence, poor parental support, and thus upbringing are seen as making them incapable of doing as well as 'good' students.

Prompted by my personal experience, the present study set out to investigate how writing can be framed differently for low achievers in the Singapore secondary school context. Undergirded by the sociocultural perspective on writing, it contextualizes literacy

learning in the larger social, cultural and political dimensions in order for practices of writing to be made meaningful. In so doing, it aims to shed some light on the sociocultural issues that made writing at school difficult and unengaging for low achievers, and to explore new possibilities that might be created for them. Following the overview of this chapter, the background information about Singapore's language situation and education system will be provided. This will lead to the rationale for the study as well as its justification. Finally, the areas in which the study seeks to make a contribution will be identified, and an outline of the thesis provided.

1.2 Background to the Context of the Study

1.2.1 The language situation in Singapore

In multi-ethnic Singapore, the language situation is diverse. There are four languages designated as official languages: English, Mandarin, Tamil and Malay. English, as the first official language, reflects Singapore's historical connection with Britain. It is the language of government administration, the lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication and has been the medium of instruction in all schools and tertiary institutions since 1987 (Lin, 2003; Pakir, 1997), whereas the other three languages were chosen to represent the ethnic diversity of Singapore and are referred to as 'mother tongues' or second languages. Apart from these, there are also several dialects and languages spoken by the ethnic groups. For example, amongst the Chinese dialects spoken, Hokkien and Cantonese are considered to be the most popular; the main Indian languages include Malayalam, Punjabi, Hindustani, Bengali and Gujarati; the Malay dialects, on the other hand, are more homogenous, but Javanese and Boyanese are also commonly spoken (Cheah, 1994). Given the language diversity in Singapore, most Singaporeans can speak a repertoire of several languages that includes at least English and a mother tongue.

Where prestige and usage is concerned, English is undoubtedly regarded as the most valuable asset for education and in the labour market, since competence in English is largely required for occupational mobility and for career advancement in Singapore. Despite being the first official language, English is not necessarily the first language acquired by most Singaporean children. Over the decades, however, it is reported that the majority of the school-going population have shifted their language to English as they advanced up the educational ladder since at schools, most children develop literacy in English first instead of their native tongues, having learnt reading and writing in a formal situation in English (Pakir, 1993). Undeniably of course, Singaporeans have also come to be known as more successful in language learning than people in many countries in the Pacific Rim, and educated Singaporeans actually use and speak English very efficiently. Still, as noted by Cheah (1998), many school-going children who come from homes where English is hardly used often have to make the adjustments from a 'non-English-knowing' home situation to the Standard English situation expected of them in school.

At the societal level, there in fact exists a continuum of English varieties spoken by different sections of the society. They range widely from the educated acrolectal speech, used by a small population of elites, to the colloquial variety known as 'Singlish', which is widely spoken by less well-educated Singaporeans, as well as by all Singaporeans in informal situations (Cheah, 1994). Indeed, for many in Singapore, Standard English coexists alongside and operates together with Singlish (Tan & Tan, 2008). Linguists such as Pakir note that Singlish is ubiquitous in Singapore society, and is used even by the highly educated and proficient in English for varying social functions. Nevertheless, the government blames the prevalence of Singlish for the overall declining standards in Standard English proficiency, which the government considers essential for maintaining the country's global competitiveness (Rubdy & Tupas, 2009). Hence, in an effort to eradicate it, the Ministry of

Education has since 2000 implemented the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) in schools, which is a once-a-year campaign aimed to promote the practice of speaking Standard English amongst students. Although the use of Singlish is disapproved of by language policy makers, and is often denigrated in official discourses (Cheah, 1994; Pakir, 1997; Stroud & Wee, 2007), it still appears to be the preferred language of identity for many young Singaporeans (Teo, 2004, September 11).

1.2.2 Bilingual policy

The policy of bilingualism is said to have been the cornerstone of the Singapore education system since 1966 (Yip, Eng, & Yap, 1997). Prior to that, the education system consisted of English and the three vernacular streams of Chinese, Malay, and Indian (Tan, 2007, p. 79). Under the bilingual policy, all students are required to learn English as the first school language and their mother tongues as the second language, the latter being determined on the basis of a person's ethnicity: Mandarin for Chinese students, Bahasa Melayu for Malay students and Tamil for Indian students. Underpinned by "economic pragmatism" (Tan, 2007, p. 79), the policy underscores the government's belief that Singaporeans' proficiency in the English language, on the one hand, helps to secure the country's competitive edge in the global market whilst knowledge in the mother tongue languages, on the other hand, imparts and preserves cultural traditions (Tan, 2007; Vaish, 2007; Yip, et al., 1997) of Singaporeans in that it "stems the tide of Westernization" (Tan, 2007, p. 81) and thus fortifies the cultural roots and identity of Singaporeans.

In fact, the government's particular interest to cultivate an elite group of Chinese within the education system, who were tasked to promote the use of the Chinese language and culture, led to the setting up of nine Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools in the secondary school system in 1979. The schools, which exclusively provide Special Stream

classes, cater to the top ten per cent of each graduating cohort at the primary level. Unlike students in other schools, SAP school students study English and Chinese as first school languages. The Language Elective Programme (LEP) in Chinese offered at the pre-university level, for example, is targeted at students who graduated from SAP schools. As SAP schools only cultivate a Chinese cultural elite, they have been criticized for being racially exclusive since there are no SAP-type schools for other ethnic groups (Tan, 2007).

1.2.3 Singapore's education system

Streaming by ability was introduced in February 1979, following the Goh report which aimed to promote the principle of meritocracy through a restructuring of the school system. According to official discourse, ability-streaming provides opportunity for less capable students to develop at a pace that is slower whilst reducing high failure rates amongst school-going children (Yip, et al., 1997). Despite concerns from various quarters that streaming students into the lower courses would create a debilitating low self-concept or negative attitudes towards school in students, studies whose findings show that the post-secondary attrition rate among secondary students was actually reduced lend support to the ability-streaming policy (Chang, 1990). Consequently, streaming was hailed a “major success” (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 162) in achieving a near-universal primary and secondary education for all Singaporean children.

Since 1980, children have been streamed as early as Primary Three (aged 9). Based on examination results, especially those for English and Mathematics, they were channelled into one of the three ability groups in Primary Four (aged 10)¹. However, beginning from 2004, changes were made to the streaming process at Primary Three and Primary Four, such that

¹ The three ability groups were EM1, EM2 and EM3. EM1 offered English as a first language and mother tongue as first language; EM2 offered English as first language and mother tongue as second language; EM3 offered English as a first language and mother tongue for oral proficiency. In 2004, EM1 and EM2 were merged while EM3 remained until 2008 and was replaced by subject-banding.

children are streamed at the end of Primary Four to determine which of the two major ability streams they will be channeled into in Primary Five (aged 11). The ‘weakest’ children from the streaming process are then grouped into different subject bands, according to their aptitude in each subject. For example, if the child is weak in English and Mathematics but strong in Mother Tongue Language and Science, he or she can choose to take English and Mathematics at the Foundation level, while taking Mother Tongue Language and Science at the Standard level (Ministry of Education, 2012b).

At the end of their six-year compulsory primary school education, children are tracked again into the three main streams in secondary school based on their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results. Until 1991, Primary Six (aged 12) students were tracked into the following streams in secondary schools (Cheah, 1998; Ee, Wang, Koh, Tan, & Liu, 2009):

Special stream for the top 10% of the cohort

Express stream for 60% of the cohort

Normal stream for 30% of the cohort

The majority of students in the Special and Express streams usually proceed to Junior College (JC), for their pre-university education, and, eventually, university; students in the Normal stream, despite given the opportunities to advance to university, have usually ended up at the current Institute of Technical Education (ITE), which was the predecessor of Vocational Institute (VI).

In 1991, the ‘Improving Primary School Education’ report led to the establishment of the Normal (Technical) stream. The Ministry’s rationale for creating a technical option in the Normal stream is so that the ‘weakest’, non-academic students would be able to receive another four years of education in secondary school before proceeding to the world of work (Yip, et al., 1997). As such, beginning from 1994, the Normal stream was further divided into

two separate streams: Normal (Academic) (henceforth, N(A)) and Normal (Technical) (henceforth, N(T)). Primary school students who are placed in the lowest ability groups after streaming at Primary Four typically end up in these two streams in secondary school. Unlike N(T) students, who are naturally bound for vocational apprenticeship and ITE after graduating from secondary school, N(A) students have a wider choice of academic routes such as the junior college or polytechnic, although about 40% of the cohort after GCE N level exams usually ends up in ITE, just like their N(T) peers². (*GCE 'N' level results out*, 2011, 19 November). It has been pointed out that N(A) and N(T) students are over-represented in most neighbourhood schools, which are located in working class housing estates. The majority of these working class families also do not speak English as their home language. With few exceptions, most of these schools tend to be “poorly positioned” (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 162) in the national school league table, a ranking and appraisal system that the Ministry uses to band schools annually according to academic performance.

1.2.4 The Normal (Academic) pathway

In 2009, there were about 30% of N(A) students in the entire population of secondary students (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Students streamed into N(A) classes take the following compulsory subjects: English Language, Mother Tongue and Mathematics. For upper secondary, Combined Humanities and a Science subject are also compulsory. In that regard, the range of subjects N(A) students take is smaller than those offered to students in Special and Express courses. While the latter finish their secondary education with the GCE ‘O’ level exams in four years, the former who obtain an aggregate not exceeding 10 points in their best three subjects and a Grade 5 or better in English in the GCE ‘N’ level exams in

² For example, only a total of 8,895 students (72.6 %) fulfilled the promotion criteria in GCE N Levels exam 2011 to move up to Secondary 5 N(A) in 2012.

Secondary four will then be promoted to Secondary 5. That is to say that N(A) students qualify for an additional year to prepare for the GCE 'O' Level exams if they do well in their 'N' level examination in Secondary 4. Otherwise, they are only considered to have passed the GCE 'N' level exams if they obtain a pass grade of Grade 5 (50 out of 100) or better in at least one subject. Alternatively, they can also proceed to take up Higher Nitec courses³ in ITE if they obtain at least a Grade 4 (60 out of 100) for English and Mathematics. Most importantly, N(A) students must pass English in both the 'N' Level and 'O' Level Examinations before they are considered to have 'cleared' both examinations.

1.2.5 The English language curriculum and syllabus

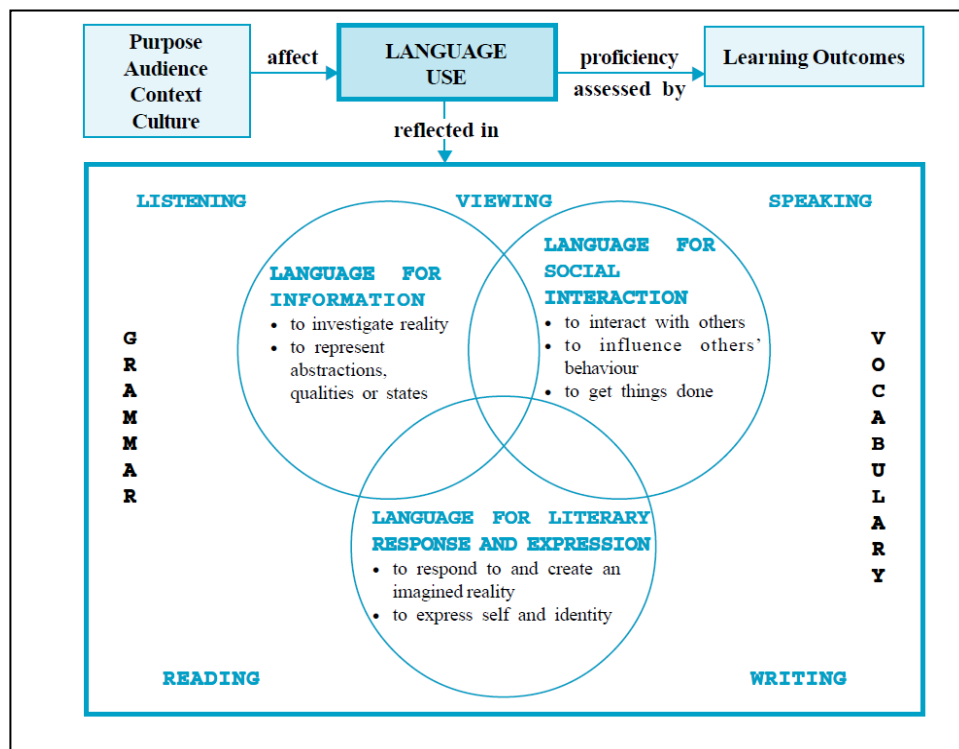
Given the importance of English in Singapore's social context on the one hand, and the realities of the home language background of the majority of Singaporeans on the other, it is clear that English language instruction at schools plays a very crucial role in both societal and personal effectiveness and success in Singapore. In response to the changing social and language profile and needs of Singaporeans over the decades, there have been syllabus revisions every ten years or so to ensure the teaching of English language remains relevant and effective in terms of the latest language trends. At the time of the writing of this thesis, the current syllabus, Syllabus 2010, has just been newly implemented at the Secondary 1 and 2 levels across schools, while Syllabus 2001 remains the de facto syllabus for all Secondary 3 and 4 streams, and Secondary 5 N(A) .

Syllabus 2001 has been described as evolutionary in the sense that it was built on the previous philosophies and practices in English language teaching, and it is grouped into three key features: *language use*, *learning outcomes*, and *skills and strategies*, as well as a specification of text types and grammar (Curriculum Planning & Development Division,

³ Higher Nitec courses are only offered in selected ITEs. They offer academic accreditation for polytechnics.

2001). Organizing the learning of English under these three specific areas ensures a more methodical, orderly coverage of language skills and grammatical items (Lim, 2004). Having incorporated Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Australian Genre-Based Pedagogy (henceforth, GBP) (Derewianka, 1990, 2003) into the overall framework of the syllabus, emphasis is given to the function of language as a system for making meaning, determined by “purpose, audience, context and culture” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 3). According to Figure 1.1, the three areas of language use focus on how language is used for organizing and communicating ideas and information (*language for information*), how language is used for social interaction (*language for social interaction*), and critical as well as literary purposes such as the expression of self and identity (*language for literary response and expression*) (Lim, 2004).

Figure 1.1 Language Use Model Prescribed in Syllabus 2001



(Source: Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 3)

For the first time too, students were formally introduced to all kinds of text types from the literary and non-literary genres which provided the context for teaching text level grammar. This allows students to not only focus on narrative texts, but also on other non-narrative texts such as factual recounts, information reports, instructions, explanations and expositions. With the emphasis on text types, students are taught how to make linguistic choices to suit purpose, audience, context and culture through instances of real-life discourse, which do not consist merely of “discrete instances of language” at the sentence level (Lin, 2003, p. 239). Further, each text type recommended in the syllabus is accompanied by the Grammatical Features of Text Types, which lists the grammar items generally associated with the particular type of text taught. In that regard, not only does the syllabus specify that students be taught how to make linguistic choices, such as text organization, grammar and vocabulary appropriate for the “purpose, audience, context and culture” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 3) related to each text type, but it also reiterates the importance of producing “internationally acceptable English” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 7) in speech and writing. The increased focus on grammar in Syllabus 2001 is not considered as new; rather, it is to be regarded as an “extension” of what was introduced in Syllabus 1991 (Lim, 2004, p. 386). As Cheah (2004) puts it, the “return to grammar teaching” in Syllabus 2001 was an overt effort on the government’s part to rectify the problem of the decline of Standard English proficiency, which resulted from the previous decade of “little to no grammar teaching” (p.365).

In sum, *language use*, *learning outcomes*, and *skills and strategies* constitute the three essential components for achieving the aims of language learning in the Singapore school system, one of which concerns the ability to “think through, interpret and evaluate fiction and non-fiction texts from print and electronic sources, and analyze how language is used to evoke responses and construct meaning” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division,

2001, p. 3). Overall, these three components are supported by six core principles of learning which represent the spirit in which the syllabus is to be implemented in the classroom: *learner centredness*, *process orientation*, *integration*, *contextualization*, *spiral progression* (in the learning of language skills and other language components), and *interaction*. Lin (2003) observes that they appear to subscribe to pedagogical practices associated with progressive constructivism and interactionist psycholinguistics rather than the sociocultural processes and principles advocated in the Australian GBP. Nevertheless, Lin points out that the sociocultural notions of scaffolding and joint construction of texts were in fact widely disseminated through workshops such as the MOE Grammar Course launched in conjunction with the introduction of Syllabus 2001 and taught in others so that today, most teachers have been using them in their classroom teaching.

The latest syllabus, Syllabus 2010, in many ways reflects the principles and philosophies of Syllabus 2001. Specifically, it aims to promote the features of spoken English and their purposes, which are to be achieved by teaching students how to identify and analyse the features of various spoken texts, as well as to teach effective presentation skills and strategies. In addition, skills and strategies for writing and representing are stressed so that students will be acquainted with the “cognitive, linguistic and social processes” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2010, p. 60) involved in idea generation and selection, development, organization, and revision for creating different types of texts. Compared to Syllabus 2001, emphasis is given to teaching processes during the delivery of the pre, main and post phases of their EL lessons with the aim to raise students’ awareness of their learning processes in order to enable application and facilitate knowledge discovery.

Apart from heightening the emphasis that learning English in a multilingual context is different from learning it in a monolingual or near-native context, the syllabus, for the first time, specifies different levels of skills and attainment targets for students in the E, N(A) and

N(T) streams. For low achievers like the N(A) and N(T) students, the syllabus even states that teachers should revisit and help students “master, where appropriate, the skills for penmanship or grammatical accuracy and spelling” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2010, p. 66), given that these learners will need more explicit instruction in the basic skills necessary for writing different text types. Thus, this implies that a hierarchy of literacies for students in different streams is enshrined in the syllabus.

1.2.6 Teaching writing in the Singapore classroom

Although it is stated that reading and writing components are given equal regard in Syllabus 2001, writing essentially assumes a high weighting of marks in school-based and national assessments in the Singapore classrooms, and many teachers regard writing, more than reading, as the focus of literacy instruction in the classroom (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007). Despite the emphasis on writing in the Singapore school context, there is a paucity of research in writing in the Singaporean secondary school context; however, Pakir and Low (1995)’s study on the implementation of process writing in primary and secondary schools in Singapore in the nineties reveals a structured, prescriptive approach to teaching writing that was geared towards preparing students to write under exam conditions.

Since the implementation of Syllabus 2001, the teaching of writing has been integrated with oral communication, reading, grammar and vocabulary activities, through the contextualization of text types. From personal experience, the actual teaching of a full cycle of writing process in most classroom contexts reflects the process-genre (Badger & White, 2000), instead of a strictly genre approach to teaching writing. First, a model of a particular genre is introduced and its linguistic structures analysed. Learners then carry out exercises, which manipulate relevant language forms and finally, produce the complete texts which reflect the rhetorical features of the same genre. Two other methods adopted to improve

writing skills include the teaching of summary writing (except for N(T) students), simplifying the relevant points extracted from a text, and reconstructing information, and the teaching of genre switching, e.g. from information report to narrative. When it comes to writing a particular topic, students brainstorm ideas in pairs and groups. After the complete text is produced, they then edit and revise their drafts before submission. After the final draft has been marked and returned, post-writing activities such as editing of mechanical and grammatical errors usually follow.

1.2.7 Teaching English literacy in the Singapore classroom

From the structural and prescriptive approaches to language teaching endorsed in the earlier syllabuses to the current communicative, genre-based lessons, English language teaching in the Singapore classroom has indeed passed through several phases over the decades. It has mainly seen a transition from the teaching of functional literacy characterized by reinforcement of linguistic accuracy, to one that recognizes a process orientation in language learning, and finally, to one that promotes literacy as a means of life skill for preparing young Singaporeans in the face of an ever more globalizing world beyond school. In particular, the more recent phase from 2001 onwards saw two major initiatives being implemented. The first was *Thinking Schools Learning Nations*; the second was *Teach Less Learn More*. The first initiative envisions nurturing students into thinking adults in the “cradle” of schools. Consequently, “the spirit of learning was expected to ‘spill over’ to the collective society” (Ministry of Education, 2012a). As a result of this initiative, which was first implemented in 1997, schools in Singapore have embarked on the use of multi-media IT tools in the teaching of English as well as in other subjects, when thirty per cent of curriculum time is devoted to IT in the language classroom (Cheah, 2004). Apart from this, Project Work, for promoting interdisciplinary learning, and National Education were

deliberately incorporated into the regular English lessons. The latter initiative, which was built on the principles of the former, advocates quality teaching in terms of “classroom interaction, opportunities for expression, the learning of life-long skills and the building of character through innovative and effective teaching approaches and strategies” (Ministry of Education, 2009b), instead of merely drilling students for quantitative results.

Cheah (2004) however observes that, although the two initiatives aimed to promote new teaching techniques, the system on the whole maintained “the same eclecticism in methodology, always choosing the strategies that work best for the purpose of achieving academic results” (p.362). For example, in some cases, the computer was reduced to an electronic drill and practice workbook or another convenient tool for projecting and sharing materials, and there was “little evidence to show that the writing has improved” (p.363). Similarly, the use of text types as the main organizing principle of lesson units has resulted in the reinforcing of the prescriptive, rigid teaching of rhetorical patterns and linguistic accuracy, much like a return to ‘reactionary’ literacy⁴. In fact, the need for successful exam performance is still so entrenched in the school systems that most schools deliberately drill students for mock preliminary exams before they sit for their actual GCE exams.

1.2.8 The low achievers in neighbourhood secondary schools

Little research has been done on low achieving students such as the N(A) or N(T) students in Singapore schools. Nevertheless, a study by Chang, Goh and Moo (1997) reports that they are average in academic achievement motivation, are particularly poor in English and Mathematics, and have poor study habits and a short attention span. In a similar vein, Ee, Wang, Koh, Tan, and Liu (2009) identify the use of inappropriate learning strategies as their biggest obstacle in academic performance. Further, Ng (1999) reports that as these students

⁴ This issue and other related ones will be discussed in depth in Chapters 2 and 9.

move up the academic levels, there is generally a decline in self-esteem and achievement motivation. More recently, Ismail and Tan's (2005) study of the N(T) students in one neighbourhood school shows that these low achievers are capable of creating "multiple centres of disruption" to classroom order, thus forcing teachers to be "on their toe" (p.4) when dealing with them. Cajoling and rationalizing, and even threats or promise of incentives sometimes cannot make the students comply with teachers' instructions. In the worst case, they "rarely" cooperate with teachers and would "continuously try to push the limits of teacher-student relations" (p.6). However, teachers in the study perceived that students' poor discipline in class was related to their low literacy level since the majority of them were still grappling with a "basic level of literacy", unable to "spell or understand the instructions" (p. 7). Because they experienced problems with understanding the curriculum content, which teachers said was too difficult for them, they thus resorted to misbehaviour. In order to minimise disruptions from low achievers, teachers used a pedagogy that largely relied on a reproductive transmission of knowledge with highly prescriptive tasks.

1.2.8.1 Deficit Thinking Towards Low Achievers

Teachers' discourse elicited by Ismail and Tan's (2005) study shows that low achievers' dispositions in class, which were a result of their low literacy level, are the cause for their perpetual poor academic performance. In the words of Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2010), these students lacked the "personal attributes and cultural resources, which a presumed 'mainstream' student possesses" (p.161). Such deficit discourse by teachers towards low achievers, which legitimizes their construction of a *logic of practice* (Johnston & Hayes, 2008), similarly resonates in other educational contexts whereby students are tracked or streamed into low-level classes, identified for special education in terms of their

behavioural problems, or originate from low income home backgrounds and minority ethnic groups (Valencia, 1997).

In each of these contexts, deficit discourse by teachers and schools takes the form of blame; that is, they blame the individual student's lack of motivation, character defects, or their non-English speaking or problematic homes for their low academic achievement (Freebody & Welch, 1993; Valencia, 1997). Under the influence of deficit discourse, low achievers are "expected to view their learning difficulties as the result of personal inability and lack of effort, rather than their position within the social hierarchy and other structural factors" (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 161). Over time, as the discourse of such deficit "labelling" persists and as "those closest to the persons labelled" begin to endorse it, low achievers, "suffering the 'pathology'" (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005, p. 9) of the discourse, also are forced to begin to accept "the validity of such constructed representations of themselves" (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 161). Heller (2008) goes on to say that often students who are subject to such discourse are coerced into believing the "naturalness and rightness" (p.54) of the prevailing patterns of deficit thinking, especially if others in their circles of influence believe that acceptance of the deficit labelling offers a solution to the perceived problem. More importantly, the circularity of deficit discourse, along with its logic of practice, invalidates any "alternate meanings or positions" (Shields, et al., 2005, p. 123), since as Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2010) explain, "any alternative explanations for deficit constructs are rejected if they do not fit into existing belief systems", thus reinforcing the "continued resilience" of these constructs (p.161). In some cases, the alternative discourse chosen by those positioned by deficit labelling has been regarded as deviance (Shields, et al., 2005).

One educational context in which deficit discourse was practised by teachers and institutions is highlighted by Bishop (2005), when he describes how Māori students in New

Zealand are subjected to “pathologizing” practices in school. For example, their bad attitude, aggressive behaviour and lack of willingness to participate in classroom activities, and subsequent low achievement and failure at school often confirm teachers’ beliefs that they are not “capable of abstract thinking or a full education” (p.63) and not able to “cope in the modern world” (p.65). Māori homes, in particular, were implicated by schools’ pathologizing practice, which present them as deficient and responsible for Māori children’s “inadequate language and intellectual development” (p.71). In some instances, these deficit discourses serve as a “ready-made” (p.71) excuse if Māori children do not achieve well at school.

The deficit views of the educability of students, as was the case of low achievers in Singapore or Māori children in New Zealand schools, which impinge severely on their educational outcomes, are consistent with Bourdieu’s (1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) notions of cultural capital and habitus, often used to describe the disadvantaged position of ethnic and linguistic minorities and problematise the seemingly innocuous notions of meritocracy and equal opportunity in today’s educational settings (Albright & Luke, 2008). Accordingly, cultural capital refers to the “physical and psychic” embodiment of a person’s “durable” dispositions and resources (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 101) such as language use, skills, economic resources, dispositions and orientations, attitudes and perceptions that children “acquired through a gradual process of inculcation” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 12) or socialization in their families and communities. The cultural capital then forms a collective habitus (Albright & Luke, 2008; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Kramsch, 2008) representative of particular groups of people in society. Lin (1999) argues that, through their familial socialization, children of advantaged socioeconomic groups receive “both more of and the right kind of cultural capital” (p.394) for school success. Their habitus therefore matches that of the school, and hence it explains their success at school. Conversely, children from disadvantaged groups are socialized into a habitus incompatible with that presupposed in

school, and thus they do not possess the same starting point as those from privileged families and communities. Literacy practices such as school-based writing represent an example of cultural capital the school endeavours to inculcate in students. Depending on the extent to which students have access to prior forms of knowledge, dispositions, linguistic practices or other resources, some can conform to the writing standards imposed by the school while others do not.

The education system, and in particular, schools, then legitimizes the reproduction of the social stratification between the dominant and ‘problematic’ groups, by transmitting and reproducing the cultural values and perspectives, or the habitus, of the dominant class. Consequently, this also perpetuates the social stratification between groups of students. In short, the nature of the mainstream habitus, which reinforces school success for some while disadvantages others, sums up the very essence of the pathologizing practices in school, which manifest themselves in the form of deficit discourse. The issue of pathologizing literacy practices, which has its roots in deficit thinking, then becomes a ‘logic of convenience’ for pointing the arrow of blame away from literacy instruction and other broader structural configurations, including stratified literacy content for students in different streams. More importantly, these deficit discourses actually severely delimit what can be achieved in professional development attempts to help low achievers broaden their offerings. The circularity of these discourses will continue to have unfavourable implications for the quality of learning and teaching for students and teachers alike if they continue to remain unchallenged.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Given the context of stratified literacy instruction, such that basic competencies are focused in the lower streams while more advanced literacy skills are reserved for students in

Express stream, the study examines the impact of deficit pedagogical practices as enacted in the classroom of low achievers. In so doing, two classes, one being the top class of the cohort and the other the last class, were selected to examine how students in the two classes were oriented towards writing; whether different literacy instruction existed for students in the two classes; and whether institutional discourse towards students in the last class has constructed a limited literacy experience. For that purpose, the analysis takes into consideration the interplay of factors inside the classroom as well as outside the Singapore school setting. In addition, the study seeks to explore whether a higher level of engagement with writing for low achievers can be achieved through the implementation of a writing intervention task. Lastly, the study also aims to explore directions for further research and curriculum development that will help schools and teachers construct a more optimistic discourse and, consequently, beneficial pedagogy for low achievers.

1.4 Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

The theoretical perspective of the present study was informed by the sociocultural theory of writing (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006), which focuses on the individual's participation in writing activities in cultural, institutional, and historical contexts (Prior, 2006). In taking on the sociocultural theory of writing as the theoretical framework, it was appropriate, as well as necessary, to access the classroom in its naturalistic setting in order to understand why and how writing practices became entrenched as they were. The study used a mixed methods methodology (Creswell, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) that was primarily qualitative in its approach to pursue the study's aims. Multiple methods were used to collect data: questionnaires, classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and document analyses. Quantitative findings from questionnaires, which were first administered to students, were triangulated with the data coded from classroom observations and

interviews, using an iterative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following that, a multi layer analytic framework (Layder, 1993) was used to interpret the overall findings, and themes were developed to explain the phenomenon of disengaging writing practices amongst low achievers.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The present study is justified for two reasons. Firstly, studies on second language acquisition (SLA) and language studies in Singapore's context have been mainly done on gifted and mainstream students but not on low achievers. The present study, while addressing beliefs teachers and institutions have towards low achievers and their 'learning difficulties', then seeks to unmask any pathologizing practices that serve to perpetuate the achievement gap between low achievers and their counterparts in the mainstream classes. Seen in this light, the study therefore has given a voice to low achieving students.

Secondly, previous studies in Singapore are predominantly psycholinguistic in nature as opposed to other qualitative and interpretative ones conducted in other educational settings. In particular, classroom-based ethnographic studies which are longitudinal are regarded as interfering with teachers' 'actual' classroom teaching. Much like the situation in Hong Kong, as depicted in Lin's (1996) study, quantitative, experimental research which is shorter in duration and promises more immediate tangible research benefits is greatly preferred by schools. Hence, this explains the dominance of psycholinguistic type of research in second language acquisition (SLA) and language studies in the Singaporean school contexts.

Scholars such as Cheah (1997) go on to say that most of these psycholinguistic studies do not describe classroom situations or document the "details of life in schools" due to the general tendency in the community of language academics in Singapore to regard studies in

the sociocultural realities of the language classroom as “unscientific” and “soft data” as opposed to the “hard data” derived from quantitative research methodology (p.129). Perhaps what is needed at this point is a change in methodological paradigm which conceptualizes teachers and students as members in their communities engaged in individual practices. This requires researchers to shift their perspective on teachers, students and schools as isolated entities into one which regards them as inter-related and situated in their respective historical, sociocultural contexts, in order to allow a better understanding of the possible ways in which classroom life has been constrained or facilitated by forces in the macro contexts of society. Therefore, in undertaking this classroom-based inquiry, the present study recognizes the relevance of qualitative, ‘soft classroom data’ in addressing literacy issues concerning low achievers, which would otherwise have been impossible if a purely quantitative methodology had been undertaken. By the same token, locating the present study beyond the paradigm of SLA de-emphasizes the common view of writing, and for that matter, language learning, as individual cognitive ability.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the sociocultural theory of and other perspectives on writing, as well as literacy development. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methods used in the study. Chapter 4 provides quantitative findings from the questionnaire administered to students. Chapters 5 and 6 present the data analyzed on the discourse patterns and activity structures in the best and low achieving class respectively. Chapter 7 examines the similarities and differences between the ways writing literacy was conceptualized in the two classes. Chapter 8 describes the writing intervention task implemented in the low achieving class, and reports and discusses the results. Chapter 9 provides an in-depth discussion on implications of the findings in the previous four chapters,

in using a multi-layer analysis. Chapter 10 summarizes the study and suggests the way forward for the literacy development of low achievers in terms of pedagogy and teacher development.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

Research into the nature of writing has largely resulted from the intersection of four distinct but inter-related disciplines, which are linguistics, education, rhetoric and composition, and psychology (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996), and it involves a broad spectrum of topics such as how people learn to write and under what conditions, the structure and function of written discourse, and the writer's identities, to name a few. Traditionally, these studies have been mainly conducted in L1 contexts, but with ever increasing numbers of international students studying in the United States or other English speaking countries, research interests in L2 writers and writing began to emerge. Despite the fact that the issues involved with L2 writing (such as its unique contexts and the difficulties L2 writers face) are mostly different from those in L1 contexts (Silva, 1993), the research orientation towards trends and developments in L2 writing still largely follow the same emphases and strands as in L1 writing research (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Silva, 1993). Therefore in reviewing the literature on the development of L1 and L2 writing research in the first part of this chapter, there is no deliberate distinction made between the two clusters of research. Rather, following Hyland (2002), the discussion hinges on three broad approaches to research on writing related to the *text*, *writer* and *context*. For each of the approaches, which offers markedly different views on the writer, its reader, the uses of language, and the meaning of a text in a social context (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993), a brief summary of its development and research trend is provided, and selected studies that have since had a significant impact on theory development and instructional practice in the classroom over the last few decades are reviewed.

Following that in the second part of the chapter, the discussion on writing research will be extended to include literacy instruction. For the Singaporean education system, where

academic literacy has fundamental instrumental value, this often means that writing is taken to be a neutral carrier of students' understanding of their societies and themselves. However, the learning of writing should not be reduced to a set of technical skills to be mastered for academic success, devoid of meaning and implication beyond the classroom; rather, the teaching and learning of writing should always be linked closely to its social contexts (Lotherington, 2006). Only by situating studies of writing in their respective contexts will the practices of writing be rendered purposeful (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Newman, 2006; Prior, 2006). As Hyland (2002) explains, writing is centrally involved in the ways we negotiate, construct and transform our identities:

when we pick up a pen or sit at a word-processor we adopt and reproduce certain roles, identities and relationships to engage in particular socially approved ways of communicating. While every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also interactional and social, expressing a culturally recognised purpose, reflecting a particular kind of relationship and acknowledging an engagement in a given community.

(p.48)

To this end, the question of 'what is involved in learning to write' is fundamentally implicated in the construction of meaning as students engage with writing.

Another important aspect of the discussion on literacy instruction hinges on Harklau's (2002) assertion that the role writing plays in facilitating textual interactions between the teacher and students in the classroom should be regarded as a "central" pedagogical concern instead of an "auxiliary" (p.341) interest, as is typically the case in the current applied linguistic field. This will offer a broader contribution in terms of theory construction when the issue of how writing, its practices and contexts, can impact upon the acquisition of a second language is addressed. In particular, the way literacy learning is defined has consequences for the way writing is approached in the classroom, either as a form of personal expression, a cognitive process or a type of discourse which may be learnt through structured,

prescriptive techniques, and in turn, this will also further impact the attitudes towards school literacy and the teaching of meaningful literacy tasks, both of which are important conditions for writing achievement.

2.2 Approaches to Writing Research

2.2.1 Text-oriented research

The approach which focuses on the products of writing was first identified as such in the 1950s, and has a long tradition dating back to current-traditional rhetorical models (Nystrand, et al., 1993). Heavily influenced by the school of structural linguistics, text-oriented research regards writing as an object or form which can be analysed either through its “formal surface elements” (Hyland, 2002, p. 7) or its discourse structure. This approach to research has led to the development of theories on text construction, seeking to explain what is involved in the production of linguistic aspects of writing, or how various linguistic features are combined to create a good piece of text (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Within this approach, grammatical rules are often emphasized, and as the focus on form became seen as the appropriate goal of writing instruction, especially in English as Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts, teachers have tended to focus on identifying problems in students’ control of the language system through the use of guided compositions (Frodesen & Holten, 2003; Nystrand, et al., 1993; Silva, 1996; Zou, 2009). The perspective of looking at writing as an object, isolated from the writer or context, means that for many years writing was practically more study of grammar and often used simply to develop a general understanding of language (Hyland, 2002). However, as Hyland (2002) and Grabe and Kaplan (1996) point out, the text-oriented approach to writing research undermines the role of writing as a source of communication; it fails to consider the rhetorical choices one has to make, as well as failing to consider the needs of audience.

2.2.1.1 Text as discourse

Another approach, which sees texts as discourse, goes beyond the understanding that they are merely an analytical object. This view towards text is premised on the notion that language consists of a set of systems from which writers make “choices to express most effectively their intended meanings” (Hyland, 2002, p. 15) in various social contexts, and in which case, grammar is regarded as a resource for communication rather than a set of prescriptive rules. Central to this approach is the concept of ‘genre’, which Hyland (2002) describes as “sets of texts...recognised as having meanings in common with each other, and as sharing the same context of situation” (p.15). This idea that genre as forms which express functions and vary according to context, constitutes the central notion of discourse analysis and underpins the theory of SFL developed by Halliday (1994). Thus, similar to the views espoused in the EAP camp, SFL sees language learning as a social activity and the writer as a member of a distinct discourse community, or communities, since they share their same knowledge of the types of text frequently used in their daily experiences (Hyland, 2007).

Today, classroom applications of genre take on various forms and guises. Known as genre-based approaches to writing, they all share the key characteristics relating to form, function and context and, most importantly, are situated within the macro-purposes of the whole text, not just the semantic micro-functions of individual words and sentences (Hyland, 2002; Lin, 2006). The Australian GBP, which was adopted into Syllabus 2001 by Singapore’s Ministry of Education, for example, classifies the types of texts, which Lin (2006) refers to as “text prototypes” (p.228), according to their primary social purposes: narratives, recounts, information reports, letters, and expository texts and so on. Genres, on the other hand, are identified as more specific classes of text, such as newspaper, report or manual. Sometimes, the text of each genre may be purely of one text-type, although in real life situations, the text may be a combination of several types of texts. Derewianka (2003) goes on to list four key

emphases that underpin the overall structure of the Australian GBP: *focus on text, focus on social purposes, focus on meaning and choice and focus on culture and ideology*. Together with its emphasis on the ‘situatedness’ of the language system, they serve to equip writers, particularly those from non-mainstream backgrounds, with the knowledge and ability to use the genres required for success in schooling as well as in the discourses of work and life (Derewianka, 2003; Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Firstly, GBP’s focus on text implies that the learning of writing occurs at the text rather than sentence level. This indicates that the writer’s specific grammatical choices are influenced by the context of the immediate situation, rather than being governed by the “simplistic” formulae or rules and regulations for “correct English”. Applying a holistic approach to language teaching and learning, rather than dealing with individual words and sentences in isolation, or, the “discrete instances of language” (Derewianka, 2003, p. 143) is seen as extending the learner’s meaning-making potential. Language teaching from a GBP perspective therefore requires the teacher to extend the learners’ repertoire of grammatical choices, both in their construction of meaning in texts, and their comprehension of meaning in texts. Secondly, its focus on social purposes means that students are taught how to engage with instances of real-life discourse so that they can participate in discourse effectively. The third focus, on meaning and choice, is just as important as the previous two. Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks and Yallop (2000) explain that ‘meaning’ refers to two types, experiential and interpersonal. The former refers to how language is used to represent our understanding of the world around us and the latter to how language is used in relating to people. The two types of meaning are again supported by the teaching of the rules and conventions of grammar contextualised in each text type, which considers how a text is structured and organized with respect to its purpose, audience, message and structure so as to render communication effective (Lin, 2003). Finally, the fourth focus acknowledges that genres are

not “neutral” but actually “ideologically driven” (p.142). Hyland (2007), in particular, regards genre instruction as emancipator, as it has the potential to empower students from non-mainstream backgrounds to acquire and critique the genres required to participate effectively in the dominant discourses of particular communities and their social institutions.

Findings on the benefits of genre-based pedagogy are well documented. For example, scholars such as Macken-Korarik (2002), in detailing the implementation of the genre approach to teaching explanation text types in Biology classes to students in the Disadvantaged Schools Programme in Australia, maintains that a genre-based curriculum that offers the explicit teaching of certain genres especially benefits students at risk of failure so they can participate in the mainstream textual and social processes within and beyond the school, although she also stresses the crucial role teachers play in initiating students into the demands of written genres. Paltridge (2002), in another study, argues that a GBP of writing provides a context in which students whose backgrounds are distant from the conventions and expectations of academic writing can gain access to and participate more successfully in academic discourse. Other work on composition writing, in a similar vein, points to the evidence that the explicit teaching of genres has facilitated the learning of writing (Johns, 2002; Madden & Myers, cited in Johns, 2002). Again, when GBP was applied to an EFL course for Business undergraduates in a Japanese university, the results showed that students improved in writing the macro-structure of their academic essays, as well as developing the organization of content at the paragraph level (Lin, 2006).

Despite its usefulness, GBP has its own potential difficulties and limitations. For example, Derewianka (2003) reports that teachers in Australian classrooms tended to present the moves or stages in texts in a rigid fashion, with “little allowance for the possibility of optional stages or reordering of stages” (p.139), when they emphasized writing as an outcome of activity rather than the process of writing. In a similar vein, Lin (2003) recounts that the

prescriptive style of using GBP was also seen in the delivery of the English Syllabus 2001 in Singapore schools, when teachers attempted to inculcate the typical rhetorical patterns expected of certain genres. Thus, contradictory to its emancipatory function as posited by Hyland, the model can likewise become a “tool for classification of forms” when teachers resume “the role of authoritative transmitter of correct forms” and neglect the critical awareness of the social dimensions of text production” (Vollmer, 2000, p. 45).

2.2.2 Writer-oriented research

2.2.2.1 The expressivist approach to writing

In response to the inadequacies of the model of current-traditional rhetorical model of writing, researchers such as Britton (1975) critiqued the traditional conception of writing and writing instruction in which the discourse about writing was predominantly focused on prescriptive text features of model prose. He argues for a model of research in which writing is perceived as a tool for learning and communicating as well as for personal growth. Only then can learners develop the ability to reflect on and speculate about subject matter. In particular, he proposes three overall categories of the function of writing: transactional, expressive and poetic. This perspective thus shifted writing research in another direction – that of a discovery process which allows writers to make meaning of their world based on their interests, a radically different viewpoint from both current traditional rhetoric and traditional ESL approaches, as it sees writing as learnt, rather than taught, and the teacher’s role to be non-directive as he or she provides writers with the space to make their own meanings in a cooperative environment with minimal interference (Hyland, 2002). Oldfather and Shanahan’s (2006) longitudinal study, which covered a span of six years, is one example that illustrates how the fostering of self-expression in a fifth grade class in the United States helped them to be expressive towards issues surrounding them as they progressed through

high school. By the same token, the authors show that a group of Georgian teachers, when trained to implement the expressivist approach of writing, became enlightened and in turn, helped their students acquire a sense of agency in writing. Nevertheless, researchers such as North (1987) point out that providing students with the freedom to express themselves may encourage fluency, but it does not free them from the constraints of grammar in composing. They also assert that the approach lacks a strong theoretical base on which writing is to be evaluated, as well as the pedagogical advice that can be implemented to help struggling writers.

2.2.2.2 The process approach

As a result of dissatisfaction with the method of using controlled composition in the current-traditional rhetorical model, the process approach to writing was introduced to the ESL contexts in the 1970s to strike a balance in instruction between writing processes and products. The *knowledge-telling* and *knowledge-transforming* models of writing developed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), which differentiate the writing behaviour as well as difficulties encountered by skilled and unskilled writers, is a well-known study related to the process approach of writing. Referring to the *knowledge-telling* model, they found that unskilled writers plan their writing less often than experts, revise less often and less extensively, and are primarily concerned with generating content from what they can remember from the assignment, topic or genre instead of “shaping or adjusting” (Hayes, 2011, p. 367) that knowledge to accommodate the reader’s or the writer’s needs during their composing process. On the other hand, the *knowledge-transforming* model describes how skilled writers apply analytical skills in the writing task to solve problems and set goals in writing. Unlike the former case, skilled writers are able to reflect on the complexities of the task and resolve the problems of content, form, audience, style, and organization, and use

sophisticated strategies to rework their thought processes to change their texts. Other studies oriented towards the process approach of writing, such as Silva's (1993), have similarly compared the differences between the composing process of more proficient L1 writers and unskilled L2 writers. Although these studies provide valuable psychological insights into the writing activities of skilled and unskilled writers, this approach neither provides a reliable theoretical framework to situate research questions, or to test hypotheses about writing processes to offer explanations about the considerable difficulties unskilled writers have with their writing despite intensive instruction (Hyland, 2002; Renkema, 2004).

Although teachers are not provided with very specific guidelines for teaching process writing, it has been so widely practised in many classroom contexts that it has become the prescribed model of writing instruction. In the Singapore context, the teaching of process writing in primary and secondary schools officially began during the implementation of Syllabus 1991, which emphasized the "integrative perspective" (Pakir & Low, 1995, p. 105) to English language pedagogy achieved through a thematic or topical approach. The stages implemented typically involved pre-writing, revising, editing, re-drafting and post writing in which the entire class would be given focused lessons on editing, or on enrichment. In particular, attention was given to developing the organizational structure of a piece of writing with the inclusion of an introduction, body and conclusion, with appropriate paragraphing, and with points logically sequenced. However, as noted by Pakir and Low (1995), there was often "a gap between theory and practice" (p.109) in implementing process writing in most classrooms in Singapore's examination-oriented setting. The real essence of making students construct personal meanings through the developmental nature of process writing was usually compromised due to several constraints, such as limited time frame, large classes, and constant appraisals by school management, which discouraged teachers from practising the full stages of process writing.

Nevertheless, despite the unpromising scenario in the Singapore schools, Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) propose that with process teaching of writing, procedural knowledge as well as a range of strategies can in fact be nurtured and directly taught. This would include “activating schemata to access prior knowledge through brainstorming, applying self regulation strategies, revising surface areas and editing drafts, providing structured feedback from teachers and peers, and even teaching the effects of audience on style, register and tone” (p.276), to name a few.

2.2.2.3 The cognitive model of writing

Drawing from cognitive theory, linguistics, and Dewey’s ideas on progressive education, the existing theories of writing research in the 1970s were expanded to involve the cognitive aspects of writing with emphasis on the structure of the mind when writers compose. As a result, several studies of this period, such as those by Britton and Burgess (1975) and Emig (1977), attempted to establish the types of cognitive development typical of young writers as they learn the demands of composition.

Research based on the cognitive model of writing promotes the teaching and learning of writing as a “problem solving activity” (Hyland, 2002, p. 24), and tends to focus on the complexity of planning and other interrelated processes during writing (Boscolo & Hidi, 2006). Emig’s study (1977), for example, pioneered the use of think-aloud protocols in composition research, and draws attention to the effects of cognition in the recursive nature of writing. Kellog (1996), in his model of writing processes, details the function of three cognitive components of text production (formulation, execution, and monitoring) in L1 writing while others have examined the impact of working memory capacity on the quality of writing (Ransdell & Levy, 1996), or effects of pre-task planning on fluency, complexity and accuracy in L2 writing (Ellis & Yuan, 2004).

The Flower and Hayes cognitive process theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 1996) is another seminal contribution often cited in studies on the cognitive processes of writing. It outlines the thinking processes involved in writing and has been the basis of much subsequent writing research and discussion. The model has helped to promote a “science-consciousness” among writing teachers with its “deep-structure” (Hyland, 2002, p. 24) theory of how writing is processed cognitively. In the model of writing process, specific references to the processes of planning, translating, and reviewing are featured. Subsequently in 1996, Hayes published another elaborate and comprehensive version of the original theory, the *Individual-Environmental Model of Writing Process* (See Hayes, 1996). In particular, Hayes regards the working memory as the central mechanism that supports the cognitive process of planning, generating ideas, logical reasoning, problem solving, visual information, and retrieving information from long-term memory, and so on. Although the influences of affective, social and physical conditions are given more attention in this model, it is clear that Hayes’s new framework still places a significant emphasis on the role of working memory vis-à-vis the entire writing process.

2.2.2.4 Motivation in writing

Following the cognitive strand in writing research, Boscolo and Hidi (2006) also highlight in recent years the relevance of various inter-related factors attributable to a person’s inclination or motivation to write. The conceptualization of motivation in writing, according to the authors, is multifaceted and is mainly informed by studies in educational psychology. Essentially, these studies are divided into three areas: the *writer’s motives*, the *writer’s perception* and the *writer’s regulation*. Studies on the writer’s motives to write discuss the role of goal orientation, task values and interests; studies on the writer’s perception involve the writer’s self-efficacy and attitude towards writing; and studies on the

writer's regulation naturally deal with the writer's use of strategies and behaviour to manage writing. Five of these factors will be discussed in detail, as they were components of the construct of engagement with writing for the questionnaire administered to the participants in the present study. They are *goal orientation; task value and interest; self-efficacy; affective feelings towards writing and self-regulation.*

2.2.2.4.1 The writer's motives

Goal Orientation

According to Wentzel (2000), goals have been conceptualized with respect to either their outcome or orientation towards achievement. Goals that entail a learning outcome would require the learner to acquire the specified content of knowledge and skills. Individuals with positive goal orientations towards a learning outcome will then exert effort and persistence, and direct their attention to relevant task features, behaviour or strategies that will help them accomplish the task (Wolters, 2004) when they compare their actual performances with the goals prescribed. This is attested in Schunk and Schwartz's (1993) study on fifth grade students' goal setting for writing, in which it is reported that students who set learning goals to acquire a writing strategy for themselves enjoyed significant learning and motivational benefits compared to those who set general goals. The study also highlights the importance of setting goals that incorporate specific learning objectives, rather than general ones, so that learning can be increasingly enhanced and self-evaluative. Where the teaching of writing is concerned, this implies that students should be taught how to identify specific self-regulatory strategies so that they know how to plan and organize their writing to achieve the best results.

On the other hand, learners whose goal is oriented towards performance are more concerned with the results than learning outcome. For example, as illustrated in Ee, Wang,

Koh, Tan and Liu's (2009) study, low achievers in Singapore schools tend to display more superficial approaches to learning and have maladaptive cognitive and affective responses to failure. It is thus expected that they are more likely to exhibit a negative attitude towards learning, avoid challenging tasks, use surface learning, and attribute their success and failure to external factors beyond their personal control. Finally, learners with performance-avoidance goals are concerned that they do not appear as less able than their classmates. It is now widely accepted that this type of goal orientation is particularly associated with undesirable learning behaviours and outcomes, although this is not necessarily reflected by lower grades (Wolters, 2004).

Interest

With regard to the role of interest in creating and sustaining the writer's motivation in writing, Hawthorne (2008) observes that research has mostly focused on the concept of interest in a topic rather than interest in writing as an activity on the whole, although interest in a topic is thought to have positive influences on a student's writing engagement because it theoretically relates what students know about a topic with what they value. More importantly, the fact that students may find a particular topic more interesting than another does not necessarily imply that they will prefer to write about it, especially if they dislike writing. Contrary to Hawthorne's stance, Boscolo, Del Favero and Borghetto's (2006) experimental study on the relationship between topic and text-based interest and students' motivation in writing shows that writing about a particular topic can trigger students' interest in the topic. Finally, studies of task value in the writer's motives to write generally support the relationship between students' expressed values for a task, expressed in the level of importance an individual attaches to doing well on a task, and their perceived competence, as well as the level of effort that they will exert. For example, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) have

established the positive relationship between students' perceived value of writing and their actual performance. Cocks and Watt (2004) likewise have found a connection between perceived competence and intrinsic value associated with the subject of English.

2.2.2.4.2 The writers' perceptions

Self-Efficacy

Introduced by Bandura (1986) as the major component in social cognitive theory in the late 1970s, self-efficacy has been found to be an important predictor of student achievement in many studies (see Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 2003; Schunk, 2003; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy beliefs postulate that the individual's judgement of their ability to succeed in a given task depends on their beliefs about their capabilities to succeed in the task. In turn, the individual's sense of efficacy will determine their choice of the activities and methods of learning attempted, as well as the level of their aspirations, the amount of effort exerted, and the persistence displayed. For example, students who are self-efficacious are more likely to exert effort and to persist longer in the face of difficulties and challenging tasks than do students who are not self-efficacious.

The writer's self-efficacy in writing is especially regarded as a "key mechanism" (Schunk, 2003, p. 159) in the social cognitive theory of writing research in that it relates individual writing achievement to interaction between behaviour, personal factors, and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2003). In their study, Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2002) examine the effectiveness of teaching designed to optimize observational and emulative learning on the acquisition of writing-revision proficiency, self-efficacy perceptions, intrinsic interest, and self-reactions. By providing an adult coping model for students to observe and from which to receive feedback, students were able to abstract key aspects of the model's writing-revision strategy, and consequently engaged in more

productive practice, were more self-motivated, and acquired more writing-revision skills. The fact that self-efficacy enhances motivation in writing is again underscored in Schunk and Swartz's (1993) research, which shows that adequate modelling, goal setting, and self-evaluation produce desirable effects. Finally, Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) found that high school girls' perceptions of self-efficacy for writing were predictive of their interest in the task as well as their attained level of proficiency. It appears that the students especially value academic tasks at which they are most competent. The findings therefore imply that self-efficacy influences task value and interest.

Affective Feelings Towards Writing

Studies of the effects of affects on the writer's perception of writing examine the writer's attitudes, emotions and feelings and their influence on the writer's satisfaction in writing, expectations of success in future writing tasks, and enjoyment of all writing-related tasks. According to McLeod (1987), writing apprehension or anxiety is the most commonly and heavily researched affective issue in motivation in writing, and these studies suggest that emotions have only a negative effect on writing. Highly apprehensive individuals find writing unrewarding. When placed in such situations, they experience more than normal amounts of anxiety. This anxiety is often reflected in their written products and in their behaviour in, and attitude about, writing situations. That explains why highly apprehensive individuals, when compared with low-anxiety people, write less, use fewer coping strategies, and opt for lower levels of language intensity (Daly & Wilson, 1983). In Cumming, Kim and Eouanzoui's (2006) quantitative study on ESL students' motivation in writing, it was found that negative emotions towards writing are positively related to students' goal orientations, although they have no effect on their final performance. Accordingly, it follows that teachers should look

into the affective aspects of writing and use effective procedures to help their students overcome negative affects in writing.

2.2.2.4.3 The writer's regulation in writing

Self-Regulation

Much of the research on the use of self-regulation to control, mobilize, direct and sustain the writer's affect and behaviour in writing has centred on task-related cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as mnemonic encoding and self-monitoring of one's performance, applying personal standards for managing and directing one's progress or enlisting self-reactive influences to guide and motivate one's efforts (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997), in their review of numerous studies conducted on the relationship between self-regulation and writing, conclude that self-regulation is also codetermined by many inter-related factors, one of which is perceived self-efficacy, since studies have produced evidence that students' use of self-regulatory processes enhanced their self-efficacy to write. For example, in Zimmerman and Bandura's study (1994), they showed that children's perceived self-efficacy to manage their writing activities predicted their self-efficacy for academic achievement on the whole since those who had a strong self-efficacy in their academic capabilities set higher goals for themselves, showed more persistence towards and put in higher amount of effort in their tasks, and were more versatile in testing problem-solving strategies than did their peers who had a weaker sense of efficacy. Bandura (1986) explains that the act of self-regulation in writing operates partly through internal standards as well as evaluative reactions to one's writing performances, and thus when writers adopt standards of merit, they develop self-evaluative reactions towards their actual performance at the same time. The anticipated self-satisfaction gained from fulfilling valued standards further provides a source of incentive

motivation for personal accomplishment. This ‘inter-relatedness’ between self-regulation and self-efficacy has also been found to improve the overall schematic structure and quality of compositions (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998).

As can be seen, the studies on motivation in writing encapsulate the influence individual and task related factors exert on the writing process of the individual, and most importantly, they provide substantial evidence for the benefits of addressing the cognitive aspects as well as the environmental influences during the composing process when they show what teachers can do to improve the extent and kind of writing instruction in the classroom.

2.2.2.5 Strategy instruction in writing

As writing research gravitated towards task environment and its influence on writing, writing researchers began to study the effectiveness of strategy instruction in composing in both L1 and L2 writing contexts. Indeed, the dimension of strategy instruction in writing research was especially “robust” (p.187) since, as Graham (2006) points out, the significant impact from these findings is independent of the type of student who received instruction, their grade-level placement, or the type of cognitive process or genre strategy taught. One well known model of strategy instruction in writing is the *Self-Regulated Strategy Development* (SRSD) model developed by Graham and Harris (1993), which has been widely used in contemporary writing research and has been described as more beneficial than the process approach to writing (Graham, 2006). Through its six stages (*develop background knowledge; discuss it; model it; memorise it; support it; individual performance*), students are explicitly taught writing strategies, with procedures which include goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction, for regulating these strategies and the writing process, as well as the critical knowledge and techniques necessary to apply the target strategies. Since it

was used as the necessary structure for the development of the intervention task in this study (see Chapter 8), the procedure for applying the SRSD model will be considered in some detail in the following paragraphs.

De La Paz and Graham's (2002) experimental study of the use of the SRSD model in the teaching of expository essays to 50 secondary school students is one example that yielded positive results. In the six-week instructional phase, students were taught self-regulatory procedures such as goal setting, self instruction, and self monitoring in an explicit manner. For example, in the *develop background knowledge* stage, teachers engaged the class in discussion about the organizational structure of an expository essay. Then in stage two of the model, they examined the organizational structures of two model essays and explored ways to improve each essay, such as adding appropriate vocabulary to enhance the quality of the essay. The *discuss it* stage is especially helpful for developing cognitive reasoning as students observed the teacher in a "coping" model of strategy use and witnessed the mental processes teachers used while composing. In the *memorise it* stage, two mnemonics, PLAN and WRITE, were used to remind students to plan before starting to write and to continue the planning process while writing. After that, in the *model it* stage, the teacher modelled the planning and writing strategies by using a variety of procedural support. A brainstorming sheet for organizing ideas as well as cue cards for reminding students what each paragraph should include were provided. Throughout the entire modelling stage, the recursive use of various processes and procedures was emphasized, such that details and examples were deliberately featured and ideas elaborated. Next, at the *support it* stage, students worked in small groups to plan and compose a second essay. As in the case of process-writing, students were also provided time to revise their papers after teachers familiarized them with peer-revising procedures. After that, teachers met with students privately to discuss any difficulties they encountered in applying the PLAN and WRITE strategy, as well as provide comments

regarding student progress and goal setting. Finally, at the *independent performance* stage, students applied the PLAN and WRITE strategy themselves to write the third essay. By now, teachers systematically reduced the number of times they assisted students on each subsequent attempt at using the planning and writing strategy, thus transferring responsibility for using the strategy to the student. Likewise, prompting and guidance, collaborative goal setting, use of brainstorming, essay sheets, cue cards, and the time available for planning and writing were gradually reduced as students were expected to assume the responsibility for independently setting goals, developing essay plans and eventually, writing their own essays. By this time, students were encouraged to recall all six stages and rehearse them in their minds while they worked on their writing independently. The results show that students in the experimental group produced essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabulary, and were qualitatively better than the essays generated by their peers in the control classrooms. Additionally, it was observed that these effects were maintained on an essay written one month after instruction ended.

The SRSD model has also been documented to work for students with learning disabilities relating to physical impairment, general learning difficulties, or emotional problems. For example, in another experimental study, the model was used to teach the writing of argumentative essays in Social Studies to secondary school students with such learning difficulties (De La Paz, 2005). Both the experimental and control groups were made up of students with and without learning difficulties. After the pre-test, teachers used the first essay to describe the target strategies outlined in the SRSD model and the second essay to model their use. Then, students worked in small groups to apply the reasoning strategies collaboratively for the third essay. Two successive writing topics were used to “fade” (De La Paz, 2005, p. 143) instructional prompts. A sample argumentative essay and the template of a five paragraph essay on historical topics were given to facilitate students’ independent

performance. The post-test results show that the essay length of students in the experimental group was significantly longer than that of students in the control condition. Likewise, after the strategy instruction, students in the experimental group wrote papers that were rated significantly more persuasive than those in the control group.

The benefits of teaching self regulation in assisting students to adapt their writing performance to changes in internal and external conditions is again underscored in Hawthorne's (2008) study, in which he explores the impact of the SRSD model on the engagement and writing performance of Year 10 students in New Zealand, many of whom were classified as reluctant writers. Findings from the intervention study show that the reported levels of motivation in writing of reluctant writers improved significantly as a result of the treatment and that the treatment had a significantly positive impact on the writing performance of both the good and reluctant writers. Hawthorne also suggests that the SRSD strategy be "modified for other situations or tasks, and that further research can be conducted on how it can be applied in these situations or tasks" (p.117) .

Overall, in Graham's (2006) meta-analyses of 38 studies on the use of the SRSD model in the teaching of genres, ranging from narratives, expository, compare-and-contrast, to argument and so on, seven of them were conducted on young learners in the United States (e.g. Grade 2 and 3) while the rest were done from Grade 4 onwards. Most of these studies show a large effect size of above .8, which indicated substantial impact of the model on students' writing performance (see Field, 2005). Thus, they give a consistent report of the beneficial effects of planning, revising, setting of goals and self-regulating of strategies on almost all student types, from the poor to the talented writers, as well as all age groups.

Despite the diverse areas of focus in writer-oriented research, many of these studies were said to be restricted in their paradigmatic viewpoints, as they did not address the social, historical and political contexts in which writing took place (see Hyland, 2002) . In fact, since

the 1980s, the trend in writing research has begun to shift towards the interdisciplinary dimension of context-oriented research, and this will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.3 Context-oriented research

Context-oriented research, which began to flourish in the 1980s as a means to mitigate the prevailing influence of the work on cognitive processes on writing, generally sees writing as an interaction between writers and readers, as well as contexts. This ‘social turn’ in writing was robust right through the 1990s, and remains the dominant paradigm for writing research today (Prior, 2006). Unlike studies based on a cognitive model, which are mostly quantitative in orientation, context-oriented research is mostly undertaken by using qualitative research methodologies (Schultz, 2002, 2006) and posits that writing is not a ‘self-contained’, solitary process, but is inherently social and interactive. Influenced by Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and dialogism (1981) and other poststructural and postmodern thinking, this perspective on writing research adopts a dialogical framework of analysis to look into the interaction between the writer, reader and their sociocultural worlds. In particular, three prominent perspectives have come to characterize the context-oriented research on writing: social interactionist, social constructionist and sociocultural perspective.

2.2.3.1 The social interactionist perspective on writing

The social interactionist view relates writing to the specific context of a discourse community as the starting point of its development (see Johns, 1996), with language as the “primary mediating tool” (Vollmer, 2000, p. 34), and takes into account both social interaction and the internal processes of the individual learner while learning to write. Nystrand’s (1989; Nystrand, et al., 1993) social-interactive model of writing, for example, embodies the communicative dimension present in textual discourse. In his words, “writers

and readers interact every time the readers understand a written text” (1989, p. 74) His model thus provides insight into the relationship between readers’ expectations, and the feedback the writer anticipates, and the writing process. He illustrates three essential things skilled writers do to interact with readers: “initiate written discourse; sustain written discourse; writers options” (1989, pp. 79-80). Studies which adopt the social-interactive approach to writing thus discuss the issues surrounding written responses of teachers to writing such as how to provide effective feedback to improve students’ writing (Leki, 1996; Williams, 2003; Zamel, 1985). Research adopting this perspective has also offered insights into the benefits talking has on writing. For example, Dysthe’s (1996) study of three high school classrooms in Norway and the United States, shows that teachers who encouraged the interaction between writing and talking fostered “multi-voicedness” which “interanimated” (p.410) students’ writing. In a similar vein, Smidt (2002) in his longitudinal study involving four different teachers and about 100 students in the Norwegian secondary school setting, examines teachers’ oral response to students’ written discourse and concludes that students’ positioning of themselves as school writers was influenced by the norms of school writing represented by teachers’ oral discourse. Overall, his study points to the conflicting, ‘multi-voicedness’ of school writing which resulted from the “dialogical positioning” (p.425) of students and teachers as they negotiated the meanings of texts and the norms of school.

2.2.3.2 The social constructionist perspective on writing

The social constructionist framework amalgamates two strands of research – a cognitive model of writing and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning. Not only does the framework embody the social dimensions of text production, including audience, other texts and negotiated understandings (Flower, 1994), but it also features the cognitive aspect of writing process. This perspective especially highlights the role of the teacher in offering

guidance in the form of direct modelling and instruction until the cognitive process of writing becomes appropriated and internalized into the mind of the writer. Studies adopting this framework emphasize the use of objects and tools to mediate learning. For example, Gosden's (1995) study of the textual revising process of L2 research assistants found that by combining the traditional "hard, norm developing" (p.52) style of writing in academic discourse with the collaborative process of learning genres, they enhanced their development of academic communicative competence. Teaching writing from the perspective of the social constructionist view thus calls for more collaborative planning, opportunities for negotiated meaning between writer and reader, and self-reflection.

2.2.3.3 Sociocultural perspective on writing

The sociocultural perspective of writing, by which the present study is informed, originated from various sociocultural theories of SLA, some of which were previously developed from the learning theories of Bakhtin's dialogism and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (see Zuengler & Miller, 2006), and points us to the realities of the socially constructed nature of language resulting from the interplay of social contexts and theory and knowledge about writing. Apart from its embodying of the 'externalisation' of writing which is situated essentially in the concrete interaction or social mediation between various individuals, activity settings, semiotic tools and artefacts, this perspective also recognizes the cognitive 'internalization' of the processes of writing (Englert, et al., 2006; Prior, 2006). To this end, the sociocultural perspective of writing shares similarities to the principles espoused by the social-interactionist and social constructionist camps, and thus their tenets are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps what distinguishes the sociocultural perspective from the preceding two social perspectives is its emphasis on the 'externalisation' of writing resulting from the intersection with several disciplinary contexts, which then

provides the basis for research to refer to the following: historical, cultural and social identities the individual brings to writing (see Prior, 2006; Schultz & Fecho, 2000), the social world in which the writing occurs, the peer and teacher interactions that surround the writing, and the classroom organization, including the curriculum and pedagogical decisions made by the teacher and school. After all, as Schultz and Fecho (2000) contend, students' writing development cannot be isolated from the macro contextual level of national policies as they impact the delivery of curriculum and pedagogical practices at the local culture of the classroom.

According to Prior (2006), sociocultural studies of writing mostly focus on close analyses of specific classroom practices involving the talk and action that make up literate practices. Englert et al. (2006) identify three common traits of studies of writing using the sociocultural framework: sociocognitive apprenticeships; procedural facilitator and tools; and participation in community of practice.

Sociocognitive Apprenticeships

The first principle relates to the role adults, experts, and agents provide to access strategies and tools through instruction, explanation and modelling in the process of writing as the 'expert' and 'novice' jointly combine their mental resources to perform a writing task. The form of interactive, collaborative dialogue, and guided writing opportunities which is clearly evident in Harris and Graham's (1992) SRSD instructional model for writing is an example of sociocognitive apprenticeships aimed at raising students' writing performance with the type of cognitive processes or strategy taught. They show that explicit instruction, combined with activities that engage students in understanding the purpose, content, and form of written discourse, was the most effective type of sociocognitive apprenticeship (Englert, et al., 2006). Sociocognitive apprenticeships also take the form of 'teacher-talk' in which teachers use appropriate discourse to induct students into the writing process. For example,

Vanderburg's (2006) analyses of studies on academic writing classes illustrate that when teachers took on the role of a "questioning scaffolder" (p.380), and stepped back from the role of a knowledge transmitter, it helped lower-level writers to acquire the arguments to construct their essays.

Again, in Dalton and Tharp's study (2002), it is shown that effective questions (e.g. How does the text sound?; What should we do?) can encourage students to take ownership of their learning when the teacher invited students to direct the specific language and problem-solving practices associated with writing activity. These step-back moves positioned teachers in the role of experts and required them to explain, problem-solve, think aloud, and make decisions about the texts, thereby creating a 'discursive space' where students could exercise the discourse, strategies, practices, and skills of expert writers. Sperling (1990) in particular found that discourse practices in teacher and student private conferencing helped students to strengthen and further acquire the writing skills which are otherwise not explicitly available to them. Hence, the negotiation and joint decision making in the teacher-student talk characterises the social construction of written language acquisition whereby students come to "inherit" (p.318) the conventions of written language through guided practice by the teacher. The result is occurrence of dialogic learning made possible in the activity setting where the expertise of the teacher is distributed to the student as teachers talk students through their ZPD of writing. Gibbons (2008) however warns that whether meaningful teacher-student talk takes place depends largely on the nature of the questions that teachers asks and how "contingently" (p.165) they respond to what students said.

Procedural Facilitator and Tools

The use of procedural facilitator and tools, which include perspectives, actual devices, or strategies to prompt students in planning, monitoring or revising their texts so that they can achieve independent performance is particularly emphasized in the sociocultural perspective

of writing (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2002). This principle encapsulates the essence of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of ZDP, by which he refers to the 'gap' between what learners can do on their own and what they are able to accomplish with help from a more experienced peer or adult. The assumption is that the novice writer, with sufficient assistance provided, will be capable of independent performance eventually.

Again, several studies on the application of the SRSD model illustrate the role of procedural facilitators and symbolic tools in supporting writing performance, such as the teaching of the POW (Pick. Organize. Write.) mnemonic in Harris et al.'s (2006) experimental study, or the use of cue cards to model different stages of writing in De La Paz and Graham's study (2002). The psychological scaffolding provided by these procedural tools becomes internalized over time and comes to "alter the flow of mental functions, mediating both the external actions and mental activities of writers" (Englert, et al., 2006, p. 213). Similarly, Barnard and Campbell (2005) report on the positive results of the use of scaffolding activities in the form of peer co-construction of text to create a supportive but equally challenging writing environment in the EAP writing class in a New Zealand university. Gibbons (2008) also illustrates in her findings the benefits of using scaffolding in GBP to help students gain control of an increasing range of registers and genres as she observed how the teacher apprenticed students through appropriate discourse into ways of thinking in various contextualised tasks in a Year 7 ESL class in Australia. To lend credibility to the benefits of scaffolding, Hammond and Gibbons (2005) had developed a comprehensive model of scaffolding of writing for ESL students in Australian secondary schools in which effective pedagogical practices were incorporated at both "macro" and "micro" (p.10) levels . For example, scaffolding at the macro level involves looking into aspects such as "students' prior knowledge of specific curriculum content and experience; selection and sequencing of task", which would enable students to move step-by-step towards more in-depth

understanding of challenging concepts and developing metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, whereas at the micro level, teacher and students engaged in interaction in which the teacher “appropriated and recast” students’ contributions, and “cued elicitation” so as to encourage longer and more productive responses.

Scaffolding has also been used to teach writing as a holistic and authentic communicative process for young learners with learning difficulties in Englert’s (2001) study. For example, while modelling drafting activities, teachers provided think-sheets to model students’ inner self talk and prompted them to think aloud about the strategies related to each stage of the writing. In this social dialogue, teachers guided students towards contributing to the dialogic process of the cognitive work involved in writing. The results indeed show that students developed ownership of the regulatory process as they took control of the dialogue related to “monitoring and correcting problems” (p.160). Englert et al. (2006) further add that teachers who simply model the writing process without providing the guided practice needed to allow students the gradual assumption of the inner dialogue about writing fail to apprentice students into the writing process; instead, sociocognitive apprenticeships will have to involve the construction of collaborative and social dialogue in which teachers and students jointly use the strategies of writing.

Participation in Community of Practice

The term Community of Practice (henceforth, CoP) was developed by Lave and Wenger (2007), who argue that learning does not happen independently; instead it is socially constructed within the communities of ‘practitioners’ where newcomers acquire an apprenticeship from old timers. For learning to take place, newcomers have to gradually move toward their fuller participation in a given community’s activities by interacting with the more experienced members in the community. This process is called Legitimate Peripheral Participation (henceforth, LPP). Morita (2004) goes on to say that in order to

master new knowledge and skill, newcomers are required to be given a certain level of legitimacy so that they can move toward full participation in the community of practice, and not just remain at the periphery. As Newmann (1992) puts it, membership in a CoP is a basis for acceptance and involvement, without which learning may not be successful. To this end, the principle of participation in writing in a community of practice, such as in the school context, emphasizes knowledge construction and dissemination as well as access to the distributed expertise and thoughts of other writers through participating in the community's ongoing literacy practices.

However, this warrants a caveat, as Morita warns that LPP is a “conflictual process of negotiation and transformation” (p.577) because in order to become a full member of a community of practice, one needs to have access to a wide range of people including old-timers and other members of the community, and depending on the ways in which the community of students “reproduces knowledge and resources” (ibid), newcomers may or may not have access to a wide range of ongoing activity and opportunity for participation, or to relations that can or cannot be established between them and the school community. Examples of such conflicting processes of negotiation and transformation are often provided in studies in which individuals, as a result of negotiating the challenges of participating in academic communities, may display both accommodation and resistance to the expected norms in these CoPs by adopting various strategies (see Lam, 2000; Morita, 2004; Stroud & Wee, 2007). As such, Prior (2006) contends that participation and communication in these communities is not just what students learn; rather it is “how they learn and how they make sense of writing” (p.215). Karr's (2003) in-depth comparative analysis of the lived experiences of three L2 graduate teaching assistants in the writing programme of a university, for example, underscores the importance of providing the right support to induct L2 users of

English into the academic setting, facilitating literacy learning and socialization processes to ensure their legitimacy and success within their academic communities.

Nevertheless, the positive side of knowledge building and dissemination in a CoP is demonstrated in Scardamalia and Bereiter's (1994) research in which they designed a computer-supported software known as the Computer-Supported Intentional Learning Environment (CSILE) with the aim of supporting students' writing of scientific discourse in the secondary school classroom context. In the CSILE programme they envisioned, students supported each other's scientific knowledge-building in three ways: focusing on problems and depth of understanding; using purposeful and constructive ways to build a decentralized and collective understanding; and engaging in productive interaction (even with less knowledgeable students) within the broader knowledge community. In essence, the knowledge-building espoused in the programme "begets more knowledge building" (p.275). Englert et al. (2006), in reviewing CSILE, reiterate that the computer technology harnessed resulted in open sharing of students' "inquiry-based notes, questions, peer comments and graphical representations" and that "revisions, elaborations, and reorganizations in students' notes and texts over time not only offered an archival record of the group's work-in-progress but also objectified the group's knowledge" (p.215). All students had participatory roles as authors and respondents as they constructed and disseminated written texts, shared their expertise, and questioned or pointed out the inadequacies in students' explanations or writing. This was made possible because CSILE promotes a publication/peer review process that encourages the type of evaluation, response, and revision akin to the academic environment of scholarly writing - by getting students to produce journals with peer review. In turn, the circulation of student writing in the CSILE network created new learning possibilities for understanding the pragmatic functions and features of written communication. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) report that students who participated in CSILE outperformed their peers

in non-CSILE classes on standardized tests in reading, language and vocabulary. Therefore, the study shows the fact that in order for effective learning to occur, access to distributed expertise, resources, including technology, and of the contribution of the thoughts of others should be allowed to thrive in a community of practice.

Having reviewed the developments in writing research in recent decades and reviewed selected works relevant to this study, the discussion for the rest of this chapter now turns to literacy development, of which writing constitutes a major component, especially in the Singaporean school setting. As mentioned at the outset of this study, writing is a situated act, and as such, focus will be especially given to the notion of literacy as a social practice, situated in the different sociocultural contexts in which writing takes place.

2.3 Writing as Literacy Development

2.3.1 Notions of literacy

Robinson-Pant (2008), citing the *Literacy for Life* report published by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in 2005, compares national definitions of literacy, and notices that for nearly all of the developing and third world nations surveyed, literacy was regarded as a measurable skill, such as the ability to write simple sentences or read a newspaper, and was also connected to a person's years of formal schooling. It indicates that these countries officially subscribe to the autonomous model of literacy which, according to Street (1984), defines it as a technical and neutral skill. Literacy as depicted by the autonomous model speaks of the importance of developing children's cognitive ability to deal with complex materials in progression (Garton & Pratt, 2009; Newman, 2006). It follows that children learn to write letters first and piece them together to form words later. Other researchers (Hyland, 2002; Newman, 2006), including Street (1997; 2003) himself, subsequently highlight that this model has created the "great

divide” (see Robinson-Pant, 2008; Street, 2003) between what is termed “literate and illiterate, oral and written language, and the abstract and concrete” (Newman, 2006, p. 245). They maintain that the autonomous model is discriminatory when it is used to perpetuate views on legitimate or less legitimate intellectual traits and skills. The seminal study by Scribner and Cole (Newman, 2006; Street, 2003) on the Vai people in Liberia in particular, draws attention to the erroneous assumption that literacy itself develops the individual’s cognitive skills, which, arguably, improves his or her economic prospects; in fact, the study shows that the only time when literacy is found to be related to cognitive skills is when it is considered in the “specific aspects of the literacy activities” (Garton & Pratt, 2009, p. 505), or within its social and cultural contexts.

In place of the inadequacies of the autonomous model, research associated with New Literacy Studies (henceforth, NLS) in the last 30 years has sought to promote the ideological model of literacy which emphasizes the understanding of literacy practices in their sociocultural contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, et al., 2000; Johns, 1997, 2002; Street, 1999; Street, 2003). Street (2009) differentiates the notion of literacy espoused in the autonomous model of literacy from that of the ideological model when he explains that the former “disguises” the ethnocentric, ideological assumptions it holds, such that they are presented in a “neutral” and “universal” light as though they are innocuous, whereas the latter offers a more “culturally sensitive notion of literacy practices” (p.337) as it recognizes that the meanings behind the practices, often loaded with ideological and policy presuppositions, are different from one context to another. Hence, given the NLS perspective, it implies that an individual can be considered literate in specific contexts, but not in others (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Since the nineties, the digital revolution brought about by the advent of the World Wide Web and other new technologies has also further expanded the notion of literacy to not

only involve the use of texts and discourse in print, but also that in multimedia. The new concept, known as multiliteracies, which is championed by the New London Group (1996, 2002), entails the study of multimodal ways of constructing meaning in reading and writing in increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse and globalized societies, in which the individual is required to have the ability to interpret a “multiplicity of discourses” represented in the “interface” (New London Group, 1996, p. 2) of visual and linguistic meaning in different mediums. For example, the intervention study by Tan and Guo (2009) in a Singaporean Secondary Two class, in which they designed literacy activities using technology to shift the traditional print-based literacy environment to video and other multimedia literacy, is one study which reflects this new trend within literacy research.

Thus far, the discussion has implied that NLS and multiliteracies reject the concept of literacy espoused in the autonomous model of literacy as mere acquisition of technical skills, as well as its idea of a monolingual and monocultural perspective of learning, which does not guarantee every individual equal access to educational success in today’s heterogeneous societies (Hammerberg & Grant, 2001; New London Group, 1996). Instead, the notions embodied in NLS and multiliteracies are aligned with those espoused by the ideological model of literacy, which emphasizes the effects of particular sociocultural contexts on teaching and learning a language.

Barton & Hamilton (1998) identify three key concepts which constitute the “basic unit” in the sociocultural perspective of literacy: literacy events, literacy practices, and texts. Accordingly, literacy *practices*, which encapsulate people’s “awareness”, “constructions” and “discourses” of literacy as well as how people talk about and make sense of literacy, are situated in *events*, which may be part of the “formal procedures and expectations of social institutions” such as schools, and are in turn, “mediated” (p.13) by written *texts*. In short, the sociocultural theory of literacy hinges on the premise that the study of text is never separate

from the study of the social practices surrounding the use of texts (Barton, et al., 2000). What is fundamental is that studies which situate literacy in their sociocultural contexts essentially regard the teaching and learning of writing to be “contested in relations of power” (Street, 2009, p. 77). Such a framework of analysis encapsulates the complex interactions of multiple factors as they juxtapose and interweave with each other at the broader institutional and sociopolitical levels. Some of these issues arising from the interactions of factors, such as “whose literacies are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant” (Ibid, p.77) will be discussed next in the review of the following studies.

2.3.1.1 Studies of literacy as social practice

Lin (1996) provides insights into the ways in which classroom life in Hong Kong can be constrained or enhanced by its larger institutional, sociocultural context. In particular, she asserts that institutional structures by themselves have already ‘patterned’ a child’s career trajectory right from the outset. For the child coming from a low sociocultural and socioeconomic background, chances for socioeconomic advancement are dependent not on hard work and enterprise, but rather on access to English as the dominant form of linguistic capital, which is only available to the elite sector of the population with the related economic, social and cultural resources to be able to take advantage of it. She illustrates her point in her classroom research in which she documented the actual teaching of English in eight classrooms in seven schools, across a range of academic levels and bands⁵. Using thick descriptions, she presented her fine-grained analyses in terms of discourse patterns as they emerged in class. In all the classes observed, the organisation of the lesson was identified as operations-oriented, meaning-oriented, or student-initiative-oriented. In the first group, the

⁵ Hong Kong schools are classified into five bands on the basis of academic results, Band 1 being the top range and Band 5 being the lowest (see Morrison & Lui, 2000).

teaching content was prescribed or dictated by the textbook, and teachers mostly made students translate the answer from L1 (Cantonese) into prescribed, complete sentences in English. In the meaning-oriented and student-initiative-oriented groups, it was observed that teachers shared real life experiences or engaged students with authentic talks, and students also took up participatory roles by asking questions and commenting on each other's responses.

Lin points out that of the three classes in their respective Band 1 schools, two of them were identified as having a meaning-oriented or student-initiative-oriented approach to literacy instruction. Although in the third class, literacy instruction was observed to be operations-oriented, the students, who were from privileged home backgrounds, were still linguistically capable of responding to the teacher's instructions. On the other hand, Lin observes that the operations-oriented approach to literacy instruction was not well received by students in any of the classes she observed in Band 3 schools. Because these students did not have the linguistic capital of those in band 1 school in the first place, they were unable to follow teachers' instruction. In one of these classes, some students even expressed their resistance through the use of creative, "verbal play" (p.229) with their teacher. However, in an exceptional case in a Band 3 school, the teacher strategically incorporated the elements of story into language learning using a "triadic task structure" consisting of "teacher-directive, student-performance, and teacher-appraisal" (p.183) moves to answer the comprehension questions in the textbook. This illustrates the teacher's use of sociocognitive strategies to facilitate the learning of her students with limited English, and in so doing, she helped her students experience a sense of achievement and confidence in learning English. Lin credits the teacher for her use of a creative, discursive agency in socializing her students into the demands of 'doing English' in school, which would eventually contribute to the transformation of the students' habitus or social world (see Lin, 1999). She goes on to argue

that schools and teachers in Hong Kong have to change existing models of literacy instruction, specifically pertaining to materials and the student-teacher discourse format, so that students' out-of-school literacy resources could be affirmed and capitalized on, to provide them access to academic success.

Gao's (2008) narrative inquiry on the learning strategies of 14 tertiary vocational students in mainland China is another study that underscores the important role teachers play in socializing students into particular "identity pursuits" (p.177) through discourses of learning at school and consequently, transforming or reproducing their social worlds. In this case, it was found that school discourse, which had been mediated by the sociocultural influences in a highly exam-oriented Chinese society, imposed particular learning strategies on the tertiary vocational students. That is, the sociocultural context of a highly exam-oriented educational system made the vocational students, most of whom were not deemed to be college bound, desire success in high stakes college entrance exams, as this determined their access to further educational and social advancement. As this overarching belief system was further reinforced by institutionalized pedagogic practices, the students were "compelled" (p.179) to adopt exam-oriented strategies in learning, such as increasing grammatical knowledge, memorization and "acquiring linguistic or cultural facts and procedures for exam purposes" (p.174). Moreover, within the classroom setting, students became competitive and unwilling to collaborate with each other for sharing of resources. The "mutual distrust" and "learner isolation" in the learning environment often "prevented them from exploring uses of effective strategies together" (p.180).

In short, mediated by teachers' pedagogic practices and discourse, the students were socialized into "a belief system highly valuing exam results" (p.182), and when coupled with an isolated learning environment, it compelled them to acquire particular exam-oriented strategies. For the underachieving students who did not have resources to enhance their

learning of English, the practice of these exam-oriented learning strategies was especially counter-productive to their literacy development. Gao found that students who failed repeatedly to obtain good academic results, despite the practice of such strategies, were “further marginalized, which then led to even poorer results and greater frustration for the individual learner” (p.178). Gao suggests that to create a supportive environment to help underachieving learners in the Chinese mainland educational setting acquire linguistic competence and achieve positive identity pursuits, there is a need to call for collaborative and open dialogues among all the educational stakeholders, such that there can be “ethical resource-allocation and pedagogical practices” (p.183).

That schools provide students with differential access to the linguistic demands and literacy learning needed to succeed in an English dominated society was similarly mirrored in Caughlin and Kelly’s (2004) research on the institutional effects of tracking on the quality of literacy learning in American schools, as they compared the quality of English literature classroom instruction in a high- and low-track class, the latter mainly composed of ESL students. In their mixed methods study, quantitative analysis was first used to find out the extent of improvement in writing scores of a high and low-track class over two periods (in the fall and spring) taught by the same teacher. Class-level residuals from the multi-level models reveal that the achievement gains in the high-track class far exceeded those in the low-track class after adjusting for individual characteristics. Then, by examining patterns of dialogic interaction between the teacher and students in both classes, it was found that a higher proportion of cognitively challenging questions was posed in the high-track class, compared to the more authentic and personal questions asked in the low-track class, although the teacher relied mainly on whole-class lecture in both classes. More importantly, interviews revealed that the teacher’s own “cultural model” (p.27) of her students in the two tracks, which resulted from her understanding of and experiences with the academic ability and

disposition of the two differing groups, had caused her to relate to them differently. The authors posit that “the set of cultural models a teacher develops of her students may be an important mechanism linking the institutional role of tracking to the instruction that occurs in tracked classrooms” (p.41). For example, there was good teacher-student rapport in the high track class as students were better behaved and the content of literary works was often taught with the “web of meanings” (p.42) built earlier in the course, thus achieving a sense of coherence in her instruction, whereas in the low track class, there was a higher degree of incoherence in her instruction, especially when she failed to “explicitly relate academic content to other aspects of their personal lives, or to previous works read in the class” (p.49).

Overall, the interaction with students in both classes, as influenced by the teacher’s conceptualization of students’ cultural models, speaks of how learners are positioned through the discourse of the classroom. Findings in Caughlan and Kelly’s (2004) study thus show that literacy development is “a product of the interaction of teacher and students and cultural models in the tracked environment” (p.55) of the school and that it is important for teachers to identify with the cultural model of their students so that it would result in effective literacy development for low-track students especially.

In Harklau’s (1994a) study, students who were recent migrants to the United States experienced a similar kind of tracking by being placed in separate ESL classes, on the basis that their English proficiency was considered to be inadequate to cope with the language demands of the mainstream classroom. In particular, Harklau documents the contrasting literacy environment between the mainstream and ESL tracks. She notes that literacy instruction in mainstream classes was characterized by interactive teaching and student-led groups. Students in these classes were expected to write extended pieces of work in some genres, such as offering a personal opinion supported by a synthesis of information. There was also considerable variation across the classes in terms of the “frequency and extent of

composing and in the degree of original thought required by assignments” (p.254). In contrast, students in ESL classes often only had to reproduce teachers’ notes on the board, without much synthesis or analysis. Instructions were teacher-centred and directed, as students mostly relied on teachers to tell them what to do, and they were assigned more individual seatwork than peer collaborative work. Unlike their peers in mainstream classes, ESL students had little opportunity to practise the communicative strategies that they would employ in building interaction, such as “negotiating turns, joint construction and maintenance of topics, and comprehension checks and repairs” (p.250). When students had the opportunity to participate in teacher-led discussions (usually in IRE (initiation-reply-evaluation) format), it was limited to a single word or phrase. Harklau therefore argues that ESL instruction as well as curriculum needs to be more responsive to the needs of ESL students in helping them make the transition to mainstream classes. This required the ESL and mainstream teachers to work collaboratively to develop a curriculum for ESL students that enabled them to connect with that of the regular mainstream curriculum. For example, as shown in a study by Percy (2011), while looking into the development of their students’ literacy skills, the ESL teachers also consciously made connections between the curriculum contents between classes in the two tracks.

To sum up, Harklau’s, and Caughlin and Kelly’s studies, while highlighting the practice of disparate literacy instruction between the high-track and low-track classes, also underscore the “coercive relations of power” that low achievers are subjected to through implementing a “reductionist” (Gibbons, 2006b, p. 706) approach to learning, as was evident from the teaching of basic, low-level skills, coupled with few opportunities for these students to develop the kinds of written discourse associated with academic learning. In particular, research on the Australian setting has shown that in schools that are culturally diverse and serve disadvantaged socioeconomic communities, there is a high likelihood that their literacy

performance would be lower than that of those who come from a white, middle-class home background (Black, 2007; Comber & Kamler, 2007). Nieto (2006) observes that in such schools, the traditional “chalk and talk” methods and teacher-centred transmission models still prevail, and she reasons that teachers simply “teach the basics” because students are thought to have neither the “innate ability nor the experiential background of more privileged students” (p.319).

Gibbons (2006b) in fact regards the reductionist approach to literacy instruction as having to have a negative impact on low achievers’ identity construction. By the same token, Vollmer (2000) shows in her classroom-based research that the limited opportunities for ESL secondary students in the United States to engage with “social construction of knowledge about text” (p.258) is linked to the institutional discourse which “collectively” (p.264) labelled them in terms of their ethnic or immigrant status, thus restricting the real identity they could construct in their texts. She points out that “interrogation and exploration of identity” should be allowed, rather than the “normalization of identity” (p.271) if there is to be progress in literacy development for this group of students.

The similar phenomenon of short-changing the literacy development of low achieving students is reported in the Australian school setting. In one study involving four different but challenging classroom settings, Johnston and Hayes (2008) note the existence of deficit thinking in which students were perceived not to have innate abilities to handle cognitive learning or favourable home support to succeed at school. For instance, in the Year 8 classes they worked with, teachers practised mostly similar discourse patterns in their interactions with students. There was little variation in the structure of activities and tasks, such that students were given intellectually unchallenging writing tasks which involved writing a few sentences. It was observed that at no point were they “treated as active, informed participants in the learning process or co-producers of their own learning” (p.114). In order to minimise

any “emotional tensions” that could happen in making students do intellectually challenging work, teachers followed a “standard script” (p.115) that would fit within their “interlocking logics” to determine “what is possible within these classrooms” (p.116). For example, within the de facto “orderly enabling learning environment” logic, teachers could spend time and energy to establish and maintain order in class without investing too much effort; however, this also restricted the quality of learning low achieving students could receive in class. For example, as Johnston and Hayes (2008) note, given the “zone of relative comfort” (p.121) teachers were so used to working in, they felt reluctant to exceed the “boundary” of the standard script to, for example, weave in interests into lessons, and instead, they invoked deficit arguments towards their charges as they were not sure that they had “sufficient maturity” (p.120) to undertake independent learning. The authors propose that school leaders adopt an incremental approach to assist teachers to eventually take up a logic which incorporates a “negotiated interactive learning environment” (p.122) in which teachers can adjust their own *logic of practice* to engage students with meaningful literacy learning.

On the rationale for the practice of a reductive literacy, Enright and Gilliland (2011) however attribute this to “the inflexible and prescriptive approaches” (p.193) to enforcing accountability measures, rather than the measures themselves. Nevertheless, they also maintain that the excessive use of exam-oriented literacy practices, as necessitated by, for example, the bench-marking policy in schools in the United States, certainly has an impact on multilingual learners, such that they become socialized into particular norms for academic writing “within and across curricular areas” (p.184), which in turn influences their writing development. As shown in their Diverse Adolescent Literacies (DAL) Project, teachers prioritized writing skills and genres that were tested in the standardized tests or district benchmark assignments, “ignoring” higher order writing and critical thinking skills that were not tested (p.184). The reductive teaching practice meant that the multilingual students in the

lower Earth Science classes were only provided graphic organizers and fill-in-the-blank worksheets that ultimately required very “little elaboration or explanation” (p.189). Not only were they not given much explicit instruction on how to improve their writing, but this teaching practice had also limited their experience of the world or meaning construction. Again, such an interpretation is consistent with a study by Black (2007), set in the Australian primary school, of the impact of wider policy implementation in mediating teachers’ discourse, especially towards low achieving students.

2.3.1.2 Studies of literacy issues in Singapore

Despite the aim in Syllabus 2001 to implement higher order literacy skills, including critical evaluation of prescribed texts, Kramer-Dahl (2007, 2008), in a two-year long study of English teachers’ pedagogical practices, found that English teachers in neighbourhood secondary schools largely practised a “reductive” (2008, p. 88) notion of literacy in their classrooms. Her findings show that the reductive literacy practices were the result of a series of misalignments between the initiatives envisioned by the syllabus and the way teachers delivered their instruction. Two of the Ministry’s misaligned initiatives pointed out were the *Thinking Schools Learning Nation* move and the more recent *Teach Less Learn More* drive. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the former emphasizes instructional flexibility in the classrooms and the promotion of a learning society, especially through enhancing students’ IT competency; the latter in a similar fashion encourages teachers to engage students in real life and independent learning, while reducing unnecessary focus on teaching to the test. One example of the conflicting discourses resulting from the misalignment took the form of coaching students on the generic structure of text through a rigid, prescriptive style of instruction, so much so that

...the texts selected to demonstrate the generic structure, often rather bland and 'fixed' to fit the tightly prescribed stages of the genre, were hardly ever made a site for meaning exploration, or revisited as a point of reference for grammar or vocabulary instruction; instead, yet another set of texts, or more often short passages or worksheets, would usually be brought in with the sole aim of highlighting the relevant grammar or vocabulary items for the unit. And, significantly, in no instance was there any evidence of texts or activities being drawn on to address one of the syllabus' key aims for secondary English – namely, the students' facility for evaluation, reflection or critique

(Kramer-Dahl, 2008, p. 98)

The ritualistic way of teaching genre writing, which Lin (2003, 2006) also observed, coupled with the constant pressure by the school to complete quotas of specified text types means that the occasions to engage students in learning text types in authentic situations were very limited. Along with the delivery of a reductive literacy instruction, there was also the practice of a “‘one-at-a-time’ discourse” or “one text type per unit” (Kramer-Dahl, 2007, p. 56) scheme of work in class. Kramer-Dahl goes on to say that this narrow way of interpreting the syllabus means that texts were not taught with “sufficient versatility to allow for literate learning to occur across a range of dimensions” (p.57), thus undermining the aims of the syllabus. Kwek, Albright and Kramer-Dahl (2007) rightly point out that teachers' preoccupation with narrow, reductive literacy instruction is nonetheless reinforced by their need to prepare students for the demands of school and external exams, since in a culture that operates on top-down curriculum dissemination, much will be at stake for teachers if they choose to deviate from what proved to work in the past, which is the focus on basic skills and factual knowledge (see Albright & Kramer-Dahl, 2009).

The emphasis on exams in Singapore schools is not a new issue but a perennial one, as Cheah (1994; 2001) shows in her study on literacy and the teaching of culture in a Singapore primary school nearly two decades ago, during the implementation of Syllabus 1991. For example, in a group writing lesson of a primary 5 class, it was shown that children

reverted to “examination-type literacy practices of reproducing information” (Cheah, 2001, p. 77) by copying notes from the given article, instead of collaborating with each other and exploring alternative ways of composing. She observed that the children were not given space to engage with expressivist views of writing as they had to write within the expectations of their teachers, which included writing about a given topic that “they clearly knew little about and in the style and variety of language that is officially sanctioned in class, that is standard Singapore English” (2001, p. 78). Despite the use of a thematic approach advocated in Syllabus 1991, little real engagement with ideas and issues was observed. Instead the ideas were dealt with in a “cursory way” (Cheah, 1994, p. 235). Cheah (2001) asserts that this approach to literacy is purely functional, rather than participatory, as it emphasizes the display of linguistic and grammatical accuracy, which are the important criteria for judging writing under the examination-type literacy.

Within the context of an examination-type literacy (Cheah, 1998), mock examination papers were often taken from commercially prepared assessment books to drill students on acceptable formats of writing in exams. Cheah reasons that the practice in fact marginalized L2 learners because of its focus on accuracy and not on composing ability. Worse, in the long run, this only leads to the replication of a particular type of school discourse as well as a certain set of ideas which in turn reifies the social positions of some of these students. Still, on a positive note, Cheah’s study shows that given the space for experimentation, students actually “venture out of the prescriptive practices” (2001, p. 77), as was illustrated in an episode involving the children’s writing about Chinese New Year foods. Cheah suggests that a participatory-type literacy, which may be more related to the interests in the students’ personal lives, could complement the examination-type literacy. By fostering a “personal dimension in literacy learning” (p.80) through a participatory-type literacy, there can be both opportunities for “appropriation of the language” (p.80) as well as the nurturing of creativity.

More recently, Kramer-Dahl and Kwek's (2010) study documents the compelling effect of the prevailing 'deficit' cultural model teachers have for students in the N(A) stream, who are typically perceived to be 'slower' in learning (see 1.2.8). Using multiple data sources to interpret the findings from their project, which focused on building teachers' pedagogical capacities in secondary English language teaching, the authors analysed teachers' beliefs about the learning difficulties these students experienced at the micro-level of classroom practice, and then connected the findings to broader ideological and cultural discourses at the macro-level of Singapore society. It was found that the deficit cultural model of these students, when interpreted against the backdrop of Singapore's streaming policy, became a legitimate basis for teachers' pedagogical reactions, which in turn impinged on teachers' classroom discourse. For example, as illustrated in one of the lessons observed, students were expected to respond in a way that would "comply with" the teacher's "narrowly conceived" understanding of the text (2010, p. 166). When interviewed, one participating teacher perceived that the class's limited "literacy potential" (p.169), which was attributable to the lack of opportunities to use the language, especially in their non-English speaking, low socioeconomic homes, made them incapable of coping with more cognitively and linguistically challenging questions. Because the class still showed that they failed to "get the basics right" (p.166), she resorted to a focus on bottom-up skills and procedural knowledge in her teaching to ameliorate her students' literacy problems. Thus, the authors show that teachers' deficit beliefs greatly influenced how they taught – limiting the type of texts for students to what they considered "linguistically and structurally" (p.171) simple ones. As Kramer-Dahl and Kwek contend, deficit thinking in itself may be true, but nonetheless serves to obliterate literacy instruction and other broader structural configurations that play a part in perpetuating achievement gaps.

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of literature on writing research that was relevant to the present study. In particular, research undergirded by the principles of the sociocultural theory of writing had informed the overarching aim of this study, which was to explore a more meaningful engagement with writing for low achievers through sociocognitive apprenticeships with experts and access to their distributed expertise. Likewise, research that reports the benefits of inculcating self regulation through strategy instruction in writing supported the design and planning of the writing intervention task in the present study (see Chapter 8).

With the sociocultural perspective on writing as the study's theoretical framework, literacy development is then conceptualized as a social practice, which is "contested in relations of power" (Street, 2009, p. 77), resulting from the interplay of factors in different levels of society. The main theme of literacy supporting or hindering low achieving students' access to effective participation in society clearly arises from the review of the literature. For example, amongst the studies discussed, some of them exemplify the role teachers and institutions play in socializing students into a particular identity construction through the use of discourse, such that the latter can either be empowered or demoralized. In highlighting the disparate literacy instruction schools provide to students in different tracks, the studies also reiterate the insidious effect the reductive approach to literacy instruction has on low achievers in terms of reifying their deficit status and, at the same time, limiting their literacy development. In that regard, Cheah's (1994), Kramer-Dahl's (2007), and Kramer-Dahl and Kwek's (2010) studies, which investigated the social, cultural and political implications of literacy learning in the context of Singapore's classroom, provided critical insights into the relationship between classroom interaction, teachers' beliefs, and the reproduction of a 'reductive' literacy geared for exam purposes. As Kramer-Dahl and Kwek's (2010) study

shows, the discourse constructed and pedagogies practised in such an approach to literacy can be especially marginalizing to low achievers, if they are not followed up with sensitive intervention measures.

Although the three studies presented useful vantage points for the present study on the whole, there seemed to be a lack of focus on the *macrogenres*, or the overall generic structure (Christie, 2002) of classroom activity for interpreting literacy events as the lesson unfolds. Cheah (1994), for example, highlighted selected analyses of her data collections to uncover the notions of literacy behind reading and writing practices. The student participants in her study were also, strictly speaking, not considered to be the most problematic amongst the entire student population; in fact they were in the best Primary Five class of the school. Further, the participants in the three studies were cast in a one-sided, passive light, as though they themselves had no say in the type of literacy they thought they should learn. Therefore, the present study built on this work by incorporating the following two elements: detailed, fine-grained microethnographic analyses of classroom discourse, examining “who is doing what, to whom, where, and how through the use of language in classrooms” (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005, p. 49) in the ‘best’ and ‘bottom rung’ class, for explaining the differences or similarities in the writing practices of both classes; and implementation of a writing intervention task, which was informed by the theoretical principles of the sociocultural theory of writing for exploring a positive outcome for low achievers in the ‘bottom rung’ class.

2.5 Research Questions

The present study focused on how writing was taught to low achievers in the naturalistic setting of the classroom and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How similar or different are the writing cultures between the best and low-achieving class?
2. How is writing literacy conceptualized in the best and low achieving class?
3. To what extent does a writing intervention result in positive changes in the teaching of writing to low achievers?

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, the research questions and methodology underpinning the research approach of the present study are first presented. This is followed by a description of its design which includes the development of the research instruments and procedures used to collect and analyze the data.

3.2 Research Design of the Study

3.2.1 The nature of the study: a case of classroom-based research

With the exception of Cheah's (1994) and Chew's (1989) classroom-based ethnographic studies, and, more recently, Loh's (2010) case study of three highly literate adolescent boys from an elite all-boys school, there are actually few studies that depict the teaching and learning of English in the naturalistic settings of Singapore school contexts. Generally, ethnographic studies such as these require a duration that covers a significant period of time. However, in this case, it was not possible to spend an extensive period of time in the research site as teachers had to prepare their students for End-of-Year Examinations. In fact, before the field work began at the site, the researcher had been requested by one of the teachers who was a participant in the study to shorten her data collection at the school as she was concerned that with the frequency of classroom observations required, it would affect the time she needed to prepare her class for the exams.

Because of the limited period of data gathering involved, the study is not considered ethnographic in the strictest sense since ethnographic research studies the change in specific learners or groups "in context, ...over time" (Van Lier, 2005, p. 196). Instead, it would be more appropriate to regard the present study as classroom-based research for two reasons. Firstly, intrinsic in the characteristics of classroom research is that it focuses on "why things

in classrooms happen the way they do, and in this way expose complex relationships between individual participants, the classroom, and the societal forces that influence it” (Van Lier, 1988, p. 82). Secondly, it does not adhere to any particular types of research methods or theories and thus aligns with classroom research’s orientation towards eclectic research principles and procedures. In Allwright and Bailey’s words (2004), classroom research

is a little like anthropology in some ways, where researchers try to understand what is going on in particular social or cultural settings...the classroom offers tremendous depth and richness in being a site for the investigation of language teaching and learning. However, it is ‘fluid’ and complex that it is virtually impossible ever to control the number of different variables that could bias the results of any attempts to test a particular theory-driven prediction...Classroom research does not always have to concern itself so directly with theories at all, whether to test them or to illuminate them. Instead, classroom research can be directed at trying to understand and deal with the immediate practical problems facing teachers and learners

(p.37)

In adopting the traditions of classroom research, the present study not only looks into the instructional aspect of the classroom, ranging from the curriculum, learning tasks, teaching methods and learning opportunities, but also attends to the social dimensions of the classroom such as teacher-student relationships and interactions, student-student collaboration, and the learning environment on the whole (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.2.2 The use of mixed methods in data collection

A mixed methods methodology was undertaken in the design of this classroom research. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), a mixed methods study consists of at least one quantitative and one qualitative method either at the data collection or at the analysis level of research, “where neither type of method is inherently linked to a particular inquiry paradigm or philosophy” (p.323). In that regard, the epistemological standpoint of mixed methods research is that “knowledge claims arise out of actions, situations, and

consequences rather than antecedent conditions” (p.90). Further, in mixed methods methodology, “objectivity” and “subjectivity” exist on “a continuum rather than on two opposing poles” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 94), since, as the authors maintain, most mixed methods researchers tend to aim for a middle position. Arguably, the bias inherent in either the qualitative or quantitative method alone would then be counter-balanced by the strength of the other, thus resulting in a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation. In that sense, mixed methods research has the potential of bringing about a workable middle position from multiple viewpoints by incorporating the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to answer the research questions at hand, thus broadening the scope of the problem under investigation (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

Inherent in the use of mixed methods methodology is therefore the need for convergence and corroboration of quantitative and qualitative findings in one single study (Dörnyei, 2007). This requires the data derived from both types of findings to be triangulated to strengthen the internal validity of the study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) define triangulation as the inspection of two or more methods of data collection in a study in an attempt to “map out”, or explain more fully, its “richness and complexity” (p.112) from the vantage point of both quantitative and qualitative data so that multiple viewpoints can be considered for greater accuracy by off-setting the weakness of one technique against the strength of another. There are four common varieties of triangulation: theoretical, data, investigator, and methodological (Denzin, 1970). In this study, data and methodological triangulation (Cohen, et al., 2000; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) were undertaken primarily to complement or cross validate the analysis from the quantitative findings with the qualitative interpretations in order to shed light on the overall aim of the study.

Although studies in the field of Applied Linguistics have been known to subscribe to either a quantitative or qualitative paradigm (Angouri, 2010), the use of mixed methods methodology in the field has actually become increasingly common in recent years. Magnan (2006), reports that over the 1995-2005 period, 6.8 per cent of the research papers in Applied Linguistics used mixed methods. In such cases, quantitative and qualitative methods were used sequentially so that the results of one helped develop or inform the other. Caughlan and Kelly's (2004) classroom research in the impact of disparate literacy instructions in tracked environment, which was discussed in Chapter 2, is one such example that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3.2.3 The stages of the research

There are three parts in this mixed methods classroom-based research, which is mainly qualitative in its orientation. Part one began with a quantitative phase involving the use of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire, which sought to find out the way students were oriented towards school writing in terms of five key motivational variables (see Appendix 1). It was administered to two classes of students, namely the top and the lowest classes, at the Secondary 3 level in one government neighbourhood secondary school (n = 79). The cross-sectional data collected was then followed up in part two of the study with interviews with four focal participants from each class and classroom observations. These focal participants were selected mainly based on their total scores of 'engagement with writing' calculated from their responses in the questionnaires. A score in the upper quartile indicates a high level of engagement with writing (H); a score in the middle range around the median represents medium engagement (M) while a score in the lower quartile represents low engagement (L). Apart from relying on the scores of the questionnaires, the respective English Language teachers were also consulted on the choice of focal participants for

interviews so as to minimize any inconsistencies between their self-reported scores and actual engagement level as observed by the teachers. In short, using mixed methods, students from the target population in the first part of the study were first surveyed through the quantitative technique of a questionnaire. The quantitative findings obtained were then used to identify specific individuals in the second part of the study.

Following that in the second part of the study, further in-depth interpretations incorporating the emic perspectives (Cleary, 1991; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003; Watson-Gegeo, 1988) of participants were elicited through the use of qualitative methods such as interviews and classroom observations. Finally, in part three of the study, a writing intervention task was implemented in the lowest class in an attempt to create a positive writing engagement. To evaluate the impact of the task, statistical analyses were made on students' scores, and classroom observations and interviews with students and teacher conducted.

3.3 The Research Site

3.3.1 The school

In order to conduct the field work at the targeted school, an application for approval to conduct the study was first submitted to the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee in August 2009, and it was granted in November 2009. At the same time, a request for permission to conduct the study in two secondary schools was submitted to the Ministry of Education, Singapore. When the request had been granted, formal letters were written in October 2009 to a number of school principals for permission to collect data in their schools. These schools were considered on the basis of two criteria: (a) low cut-off points for intake of Secondary One students; (b) status of being a government neighbourhood school. While the 'better' schools have the autonomy to impose higher cut-off points for their

intake of Express and N(A) students, the targeted schools follow the stipulated national band for Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) T-scores from the Ministry of Education, which is a score of 188 and 140 for Express and N(A) streams respectively. This means these schools are 'poorer' in academic performance and their Secondary One students have a lower T-score compared to their counterparts in the 'better' schools. In addition, being government neighbourhood schools, they would be located in the public housing estates all over the country, as opposed to the elite independent or autonomous schools located in the more upmarket districts. Students of these neighbourhood schools predominately originate from a low SES background. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is thus expected that the majority of these students would have a lower level of home exposure to and use of Standard English, the medium of instruction at school (see page 7), compared to their counterparts in better schools.

Eventually, in December 2009, permission to conduct the pilot and main studies was obtained from the principals of two neighbourhood government secondary schools, Orchid Secondary School (pseudonym), where the researcher was a former member of the teaching staff, and Mayflower Secondary School (pseudonym). Both schools participated in the pilot study, which was conducted over two weeks in mid-February 2010, mainly to 'fine tune' the design of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire as well as to try out the research procedures that were to be used in the main study. In the main study however, only the latter school was involved.

Founded in 2000, Mayflower Secondary School, which is co-ed, is considered a new school, compared to other more established neighbourhood schools. Like Orchid Secondary School, it has a large demographic of non-Chinese students (Malays, Indians and others). At the time of the field work in 2010, there were a total of 1380 students in the school, of which 791 were non-Chinese (57.4%). As it is located in the northern part of Singapore, the school is geographically close to Johor Bahru, the capital city of the state of Johor, Malaysia.

Consequently, the school also has a small population of Malaysian students who commute daily between Johor Bahru and Singapore for school. In 2009, the school achieved a percentage pass of 98.2 in its GCE 'N' Level English examination for Secondary 4 N(A), which was above the national average (97.6%). However, its percentage pass in English for Secondary 4 E (86.8%) was lower than that for the national level (93.3%). Given its performance, it did not attain the value-added criteria,⁶ as stipulated by the Ministry, for English in 2009. Nonetheless, the school boasted of achievements in some non-academic activities. For example, as a strategic thrust to build itself a niche and reputation, the school's Environment Club had recently launched the Environment Hub project targeted at educating the school population on environmental issues. One of the projects built by students of the Environment Club was a water-conserving shower unit which won an award in a competition against schools in the same zone.

3.3.2 The research participants

3.3.2.1 Class M and Class S

In the main study which took place from the months of late July to early October 2010, the research participants from two classes of secondary 3 students (n = 79) were selected, after they had given their consent. All participants were fifteen years old, and had been streamed into their respective classes based on their Secondary 2 End-of-Year Examinations. The first class, Class M, belonged to the top end of the secondary 3 cohort whilst the other, Class S, was the lowest class of the secondary 3 academic stream. Although Classes M and S took different combinations of subjects, they shared the same English syllabus. Students in Class M mostly took nine academic subjects. There were a handful of

⁶ The value-added criteria is not made known to the public by the Ministry, but to members of staff in the school's Management Commitment headed by the principal. However, it is a general assumption that a subject attains value-added criteria when its mean score in the GCE 'O' or 'N' level examinations in the current year surpasses that in the previous year by a certain percentage.

Malaysian students, one of whom was the top student of the entire secondary 3 level. Teachers described the class as highly motivated, and some of the students also held leadership positions in Core Curriculum Activities (CCA)⁷ they joined at school. On the other hand, Class S was deemed as unmotivated in academic learning and problematic in behaviour. There were however a handful of students in leadership positions, either as the Presidents of the clubs they joined at school or as student councillors nominated by teachers. The details of the participants are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Data of Students Who Participated in the Main Study

Class	N	PSLE T Scores		Gender		Ethnicity		
		Mean	SD	Boys	Girls	Chinese	Malays	Others
M	39	204.2	9.06	20	19	27	7	5
S	40	169.9	8.28	23	17	13	21	6

3.3.2.2 The focal students

Table 3.2 shows the details of the focal students selected for interviews. There were four focal participants selected in Class M for interviews: Ivan (H writer), Kevin (M writer), Azura (L writer) and Dinesh (L writer). Four other focal participants were selected in Class S. They were Gabriel (H writer), Chee Seng (M writer), Akmal (M writer) and Diyana (L writer). Pseudonyms were given to the students, who were all 15 years in age, for protection of their real identity.

⁷ Co-curricular activities (CCAs) are non-academic activities such as sports and uniformed groups that all Singaporean students must participate in.

Table 3.2 The Focal Participants in Class M and Class S

Class	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Engagement Level in Writing
M	Ivan	Male	Indian	H
	Kevin	Male	Chinese	M
	Azura	Female	Malay	L
	Dinesh	Male	Indian	L
S	Gabriel	Male	Chinese	H
	Chee Seng	Male	Chinese	M
	Akmal	Male	Malay	M
	Diyana	Female	Malay	L

3.3.2.3 Teachers of Class M and Class S

The English teacher of Class M, Belle (pseudonym) had eight years of teaching experience while the English teacher of Class S, Jenny (pseudonym) was a novice teacher with just over two years of teaching experience. Both were Chinese in their ethnicity. Further pertinent details of the focal students from Class M and Class S as well as their English teachers will be provided in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

All participating teachers, the principals, and students' parents or caregivers signed consent forms, as required by the University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee.

3.4 Instruments and Procedures

3.4.1 Development of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire

The use of a questionnaire was adopted in part one of the study for two main reasons. Firstly, it was appropriate to survey and describe, at first hand, the several different aspects of engagement with school-based writing representative of low achieving students at a neighbourhood secondary school; Secondly, the responses from the questionnaire could be

used to identify a purposive sample of focal participants for detailed analysis of individuals' state of engagement with writing in the second part of the study.

3.4.2 The Construct of the *Engagement with Writing* Questionnaire

The construct of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire was based on research on motivation to write (Boscolo & Hidi, 2006) which addresses the concepts of self-beliefs, motives to act and regulation (see 2.2.2.4). Having drawn on the relevant knowledge of these research, it was decided that the questionnaire would consist of seven subscales, namely, self-efficacy (SE), task value and interest (TVI), effort and goal orientation (EG), self-regulation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (SRC), affective feelings towards writing (AFW), classroom instruction (CI), and classroom environment (CE). Many of the questionnaire items were adapted from other published questionnaires related to engagement in educational studies (Chang, 1990; Hawthorne, 2008; Marks, 2000; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008; Stipek, 2002), whilst others originated from research on writing and SLA (Daly & Miller, 1975; Humphreys & Spratt, 2008; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Referring to these previously published works had helped to improve the construct of this questionnaire.

The items in the questionnaire were both negatively and positively worded and operated on a 6 point response scale. Point 1 represents *Strongly Disagree*; Point 2 represents *Disagree*; Point 3 represents *Slightly Disagree*; Point 4 represents *Slightly Agree*; Point 5 represents *Agree* and Point 6 represents *Strongly Agree*. Each subscale of variables contained 5 to 7 items so as to give a more reliable measure of each one. The structure of the questionnaire is summarized in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 **Categorization of items in the First Version of questionnaire**

Code	Description	No. of items
TVI	Task value and interest	5
SEA	Self-efficacy and attribution	6
AFW	Affective Feelings towards Writing	6
ERG	Effort regulation and goal orientation	6
SRC	Self-regulation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies	5
CI	Classroom Instruction	5
CE	Classroom environment	6

Generally, all items in the TVI category measured the value and interest students attached to the learning of writing at school. For example, item 1 in TVI reads *having good writing is more important than speaking skills at work*, and item 2 reads *getting a pass in English is important for my further study*. The five items in the SEA category aimed to find out students' beliefs in their abilities in writing and whether they attributed their abilities to aptitude or external factors they had no control over. In particular, item 10 reads *I know most of the rules I need to know for doing the writing papers 1 & 2 (compo/compre/summary)*, and item 11 reads *No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing*. Items in the AFW category measured participants' emotional response towards writing. Item 14, for example, reads *handing in a good piece of writing makes me feel good*, and item 16 is *I avoid writing as much as possible*. Items in ERG aimed to measure the extent to which students control, mobilize, direct and sustain their motivation in writing, while those in SRC sought to measure students' use of cognitive strategies in writing. Accordingly, item 20 in the ERG category reads *I make sure I find out from my teacher or classmates when I don't know how to do my writing tasks*, and item 27 reads *I check over my writing before handing in for marking*. Items in the CI category were specifically intended to measure students' perception

towards the teaching of writing. For example, items 31 and 33 are *My English teacher teaches us important skills to do our writing tasks* and *My English teacher uses interesting methods in English lessons* respectively. Finally, items in the CE category aimed to find out the extent of influence the classroom environment has towards students' learning during writing class. Items 38 and 40 read *My teacher will not allow us to say anything negative about each other in class* and *The class is disruptive during English lesson* respectively.

The first version of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire, which consisted of 40 closed-ended questions, was administered to a total of 147 students from the two lowest classes of secondary 4 N(A) classes in Orchid and Mayflower Secondary Schools. A Principal Component Analysis found that the subscales of CI and CE had a low correlation with the other subscales and a Spearman correlation matrix showed that they had mostly negative correlations with writing score. Thus, the two subscales were deleted from the final version of the questionnaire to be used in the main study, and the items belonging to these two subscales were deleted, except for item 34 *There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school* which was regrouped into the TVI category. The final version of the questionnaire, which was used in the main study, was shortened to five subscales to better identify the motivational variables which were correlated more with writing performance (see Appendix 1). Shown in Table 3.4, it has 22 closed-ended items.

Table 3.4 **Categorization of Items in the Final Version of Questionnaire**

Code	Description	Item	No. of questions
TVI	Task value and interest	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	5
SE	Self-efficacy	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	5
ATW	Affective Feelings Towards Writing	11, 12, 13, 14	4
ER	Effort regulation and goal orientation	15, 16, 17, 18	4
SRC	Self regulation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies	19, 20, 21, 22	4

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

In part two of the main study, questions for the two semi-structured interviews with the students were revised and re-phrased from the original version used in the pilot study. The interview questions focused on the students' academic inclinations, their attitudes towards using English, their perception of school writing and of how writing could be better taught at school, the problems encountered in writing, the strategies used, and the participants' trajectory of future self. The use of a semi-structured format standardised the questions asked of all participants and provided a degree of consistency. In addition, it enabled participants' comments to be compared, and it guided the researcher to finish the interview without digressing from the core questions in the interview template (see Appendix 2 & Appendix 3). Nevertheless, provisions were made for participants to make open-ended comments especially when after the questions had steered the interview in a general direction, every attempt was made to let the interviewee take the lead while the interviewer probed for clarification and expansion of what was said.

The four focal students from Class M were interviewed once at the beginning of the field work, except for Dinesh and Ivan, who were informally interviewed a second time. All other four students from Class S were interviewed a second time, after the completion of the writing intervention, on the effects of the intervention task on their writing. Each interview with students lasted between 20 to 35 minutes. The details of the interview schedules for students and teachers respectively are listed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Interview Schedule for Students

Student	Class	Initial Interview/Briefing	First Interview	Second Interview
		Week 2 2 – 7 Aug	Week 2 & 3 2-20 Aug	Week 9 & 10 20 Sep – 5 Oct
Azura	M	X	X	
Kevin	M	X	X	
Dinesh	M	X	X	X
Ivan	M		X	X
Diyana	S	X	X	X
Chee Seng	S	X	X	X
Akmal	S	X	X	X
Gabriel	S	X	X	X

Table 3.6 shows the details of the interview schedules for both teachers. The semi-structured interviews with the teachers were guided by sources such as Graham and MacArthur’s (1993) research on best writing practices (see Appendix 4). Both teachers were interviewed twice, once at the beginning and the other towards the end of the field work. Apart from addressing pedagogical issues such as their beliefs in language teaching, understanding of GBP, practices and styles of teaching writing in class, and perceptions towards their students’ lack of engagement with writing as well as language learning difficulties, the interview questions also explored their personal interests, enjoyment, career trajectory, and background in teaching English and other subjects. The duration of each interview was between 25 to 40 minutes. Again, like the interviews with the focal students, additional questions were used to probe any response that seemed particularly relevant to the context of the study. Occasionally, one or two questions were omitted because they were

either irrelevant or had been answered through a participant’s previous response. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. Notes on the teachers’ emotional response, attitudes, or comments added after the ‘formal’ interviews were over were also taken, and both teachers were consulted for their permission at the beginning of each interview.

Table 3.6 Interview Schedule for Teachers

Teacher	First Interview Week2 2-20 Aug	Second Interview Week 9 & 10 20 Sep – 5 Oct
Belle	X	X
Jenny	X	X

3.4.4 Classroom observations

The classroom observations conducted in the main study did not set out to provide the full account expected in traditional ethnographic studies (Dörnyei, 2007). Instead, they focused on the overall sense of teacher-student interaction in writing classes. Attention was given to the specific areas of students’ verbal and non-verbal behaviour, informal interactions with peers and teacher, the content of lessons and activities, and types of skills and strategies taught. Overall, they served to complement the responses in the participants’ self reported questionnaires (McDonald, 1997). A structured observation template modified from Mackey and Gass (2005)’s categories as well as Spada and Fröhlich (1995)’s COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme), which provides a range of description of classroom activities, was developed for use throughout each observation. Specific attention was given to four aspects of classroom activity: teacher-student interaction,

verbal and non-verbal behaviour of participants, procedure and structure of lesson, and the content and types of skills taught. To further enhance the relevance of the template to the purpose of this study, two areas of language use specified by Syllabus 2001, language for literary expression and language for social interaction were especially incorporated in the observation template. In order not to constrain any novel findings, the template was not made more specific (see Appendix 5).

In all, 17 classroom observations, which constituted the bulk of the time spent at the research site, occurred throughout the second part of the study. Six observations were made in Class M and eleven in Class S respectively (see Table 3.8). Each observation, lasting between 50 to 70 minutes, was video-taped and notes were taken whenever necessary to supplement what was recorded on the observation template. They totalled approximately 16 hours of classroom recording that took place nearly every week during the entire two-and-a-half month study. Field notes were recorded to complement details such as the seating plan, specific features of the environment pertinent to that lesson, or any unexpected episodes observed in class (see Appendix 6). Throughout the observations, the researcher undertook the role of a non-participant observer and sat at the back of the classroom. Whenever appropriate, for brief periods, especially when group work was in progress, she became a participant-observer and interacted with students. Initially, her presence as an observer led to some disruption to the classes' normal routine, which could have altered the behaviour of students, though she would have preferred to remain unobtrusive as much as possible. However as the study progressed, teacher and students also seemed to have accommodated her presence during class.

3.4.5 The writing intervention task

Finally, in part three of the study, a writing task was implemented in Class S after four weeks of the field work in Mayflower Secondary. The task was incorporated into the overall design of the study for the purpose of investigating whether a higher level of engagement with school writing could be achieved by the class through an intervention. Its design (see Appendix 7) was guided by the following assumptions: (a) use of an authentic writing topic which concerned the interests of the students would encourage students' construction of personal voice; (b) intentional teaching of relevant strategies would foster competency and lead to successful outcomes; (c) and a collaborative activity in groups would enhance self efficacy in writing.

The task, which was adapted from Graham and Harris's (1993) Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) writing model, required the students to do a survey to find out the perceptions of their peers and teachers towards one of the latest initiatives announced by the Ministry of Education, which was to allow more N(A) students to skip the O level exams and proceed to a Higher Nitec programme at the Institute of Technical Education or to a polytechnic diploma (Leow, 2010). They were provided with a survey which consisted of three closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions (see Appendix 8). In groups of four, they then interviewed their peers and teachers and compiled their findings in groups. This was followed by a writing exercise, with scaffolding provided by the teacher, in which the groups presented their survey results and voiced their personal response towards the issue concerned. In order to establish an awareness of the language and genre structure expected of the writing, the teacher carefully taught the rhetorical features required of the genre by providing two model templates and two writing strategies.

There were six lessons devoted to this final stage of the study. For each lesson, the researcher shared her field notes with Jenny to ensure that what was observed and interpreted

were representative in her classroom and also to anchor teaching points for planning subsequent lessons. After each lesson, they also met immediately to address issues and problems that arose during classroom teaching. Both the teacher and researcher marked the students' writing using the GCE marking bands (see Appendix 11). The final scores were agreed upon by both of them. The full details of the intervention task, which include the rationale for the task, the procedures involved, the results, and their discussion, will be discussed in Chapter 8.

3.4.6 Post writing intervention questionnaire

After the completion of the writing intervention task, a post writing intervention questionnaire was administered to the class (see Appendix 12). As findings in the pilot study showed that students' writing performance was related to their self-efficacy and perceptions regarding the connectedness of writing topics and their lives outside of school, the post writing intervention questionnaire was designed to find out the extent to which the writing topic had influenced students' self-efficacy in writing as well as boosted their writing scores. Therefore, as shown in Table 3.7, the questionnaire only consisted of two subscales, Task Value and Interest (TVI) and Self-Efficacy (SE), which were represented by fourteen closed-ended items. Apart from these, there were two open-ended questions with which students were asked about specific difficulties encountered by and benefits received from doing the task.

Table 3.7 Categorization of Items in Post Writing Intervention Task Questionnaire

Code	Description	Item	No. of questions
TVI	Task value and interest	1, 2, 6, 9	4
SE	Self-efficacy	3, 4, 5, 7, 8	5
	Open ended	10, 11	2

Having described the stages of and procedures for data collection in all three parts of the study, an overview of the entire data gathering process is given in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Overview of the Data Collection Procedures

Week/Date	Questionnaire	Interview	Classroom observation (No. & Duration)	Intervention Task for Class S	
Week 1 26 – 31 July	Questionnaire on <i>Engagement with Writing</i> administered to Class S and Class M (n = 79)	-	Class S (1x, 50 min, 1x, 70 min)	Class M (1x, 70min, 1x, 50 min)	-
Week 2 2 – 7 Aug	-	Belle (20 min) Jenny (25 min) 4 focal students, Class M (20 min each)	(1x, 50 min)	(1x, 70min)	-
Week 3 9 -13 Aug	-	5 focal students, Class S (20 min each)	(1x, 50 min)	-	-
Week 4 16 – 20 Aug	-	-	(1x, 50 min)	-	Lesson 1
Week 5 23 – 28 Aug	-	-	-	(1x,50 min)	-
Week 6 1-4 Sep	-	-	(1x, 50 min)	-	Lesson 2
Week 7 6 – 11 Sep	-	1 Week Term Break			-
Week 8 13 – 17 Sep	-	-	(1x, 70 min)	(1x,50 min)	Lesson 3
Week 9 20 – 24 Sep	-	-	(1x, 70 min, 1x,50 min)	-	Lesson 4
Week 10 27 sep – 1 Oct	-	5 focal students, Class S (20 min each) Belle (35 min) Jenny (25 min)	(1x, 50 min)	(1x,50 min)	Lesson 5
Week 11 4 – 8 Oct	Post Questionnaire administered to Class S (n = 40)	-	(1x,70 min)	-	Lesson 6

3.5 Modifications Following the Pilot Study

Apart from the revision of the first version of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire (see 3.4.2), there were two modifications made to the design of the study following the results of the pilot study. Firstly, the original intention was that the main study would involve a comparison of the two schools, Orchid and Mayflower. However, findings from the first version of the questionnaire scores showed that there were no significant differences in the scores amongst the four classes in the two schools. This indicated that the state of engagement with writing in the two schools was quite similar. Because of the lack of obvious differences between the two schools, the focus was shifted to Mayflower Secondary School, where comparisons and contrasts were made between the ‘good’ class in the higher stream (E) and the ‘worse’ class in the lower stream (N(A)) of the Secondary 3 level. Thus, this explains the selection of students in Class M and Class S as participants in the main study. Secondly, interviews with teachers and focal students as well as observations in the classroom confirmed that students were attuned to institutional discourses, which seemed to have exerted negative effects on their engagement with writing. Further, findings from interviews also revealed that teachers’ pedagogical practices had caused the learning of writing to be perceived as disconnected from students’ lives outside of schools. This then prompted the idea of implementing a writing intervention task in Class S for the purpose of creating a higher level of student engagement with school-based writing.

3.6 Data Analysis

In part 1 of the study, the quantitative data from the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire, which aimed to provide tentative hypotheses about the generalization of the writing orientations of students in Class M and Class S, was subject to statistical analysis using SPSS. Similarly, the responses from the Post Writing Intervention questionnaire in part 3 of the study were also analysed using the statistical software. The findings were then triangulated with those from the qualitative data in part 2 of the study using a strategy known as data consolidation or merging in mixed methods research (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008).

Overall, the use of qualitative analysis is central to this study. Data from interviews and classroom observations were first transcribed verbatim, and the patterns of classroom talk and interactional structures which occurred in class were then analyzed using the triadic Initiation-Response-Feedback/Follow-up (henceforth, IRF) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) in classroom discourse to make sense of the curriculum *macrogenres* (Christie, 2002) which underpin the practices and procedures in classroom lessons. In so doing, the utterances in the transcripts were parsed into specific turns and then coded into broad categories adapted from a pre-determined coding scheme developed by Luke, Cazden, Lin and Freebody (2005), which related to pedagogical functions, such as content of lessons and activities, types of skills and strategies taught, learning outcomes, and to specific organization of classroom activities, such as group and individual work, as well as teacher-student relationships and participation structure in the Singapore classroom context.

Using microethnographic technique, the categories were further identified for “thematic coherence” (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 33) to interpret the literacy events and practices that were represented in the classroom discourse. Deductive and inductive approaches were used in the entire coding process, and the findings were constantly referred to those in the literature. Thus, the organization, sorting and coding of the data from transcripts followed an iterative process which helped to redefine more precisely the phenomenon under investigation, while attention was given serendipitously to the new insights and details so that emergent patterns, themes and relationships pertinent to the research problem could be established at the same time (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Mackey & Gass, 2005).

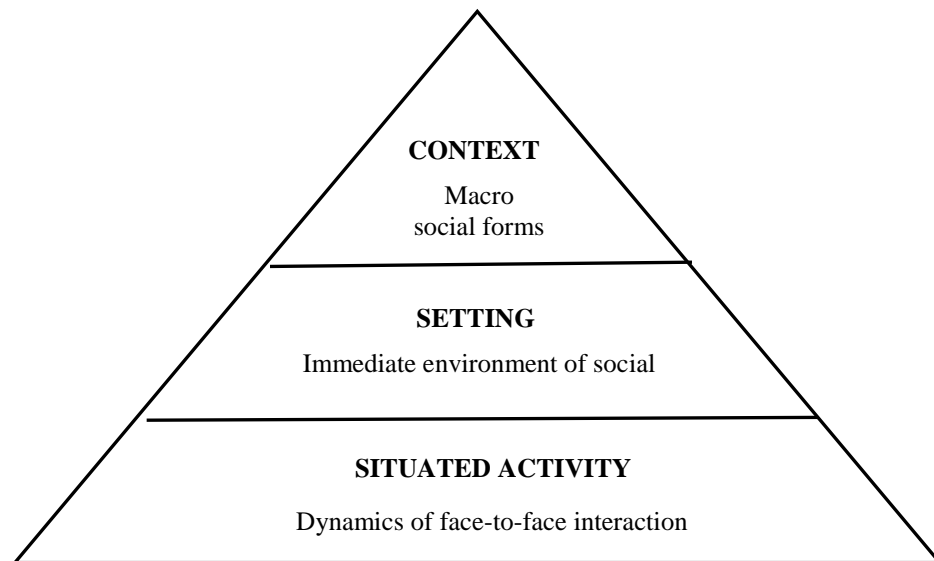
3.6.1 Multi-layered strategy for analysis of overall findings

After having coded the data into plausible themes, the findings were interpreted and discussed from the perspective of a multi-layered research strategy adapted from Layder’s (1993) research map (see Figure 3.1) which relates a phenomenon under study that arises in the micro context to various influences in the macro context in society. As seen in Figure 1, the research map is composed of four elements, each of which is interconnected to the other. The research problem is then analysed “as a series of interwoven layers” of elements in order to explain “how social activity is influenced by different aspects of society at specific points in time” (p.10). At the *context* layer, focus is given to the macro social organization, values, traditions, and forms of social, economic organization and power relations within the social formation; the *setting* layer considers the intermediate social organization such as schools or institutions; the *situated activity*

focuses on the face-to-face or mediated, social activity within the particular setting of schools or institutions; the *self* refers to an individual's sense of identity, personality and perception of the social world as directed by his or her social experience.

In this study, the analysis of the overall findings began at the *situated activity* layer where discourse analyses of classroom interaction, interviews with student and teacher participants, classroom observation notes, and self reported findings from questionnaire were taken into consideration, before proceeding to examine the institutional discourses at the *setting* layer. Finally, the analysis ended by looking at the discourses generated from policies and social norms at the *context* layer.

Figure 3.1 Research Map



3.7 Summary

This chapter has presented the research design for and methods adopted in the present study. Further, the selection and brief details of focal participants have been given.

Following that, the modifications made to the design of the study after the pilot study have been outlined and the methods of analysis for the data collected also discussed. The overall design of the study aimed to answer the three research questions. Following this chapter, the quantitative findings from the data collected from the questionnaires will be presented in Chapter 4 and those from interviews and classroom observations will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

4 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, the findings from the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire in the main study will be presented. Students who responded to the questionnaire were asked to complete 23 items, 22 of which were closed and 1 open-ended. Items in the closed-ended section were designed to establish the relationship between the five subscales and writing performance while the item in the open-ended category asked students to rank three topics they had written about according to their preference. The 22 items were positively as well as negatively worded and rated on a 6 point Likert scale. Point 1 represents *Strongly Disagree*; Point 2 represents *Disagree*; Point 3 represents *Slightly Disagree*; Point 4 represents *Slightly Agree*; Point 5 represents *Agree* and Point 6 represents *Strongly Agree*.

4.2 Results of Responses to Questionnaire by the Two Classes

A total of 79 students participated in the survey. The profile of the students is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Data of Students Responding to Questionnaire

Class	N	PSLE T		Gender		Ethnicity		
		Mean	SD	Male	Female	Chinese	Malay	Others
M	39	204.2	8.3	20	23	27	7	5
S	40	169.9	9.1	23	17	13	21	6

From the table, it can be seen that Class M obtained a higher mean T score in the PSLE than Class S. In terms of its student composition, there were more Chinese ($n = 27$) than other races in the class compared to Class S, in which the population of Chinese students was less than 50%. The pattern can be observed in most neighbourhood schools in Singapore where there tend to be more Chinese students in the better classes and more Malay and other ethnic groups in the 'bottom-rung' classes. In class M, there were also eight Malaysian students, one of whom was the top student in the entire secondary 3 level.

4.2.1 Reliability analysis

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the construct of the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire consisted of five subscales, namely SE (Self Efficacy), ATW (Affective feelings Towards Writing), ER (Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation), SR (Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies) and TVI (Task Value and Interest). The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and was found to have an Alpha of .778 as a whole. This was considered to be very satisfactory for a scale with three to four items, since a coefficient of .6 and above is the minimum requirement for reliability. Otherwise, it would sound "warning bells" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 112; Dörnyei, 2007, p. 207). The analyses of the individual subscales show that three out of the five subscales, SE, ER and ATW produced alpha coefficients of at least .6. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 4.2 to Table 4.6. In addition to the alpha coefficient for each subscale, the Tables show the correlation between each item and the total score for each subscale, as well as the effect on the alpha value of deleting each item.

Table 4.2 Reliability Analysis for SE Subscale in the Questionnaire

Item	Description	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted
6	No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing.	.101	.729
7	I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors and correct grammar.	.180	.669
8	I can organize sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme.	.544	.508
9	I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	.530	.502
10	Compared with other students in this class, I think I am good at writing.	.704	.408

Cronbach Alpha for the 5 items = .633

Table 4.2 shows the Cronbach alpha for the SE (Self-Efficacy) subscale to be .633, which is the highest alpha obtained amongst the five subscales. The correlation coefficients in the Corrected Item-Total Correlation column for items 8, 9 and 10 show that the items correlate reasonably well with the subscale itself, since Field (2005) points out that item correlations with the overall score should not be “less than .3” (p672). However it is also clear that items 6 and 7 did not correlate well with the subscale, with coefficients of .101 and .180 respectively. This could mean that the two items were not good measures of self-efficacy for these students.

Table 4.3 Reliability Analysis for ER Subscale in the Questionnaire

Item	Description	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted
15	I make sure I find out from my teacher or classmates when I don't know how to do my writing tasks.	.332	.583
16	Even if I think the writing task is boring, I will do my best.	.295	.605
17	I practise writing on my own.	.509	.441
18	I am strongly motivated to improve my writing.	.452	.494
Cronbach Alpha for the 4 items = .612			

In Table 4.3, it can be seen that the Cronbach Alpha for the 4 items in the ER (Effort Regulation) subscale is .612, which is again above the .6 requirement for reliability. All the items have a correlation coefficient that is above .3 except for item 16 (.295) which is just marginally below the minimum value required for reliability. This means that almost all the items correlated reasonably well with the subscale.

Table 4.4 Reliability Analysis for ATW Subscale in the Questionnaire

Item	Description	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted
11	I enjoy writing.	.228	.572
12	When my English teacher gives me good feedback for my writing, I feel good.	.353	.483
13	Expressing ideas through writing is a waste of time.	.502	.331
14	I have fear of writing compositions when I know they'll be evaluated by teachers.	.306	.519
Cronbach Alpha for the 4 items = .557			

Compared to the earlier two subscales, the ATW (Affective Feelings Towards Writing) subscale has an Alpha that is lower but nonetheless close to .6. Judging from the Corrected Item-Total Correlation column in Table 4.4, items 12, 13 and 14 had a reasonably good correlation with the subscale but item 11 did not relate too well to the other items, possibly because it was too general a statement.

Table 4.5 Reliability Analysis for SR Subscale in the Questionnaire

Item	Description	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted
19	I don't plan my ideas before I start writing.	-.180	.611
20	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	.260	.129
21	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	.372	.027
22	I notice my mistakes in writing and use that information to help me write better.	.163	.095
Cronbach Alpha for the 4 items = .317			

Table 4.5 shows the reliability statistics for the SR (Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies) subscale which ranks the second lowest amongst all the five subscales. Apart from item 21, the other items did not show a strong correlation with the subscale. Item 19 obtained a particularly low Corrected Item-Total Correlation value (-.180). Its Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted value is also substantially higher (.611) than the actual Cronbach Alpha (.317) value for the 4 items. Likewise, the item total correlations for items 20 and 22 are also lower than the .3 benchmark.

Table 4.6 Reliability Analysis for TVI Subscale in the Questionnaire

Item	Description	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item is Deleted
1	I find the writing tasks in class useful to my life outside of school.	.170	.169
2	Having good writing is more important than speaking skills at work.	.135	.196
3	To write well, my grammar knowledge must be good.	.101	.229
4	There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school.	.038	.293
5	The topics we wrote in English class are boring to me.	.152	.176
Cronbach Alpha for the 5 items = .254			

At a value of .254, the alpha for the subscale of TVI (Task Value and Interest) is shown to be the lowest amongst the five subscales. In Table 4.6, the Corrected Item-Total Correlations of all five items in the subscale are below .3. This indicates that the items did not correlate well with the subscale itself. In particular, the item-total correlation for item 4 is extremely weak (.038). This is probably attributed to the phrasing of the item, which did not have specific reference to the activity of writing. As a result, the students responded to the item in a way that was not consistent with the rest of the items.

In sum, three out of the five subscales, SE, ATW and ER achieved a value of .6 or higher whereas the SR and TVI subscales achieved the lowest alpha value. Although the five subscales have been regarded as important constructs in motivation in writing (Boscolo & Hidi, 2006; Hawthorne, 2008; Pintrich, 2003), it is evident that not all of them have contributed satisfactorily to the overall reliability of the questionnaire. As such, it is

appropriate to discuss how the individual items correlate with the overall set of items in the questionnaire.

Table 4.7 Reliability Estimates for Individual Questionnaire Items

Item	Subscale	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
1	TVI	.400	.766
2	TVI	.411	.764
3	TVI	.221	.775
4	TVI	.044	.786
5	TVI	.340	.769
6	SE	.243	.776
7	SE	.221	.775
8	SE	.434	.764
9	SE	.475	.760
10	SE	.571	.755
11	ATW	.474	.760
12	ATW	.329	.769
13	ATW	.361	.767
14	ATW	-.217	.789
15	ER	.396	.774
16	ER	.240	.774
17	ER	.485	.758
18	ER	.473	.761
19	SR	-.075	.792
20	SR	.473	.762
21	SR	.583	.752
22	SR	.460	.762
Cronbach Alpha for the 22 items = .778			

Table 4.7 shows the correlation coefficients of each individual item to the overall score of the questionnaire. Items 4, 5, 6, 13, 14 and 19 were negatively worded and the

scores reversed when calculating the statistics. As mentioned, there was a satisfactory Cronbach Alpha value of .778 for the entire questionnaire. Further, item by item analysis shows that there are 15 items whose correlation coefficients are above the .3 benchmark, and thus they contributed well to the overall reliability of the questionnaire. For example, item 21 (*I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them*) was found to have the highest correlation coefficient (.583) with the overall set of items in the questionnaire. Following that, item 10 (*Compared with other students in this class, I think I am good at writing*) has the second highest correlation coefficient (.571). This is not surprising since the item has a strong correlation coefficient (.704) with the subscale of SE itself. Likewise, item 17 (*I practise writing on my own*) which shows a correlation of .485 with the overall set of the questionnaire also has a strong coefficient with the subscale of ER itself. Items 8 and 9 which are grouped in the SE subscale again obtained strong coefficients with the overall set of items in the questionnaire as they did with the subscale itself. Items 11 (.474) and 18 (.473) each obtained a higher correlation coefficient with the overall questionnaire, compared with that with the individual subscales.

Additionally, there are seven items (3, 4, 6, 7, 14, 16 and 19) with a correlation coefficient of below .3 with the overall questionnaire. In particular, Item 3 (*To write well, my grammar knowledge must be good*) was a new item. It was included in the revised questionnaire as interviews in the pilot study suggested that students generally regarded grammatical knowledge as the basis for good writing and that teachers placed greater emphasis on accuracy than on fluency. As the importance of grammatical knowledge had often been emphasized by teachers, the item was probably interpreted as factual rather

than an affective statement about writing. Hence this may explain the weak correlation with the whole questionnaire.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, item 4 was previously grouped under another subscale in the first version of the questionnaire. With a low correlation coefficient (.221), the item (*There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school*) actually shows little relationship with the overall set of the questionnaire. In retrospect, the item did not refer specifically to writing. Therefore, it is understandable it demonstrated a weak correlation. The item was originally included in the subscale of *Classroom Instruction (CI)* in the pilot questionnaire, but the subscale was subsequently deleted from the current questionnaire after the factor loadings from the Principal Components Analysis found that it had a low correlation with the other subscales. However, as the theme of ‘disconnectedness’ was elicited in the interviews with students, the item was retained but grouped with the TVI (*Task Value and Interest*) subscale for the purpose of capturing the intended response in the main questionnaire.

Like item 4, item 6 (*No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing*) was originally included in the pilot questionnaire to elicit the relationship of students' self-efficacy with their writing, but as the Alpha value if deleted was not higher than that of the entire questionnaire, the item was retained in the revised questionnaire. Item 7 (*I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors and correct grammar*) was adapted from Hawthorne's (2008) *Survey of Motivation to Engage with Writing* questionnaire to replace the item *I know most of the rules I need to know for doing Papers 1 & 2 (compo/compre/summary)* which, like the other items, had a low correlation coefficient with the scores of the overall questionnaire. Finally, item 16 (*Even if I think the writing*

task is boring, I will do my best) which was also adapted from the *Survey of Motivation to Engage with Writing* questionnaire replaced the original item (*If it takes more than half an hour to complete my writing tasks, I stop trying*). Since both items did not show an Alpha value that was comparatively higher than that of the entire questionnaire if deleted, they were retained for the revised questionnaire.

Items 14 and 19 are the only two items that obtained a negative correlation coefficient with the overall set of the questionnaire. The former (*I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated*) yielded a coefficient of $-.217$ while the latter (*I don't plan any ideas before I start writing*) correlated at $-.075$. Item 14 was not included in the first version of the questionnaire and was a replacement for the item *I have a bad time organizing my ideas in composition* since this item had a low correlation with the overall construct of the pilot questionnaire. The current item was adapted from one of the 26 items in Daly and Miller's (1975) questionnaire on measuring writing apprehension, and its score was expected to correlate with the rest of the questionnaire items, but it did not do so. One possible reason why the students had answered the item differently from the other items might be their misinterpretation of the meaning of the word 'evaluated'. A better word might have been 'marked'. Item 19 (*I don't plan my ideas before I start writing*) was not a new item as it had been used in the pilot questionnaire. Initially, the item yielded a low but positive correlation with the overall questionnaire. Since its reliability seemed to be adequate, the item was retained for the revised questionnaire.

It also ought to be mentioned that the revised questionnaire actually contained 12 newly worded items. Amongst them, items 2, 3 and 4 were actually formulated based on the themes that were elicited from the interviews with teachers and students in the pilot

study. Ideally, these 12 items should have been pilot tested again before being used in the main study. However, given the limited number of participants and the short length of time I was allowed to access the school in the main study, there was no opportunity to do so. Moreover, the majority of these items if deleted would not have produced a Cronbach's alpha that is significantly higher than .778.

4.2.2 Descriptive statistics of responses to questionnaire by the two classes

Table 4.8 presents the scores from the questionnaires for both classes. The overall scores for Class M ranged from 63 to 113, with a mean of 85.3. The average scores of the 22 individual items for the class ranged from 2.33 to 5.18, with a mean of 3.85. On the other hand, the scores of Class S ranged from 64 to 111, with a mean of 87.9. On the whole, the mean scores show that Class S rated themselves higher than Class M for 15 out of 22 items in the questionnaire. As such, there appears a trend in which students in Class S perceived themselves to be more engaged with writing than their peers in Class M. The Alpha value for Class S's responses to the 22 items (.705) is also higher than those for Class M (.655). In order to verify whether there are any significant differences between the mean scores, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was first performed to find out if the distribution of the questionnaire scores was normal. The score of Class M was represented by $D(39) = .112$ ($p < .05$) while that of Class S was represented by $D(40) = .130$ ($p < .05$). Thus, the data for both classes is normally distributed. Judging from the results, it appears that the mean scores for Class S are slightly higher than those for Class M. An analysis of individual items found that their average scores for the 22 items indeed were higher than those of the students in Class M ranging from 2.88 to 5.33, with a mean of

3.93. However, an independent sample *t*-test did not find any significant differences between the total score of the two classes ($t(77) = 9.32$).

Table 4.8 Questionnaire Results by Class

Class	N	Average scores for 22 items		Total score of questionnaire	
		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
M	39	3.85	.69	85.3	12.2
S	40	3.93	.19	87.9	11.8

Following that, the response to each item by both classes was analysed and the results displayed in Table 4.9. The results are presented in the order of the following subscales: SE (Self-Efficacy), ER (Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation), ATW (Affective Feelings Towards Writing), SR (Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies) and TVI (Task Value and Interest).

Table 4.9 Mean scores of questionnaire items for Class M and Class S

Sub scale	Item	Class M		Class S	
		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
TVI	1 I find the writing tasks in class useful to my life outside of school.	4.23	1.01	4.28	1.18
	2 Having good writing is more important than speaking skills at work.	4.03	1.39	4.33	.27
	3 To write well, my grammar knowledge must be good.	5.16	.886	5.33	.797
	4 There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school.	3.97	1.48	4.08	.971
	5 The topics we wrote in English class are boring to me.	3.63	1.35	3.15	1.27
SE	6 No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing.	2.84	1.36	3.88	1.53
	7 I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors and correct grammar.	4.17	1.20	4.10	1.26
	8 I can organize sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme.	4.03	1.74	3.83	1.20
	9 I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	3.89	1.31	4.10	1.39
	10 Compared with other students in this class, I think I am good at writing.	2.77	1.42	3.13	1.14
ATW	11 I enjoy writing.	4.00	1.34	3.80	1.47
	12 When my English teacher gives me good feedback for my writing, I feel good.	4.68	1.26	4.90	1.06
	13 Expressing ideas through writing is a waste of time.	3.63	1.24	4.15	1.49
	14 I have fear of writing compositions when I know they'll be evaluated by teachers.	4.26	1.61	3.95	1.55
ER	15 I make sure I find out from my teacher or classmates when I don't know how to do my writing tasks.	4.13	1.21	4.45	1.54
	16 Even if I think the writing task is boring, I will do my best.	4.71	1.60	4.70	.883
	17 I practise writing on my own.	3.08	1.60	3.23	1.48
SR	18 I am strongly motivated to improve my writing.	3.95	1.34	4.10	1.24
	19 I don't plan my ideas before I start writing.	4.26	1.41	3.95	1.55
	20 I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	4.21	1.32	4.22	1.58
	21 I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.68	1.38	4.13	1.42
	22 I notice my mistakes in writing and use that information to help me write better.	4.29	1.38	4.28	1.43
Average of Total Mean		3.76	1.43	4.23	1.38

SE Subscale

There is a noticeable difference between the responses of Class M ($M = 2.84$) and Class S ($M = 3.88$) for item 6 (*No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing*). This suggests that Class S exhibited more self-efficacy in writing than Class M. With a mean score that is above 4.0, both classes showed a positive response for item 7 (*I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors and correct grammar*). For items 8 (*I can organize sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme*) and 9 (*I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing*), it can be seen that the two classes had somewhat similar mean scores. With a mean score ($M = 4.03$) for item 8 that is higher than Class S' ($M = 3.83$), it appears that the majority of students in Class M had slightly more awareness about the relationship between sentence organization and expressing clarity in writing than those in Class S. However, they rated themselves lower ($M = 3.89$) than their peers in Class S ($M = 4.10$) for item 9. Again, for item 10, the mean scores suggest that Class S ($M = 3.13$) perceived themselves to have a slightly higher perception of their writing abilities than Class M ($M = 2.77$). As the item obtained a reasonably strong correlation coefficient with the entire questionnaire, this means that the responses by the two classes were reliable to some extent. Overall, the mean scores in the subscale indicate that both classes claimed to have a similar level of self-efficacy in writing abilities.

ER Subscale

Items 15 (*I make sure I find out from my teacher or classmates when I don't know how to do my writing tasks*) as well as 16 (*Even if I think the writing task is boring, I will*

do my best) yielded somewhat similar scores of more than a 4.0 for both classes. Thus students in the two classes reported the same level of motivation towards writing. Even if they did not like the writing task, they expressed a strong sense of effort regulation and goal orientation. The mean scores for item 17 (*I practise writing on my own*) by Class M (M = 3.08) and Class S (M = 3.23) suggest that the majority of the students did not practise writing on their own. The mean scores for item 18 (*I am strongly motivated to improve my writing*) by Class M (M = 3.92) and Class S (M = 4.10) again suggest that the students were somewhat determined to do well in writing. In short, given the similar mean scores for the four items, both classes demonstrated a somewhat equivalent level of effort regulation towards writing.

ATW Subscale

In the ATW subscale, the responses to item 11 (Class M, M = 4.00; Class S, M = 3.80) show that the students shared the same level of enthusiasm for writing. The mean scores of 4.68 and 4.90 for item 12 (*When my English teacher gives me good feedback for my writing, I feel good*) for Class M and Class S respectively indicate that the majority of students in both classes valued teachers' feedback. For item 13 (*Expressing ideas through writing is a waste of time*) which was negatively worded, Class M expressed a slightly more positive response (M = 2.37, SD = 1.24) compared with Class S (M = 2.88, SD = 1.51). Moreover, the mean scores of 2.74 and 3.05 for item 14 (*I have fear of writing compositions when I know they'll be evaluated by teachers*) by Class M and Class S respectively indicate that not only were the students not apprehensive towards writing, but they were also able to regulate their emotions while writing. Still, the responses by Class

S and M to all the items in the ATW subscale seem to indicate that they both had a somewhat positive attitude towards writing. This contradicts the expectation that Class S would have indicated a clearly negative attitude towards writing.

SR Subscale

It appears that there is a difference between the two classes' response for item 19 (*I don't plan my ideas before I start writing*) and item 21 (*I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them*). In Class M, the reversed mean score for item 19 ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.41$) when compared to that of Class S ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.55$) suggests the majority of students in Class S did not practise the strategy of planning writing as much as those in Class M. For Class S particularly, it can be deduced that more students in the class did not plan and make drafts before writing. The majority of the students in both classes also claimed to have used new English words in writing (item 21) though the mean score for Class S ($M = 4.13$) suggests that more students in Class S practised the strategy than those in Class M ($M = 3.68$). As noted in Table 4.7, the item showed the strongest correlation coefficient with the whole questionnaire. Therefore, responses to the item by the two classes are consistent with the responses to the overall set of the questionnaire. In particular, the mean scores for items 20 (*I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English*), and 22 (*I notice my mistakes in writing and use that information to help me write better*) are mostly above a 4.0, and have also shown to correlate well with the overall questionnaire. However, except for item 19, the mean scores did not suggest that the two classes are different in their use of self regulatory practices in writing.

TVI Subscale

The items in the TVI subscale generally showed a high mean score. For example, item 3 (*To write well, my grammar knowledge must be good*) obtained the highest mean for both classes (Class M, $M = 5.16$; Class S, $M = 5.33$) in the whole questionnaire. It shows that the students in the two classes generally regarded grammatical knowledge as the basis for good writing. In fact, the scores for items 1 and 2 are also above 4.0. As such, the students regarded writing tasks at school as useful, and they also agreed somewhat that learning writing is relevant for future work. However, the mean scores of the negatively worded item 4 (*There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school*) indicates that both classes agreed somewhat that learning in English class was disconnected from their lives outside of school (Class M, $M = 3.97$; Class S, $M = 4.08$). It appears that Class S perceived tasks in English class to be more related to their personal lives compared to Class M. In fact, the responses to this item were more homogenous in Class M ($SD = 1.48$) than Class S ($SD = 9.71$), as indicated by the former's smaller standard deviation. Like item 19 however, it has low correlation coefficient with the score of the entire questionnaire. Hence, the responses need to be interpreted cautiously. Again, for item 5, the mean scores for the two classes (Class M, $M = 3.63$; Class S, $M = 3.15$) show that students generally agreed that the writing topics were uninteresting. With a reversed mean that is higher than Class S, it seems that Class M was more negative towards the topics teachers assigned them to write in class, although it also appeared that students in both classes had the same perception towards the relevance and interest of writing at school on the whole.

Finally, an independent sample *t* test was performed on the mean scores for the individual 22 items for both classes. It was found that there was a significant difference between the mean score of item 6 (*No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing* for both classes), $t(76) = 3.04$, $p < .05$. Apart from that, there were no significant differences between the mean scores for the other items.

4.3 Correlation Analyses of Responses to Questionnaires and Writing Performance by Classes

The scores of the respective Mid-Year Exam (MYE) Paper 1 writing for the two classes were collected for the purpose of correlation analyses, and the results of their scores of writing are shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Results of Mid-Year Exam Paper 1 Writing for the Two Classes

Class	N	Mid Year Exam (MYE) Paper 1 Writing		
		<u>Range of scores</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
M	39	45 - 75	53.4	6.4
S	40	43 - 63	50.5	6.6

By comparison, Class S ($M = 50.5$) obtained a lower overall score for their MYE Paper 1 writing than Class M ($M = 53.4$). An independent sample *t* test did not show any significant differences between the mean scores of the two classes. In order to explore the relationships between the five subscales and the writing performance of the two classes,

Pearson Correlation coefficients were calculated. However, as both classes sat for different papers, the analyses presented in Table 4.11 were performed separately for each class.

Table 4.11 The Intercorrelations of Variables of the Two Classes

		MYE P1 Writing	TVI	SE	ATW	ER	SR	Total Score
MYE Paper 1 Writing	class M (n=39)	1						
	class S (n =40)	1						
TVI	class M (n=39)	.557**	1					
	class S (n=40)	-.137	1					
SE	class M (n=39)	.638**	.502**	1				
	class S (n=40)	.227	.207	1				
ATW	class M (n=39)	.278	.524**	.153	1			
	class S (n=40)	.158	.388*	.220	1			
ER	class M (n=39)	.275	.393*	.303	.382*	1		
	class S (n=40)	.007	.248	.535**	.362*	1		
SR	class M (n=39)	.440**	.341*	.366*	.488*	.412**	1	
	class S (n=40)	.226	.417**	.606**	.535**	.628**	1	
Total Score	class 1 M (n=39)	.636**	.778**	.738**	.634**	.704**	.680**	1
	class S (n=40)	.149	.585**	.731**	.676**	.765**	.885**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the inter-correlation analysis show that in Class M the overall questionnaire scores are moderately correlated with those of MYE Paper 1 writing at a significant level ($r = .636$). As for the individual subscales, SE (Self-Efficacy) was found to have the highest level of correlation with MYE writing ($r = .638$), followed by TVI (Task Value and Interest) ($r = .557$) and SR (Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies) ($r = .440$). This suggests that the writing performance of students in Class M was positively related to factors involving self-efficacy, the value and interest of the writing task and their self-regulation of cognitive strategies. That the SE subscale obtained the highest correlation indicates that the students in Class M had a realistic perception of their writing abilities. That is to say, those who perceived themselves to have a high efficacy in writing tended to obtain higher scores in MYE Paper 1 writing. Conversely, those with a low self-efficacy towards writing were likely to have a low score in MYE Paper 1 writing. The results of the correlation matrix also show that the students who reported that the writing tasks were relevant and useful to their future work and interesting had obtained higher scores in their writing. This pattern is observed as well for those who claimed to have a positive attitude towards writing in class. With regard to the individual subscales, the correlation between ATW (Affective Feelings Towards Writing) and TVI is observed to be the highest ($r = .524$) in Class M. This then suggests that there is a modest relationship between the two variables. SE and TVI were also found to have a moderately strong correlation ($r = .502$) for the class. Again, this probably suggests a positive relationship between the students' perception of their writing abilities and the value and interest of the writing task for them. Finally, the correlation coefficient of $r = .412$ shows a weaker relationship between ER (Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation) and SR.

By contrast, no significant correlations between the subscales and MYE Paper 1 writing were found in Class S. In particular, the correlation coefficient between the class's writing performance and the ER subscale is the lowest ($r = .007$). This seems to contradict the high mean scores reported in Table 4.9 which indicate that the majority of students in Class S monitored their effort in writing. One possibility for the lack of consistency could be that the students did not have sufficient meta-cognitive ability to evaluate their own writing skills as well as their peers in Class M, given that their mean scores in the questionnaire were not consistent with their performance in MYE Paper 1 writing. The class however showed a number of substantial inter-correlations between the subscales. In particular, the correlation between SR and ER is shown to be the strongest at $r = .628$, which means that students who perceived themselves to be self-regulated in writing through the use of cognitive strategies also reported being diligent in sustaining their motivation through effort regulation. SE and SR ($r = .606$) were found to have a moderate correlation as did ATW and ER ($r = .535$).

4.4 Analyses of Open-ended Items

For item 23, students in both classes indicated their most preferred text types they had written about in the year. The results are shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Frequencies of Most Preferred Text Types in Writing in Class M and Class S

	Narrative	Personal Recount	Descriptive	One-Word Topic	Formal Letter	Report	Expository
Class M	18	5	3	9	1	1	2
Class S	17	1	-	-	9	12	-

As seen from the table, the majority of the students in the two classes preferred to write narratives. In class M, the narrative topics students wrote about included *Don't Judge the Book by Its Cover*, *An Embarrassing Moment* and *Run Away*. The personal recount topics included titles such as *I Wish I Wouldn't Have Known the Truth* and *I Regretted Telling Him/Her My Secret*; the two most preferred descriptive topics were *My Bedroom and Me*; and two one-word essays, such as *Solace* and *Rejuvenate*, which allowed students the flexibility to structure their writing into either a narrative or personal recount. In all, narrative topics such as *Don't Judge the Book by Its Cover* were listed by the majority (46%) as the best topic they had written, followed by one-word essay topics (23%). Only two students preferred to write expository topics like *What kind of voluntary work is worth doing, and why?* and *Talk about the impact of gambling*.

On the other hand, the majority of students (54%) in Class S preferred to write letters and reports, instead of narratives. The second most popular text type (17) was narratives which include topics such as *Promises*, *Friends*, *An Unusual Person I met*, *Childhood Memories* and *Ambition*. Of these five topics, *Promises* remained the class's most preferred narrative topic. However, a study of Scheme of Work for the class shows that for the entire academic year in 2010, the class was expected to produce a quota of

four letters and three reports. Thus, it seemed that the emphasis was placed on formal letters more than the rest of the text types. Jenny thought that ‘bottom-rung’ classes such as Class S were more able to cope with a ‘predictable’ text types such as letters and reports if she drilled them continuously.

4.5 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, the quantitative findings obtained from the *Engagement with Writing* questionnaire were presented. Initially, the mean scores of the responses to the questionnaire suggest that Class S was more engaged with writing than Class M in relation to the five subscales, SE (Self Efficacy); ER (Effort Regulation); ATW (Affective Feelings Towards Writing); SR (Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies) and TVI (Task Value and Interest). However, there were no significant differences between the mean scores of the two classes, and detailed analyses of the classes’ responses to the 22 items in fact reveal that the students in both classes displayed somewhat similar orientation towards writing on the whole. Although there were no significant differences between the mean scores for the individual items of the two classes, their responses to item 6 (*No matter how hard I try, I can’t do better in English writing*) were found to be significantly different (see 4.2.2). Thus, this shows that the majority of students in Class S actually perceived themselves to be at least as confident about writing, if not more so as their peers in Class M.

Despite the general similarities in their writing behaviour, Class M had performed better than Class S in their respective Mid Year Exam (MYE) Paper 1 writing. Correlation statistics, on the other hand, indicate that there were no positive relationships between any

of the five subscales and students' writing performance in Class S; whereas, in Class M, moderate to strong relationships between students' writing performance and the following three subscales were found: SE, TVI and SR. Hence, the correlations with the writing test results provided clear evidence that the students in Class M were rather better at judging their writing abilities than those in Class S. This in itself shed some light on the disadvantaged position of low-achieving students. Apart from everything else, it appears that they lacked relevant metacognitive abilities to evaluate their own writing skills as well as their peers in Class M.

Overall, in hindsight, the questionnaire did not prove as useful as it was originally intended to be, since the findings failed to clearly show the realistic differences between the two classes' orientation towards writing, as was expected. It was a hybrid instrument, drawing on a variety of previous questionnaires, and was perhaps overly ambitious in terms of the components of the construct of engagement that it incorporated. Indeed, in the light of the subsequent qualitative data-gathering in the two classes, it became clear that the questionnaire responses gave a very misleading picture of the relative degrees of engagement of the students in the two classes. This highlights the importance of observing what really went on in the teaching of writing and literacy in the two classrooms in order to triangulate the findings of quantitative data gathering that relied on self-report by the participants. It is to an analysis of these actual happenings in Class M and Class S that I now turn in Chapters 5 and Chapter 6.

5 INSIDE CLASS M

5.1 Overview

This chapter focuses on qualitative analyses of classroom interaction. It begins with a descriptive account of the focal participants in Class M and their teacher, Belle, as well as instructional activities which took place in the classroom. Following that, the interaction between teachers and students, and between students themselves that occurred in class are presented, based on classroom discourse analysis (Bloome, et al., 2005; Christie, 2002; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), into practices, procedures and structures of talk, from which key themes and concepts were derived, and connections between the concepts and categories were then developed from the overall analysis (Flick, 2006). The coded data were triangulated with those from interviews with the respective individuals, and this further explains the kind of meaning-making that was going on within the lessons. Throughout the analysis, a part inductive, part deductive approach to the coding procedures (Lofland, et al., 2006) was used. I will present a preliminary description (Spencer, Ritchie, & O' Connor, 2003) of the turn-by-turn analysis of the IRF sequences (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) that occurred in some stages of the classroom lessons, and ultimately conclude by drawing up the culture of the writing practices, as contextualized in these classroom lessons.

5.2 A Description of the Focal Participants and Research Site

5.2.1 Mayflower Secondary School

Mayflower Secondary School, having only 10 years of history, was considered a new school, compared to other more established schools. It had four blocks of buildings.

Each of the yellow and blue painted blocks was four storeys high. Classes of the same streams were grouped in the same block. All the classrooms were located from the second storey onwards. The first floor of the main building housed the General Office, the offices of the Principal, two Vice-Principals and the Operations Manager who was in charge of the maintenance of the school and sometimes handled disciplinary problems with students. One could clearly see the photos and names of the office staff and the organisation chart of the entire school upon entering the General Office. Like most neighbourhood schools, more than half of the school's population was non-Chinese (57.4%). The motto of the school is *Make Your Mark*. Located in the northern part of Singapore, the school was close to Johor Bahru, the capital city of the state of Johor, Malaysia. Consequently, the school also had a small population of Malaysian students who commute daily between Johor Bahru and Singapore for school. Outside the General Office, murals depicting a garden decorated the wall. On it, the philosophy of the school was spelled out:

We firmly believe that all pupils can learn and want to achieve, and that the teachers can harness their enthusiasm and guide them to be self-directed learners and useful citizens of the future.

The core values which were perseverance, responsibility, integrity, diligence, enterprise, care and respect, were inscribed on the same side of the wall. The school's mission statement which reads 'to provide a challenging curriculum to enhance the capacity of our pupils with competencies, attitudes for the future and to nurture them to be morally upright citizens' could be seen further down on the wall of the school foyer, which was right after the General Office. It was evident that the school prided itself on its various

projects undertaken by teachers and students. For example, the Environment Hub, was amongst the several projects the school undertook to build itself a niche and reputation (see 3.3.1).

5.2.2 The focal classroom

As mentioned, Class M was the first class amongst the seven academic classes (three E and four N(A)) in the school. It was situated at the end of the corridor, on the fourth floor of the Express block which was across from a quadrangle. Lush greeneries, which blocked off some government subsidized flats, could be seen from the louver windows on the right of the classroom. The left of the classroom overlooked some of the classrooms in the Normal (Technical) block. Inside the classroom, the teacher's desk was located in the front corner to the furthest right. A visualizer (document camera) could be seen on the desk. The students' desks were divided in four columns, and the students seated in rows of ones in each column, which were separated by aisles. A white board hung on the front wall. Located on top of the white board was an overhead pull down screen.

As part of the Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) programme, all students were responsible for decorating their classrooms. In Class M, drawings themed to a beach were seen on top of the white board which was also flanked by two small notice boards. On one of the notice boards, 'The Thought of the Week' message, another area of the PCCG's programme, was pinned up. A bigger notice board covered in black art papers hung at the back of the classroom. It was marked into columns in pink strips of art papers for notices or materials related to the key O Levels subjects: English language,

Elementary and Additional Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. To the right of the notice board, an attractive collage of the class's family photos was displayed on the wall. To the left of the notice board, a large drawing of a tree with its elongated roots was pasted onto the wall. The students had put their signatures on the brown soil burying the roots. There was also a metal cupboard at one corner at the back of the class next to the collage.

During my time there, the seating arrangement usually remained fixed. Whenever one or two mischievous students attempted to change places with their classmates, they were told off by Belle and had to move back to their original places. Because of the physical arrangement of the class, the students simply turned around to face their classmates in the row behind during group work. The class also kept a duty roster for cleaning up the room. Two brooms and a waste paper basket, placed at the farthest right corner at the front of the class, were the only tools provided. Based on recollection, the classroom was generally neat and tidy and free from any sort of graffiti. Overall, the atmosphere conveyed by the class was one that was warm and positive; the students, most of whom were student leaders, were cheerful, chatty and polite, and they always rose from their seats to greet me when I entered the class.

5.2.3 The focal participants

The four focal students, Azura, Dinesh, Kevin, and Ivan, were of different ethnicity and showed different levels of engagement with writing. Azura was Malay and medium-engaged with writing, based on her responses in the questionnaire. Although she was described as shy, she volunteered to play host to contestants from Namibia and

Azerbaijan in the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (YOG) held in Singapore in 2010. Part of her duty as host involved shuttling between the competition venues and the contestants' quarters on a university campus in the western part of Singapore and ensuring that the contestants were looked after.

At the start of the interview, she mentioned that her performance in spoken and writing English was unsatisfactory. When asked about her class position in the Mid Year Examinations (MYE), she was reluctant to tell me, saying that it was 'embarrassing'. Having originated in a lower middle class home, her father held two jobs to support the family. She also received financial assistance from the school. However, throughout the interview, she never failed to show her pride in her father, who seemed to be an influential person in her life. Contrary to her response in the questionnaire, she came across as highly motivated in my face-to-face interaction with her. Despite her sense of low self-efficacy in academic studies, she expressed a keen desire to do well by obtaining straight 'As' in her O levels, and hoped to be a doctor when she finished university. As far as school-based writing was concerned, she had always preferred to do a one-word topic essay or any topics for which she had 'an idea in her mind'. She did not actually enjoy writing on some text types, except narratives and story-like ones whose inputs she mainly derived from reading others' blogs on the Internet. In my interviews with Belle, I was told that Azura was 'inconsistent' in her performance, but she had the potential to qualify as a high-engaged writer. Essentially, her problem with writing was psychologically related as she lacked confidence.

Dinesh in his questionnaire claimed to be low-engaged with writing. He was a Malaysian Indian who had to spend extra time commuting between his home across the

Causeway and the school. He spent the first two years of his secondary education in another neighbourhood school before transferring to Mayflower Secondary School only because the school offered Biology as an academic subject. Having originated from an upper middle class home background, he definitely had sufficient parental support. According to him, his father wanted him to become a doctor. He however wished to practise law when he finished university. He told me that he quite liked the school as he sensed that there was a higher degree of independence allowed compared to his former school. Like Azura, he struggled with low self-efficacy in his English, particularly in the areas of vocabulary and spelling. Although he did not express a high level of confidence in his writing ability, he wanted to score well in his English papers, and to eventually obtain a good aggregate in his O level examinations. A weak writer, Dinesh did not particularly enjoy writing as he often found it difficult to express his ideas, but his parents made him practise compositions in assessment books to improve his performance in writing. Throughout the interview, he mentioned that he was determined to obtain high scores in his academic subjects. A motivated individual, he was one of the few students in the class who nominated himself for the school's writing enrichment workshop conducted by an outside agency.

The third focal participant, Kevin, was Chinese and a medium-engaged writer. He appeared to be quiet and unassuming, and he was not as forth-coming as the previous two participants in their exchanges with me. According to him, the best thing that happened to him for the year was getting into Class M as it was known to be competitive. He told me that his writing ability was average, sometimes managing to produce a pass mark only. Nevertheless, he aimed to score better in his Paper One writing in the coming

examinations. This talk about results and marks underscores Kevin's (as well as Azura's and Dinesh's) achievement-oriented attitude towards academic studies, inculcated by the school's and parents' expectations. His father held a supervisory post at work and his mother was a housewife. He reported that he spoke English at home with his parents and siblings. Unlike Dinesh, his parents did not specify his career choices, but advised him to take up a job in the civil service as it usually guaranteed stable employment. Amongst the four participants, he was the only one who preferred to write functional text types such as reports and letters, as they all involved a 'format' and thus were easier to manage.

The final participant, Ivan was another Malaysian Indian student. Like Azura, he had the opportunity to participate as a student helper in the YOG. More significantly, he topped the class in Mid-Year-Examinations (MYE) in many subjects, including English. Not surprisingly, his responses in the questionnaire put him in the high-engaged category. Belle described him as a good and 'imaginative' writer who was consistent in his performance though he tended to write more fictional accounts. He was the only student in the class who took English Literature as an O Levels subject (the majority of his classmates either took Geography or History as an O Levels subject) as it was his favourite subject, apart from Maths. However, what clearly marked him as different from the previous three participants was his air of confidence. He, on the other hand, thought that he was not a consistent worker as he habitually delayed submitting his work. He told me that he derived his sources for writing from the books he read, which included predominately science fiction and fantasy books.

Like Dinesh, Ivan came from an upper middle class background. His father who was a dentist wanted him to deliver his best performance and enter into the top local

university. However, he preferred to keep his 'options open'. Unlike Dinesh, who took his mother tongue as a second language, Ivan studied Malay Language instead of his native tongue, Urdu. Overall, not only did he come across as someone who was motivated and driven, but he also appeared to be overly conscious about his marks, as he told me he had on a couple of occasions argued with his teacher over the scores of his writing assignments. Among the four participants, Ivan was the only one who reported that he read regularly and that he even attempted to write poems 'for fun'. Although the other three participants were reported to be motivated and driven, they did not have the habit of writing for recreational purposes.

5.2.4 The Teacher

Belle was Chinese, and in her early thirties. At the time of the interview, Belle had taught at Mayflower Secondary School, her first school, for nine years. In the sixth year of her teaching career, she left the school to pursue her Masters in Arts degree at a New Zealand university. She returned the following year and was promoted to the position of the English Level Head for the lower secondary in the English Language and Literature department at the school. Apart from her normal teaching load, some of her duties as Level Head included vetting exam and common test papers set by the lower secondary teachers, arranging remedial classes for students, endorsing the lower secondary teachers' record books, which outlined their weekly teaching activities, and sometimes standing in for her Head of Department at meetings.

Belle was the homeroom teacher of the best secondary 1 Express class in the school. She also taught English to one N(T) class. Although she had comparatively fewer

teaching periods, being a Level Head had in fact increased her workload. According to Jenny, the English teacher of Class S, Belle usually stayed behind after school hours to clear her work, and only left in the evening. Having taught at the school for such a long time, she perceived it as ‘friendly’ and ‘like a family’. According to her, the Discipline Master had successfully set the ‘tone’ of the school, thus giving it the reputation of a good school.

There were difficulties accessing Belle’s class on some occasions. She was the teacher referred to in Chapter 3 who had requested to reduce the frequency of classroom observations required by me. In the initial meeting with the researcher, she expressed the concern that for the observations she had to ‘stage’ interesting lessons involving cooperative learning, rather than the usual whole class lecture, which would interfere with her agenda of preparing the class to complete the tasks specified in her scheme of work (see 5.3) or coach them for upcoming assessments. Further, my presence in the class would probably make the students too excited for them to concentrate on her teaching. Eventually, she managed to accommodate me to the extent of giving access to Class M on six lessons, out of the ten weeks I was there.

From the two interviews, it was quite clear that Belle liked Class M for its good attitude; they were generally well-behaved, hard working, motivated, and held a positive attitude towards academic learning, although she also thought that some of the members of the class were not serious with their work and tended to procrastinate when it came to the submission of writing tasks. According to all four focal students, Belle was a competent teacher who was strict with their learning. In particular, it was observed that she made sure that her students paid attention to her during instruction time. Although,

certain individuals' attention sometimes wandered off during class, they were mostly attentive. Ivan remarked that Belle's teaching was 'very very versatile.' He further commented that 'first, she gives us spontaneous scope like find thirty words in the article, and turn them into a summary, or find any two words that you can't understand..Anything that comes to her mind..She decides to give you if she thinks it can improve your English.' (Interview, 27 August). Since it was the top class, she had high expectations of the class, and had often 'drummed' into them the need to achieve their expected Mean Subject Grade of 3.4 (equivalent to an upper B or 65 out of 100 or higher). Belle felt that there was a need to jolt or push them by giving them pep talks whenever necessary, as evidenced in the excerpts of classroom discourse that follow in the rest of the chapter, although she also allowed students to joke with her sometimes during class. However, when she felt that they had crossed over their boundaries, she would tell them off directly so that there were usually minimum disruptions during her class.

Belle clearly knew her students. For example, in her class of forty, she could identify the 'dreamers', the 'mavericks' and those with low self-efficacy. She knew about their personal problems and could point out the strengths and weaknesses of some of her students' writing. Belle told me that she usually allowed some leeway for her strong writers whereas for the weak writers, she would insist that they followed her 'steps' of drafting and editing. In fact, Belle did not think that Class M was really proficient in English, though she had no doubt the class could be 'stretched' further beyond their current standards. In her opinion, preparing the class to face the ultimate O levels was like being 'in the war zone' as her students were mainly disadvantaged by their low socio-economic backgrounds. In her words,

Our kids are not so privileged...Sometimes, they're not as exposed as other students from other schools. Their knowledge is quite limited. Ah. So, it is quite sad sometimes they being in a neighbourhood school...They've not seen the world, you know? So, these are the things that I'd say they're lacking.'

(Interview, 5 August 2010)

Her remark was a subtle reminder of the realism of habitus and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) which accounted for the gaps in academic performances between students from a typical neighbourhood and elite schools. In short, she perceived that her students were deficient at the outset (see 1.2.8.1). In so far as writing was concerned, she was aware that the class did not like to write. In particular, there were a couple of students who were 'very reluctant' to write. She commented that

'You can see that they are those who don't really complain but you can see the moods differ compared to other exercises...They still find writing more like a chore, rather than something they enjoy doing...I'd say I've failed. It's not easy for students like them to enjoy writing.'

(Interview, 5 August 2010)

Belle described herself as an avid reader, and she sometimes penned her thoughts after reading. To her, reading formed the basis of one's writing; one had to read in order to write. Although writing, to Belle, was something personal and informal, most of the writing she did was directly related to her professional work as she did not have a lot of time to write diary entries like she used to when she was younger. Her account is consistent with Albright and Kramer-Dahl (2009)'s, findings on the pedagogical profile of teachers, which show that teachers in Singapore generally have limited reading habits themselves. Even if they do read, the texts chosen are for functional rather than

recreational purposes given that their heavy workload does impinge on their time to read outside of teaching needs.

The most important aspect of learning writing, according to Belle, involved the steps of ‘assembling’ the generic structure of the different text types. Hence, most of the time, she was reinforcing the steps of writing the text types which the students were first taught in lower secondary. In the first school semester of the year, she had assigned one-word essay topics which Azura, Dinesh and Ivan said they liked to write on. However, nearer to the Mid-Year Exam, she usually drilled the class using past exam papers instead. Belle admitted that the practice of drilling the class for exam preparation was ‘in theory defeating the purpose of learning’ as it was not ‘real’ learning. She thus implied that there was a distinction between what she considered teaching and preparation for examinations, but exigency often meant that drill and practice was in fact the most ‘economic’ way of mastering language in this examination-oriented setting. Apart from drilling the class with past exam papers, she also relied heavily on error analyses. She said,

When they see me, how I mark right, when they see their classmates’ errors, I find that they learn a lot. I do it randomly. This assessment, I’ll mark on this one or two. After a while, they get the hang of it, they’re able to spot their mistakes. When they’re able to spot, then they’ve learnt. I’ll try to do it at least once for each of the text types I taught them in writing.

(Interview, 29 September 2010)

Her comment thus underscores the importance of grammatical accuracy as evidence of having learnt how to write.

5.3 The Classroom Scheme of Work

Typically, for every English language classroom in Singapore, the syllabus is broken down into schemes of work within which weekly lessons are planned. Such schemes are prepared at the beginning of the school year with reference to the syllabus, and teachers prepare their weekly lessons from these schemes. The weekly lessons are written down in teachers' record books and submitted to the Principal, Vice Principal, or Heads of Departments for endorsement on the first day of each week.

In Mayflower Secondary, no prescribed textbooks were used in the upper secondary (three and four) level. Instead, the respective English teachers in each of the three streams of the two levels had compiled materials on the selected text types, known as writing modules, at the beginning of the year. The writing, as well as reading and speaking syllabuses, was essentially planned around a designated text type which could be factual recount, narrative, report, formal letters, expository or argumentative writing. The idea was to ensure that students were exposed to sufficient genres that would help them to cope with the demands of school and national exams. In particular, for writing, the assessment format consisted of two components: free writing and situation-based writing (see Appendix 11). There was usually no particular order advocated for the teaching of these texts in any one year, though, based on personal experience, there could be an emphasis on certain texts such as formal letters and reports in some quarters.

In the six classroom lessons I observed, Belle covered the scaffolding and drafting of two pieces of functional writing: one incident report writing and a speech. The students were then asked to complete the writing at home and submit them during the following lessons. Earlier in the year, the class had covered four narrative, two descriptive, and one

argumentative text types, along with four one-word essays. She also went over the class's Common Test, which tested them on summary and incident report writing. Apart from the materials developed by the department, Class M also used a supplementary book which was commercially produced for discrete vocabulary practice. In addition, Belle made the class submit a weekly journal for which they were free to write about any topics of interest.

5.4 A Preliminary Analysis of Classroom Instruction and Patterns of Interaction

Each recording of the six lessons observed was transcribed and contents were parsed into 'turns at talk', which were subsequently analysed using the triadic IRF sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) related to classroom discourse analysis (Cazden, 2001; Christie, 2002; Wells & Arauz, 2006) to examine the nature of the on-going task or activity. In general, Belle organized her teaching around the structures and language features of text types. For example, in Excerpt 5.1, which is a lesson on incident report writing, Belle highlighted the distinctive structures of each paragraph by getting the class to look out for 'what happened?', 'where and when the incident took place?', 'why did the incident happen?' etc. As she systematically covered the language features of the text type in her PowerPoint slides, the class then filled in the blanks in the handouts and made notes. This pattern of engagement with students was also mostly observed in all her lessons I sat in.

Excerpt 5.1 27 July 2010

1	Belle	Now, this is a report writing scaffold template: To, From, Date,
2		Title, and this one here : : because it's not enough space, huh?
3		This chunk here should be here. Get me? Let's say if Mr Tay
4		wants you to write a report about a theft in the class. You, as the
5		class chairperson..you'll write 'report written by' your full name.
6		In some examples, you'll see the names of the school, that's on
7		the third line. That's fine. It's all left alignment. Same as formal
8		letters. You don't put your two-finger spacing anymore. Leave a
9		line when you want to show a new paragraph. OK? Zoom in again
10		on the first paragraph. What is it about the first paragraph of
11		report writing? It's always very clear, very good. No wishy-
12		washy. Right from the start, you are telling the reader what is
13		happening, where, when, and how do you report the time. And at
14		the end of the paragraph, this is one way...Now, what does it
15		mean by 5W and 1H?
16	S1	Where. Why.
17	Belle	And how. (2) Body. Look through. Closing. Then, report written
18		by : : name of sender. Always write the full name. I think it's
19		always better to write the full name than (). Write the full name
20		OK? All right, on with the next page...Now, I want you to spend
21		some time on page 5. You study it closely.
22	S2	I'm confused with comment and opinion.
23	Belle	They are basically the same. ().. So, all in all, report writing at
24		your level, I'm looking at 4 to 5 paragraphs, covering all these
25		points here. The tone is definitely going to be formal..All right,
26		you turn over to page 6. Language use, alright? (2) So, you need
27		to use third person pronoun. Now, what do you think the tense
		will be?
28	S2	Past tense.
29	Belle	Now, comparing a report and a formal letter. In a formal letter,
30		let's say you want to make comments, proposals, whatever, things
31		like that to your form teacher or Mr Loke. (2) Kevin, I've already
32		said that. Please, MOVE!
		[She tells Kevin to move back to his original seat. Her right index
		finger points to the seat Kevin is supposed to return to.]
33		Now, in a formal letter, you can make your own comments.
34		However, in a report writing, you don't put any comment which
35		is subjective. You only report what you see. OK? You don't take
36		sides at all in a report.
37	Ss	Yes.
38	Belle	Yes : : which is your 5W and 1H OK? And it is to the point. So
39		you must know the incident, where, what, vocabulary, thematic

40		...This is a fight, an argument...So what are the words associated
41		with fight and argument? (2) PROVOKE. ANGER. You know,
42		that kind of words. Thematic words. Words associated with a
43		theme. How can you round up a report?
44	S3	Recommendations.
45	Belle	Recommendations. Suggestions. What else? Sometimes, you may
46		want to put down 'contact you if you...' because the person you
47		want to write to (2) wants to have further enquiry. Normally, don't
48		put in your judgement. Don't put in your emotion. Don't put in
49		words like 'I'm very sad or I'm very sure.' You report what you
50		see. You're not one-sided. That is a good report. All right? Any
51		questions? Now, take out the question paper.

5.4.1 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 5.1

In all 11 turns, Belle mainly used whole class lecture, but she also resorted to the IRF format of interaction at some turns. Throughout the excerpt, it seems that she 'compartmentalized' the teaching of a piece of incident report writing by emphasizing and de-emphasizing the different features in incident report writing. From lines 7 to 27, she particularly emphasized, with the use of imperatives, the correct layout such as alignment and paragraphing, the use of the correct salutation, the appropriate style of presentation, and language use in attempting to systematically lead students through the three part structure of report writing: introduction, body and conclusion. She also advised against two-finger spacing when formatting the paragraphs, as well as avoiding personalised comments and opinions in the concluding paragraph at lines 34 to 36 as well as 47 to 51. Her systematic, formulaic approach also extended to the choice of words commonly used in a report on fights and arguments from lines 40 to 43.

The excerpt is also characterized by its “‘performative’ talk”⁸ (Luke, et al., 2005, p. 69) as demonstrated in the pseudo, recall type questions she posed to the class (e.g. lines 15, 27, 36 and 43, and 45), except at lines 41 and 42, where she posed an ‘pseudo’ question (*So what are the words associated with fight and argument?*). However, she did not wait for students to respond to her question. Instead, she told them the answers straightaway. It is also interesting to note that at line 23, her monologic-centred instruction (Wells & Arauz, 2006) was interrupted by S2, who asked her about the difference between a ‘comment’ and an ‘opinion’. Again, she could have invited the rest of the class to contribute any input to the question, but resorted to telling S2 the answer. Equally worthwhile to note is that, in lines 31 and 32, she raised her voice at Kevin and told him to move back to his original seat when she saw that he had exchanged seats with another classmate. Apparently, it was a repeated offence since she had addressed the matter with him earlier. This episode suggested that Belle was very concerned with maintaining a disciplined order in class.

On other occasions, as was illustrated in Excerpt 5.2, it was observed that there were more instances of teacher-student exchanges:

⁸ ‘Performative Talk’ is talk that focuses on the use of closed questions by the teacher to test student knowledge and/or understanding and the efforts of students to give the right answer... In effect, it is talk dominated by the logic of transmission and reproduction.

Excerpt 5.2 17 September 2010

	Belle	[I try to fix up the camera on the tripod. The class has just settled down for the lesson.]
1		What are the three big (2) big threes? Can you remember?
2	S1	Inform. Persuade. Entertain.
3	Belle	The purpose of a speech is to be persuasive in nature, convince
4		people through one's argument. The big THREES: Inform,
5		Persuade, Entertain. (2) OK, recap: what are some of the examples?
6		You have : : incident reports, training sessions, and this morning,
7		this morning, the two sports leaders, they informed you about?
8	Jason	Nazirah rocks (??)
9	S2	Nazirah rocks. Nazirah rocks.
		[Tittering can be heard in the background]
10	Belle	Which class?
11	S2	1M.
12	Belle	[OK, 1M.
13	S2	The rocking class].
14	Belle	Sec 1. (2) She's a VERY good example of a good speaker. I'm very
15		impressed. OK, next. Hm, on the second slide (of the handout) will
16		be persuade. Persuasive, which I mentioned yesterday: job
17		interviews, sale representations, and we also talked about asking for
18		funding. Or you want to set up a guitar club, and then you want to (
19) your fellow Mayflower students to come and support you right?
20		So, you must tell them why, the purpose...Now, I'm running very
21		fast because we've done this before. All right...Now, this is about a
22		written text: your speech OK but in the written form cos in the exam,
23		even though they asked you to prepare a speech right, you still have
24		to write it down alright? So, the title would be centralized,
25		underlined, or capitalized. Right away from the title, you get to
26		know what the speaker is going to talk about. Greeting
27		audience..then you need to go through the hierarchy – who is more
28		important first. You get me?
		[She refers to her slides.]
29		Followed by introduction of yourself..Let's say, you're representing
30		the Student Council. Then you have to say, "I'm from the Student
31		Council." Because they are representing the sports leaders who
32		embraces the what?
33	S4	Health.
34	Belle	Healthy living. Sports and all that. OK, (2) Objectives; Purpose;
35		Topic of your Speech; Position of Your Issue; Preview of Your Main

36		Points; That's under intro. (2) Body. Main points: details,
37		experiences...Now refer to your handout. We go back to the speech
38		from Animal Farm. What do you think are the features of this speech
39		here? Think about it. If you are a good speaker, you want to capture
40		the attention of the audience, sometimes you have to repeat your : :
41		content. If you look at Obama's speech, how many of you did
42		google and look at his speech? (2) There are many speeches by him.
43		He always repeats his final statement. Why do you think he wants to
44		do that?
45	Kevin	End with a bang.
46	Belle	End with a very deep impression so that the audience will
47		remember...Alright, refer to page 2. Identify where this is coming
48		from..Before I give you the answer, what do you think are the
49		characteristics of this speech here, this part here?
50	Dinesh	Ask for ().
51	Belle	Very good. And do you answer it?
52	Dinesh	No.
53	Belle	So what kind of question do you call this?
54	S5	Rhetorical questions.

5.4.2 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 5.2

Before the start of the lesson proper, Jason was asked to present a graduation speech assigned to the class from the previous lesson. The class was unusually boisterous as they clapped and cheered for him every now and then. It was a very relaxed scene until Belle began the lesson proper by checking the content of the previous lesson at a quick pace (lines 20 and 21). She recapped the function of speeches, and related the real life instances, such as job interviews, campaign elections and even the speech Nazirah of Class 1M made on the podium in front of the parade square at which the entire school assembled for the flag raising ceremony every morning (lines 6 and 7). This feature of making students recall the content of earlier lessons was also one of the characteristics of her teaching (e.g., lines 1, 5 and 53). Throughout the lesson, the scaffolding template and her PowerPoint slides were used as procedural tools (Englert, et al., 2006) to facilitate her teaching on the structure of the genre of a formal speech.

At line 23, her talk was directed to the End-of-Year exam as Belle pointed out to the class the structure and style of writing a speech and also reminded them of the possibility of having to write a speech in the exam, as if in an attempt to get the class to pay serious attention. As in Excerpt 5.1, we see that she was systematically prescriptive in her lesson delivery as she emphasized the linguistic features and style of presenting a formal speech (e.g., line 24 to 37). Eventually, after 19 turns of talk, at line 38, she asked a question (*What do you think are the features of this speech here?*), which serves to reinforce the rhetorical features she raised in her performative talk. This time, it was seen that she engaged with the students more in IRF format, although she still maintained the control of the floor with extensive talk. At lines 41 to 44, however, she further attempted to engage the class in exploratory talk when she probed them to answer her earlier question. This was an indication of knowledge building through making connection with sources outside the text. Her question at line 44 (*Why do you think he wants to do that?*) also reflects a slightly higher degree of cognition required as she urged the students to think about one critical strategy speakers use to create impressions on the audience. The question then led Kevin and two other students to respond (turns 45, 50 and 52) to her questions. What ensued was a short episode of slightly more exchanges between the students and Belle.

Excerpt 5.3 17 September 2010

1	Belle	For conclusion, how do you end the conclusion? Anyone? How do
2		you end your : : speech?
4	S6	Repeat your original points.
5	Belle	You have to summarize your main points again and then end : :
6		with a bang, to give that lasting ending impression alright before
7		you go (2) A simple statement is far more effective than a long one

8		because when you are speaking, the audience may lose the fluency
9		(?)...Wait, (2) take this down : : do you have this erm : : in your
10		hand out?
		<i>[The slide reads “Imagine you are on a cruise and the ship is sinking in 20 minutes time. Write a speech worth 2 minutes long to convince the rest of your passengers why your group should be saved. Use all three pointers in your speech (refer to At a Glance slide.]</i>
11	Ss	Cher ⁹ , cher ()
12	S7	People die already!
13	Kevin	Doesn’t make sense. Everyone should be saved.
14	Belle	All right. Take this down first. You don’t have this in your hand
15		out. I don’t think so. OK, (2) Find a space in the bottom to take
16		down this activity which you are going to do. Now, if there’s not
17		enough space, you may want to write on foolscap papers and staple
18		together. That forms a set of your speech hand out, alright?
		<i>[The class is busily copying the instructions. Some students are talking amongst themselves while copying the question.]</i>
19		Not very authentic but this is fun to do. (2) If you are about to die : :
20		but this is just a fun activity (2) but never mind, write it down : :
21	Ivan	What do you mean by your group should be saved?
22	Kevin	Cher, can’t say that (). Cher, cher, cher!
23	Belle	There are only so few life boats, so who should be allowed to use
24		them?
25	S7	Women.
26	Belle	I thought this is not exactly the (), Ivan. Have you taken it down?
27	Ivan	Yes, I’m taking it down.
28	Belle	Once you have done it, I want you to revise : : You can take a read
29		at (page) 7, 8 and 9 one more time. Revisit the notes, huh? Very
30		important. Take a look at the scaffold one more time...Ready?
31		Attention, class. Look up! Yesterday, we also covered one
32		important component on language features. What are those? For
33		example?... You make use of : : Start with the letter C?
34	S8	Content.
35	S9	Connectors.
36	Belle	Connectors. Very good. Skim your notes. Alright? And what are
37		the dos and don’ts?...Don’ts first. Seng Chew, tell me one
38		don’t...Can you see slang?

⁹ A Singlish term popular amongst students of neighbourhood schools which means ‘teacher’.

39	Ss	No : :
40	Belle	Can you use contracted form?
41		Yes, you are allowed to use contracted forms in the speech only.
42		You get me? OK.
43	Ss	Yes!
44	Belle	OK, let's look at the writing task.
		[She begins to read from the slide.]
45		<i>The Principal has agreed to an overseas educational trip in the</i>
46		<i>holidays. The Secondary Four students are given an opportunity to</i>
47		<i>learn new knowledge and invaluable experience that is not covered</i>
48		<i>in the school curriculum. (2) Now, let's say there are two countries,</i>
49		<i>and you as the class chairman, alright, ah you, you're going to</i>
50		<i>deliver a speech 'why most of the classmates have chosen one but</i>
51		<i>not the other?' OK?</i>
		[The class quietly reads the question.]
52		Now, there is no right answer. All right? Remember, er, the big
53		threes? The focus is to persuade your classmate why this choice is
54		better than the other. (2) You have to inform them why the other
55		choice is not better than the choice you have chosen. And, are you
56		going to add in any entertainment in this speech?
57	S10	No.
58	Belle	Not necessary. This is not the purpose so we inform and (2)
59		persuade. Now, I do not want you to do in groups. I think pair work
60		will do, OK? Now, before you discuss with your partner next to you
61		: : be very clear (about) your task before you discuss with your
62		partner...At the end of it, the two of you decide on which country
63		you want to go. All right, start now.

5.4.3 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 5.3

As in the previous excerpts, Belle gave explicit reminders on using the appropriate register in a formal speech before introducing an activity that was not featured in their handouts at line 10. They were to imagine that the ship they were travelling on was sinking, and they had to make a speech, applying the 'big THREES' discussed in the previous lesson (see Excerpt 5.2) to convince their fellow passengers why they and their partner deserved to be saved. The activity seemed to generate some excitement from the

students, particularly Kevin and Ivan (lines 13, 21 and 22). However, what seemed fun was abruptly terminated, and Belle reverted to her ritual of emphasizing the do's and don'ts in writing a speech (lines 33 to 44). Just like previous occasions, the questions she posed mostly required students to recall and reproduce one-word answers. We also see that she emphasized the practice of good work habits in her students when she reminded the class to write the question on foolscap papers and staple those pages together (lines 16 to 18). Again, we see her use of regulatory discourse to exert control over Ivan's behaviour (lines 26 and 27).

Perhaps this exercise, though 'fun', was not considered 'authentic' enough to prepare the class for the actual types of questions tested in the exams (lines 19 and 20). If the exercise had been pursued, it might have facilitated the development of a higher level of epistemic agency whereby students "assume responsibility for the advancement of their knowledge and inquiry" (Luke, et al., 2005, p. 62). Instead, the class was asked to work on the actual task (lines 44 to 56), which involved them writing a speech to convince the Principal to allow them to travel to the country of their choice for educational exchange. A noteworthy point is that Belle stressed that the students should be 'very clear about' their choice of country before discussing it with their partners (lines 60 to 62) in the unstructured pair work. This seemed to discourage student-to-student dialogues from which they constructed and negotiated meanings, although it was also likely that Belle wanted to minimize unproductive time during discussions as she found that the class was 'rowdy' when they were doing group work (Interview, 5 August). Students like Ivan felt that group and pair work was fun, but he too thought that they would not help the class to achieve as much at the end of the day. This understanding that group work activities were

‘uncoordinated’ was why Dinesh preferred to do individual seat work instead. Thus, embedded in the class culture was that fun activities or group work were not efficacious for ‘true’ learning.

5.5 Summary: The Writing Culture in Class M

In sum, two main features that have come to define the way writing practices were constructed in Class M can be highlighted. Firstly, whole class lecture was predominant, and IRF interaction with individual students brief and un-sustained. This aligns with the observation made by Vaish (2008), and Liu and Hong (2009) on the nature of interactional patterns occurring in the typical Singapore classroom. In general, Belle’s pattern of interaction with the class can be characterized in this order:

- i. Teacher extensive talk
- ii. Teacher initiation
- iii. Student response
- iv. Teacher feedback and continuing of extensive talk
- v. Teacher initiation
- vi. Student response
- vii. Goes back to iv until instruction is finished and students begin to do individual or pair work

With the exception of a few instances of exploratory and connecting talk shown in Excerpt 5.2, there was a dominance of performative talk in Belle’s instructional activities, with constant emphasis on appropriate as well as unacceptable structures and features of text types in the form of do’s and don’ts. Further, the questions Belle posed to the class were generally ‘pseudo’ as opposed to authentic. For example, her question about ‘5W and 1H’ at line 16 in Excerpt 5.1 was really a reminder for the class to fall back on the strategy to develop the overall outline of an incident report. Although her use of recall

type questions was thought to reinforce the procedural support needed for writing the text types, there was nevertheless a lack of joint construction of knowledge or negotiation of meaning (Christie, 2002) in the overall discourse pattern of teacher-student interactions.

Secondly, Belle's instruction was considered to revolve around acceptable work habits and standards such as 'two-finger spacing', and her reprimanding of Kevin for moving to someone else's seat in class. Talk related to exam and assessments, which researchers like Kramer-Dahl (2007) have referred to as "the knowledge that seemed to have the greatest currency in the English classroom" (p.54), also surfaced repeatedly in the interviews and classroom observations.

The two main features of the discourse in Belle's class implied that students learnt to do writing in an instrumental manner, and in turn this curtailed students' sense of epistemic or discursive agency, such that they did not own their writing. For example in Dinesh's case, writing for pleasure was certainly not a part of his cultural experience (Sripathy, 2007); what counted as purposeful writing, as advised by his mother, was composition writing in assessment books.

Lastly, it is important to point out that all this is not meant to suggest that Belle was 'unthinking', and merely submitted herself to the dominant discourse of standards and pragmatism in order to carry on as usual her work in the classroom. In fact, it was her sense of agency that led her to enact the writing practices in Class M by engaging her students with good, acceptable writing behaviour.

6 INSIDE CLASS S

6.1 Overview

In this chapter, I continue describing the characteristics of the focal participants in Class S and their teacher as well as the writing lessons and instructional activities which took place in the classroom. As in the previous chapter, the transcripts of classroom interactions were first analysed and coded using the IRF sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Following that, key themes and concepts were developed and synthesized. In so doing, I continue to present my analysis of the class as a “cultural entity” (Allwright & Bailey, 2004, p. 1).

6.2 A Description of the Classroom and Focal Participants

6.2.1 The focal classroom

Class S was situated on the third floor of the N(A) block, which was behind the E block. The right side of the classroom overlooked the science laboratories while some classrooms in the E block could be seen on the left. Essentially, the layout of the furniture in the classroom was the same as that for Class M. While students in Class M were seated in single rows, students in Class S were seated in twos, except for two students (who were also focal participants) at the back of the middle rows who were seated separate from each other. Like the students in Class M, they were expected to remain in their designated seats and not allowed to exchange seats with each other during English class. However, some of them had perpetually refused to comply with Jenny’s rule, and Jenny usually had to reprimand them each time they broke the rule.

The classroom was decorated albeit in a less eye-catching manner, compared to Class M. In this case, the large notice board at the back of the classroom was covered with pieces of A4 sized coloured art paper, except that it was not entirely covered, revealing the parts of the original board at the bottom. Notices or materials related to various academic subjects were pinned up on the covered parts of the board. A metal cupboard in which the students kept some of their books stood on the left of the notice board. To the right, a huge cut-out of the heading '7 Habits of Effective People' was pasted on the wall, probably as part of the Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) curriculum. Below the heading, the individual seven habits were featured. The students had pinned up their personal targets for the End-of-Year exams further down the wall. They also kept a duty roster, like their peers in Class M, for cleaning up the classroom. However, it was observed that the two brooms at the front corner of the class were usually left lying on the floor. On more than one occasion, crushed papers were seen near the waste paper basket placed next to the brooms. Nevertheless, the tables were usually arranged in neat rows and there were no signs of graffiti. Overall, the most significant difference between Class M and Class S is that the latter was not as keen as the former in greeting me each time I stepped into the class and appeared lethargic. Overall, the atmosphere also seemed to be charged with 'negative energy' on almost all my visits.

6.2.2 The focal participants

There were two interviews conducted with the focal participants: Diyana, Chee Seng, Gabriel and Akmal. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the study whilst the second interview was conducted after the completion of the writing

intervention task (see Chapter 9) primarily to elicit feedback on the task. The descriptions presented on the participants and classroom setting were mainly based on the first interview.

Diyana was a seventeen year old Malay female, who rated herself as low-engaged in writing. A vivacious teenager, she was older than her classmates by two years as she had only just resumed schooling in 2008 after being expelled from her former school and put on remand at a Girls' Home for juvenile crimes in 2006. After her discharge, her mother, who did some casual work part-time, had tried speaking to several schools in the area and Mayflower Secondary School was the only one that agreed to take her in. Diyana described her family as 'normal' even though her parents were divorced, and she had been living with her mother, stepfather and step-siblings since. All her step-siblings were in their late twenties or early thirties. She implied that she did not get along with her step-siblings, especially the youngest step-brother when she said that she would 'show him she was better than him in many ways'.

Diyana was very open to me throughout both interviews. She considered herself mediocre in academic studies and had no intention to pursue further education in a polytechnic. Her ambition after graduating from Mayflower was to take up graphic design, an unusual pathway for many of her peers. Being rewarded by the school for a trip to Jogjakarta, Indonesia for her good conduct was the happiest thing that happened to her for the year. Throughout the interview, she spoke of wanting to 'prove' to others that she could 'make it', thus indicating that she was motivated to succeed in life, though she could not explain how she was going to do that except 'work harder'.

Diyana did not enjoy English class particularly because of Jenny. She disapproved of her teaching and managerial style and most importantly, her favouritism towards the Chinese students in the class. She also claimed that the majority of the class shared her sentiment. From what was observed in class, she behaved aggressively towards some of her classmates when they became too noisy, or when they had annoyed her (see Excerpt 6.1). Her main language spoken at home remained Malay, except that when she was quarrelling with her mother, they would do so in English. As far as writing was concerned, she used to write regularly to her mother when she was on remand at the Girls' Home. Apart from that, she did not have the habit of writing especially since grammatical problems were a hindrance to her.

Chee Seng's questionnaire responses put him in the high-engaged category. Both his parents were part-time badminton coaches. When I first saw him, he had three ear holes, suggesting that he wore ear studs – something forbidden by the school. He told me that he started wearing them in primary school, but because it was against the school rule in Mayflower, he had to put 'sticks' through his ear holes so as to keep the holes from closing up. He reasoned that 'everybody is doing it' in the school; thus piercing ear holes and wearing ear studs was 'nothing to be surprised of', despite it being an offence in the school. Chee Seng like Diyana expressed a motivation to succeed in school and in life. He added that his performance in the MYE improved from the previous year. In particular, he was very pleased with his performance in his PoA (Principles of Accounting) which he took as a private candidate outside the school. His English teacher, Jenny, on the other hand, thought that he was 'a smart Alec' since he was actually quite disengaged in her class, sometimes even rude to her. Chee Seng apparently thought that he was

disadvantaged by the 'rigid' school system when the school did not allow him to take up PoA in secondary three because of his poor secondary two end-of-year examination results, thus depriving him a chance to 'prove' himself.

Being a school badminton team player, Chee Seng spent a lot of his time after school hours training for inter-school tournaments. He also took up part-time coaching in primary schools for which he received some regular income. Chee Seng did not consider English a content subject like the others, and he did not know 'what to study' for the exam. Where the four skills were concerned, he accorded more significance to speaking than writing. He perceived that 'it's on how you speak outside, and what kind of English you use outside' that made a difference to one's linguistic competency (interview, 12 August, 2010). When asked what he thought of his writing class, which he described as 'boring', he strongly felt that amongst all the text types taught at school, formal letters were most useful for his vocational needs in the area of business management or accounting. In particular, he felt that it was quite sufficient to learn the 'format' of different types of letters rather than doing other genres of writing. Apart from the writing activities in class, he basically did not engage in any form of writing except when he was texting his friends on his phone.

Gabriel was a medium-engaged writer though he had topped the class in the recent MYE. His father worked as a driver at a government agency while his mother was a sales promoter in a departmental store in town. Gabriel told me about the difficult relationships in his family. His parents sometimes fought with each other and his second sister, who often came home late, would fly into a rage when questioned by his parents though she was their favourite child. Being the youngest amongst his four siblings, he did not feel his

parents thought much of him since they had high hopes for his eldest brother as he was the ‘smartest’ in the family. Given the conflicts in the family, he found school to be a place to get away from the problems at home though the class was often ‘slack’ in discipline, and ‘noisy’. A good friend of Chee Seng, he was observed talking to him during class, although they had been made to sit separate from each other. However, he claimed that they had stopped hanging out together for some time as Chee Seng had new friends from other classes, and he had since turned ‘wild’.

Gabriel spoke mainly Mandarin and Hokkien with his parents and sometimes English with his siblings at home. He regarded his written English as better than his oral English though he hardly engaged in writing outside of school except blogging. He preferred to do comprehension questions and did not like any writing activities, especially the drills on past exam papers Jenny made the class go through. Where text types were concerned, he perceived reports or formal letters, which required the mastery of ‘format’ or ‘structure’, the easiest to cope with. Any other types of writing such as narratives which required a ‘free form’ would be hard from him to manage. He had no negative opinions about Jenny or her teaching, though he felt that she should provide more explanations and contextualization to their writing topics instead of just getting them to ‘look at slides and copy on paper’.

Akmal was Malay and medium-engaged with writing. He was the President of the school’s Environmental Champion Club, one of the Core Curricular Activities which advocated public awareness about environmental issues and good eco-friendly practices. He told me he was elected President of his club because he had ‘a lot of knowledge’ of environmental issues and had effective leadership skills. His father, who worked at a

power plant, and his mother, an employee at a bank, were very supportive of his involvement in the Environmental Champion Club, but they often reminded him not to neglect his studies. Like some of his peers, he had already made up his mind about his future vocation. He wanted to be an engineer after obtaining a diploma in the polytechnic. He showed himself to be very motivated when he told me he topped the class for Maths in MYE and said he needed to ‘concentrate on’ his studies and not get distracted when his friends asked him out to play soccer.

He described his writing ability as ‘perfectly okay’ if he made the effort to plan his draft and ‘memorize’ the formats of the functional text types Jenny taught. He thought that reading comprehension was his only weak area as the ‘passages are hard to understand’. Insofar as the whole class was concerned, he found the noise annoying, and Jenny usually became so distracted that the teaching became disrupted. He also commented that Jenny’s lessons were usually teacher-centred, involving the board and PowerPoint slides.

6.2.3 The teacher

Jenny was a young teacher who had been teaching Geography and English for three years at the school since she graduated from teacher training. Before becoming a full-fledged teacher, she was involved with relief and short-term contract teaching at other schools. The school where Jenny had previously taught was a very reputable one. She was proud that she had ‘taught with passion’ at that time; by contrast, she described her first year at Mayflower a ‘culture shock’. When asked why, she cited the large population of non-Chinese students and staff members, particularly referring to the Malays, for creating

a different school ethos from her previous school. Over time, she found the school culture in Mayflower lacking the spirit of motivation as well as collegiality amongst students and staff members respectively. She went on to explain:

The school (former school) culture promotes chinese language and chinese festivals seem to be a lot more prominent...Work culture: the teachers are more willing to help and strike a balance between work and life after work. It is basically a healthier culture whereby people are friendlier and happier as well. Students are of a higher order thinking skills and pose less disciplinary issue...

(Interview, 5 October 2010)

Gradually, teaching at Mayflower seemed 'like a job' to her, compared to the rewarding experiences she had at her former school.

As the co-homeroom teacher of Class S, Jenny did not have to be responsible for providing pastoral care or getting in touch with her students' parents. Instead, she usually assisted her homeroom teacher with attendance taking and 'chasing' students for medical certificates as valid excuses for absence from class. Unlike Belle, who knew her students well, she seemed unable to pinpoint the weakness or strengths of particular students' writing or the Mean Subject Grade (MSG) expected of the class. Neither was she aware of her department's on-going remedial classes or enrichment programme conducted by an outside agency, except that she had nominated students for the enrichment programme earlier in the year.

Jenny did not engage in personal writing apart from blogging on the Internet occasionally, and her writing experience largely consisted of writing compositions in her school days when she would compete with classmates for higher marks for each writing assignment. Unlike Belle who employed a somewhat eclectic approach to teaching writing, she was fixed on a strictly genre approach (see 1.2.6), skipping the drafting

process since it was the end product that mattered. Like Belle, she organized her teaching according to the structure of the text types and grammar. She expressed her belief in drilling the students on the ‘format and style’ of writing the functional text types, particularly formal letters for which the question ‘is more predictable’. To her, what mattered most in teaching writing to Class S was the delivery of basic instrumental knowledge and the technique of reproducing ‘predictable’ text types. To her, ‘good’ writing practices also included neat handwriting, adequate word length and correct grammar. Most important of all, the writing should not be ‘out of point’, but stick to the requirement of the question. Asked if she had attempted assigning expository writing to the class, she invoked deficit and readiness arguments by claiming that the inculcation of metacognitive skills, and advanced literate behaviour was beyond the standard of the class:

Perhaps some of them aware that they can only manage so much. Ya, perhaps some of them are like that and because taking the O levels means being subject to the usual academic style of learning...they do not want : : to be subject to another year of you know, all those writing, theoretical work.

(Interview, 28 July, 2010)

Throughout the two interviews, she consistently expressed her ‘helplessness’ over the ‘low-level products’ the class submitted. Despite the scaffolding she usually provided before each writing task, she found that she still needed to go to different individuals and ‘describe to them what exactly’ was to be done ‘before they can understand’. She reasoned, ‘I would say they see the scaffolding as theory. After that, (when) I want them to apply them to actual writing, they might find it difficult to link.’ (Interview, 28 July 2010). She lamented that:

They don't read..they don't read. They speak in other languages other than English. The things they read are unhealthy. That's why they're unable to get ideas and there's no point in telling them to speak English in class because they can't, and their family, for our school, they don't really..how do I explain huh? They don't speak English at home. Their parents don't really care about the language and everything. There's no encouragement from the parents.

(Interview, 28 July 2010)

Her comments suggest that pedagogy was not so much an issue for the class's under-performance. Rather, she alluded to the students' disposition and attitude, or their collective habitus (Albright & Luke, 2008; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Kramsch, 2008) for making them, in her own words, 'like that' – disengaged, problematic and deficient in school's literacy expectations. In fact, many times during the interviews, Jenny conveyed a sense of resignation towards the disengagement of the class. She felt that if one was motivated to learn, there would be tangible results regardless:

Actually we tried to help them. We made all those er posters and we pasted them on the board and guided them on the simple errors they made, and we can also do so much.

(Interview, 5 October 2010)

To make things worse, she lacked the ability to manage the class, especially the Malay male students who were notorious for their ill-discipline. She commented:

I think ... probably, they don't fear me. I'm not those kinds of very fierce teachers. If I'm very, very firm and very fierce, probably, they could have done even better.

(Interview, 5 October 2010)

Still, Jenny thought that some of her students were really 'beyond help' when she commented:

But if I was to throw people out, I'd like to throw Faizal out...I cannot stand the way he communicates with me. I don't know why he's so rude. If I'm talking

about attitude, they're not so bad la. It's really the quality of work they produce. If they want them to be in class, they're just there. You have no idea if they're learning things or not.

(Interview, 5 October, 2010)

The implication here is also that if the students came from better homes, it would have made them better learners, and the school would have better results. While it cannot be denied that home backgrounds are positively related to the students' performance at school, Jenny's perceptions of her class of low achievers seems to concur with research on deficit thinking, which reports of teachers' tendency to blame students' poor behaviour and academic results on their home backgrounds (see 1.2.8.1).

Over time, Jenny actually developed what seemed like a coping mechanism to deal with the class's disengaged behaviour, which was to ignore them and continue teaching. After I left the school when the field work had finished, I learnt that Jenny fell out of favour with her HoD in the English Language Department. It seemed that 'things got harder' for her, and she was also given a fail grade in her appraisal report. As it was impossible to redress the misunderstanding between them, she applied for transfer to another school. She added that a few of her colleagues also left to go to 'another school with more Chinese' and where there was less 'comparing and plotting...to do people in'.

6.3 The Classroom Scheme of Work

Like Class M, students in Class S also used the materials compiled for their Writing Modules handout. In particular, writing lessons were planned around one designated text type at a time. For the Secondary 3 N(A) stream, the required text types

specified in the year's schemes of work included predominately the functional ones such as formal letter and report writing, narratives and personal recounts, with two weeks devoted to personal response essays in the second semester. Similar to students in Secondary 3 E, those in Secondary 3 N(A) shared the same assessment format which comprised free writing and situation-based writing (see Appendix 11).

In the five classroom lessons I observed prior to the implementation of the writing intervention task, Jenny covered one personal response text type, a formal letter and an information report. She also conducted a mock Common Test with the class. Earlier in the year, they had done three narratives, one police report, one incident report and one formal letter. Like Class M, the students also used a commercially produced assessment book for discrete vocabulary practice.

6.4 Preliminary Discussion of Classroom Discourse and Patterns of Interactions

Classroom instruction in Jenny's writing class was mostly characterized by whole class lecture if not independent writing. Jenny, like Belle, usually began teaching the cycle of writing by scaffolding the structure of a particular text type with the class. To do that, she relied on PowerPoint slides to go through her notes with the class. For example, in Excerpt 6.1, Jenny briefly provided some contextualization on the nature of a personal response essay before introducing its organizational structure. It shows a mostly teacher-centred talk, frequently disrupted by various individuals.

Excerpt 6.1 28 July 2010

1	Jenny	I've already asked you to compare the two essays. So, you basically look at the types of tenses that they use. This one is (opinion). It is unlike personal recounts whereby you've to recount something that happened in the past. So, your stance is still very clear-cut, what you want...And look at the words they use to connect the compo: finally, next, first, foremost, unless...The first point your first stance, you just use firstly, elaboration, then lastly, in addition..The last one, the last paragraph, you can use 'in conclusion'...So, over here, I need you to use words like 'I'. This is very important, especially if the compo requires you to use your own personal opinion, and note the tone must be formal..not supposed to use slangs or Singlish.
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14	S1	Ya ::
15	Jenny	Now, Rizduan I don't want you to sit like that. You go back to your own place...Rizduan, come back..ONE,TWO, THREE..
16		
17		
		[Rizduan slowly gets up and moves back to his original seat. A student echoing 'one, two, three' in the background]
16		Why are some of you still on this page? I thought I've already shown you (? ?) the other lesson?
17		
18	S2	//You know why? (2) I don't know why.
19	Jenny	I have two more periods. Gabriel, what is the language you're using?
20		
		[students giggling in the background]
21	Chee Seng	Cher, your Chinese not bad ah!
		[Ss giggle in the background.]
22	S3	Cher, what page is this huh?
23	Jenny	Noor, write faster. Nazira? Taufiq? This is the one number five (??). Muhammed, why are you standing up? Throw it inside the rubbish bin. I don't to see it again. (2) Can I move on to the next slide?
24		
25		
26		
27	Ss	No ::
28	S4	Yes ::
29	Diyana	SHUT UP la!

6.4.1 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 6.1

From lines 1 to 13, Jenny's talk was clearly performative. She told the class what she wanted to see in their writing by explicitly pointing out the distinct language features of a personal response essay in her slides, particularly concerning the appropriate tenses, linkers, and registers using declarative verbs (*I need you*, line 10). One gets the impression that the monologic-centred instruction (Wells & Arauz, 2006) was largely unidirectional as she was telling the class the answers and the students were preoccupied with copying her model answers from her PowerPoint slides at the same time. Some students were 'mucking around' or moving about when they were expected to quietly copy down her model answers onto their Writing Modules handouts. For example, from turns 15 to 17, Rizduan had moved to another seat (so he could talk to another student) without Jenny's permission. She then told him to get back to his original place. Likewise, in lines 19, 20, 23, 24, 25 and 29, various other individuals were seen disrupting the lesson. What was observed therefore aligned with the accounts given by Chee Seng and Akmal that often these disruptions were so noisy that it became quite 'unconducive for learning'. Perhaps this need to keep the noise level down made Diyana shout at her classmates. Whenever that happened, Jenny would, in her words, 'stop the lesson and control them'. As in lines 24 and 25, Jenny used a regulatory tone, characterized by the use of imperatives, to get Muhammed to keep to classroom order. In fact, it was observed that particular individuals were always defiant of Jenny's authority so that she often resorted to using regulative discourse to assert her control.

Let us turn to look at how the rest of the lesson developed in Excerpt 6.2.

Excerpt 6.2 28 July 2010

1	Jenny	(), put that away...All right. Next, so the breakdown of
2		structure..listen, listen. I'm going to teach you exactly what it
3		means. So example, I need an introductory statement, so this
4		one will tell you what the essay is about, what points you will
5		be making. So thesis statement, 'I believe that', 'In my
6		opinion'. So, you can start off with something like these. (),
7		you're talking all the while. I can see : : OK. Body. Over here,
8		I've already mentioned. For each paragraph in the body, the
9		first statement will be the topic sentence. And this one contains
10		the main idea of what the paragraph is going to talk about.
11		And after having the topic sentence, subsequently, after the few
12		paragraphs will be the evidence of supporting details. So, it is
13		to develop on the main ideas. And you can also have
14		elaboration, facts, evidence, explanation, reason. It can also be
15		information from newspapers, magazine, news that you've
16		heard or read (2). And, over here, you need at least three
17		points, which means at least three paragraphs for the body. All
18		right, for the closing statement, what you can do is you
19		reinstate the main idea. So, the three ideas you brought up in
20		the body, you just repeat them again so that the argument will
21		be stronger. OK. Next one, for those of you who are done, you
22		can look at next page. I think I've already asked you to look at
23		this essay. Now, what I want you to do is to identify the
24		structure of this essay. That means, by the side, you tell me
25		which one is the introduction? Which one is the thesis
26		statement, followed by the body. Which paragraph belongs to
27		the body? What are the topic statements? And also the
28		conclusion, what is the closing statement? How long would
29		you need for this? Five minutes?
30	Faizal	No : : One hour.
		[Ss laughing in background]
31	Jenny	Five minutes. You identify as many of them in the given
32		sample.
33	Faizal	Cannot la, cher. I underline the whole compo, can?

6.4.2 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 6.2

Using the two sample essays in the Writing Modules handout, Jenny went on to focus on the organizational structure of the personal response text type, beginning with the introduction and finishing with the conclusion after she had stated to the class the

specific structures associated with the text type. From lines 2 to 22, she explicitly pointed out, in a ‘theoretical’ sense (see p152) the features associated with the text type: topic sentence, supporting details, elaboration, facts and evidence and the giving of explanation. She also reminded the class that each paragraph should contain one main idea. Finally, for the closing statement, the main idea of the thesis statement should be restated. To finish off with the scaffolding part of her teaching, the class was asked to do a decoding exercise (lines 23 to 29) in which they identified various generic features of a personal response essay in the Writing Modules handouts. All this time, there was no exchange between teacher and students involving in-depth talk related to the text or writing as she did not invite students to contribute their inputs. By this time, the students were still engaged in mechanical copying, and it was doubtful as to whether they actually understood her instructions since she had to address questions from various individuals during the individual decoding exercise that ensued.

In Excerpt 6.3, a slightly higher level of teacher-student interaction was observed whereby Jenny attempted to involve the students in talk about some unusual occupations, which served as the contextual background to writing up an information report:

Excerpt 6.3 2 September 2010

1	Jenny	I have not finished, wa. So, this is what I’ve done the previous week
		[She flashes the old materials up on document camera.]
2		Imfran, put the newspapers away..We have touched on these:
3		undertaker, hypnotist,..and I’ve also given you a worksheet on : :
4		pilot, right? Look at the educational level – what is the job
5		requirement?..So, basically, who exactly is the hypnotist? He’s
6		someone who conducts therapies...so that he can help you. (2) Put

7		that away. Mardiana, what is that? Put it away. Listen first. All
8		right, and you look at the second one. Optometrist. What exactly is
9		this? Anyone wants to guess?..What is this term?..Faris and Zaid,
10		ONE MORE TIME, I'LL SEND YOU OUT OF THE CLASS!!
11		
12	S1	Oh oh.
13	Jenny	Tell me what does the optometrist do? Who understands? Yes?
14	S2	[Eyes.
15	S3	Spectacles.]
16	Jenny	Yes. A person who can practise : : looking at your degree and
17		prescribing spectacles for you.
18	Rashid	Cher, I've no problem ()
19	Jenny	So, this is what the person will do..Psychiatrist. He is a medical
20		doctor that deals with () emotional and behavioural disorder. Can
21		you see the patient lying down? Over here, the patient will tell him
22		what kind of disorder he's having.
23	S3	Sleeping disorder.
24	Jenny	Psychologist. This person compared to the previous one is not
25		medically trained but he's able to offer some counselling to deal
26		with the emotional and behavioural problems...he'll go through
27		some counselling with the patient..
		[T shows a cartoon. Ss show interest in the picture.]
28	S1	Cher, why ()?
29	Jenny	And look at this advertisement <i>I'm trying to look for a suitable</i>
30		<i>candidate here: Someone with loose limbs and can fit into a 60 cm</i>
31		<i>bottle.</i> Rashid, you want to try?
32	Rashid	Nooo. Cher, got nothing better to do ah?
33	Jenny	So you look at the person doing the job. Is he going to be a
34		performer?
35	S3	A freak. A freak.
36	Jenny	All right, basically, we conduct this lesson is to help you set long
37		term goals. What kind of career do you want to go into? Chee
38		Seng, what kind of career do you want?
39	Chee Seng	Manager.
40	Jenny	Mohammed?
41	S1	He don't know yet.
42	Jenny	Don't know yet. Or rather, what kind of courses do you want to
		go?
43	Mohammed	Building ()
44	Jenny	Building and Real Estate. Zahidah, what about you? Put that away
45		first. Those boys over that, can you stop your ()? You want, you
46		talk to me.
		[Ss begin to titter in the background.]

47	Zahidah	Manager. Manager.
48	Jenny	By now, class, look here, look here. Some of you want to be
49		manager. Some of you want to be lawyer. But what exactly do you
50		need?
51	S5	Study?
52	Jenny	Study for the academic qualifications right? And also, the right
53		kind of attitude – how are you going to present yourselves during
54		the interview. Some time next year..Nazirah! you have to think
55		about the kind of jobs you have to do, and you can't always be
56		studying throughout.
		[More tittering in the background.]
57	Faizal	Cher, can go Poly you know? No need to do N level.
58	Jenny	All right, so back to this and you decide on what you want to do.
59		So, do you have these courses in Poly and ITE? Think about your
60		future.
61	S3	Cry. Crying.
62	Jenny	So, over here I have one YouTube video..This is a job interview
63		and it is really bad. I hope you can hear the sound.

6.4.3 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 6.3

Following the previous lesson, Jenny continued to illustrate some unusual occupations (as perceived by Singaporeans) which included hypnotists and performers/entertainers. She started off by giving the class the definition of each, accompanied by graphics downloaded from the Internet, in an effort to stimulate interest. At lines 5 and 6, and 8 and 9, she posed two factual and somewhat pseudo questions on the nature of the occupations, without allowing enough wait time for the class to respond. Finally, after many turns of extensive teacher talk, we see a brief IRF sequence taking place from lines 13 to 23, and she tried to engage with Rashid (lines 31 to 32), when she asked if he would actually be interested in taking up the career as a performer.

From lines 37 to 47, her performative talk turned to one that attempted to get the class to share their future vocational plans when she elicited responses from particular

students. In particular, from lines 49 to 50, the questions posed were intended to elicit answers to the earlier question raised (*But what exactly do you need?*). From lines 52 to 56, Jenny also went on to clarify S5's response in lines 59 and 60 (*So, do you have these courses in Poly and ITE? Think about your future*). However, the class did not seem to respond readily to her questions, thus indicating a lack of "inclusivity" in the whole class lecture as well as voluntary "reciprocity"¹⁰ (Luke, et al., 2005, p. 47) between her and the students.

As usual, constant disruptions from various students (no fewer than 10 such instances) caused her to minimize any dialogic interactions with students so that she could maintain better control over the class's discipline. For example, she told particular individuals to put away materials not related to the lesson at lines 2, and 44 and 45. Then, at lines 10 and 11, she threatened to send some boys out of the class for not paying attention to her, and at lines 44 to 46, and 54, she was again annoyed with the students who were talking amongst themselves, instead of participating in the class discussion. The lesson concluded with the watching of a YouTube video on a bad job interview. Although it appeared that the students found the video interesting, there was no mention of the purpose of watching the video or discussion of the content thereafter as she hurried to talk about the 'format' of the information report they were expected to write. Let us continue to see how Jenny delivered the rest of the lesson in the final excerpt.

¹⁰ Inclusivity is indicated by the number of students participating in classroom discussion, whereas reciprocity is a specific form of collective talk and is evident when teachers and students listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints and do so in a respectful manner.

Excerpt 6.4 2 September 2010

1	Jenny	Did you manage to find that? Page 1, the second paragraph...So
2		simple, “he was in the Air Force.” My question is how? (2) After
3		that, you’ll have to tell me. (2) Who would like to try? Faizal, you
4		come and do question 3 for me.
5	Faizal	I never do anything.
7	Jenny	I know you didn’t do. That’s why I want you to come up here and
6		try.
8	Faizal	Wait, wait. Give me a moment.
		[He walks to the board and starts to write his answers.]
9	Jenny	‘ <i>Change people’s mind</i> ’? It is not exactly the right answer. Give
10		me the right answer..If you watched the video the first time, you
11		should know... “He can make people quit smoking.” The fourth
12		one, (), Come and try..Come.. No. 5, it’ll be Mohammed’s
13		turn..“What is the flip side?” That means “What is the side effect?”
14	Mohammed	Class, can you hurry up or not?
		[He said it cheekily.]
15	Jenny	No. 5. No. 5...Alright, for number 5, the side effect, it can be
16		creepy. Next one, number 6. “What is the qualification required?”
17	S2	Cher, he don’t need education to do this.
		[Ss titter in the background.]
18	Jenny	Class, hurry up, I want to teach you the format. This one is
19		important, alright? After this, I need you to do a group write-up.
		[T gives out the second handout which is the scaffolding template.]
20		..So, class can you look here? So, this is what I want you to write.
21		This is the format. Can you see? Over here, this one will be the
22		title. Can you fill in the blank here? And what kind of tense do you
23		use? PRESENT TENSE.
		[T gets class to jot down on the blanks the missing answers for the
		class to copy.]
24		So, for every write-up, the first paragraph is always the
25		introduction – what kind of info, who are these people, what is it
26		that they are doing?
27	S4	Cher, go lower la, cher.

		[He is asking Jenny to move the paper further down the document camera so he can see.]
28	Jenny	Next one, you'll use vey technical language or terms. All these are
29		job-related terms..later on you'll do the write up and you'll get the
30		marks from there. (). Ssh! Asraf, let me finish this. Subsequently,
31		you need to use words like connectors: firstly, secondly, and so on.
32		And not just that, I've two to four paragraphs for the body. And
33		they include sub-heading for each new paragraphs. And also try to
34		use adjectives. Can you see the word 'powerful'?
35	S2	Cher, you want <i>ganna</i> (Malay word for 'to get') brainwash ah?
36	Jenny	So if you're able to have these description words, I'll be able to
37		give you more marks (2) Next, I need one concluding paragraph. It
38		is a paragraph that you can roughly tell me where you can get the
39		certification....So you just write down the web site, cut and paste...
40		So this one, don't lose it....All right class, can you write your
41		name on this one "the model of an information report", I want to
42		collect it so that you won't lose it.

6.4.4 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 6.4

Here, Jenny nominated different students to answer some short comprehension questions she developed and wrote on the white board, based on a text about the job of a hypnotist, which were mostly directed at the literal level of understanding (lines 3 to 16). Perhaps sensing that the questions were simple enough (line 2), she did not allow Faizal to clarify his answers or invite the rest of the class to contribute their thoughts at lines 9 and 10. As in the previous answers, she told them her answer straightaway. In an effort to hurry through the exercise, she did not manage to engage students in talks related to their future vocational needs, following S2's comment at line 17. Instead, she resumed her procedural talk at lines 24 to 39 and focused on the overall structure or 'format' of the information report text type using a scaffolding template. That is, the appropriate 'format' would consist of five paragraphs: introduction to the essential information about the job of hypnotist, the necessary criteria or pre-requisites for the job, the description of

the job scope, the positive and adverse sides of the job and the use of present tense. Finally, the students were also required to acknowledge the sources from which they derived the details (line 39). As she was talking, the class copied the answers required in their write up on the blanks by the side of the handout. To get hold of students' attention, she reiterated the importance of writing the text type in the acceptable 'format' so they would get 'marks' for it (lines 30 and 37). Just before the bell went off, she told them to write their names on top of the pages of the template and submit them to her (lines 41 and 42), as there was a likelihood that they would lose it or forget to bring it to class for the next lesson.

6.5 Summary: The Writing Culture in Class S

To a large extent, Jenny's unidirectional, monologic-centred discourse resembles that of Belle's, except for the fact that there were few I (initiation) moves featured in all the four excerpts. Overall, it can be described as consisting of the following:

- i. Teacher extensive talk
- ii. Occasional initiation by teacher
- iii. Mono-syllabic response by students
- iv. Teacher feedback and continuing of extensive talk

As seen, her whole-class performative talk, which was related to the scaffolding of the structures, conventions, styles, and registers of the text types, was interspersed with regulatory talk involving classroom discipline. Apart from these talks, there was evidence of Jenny engaging the class with a minimal amount of sharing talk in Excerpt 6.3. Otherwise, there were few occasions whereby sustained discussions related to texts or writing were observed between teacher and students (see Excerpts 6.3 and 6.4.3). Instead,

a lot of the instructional time was spent on making students copy from the white board or PowerPoint slides, and on managing defiant behaviour.

Two important characteristics of the class's writing practices could therefore be identified. Firstly, like Class M, there was evidence of the reinforcement of procedural support in writing, primarily by drilling students on acceptable 'formats' of writing and good work habits. Given the minimal engagement with students during lessons, a second characteristic was the lack of deliberate reciprocity between teacher and students, which have militated against the construction of meanings as well as development of personal experiences in writing. Finally, the class can be said to be heavily characterized by its over-riding sense of mild frustration and boredom. The students appeared to be either only procedurally engaged (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) at best or worse, disengaged completely. Given the collective habitus of the class and to some extent, Jenny's perception of the non-Chinese students and of her lack of ability to 'control' the class, teaching had surely been compromised.

7 A COMPARISON OF THE WRITING CULTURES IN CLASS M AND CLASS S

7.1 Overview

Having presented a preliminary discussion of the respective cultures of the writing practice in Class M and Class S, this chapter will further examine the similarities and differences between the two cultures in order to understand the type of writing literacy conceptualized in the two classes. In so doing, it will also answer research question 1 set out in Chapter 1:

How similar or different are the writing cultures between the best and low achieving class?

7.1.1 The context: the classes, the teachers and schemes of work

7.1.1.1 The two classes

As mentioned at the outset of the study, Class M and Class S belonged to two different streams in the whole secondary three cohort. The curriculum for Class M was one that was geared towards the pathway of university education. It offered a combination of triple Sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) as well as a humanities subject for the students. Being the first class of the secondary 3 E stream, students in Class M ‘naturally’ had a higher aptitude for academic studies, showed a strong motivation to succeed in life and displayed a cheerful disposition towards school and learning. A good number of the students had also been appointed student leaders, judging from the badge they wore on their uniforms. Interviews with the focal students confirmed that they were positive in outlook and aspired to enter into a Junior College for their pre-university education after finishing secondary school. The physical setting of the class likewise corresponded with the optimistic ‘make-up’ of the students. The attractive decorations on the classroom’s

notice board especially evoked the theme of ‘family’, and on the whole, the classroom climate was pleasant.

The curriculum for Class S, on the other hand, was pegged at a pace slower than that for the ‘more capable’ students in Class M. As mentioned in Chapter 1, students in Class S would take a year longer than their peers in Class M to finish their secondary school education and, provided they managed to do so, eventually enter the university – although for most of them it would be the polytechnic. The subjects the students took for their exams were also different from those in Class M. They were not offered the ‘prestigious’ and ‘economically viable’ combination like triple Sciences. Instead, the ‘hands-on’ and ‘apprenticeship-like’ subjects such as Design and Technology and Home Economics were offered. At first glance, the classroom environment appeared very different from Class M’s in that it was plain looking and sometimes messy with litter thrown on the floor. The students too were different. They had a lower aptitude for academic subjects, including English. A striking difference is that compared to Class M, who were usually attentive and engaged, they were either procedurally engaged at best or worse, disengaged completely. Being the last class of secondary 3 N(A) stream, they were reported to be particularly problematic in terms of behaviour and observed to be defiant towards their English teacher.

Insofar as writing performance was concerned, Class M (Mean = 53.4) had performed better in the writing paper in the Mid-Year Exam (MYE) than Class S (Mean = 50.5). However, the quantitative findings from the questionnaire responses suggested a different picture. Students in Class S (Mean = 87.9) actually perceived themselves to be slightly more engaged than those in Class M (Mean = 85.3) and reported that they were

more confident in writing than their peers in Class M, since the mean scores of their responses to items in the self-efficacy subscale were mostly higher in comparison. Furthermore, one-to-one interviews with all four focal students showed that they were just as motivated as their peers in Class M to succeed in exams and to do well in life, although Gabriel was the only one who used techniques such as brainstorming and mind mapping in writing. The other three focal students did not seem to have a clear awareness of the meta-cognitive strategies involved in improving their writing. By contrast, all four focal students from Class M were able to point out specific meta-cognitive strategies, such as planning and revising, that they applied in writing.

The four focal students in Class M reported being involved with reading or writing for personal purposes, whereas their counterparts in Class S did not have any regular habits of reading or writing. The latter especially regarded writing functional text types such as letters and reports as formulaic but practical for their future needs. While all four Class M students expressed their liking for Belle, all except Gabriel in Class S had strong negative feeling about Jenny's teaching.

7.1.1.2 The two teachers

The teachers differed in terms of their professional outlook, position in the school, years of teaching experience and approach to pedagogical practices. The teacher of Class M, Belle, had nine years of teaching experience, coupled with a year of study for a Masters in Applied Linguistics in a New Zealand university. She held the position of the English Level Head for lower secondary and was in charge of some important programmes in the English Language and Literature department. Her attitude towards the

school and students in general was positive, referring to the environment as ‘friendly’ and ‘family-like’. Class M generally regarded her as a high mastery-focused teacher who was ‘versatile’ in her teaching. She, however, was strict towards her class and had high expectations for them as she perceived that they could be ‘stretched’ beyond the academic results they were producing at that time. Given her good rapport with the class, she often joked with them during the lessons. Furthermore, she was well aware of most individuals in her class; she knew their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses in writing, and how best to ‘drill’ them, such as by doing error analyses to enhance their cognitive awareness of correct grammatical structures. In terms of her pedagogical approach to writing, she adopted a clear notion of what school-based writing entailed, which was largely skills acquisition and presentation of ‘meticulously packaged’ output. In order to deliver such output, she practised the process-genre approach in writing.

Jenny, the teacher of Class S, was less experienced than Belle, having taught at Mayflower for less than three years, although she had some teaching experiences at two other schools before becoming a certified secondary school teacher. Unlike Belle, who was an English major, she specialized in teaching Geography. While Belle had a positive perception towards the school and her students, Jenny described her teaching experience at Mayflower as a ‘culture shock’ from what she was accustomed to at her former schools. Essentially, she did not like the racial composition at the school (see 3.3) as she preferred a more Chinese ethos with regard to teaching and learning. As such, she was somewhat unsatisfied with her work situation at Mayflower with its more than 50% of non-Chinese students and staff members. Apart from that, she also reported that there had been unfair practices in her department which resulted in her being given an

unsatisfactory work appraisal. Contrary to Belle, who knew her students well, she neither knew much about any particular student's family background nor was able to identify their specific strengths and weaknesses in writing. Unlike the positive teacher-student relationship Belle had with Class M, she did not like her class, and was particularly annoyed with some Malay male students. Having a preference for a genre approach to teaching writing, she frequently skipped the drafting process, and thus doing drafts and revision were not emphasized in her class. Instead, she often 'drilled' the class on 'predictable' genres that would be tested in exams. In this regard, Jenny's approach to teaching writing corresponds with that of Belle's, although she did not seem to be as versatile as Belle when it came to using techniques to engage students in learning.

7.1.1.3 The syllabuses of the two classes

For prescribed materials, both classes referred to the writing modules handouts which had been collectively developed by the teachers in charge of their levels in the department as instructional materials during curriculum time. The practice of using teachers' self-developed materials particularly served to systematically prepare students for the O and N level exams, since they were structured according to the types of genres usually tested in the exams.

In Class M, the genres assigned for the year 2010 included a range of narrative, descriptive and argumentative writing tasks, along with the formal letter and the incident report. In all, the quota expected of the class for the entire academic year was two narrative essays, which included one-word topics, two descriptive essays, one argumentative essay, two incident reports and two formal letters. On the other hand, in

class S, the genres assigned for the year were predominately formal and informal letter-writing. Apart from that, the class was also expected to do two narrative essays, one personal recount essay, one personal response essay and two reports, one incident and the other information. As well as their official writing quota, students in Class M also had regular spontaneous writing periods where they were allowed to write about anything with no word limit. Students in Class S however did not engage in spontaneous writing as frequently as their peers in Class M.

7.1.2 The organization of instructional activities and tasks in the two writing classes

7.1.2.1 The sequence of phases in the teaching of writing

The teaching of writing in both classes was observed to have a similar overall organization, which can be described in terms of the following sequence of phases:

(i) Pre-writing phase:

The first phase, which consisted of the introduction of the purpose and audience for the targeted genre of writing, occurred at the beginning of a complete writing cycle. In other contexts, the teacher might also conduct some lead-in activities based on reading, listening or speaking tasks. However, this was not observed in these two classes. Instead, the pre-writing phase in Class M consisted of a question-and-answer time whereby Belle elicited responses from the whole class by asking specific recall type questions using the IRF sequence. Sometimes, the whole class would respond accordingly; at other times, she would nominate particular individuals to answer her question. On the other hand, there was no clear indication at the start of a pre-writing phase in Class S. Jenny mostly relied

on whole class lecture to organize her teaching, and there were usually fewer questions directed at the whole class.

(ii) The scaffolding phase:

Following the pre-writing phase, the students would be directed to the structures of the target text types to be taught using the scaffolding materials provided in the Writing Modules Handout. As observed in both classes, attention was given to the organization of paragraphs and generic features when writing the targeted text types. In Class M particularly, Belle provided procedural support in the form of detailed reinforcements on the appropriate register and styles in writing. Like Belle, Jenny also focused on the distinctive structures and grammatical features of the genres taught.

(iii) Drafting phase:

Students in Class M had the practice of doing drafts, either in pairs or on their own, whereby they produced their individual drafts on an incident report they had done at home beforehand and worked with their partners to revise their work in class. In the case of Class S, there was evidence from the interviews with Jenny, as well as classroom observations, that Class S seldom engaged in the drafting process of writing (See 6.2.3 on p161).

(iv) Individual writing phase:

In Class M, the students were usually asked to finish their individual writing at home after the scaffolding phase, and bring it back for submission to Belle in the next lesson. Sometimes, they were asked to write the beginning paragraphs of the essay in class and then finish the rest of the writing at home. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this was because Belle perceived that she lacked the time to allow the class to spend the entire

double periods on individual writing. In the case of Class S, this phase was usually conducted in class after the scaffolding phase since Jenny deemed it necessary to make them finish their writing in class as they usually would fail to submit their work if they had been allowed to take it home and complete it the day before.

(v) Evaluation phase:

During this phase, both teachers addressed the common errors in students' writing, which were usually related to grammar and mechanics. As will be seen in Excerpt 7.9, Belle preferred to focus on the break-down of the marks for the essay so that her students could have a better idea of how to 'tackle' their writing. She would also review the common types of errors and show the correct forms at the same time, whereas in Jenny's case, as shown in Excerpt 7.10, she would conduct evaluative feedback by explaining the particular strengths and weaknesses of some students' writing. For both classes, the exercise would finish with the students doing corrections.

Having outlined the different phases of the teaching of writing in both classes, detailed analyses of the typical discourse patterns that occurred during the four phases of writing in Class M and Class S will be presented in the following sections. In particular, the analyses will cover the following aspects:

- (i) teacher-student discourse patterns used in writing lessons;
- (ii) possible functions of the identified teacher-student discourse patterns in relation to particular
 - (a) tasks and activities in writing lessons;
 - (b) behaviour and disposition of students

Along with the analyses, hypotheses about possible causes and effects of the differences for (i) and (ii) will also be discussed.

7.2 Teacher-Student Discourse Patterns during the Different Phases of Writing

7.2.1 'I want you to put on your thinking cap': pre-writing and scaffolding in Class M

Excerpt 7.1 was taken from a recording of the pre-writing phase of an incident report. For the bulk of the lesson, Belle played a video clip downloaded from YouTube.com featuring someone injured whilst skating. Her intention was to provide input and ideas for the content of the accident report they were to draft in pairs, using the visual stimulus to facilitate brainstorming of ideas for writing in the pre-writing phase.

Excerpt 7.1 27 July 2010

1	Belle	All right, look at me huh?...I call some of you and you must tell me what
2		are some of the things to include, OK? Alright, for introduction. Crystal,
3		tell me two things you include in the introduction. Hurry. The checklist is
4		there. The checklist is there but you don't refer to it. You Look at me.
5		Quick. OK, say one. For intro, who was involved in the accident, which
6		is here. There are 5 things here, Crystal.
7	Crystal	()
8	Belle	OK, another one, Jiajun?
9	Jiajun	When and where.
10	Belle	OK, when and where. Right. One more. Kevin?
11	Kevin	When. When.
12	Belle	Mentioned already.
13	Kevin	Aw. Why.
14	S1	What. What.
15	Belle	Why it happened usually comes in the body..the sequence of events.
16	S8	//How.
17	Belle	How. OK. Fine. We move on to the body which is the longer one.
18		Volunteer?
19	Pinky	Events in details.

20	Belle	What you mentioned in the introductory paragraph is just the gist. Right,
21		you're going to elaborate the sequence of how the events occur. One
22		more thing. One more. OK, Seng Chew?
23	Seng Chew	...
24	Belle	Are there any injuries? Let's say there are going to be injuries in your
25		report, any hurts you mentioned, and then it's when you're going to use
26		your kinetic words related to the theme to show case your language use.
27		Closing. Round up the report. What has been done? Recommendations to
28		avoid (). All right? Ready for the video clip?
		[Murmuring in the background can be heard as she and one student try to fix up the projector.]
29		Now, referring to your scaffold (2), do you see the scaffold, the template?
30		(2) Now you are () with the checklist. You move on to page 9..On top
31		<i>based on the video which you've just watched, write an accidental report</i>
32		<i>to the police, describing the event in everything you've learnt so far about</i>
33		<i>writing incident report...Now, run through the question so that when I</i>
34		<i>play the video, you know what to pen down. (2) You can write in point</i>
35		<i>form in pencil first. Three minutes. OK? Ready? Now, I want you to put</i>
36		<i>on your thinking cap. You are allowed to use your imagination.</i>
37	Ss	Awesome!
		[The video begins to play in the background. It shows someone doing stunts on his skateboard.]
38	Belle	Don't just watch it and forget to do what you're supposed to do.
39	S9	Hey, the socks are Nike leh.
		[Belle stops the video]
40	Belle	OK. All right, your job now.
41	S9 & S10	That's all?
42	Belle	OK? OK, we play it one more time?
		[She plays the clip again. There's murmuring and excitement in the background.]
43	S11	I don't think he can walk ever again.
44	Belle	OK. Done? All right. Now, on page 10, there are still some more you
45		know, where they ask you to make recommendations. So, think about
46		that. You can imagine. Look at the first part. Why (). Huh : : OK, I
47		replay the first part again. Then you've to make recommendation. Then,

48		you can talk about the cause. OK, carry on. Page 9 and 10, fill up
		[Belle pauses to replay the scene in which the skater fell and injured his knee.]
49		All right, done? At least you've the gist of it? Ivan, you're dying to
50		share? Turn over to page 10 ah? Page 10 is the last part on conclusion.
51		I want you to put on your thinking cap and start thinking. Why am I
52		showing you the first part again? You look at the place where he's
53		coming down. It can be dangerous. Then, you look at his attire...I play
54		one more time?
55	Ss	Play again. Play again.
56	Ss	//No, no, no.
	Belle	[pointing to the scene as the video is replaying]
57		Now, you look at the ground. Those of you who skateboard right, you
58		usually don't do it in this kind of environment.
		[Students can be heard murmuring in the background. She pauses the video.]
59		You've about 12 minutes, enough for you to do pair work because two
60		minds work better. Now, you have two versions of ideas..OK, when you
61		do it with a partner, you're going to decide on one version, all right? You
62		can combine if it is appropriate..depending on which one is the better
63		one... Remember the checklist that we went through just now? And using
64		the scaffold that you've penned down your notes and all that, and write it
65		on page 10 and 11. The correct report writing format. OK, never mind
66		about the name, You can use any names, OK?

7.2.1.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.1

Prior to showing the video clip, Belle checked prior relevant knowledge with the class by asking specific individuals to recall the generic features of an incident report, as outlined in the checklist (lines 1 to 28). Through her cued elicitation, she was able to have as many as seven students participating in the whole class lecture, although the IRF interactions between her and the students in this excerpt were still essentially brief and

unsustained, just as we saw in the excerpts in Chapter 5. For example, from lines 21 to 22, Belle asked a question about the register appropriate for incident report writing, which Seng Chew failed to provide. She then told the class the answer, rather than reformulating her questions and encouraging others to attempt it. The latter approach would have created more opportunity to negotiate meaning with the class. The lack of time was likely to be the reason she minimized dialogue with her students as she was observed to hurry through her whole class lecture (line 3) before playing the video to the class (line 27) and to time the students while they were brain-storming ideas (lines 35 and 59).

Following that, from lines 29 to 38, we see Belle explicitly telling the students to watch for critical details that would be relevant to the scaffolding checklist in their handouts. Although her teaching of the ‘format’ detailed in the Writing Modules handouts was observed to be systematic and lock-step, it was nevertheless critical in guiding the students in generating ideas. Further, at lines 51 to 54, she probed students on the possible reasons for the character’s injuries by directing the students’ attention to the setting (*You look at the place where he’s coming down. It can be dangerous*) and the character’s attire whilst on the skateboard (*Then you look at his attire*). Thus, as in the sociocultural notion of apprenticeship, she “transferred control” (Englert, et al., 2006, p. 210) of the process of meaning making back to the students when she cued them for ideas. However, it seemed that her reminder that they were ‘allowed to use their imagination’ by putting on their ‘thinking cap’ (lines 35 and 36, and 51) while watching the video might imply that there were not many occasions in which the class initiated their own ideas in writing. Indeed, it was as though there was no sense of “discursive” and “epistemic agency” (Luke, et al., 2005, p. 62) on the part of the students in this pre-writing phase, as Belle was directing

them at almost every step to create their own ideas. Finally, from lines 60 to 66, the students were to get into pairs to combine ideas for drafting a paragraph on the recommendations to make, following the incident which happened.

Another noteworthy point is that the students appeared to enjoy the video with their comments of ‘awesome’ (line 37), but Belle was concerned that the students might miss the real intention of watching the video, which was to obtain some ideas to do the serious work of writing a formal incident report. Her reminder to the class in line 38 (*Don’t just watch it and forget to do what you’re supposed to do*) again suggests that fun was seldom regarded as important in the writing class.

Let us examine the sequence of events that followed in the subsequent drafting phase in excerpt 2.

7.2.2 Format, behaviour and MSG: the drafting phase

Excerpt 7.2 30 July 2010

1	Belle	OK, where is the checklist? OK, all turn : : to page 5. Do a quick
2		glance.
		[She walks to the boys at the back of the class, to the right.]
3		Revisit page 3 – a model incident report. Now, with the checklist and
4		your model on page 3, we try to match the characteristics onto the
5		model. Do you notice that the title is in capital letters? And everything
6		is left alignment, where the title is in the centre. That’s your
7		presentation. Any finger spacing? No finger spacing. If you want to
8		show a paragraph, you leave a line. OK, now you look at the first
9		paragraph on page 3. “We have for some time () practice staying back
10		blah, blah, blah.” Look at the checklist. Are you able to answer the
11		questions of 5 W and 1 H? Is the how, why, who, what, where and
12		when – was it there? (2) Then the second and the third
13		paragraph..words related to the incident?

		[A long pause.]
14		Yes, there are some attributes. Description of the pain and the fall,
15		right? Now, zoom into the last paragraph, <i>We do not believe that</i>
16		<i>anyone can be blamed for the accident blah, blah, blah.</i> Now, look at
17		the checklist..the summary of the report: what has been done, any
18		recommendations to avoid the recurrence, then report written by, full
19		name of the person.. Yes, I repeat huh if you sign, write your full name
20		after that. Alright, don't sign. Just write your full name. It does not
21		have any meaning if you just sign because nobody can recognize your
22		signature except yourself. So you must sign, followed by your full
23		name. Get me? Now, you've done the scaffold on your own, page 10
24		right? Then after which using the scaffold on page 10, you map it,
25		combine the two – your own work and your partner's, redo it, and do it
26		on page 11. Now, so everybody has a copy of your work right, good.
27		Now, in your pairs, I'm going to give you the butcher papers. Jason,
28		can you bring them to me? You are going to give out one sheet a pair
29		per couple alright? Can you give out quickly?
30	Jason	One sheet per pair, huh?
31	Belle	Yes : : While you wait for your paper to come, you listen, ah? You're
32		going to do this, alright? You're only going to do intro, alright and
33		conclusion for group 1 and 3, ya? Group 2 and 4, you're going to do
34		the body. OK, get me?
35		So, group 1 and 3. Group 2 and 4.
		[Belle writes on the board her instructions.]
36	S3	()
37	Belle	No, not a mind map. Now, listen to me one more time. Now, you've
38		already written it onto your (2) handout. You're going to pen it onto the
39		butcher sheet: what you're supposed to do. (2) After which you're
40		going to present, OK?
41	S3	Cher, how are we going to hang the work?
42	Belle	Never mind, you're going to be the hanger yourself.
43	Ss	Hanger! Hanger!

7.2.2.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.2

Having conducted her 'recap ritual', which the class was familiar with at the beginning of the lesson, Belle hurried the class to get into the proper 'rhythm' of the

lesson at line 1, as she was conscious of time. Unlike other lessons, there was a break from the routine whole class lecture. This time, the students were to work in pairs and map their ideas onto the scaffolding structure and then combine each other's drafts to produce the final version of the incident report for presentation (lines 24 to 26). As usual, we see that Belle emphasized the practice of good work habits (Kramer-Dahl, 2007): left alignment, no finger spacing, capitalization of first letters of the characters in the title and the use of the correct salutation (lines 5 to 8 and 19 to 23) in her performative talk on the stylistic presentation of report writing.

When the combined version was complete, the students would pin up their work on the walls, and then go around the classroom to view each other's work and offer comments. Again, we see the systematic side of Belle's teaching when she listed her instructions on the board for the students to follow (lines 31 to 35). Although Belle joked with the class that they could be the hanger themselves to hang their work on (line 42), she was equally concerned that her students would not misbehave while going around and viewing each other's work.

When I went around observing the groups, it seemed that collaborating with each other simply meant combining each other's ideas. Although the students had the opportunity to negotiate their ideas and produce a final combined version, most of them seemed to end up doing a 'patchwork quilt' by incorporating segments of writing from each other, instead of developing their own discursive or epistemic agency, which would have resulted in alternative perspectives, explanations, or reasons.

Before they started to view each other's work, Belle gave lengthy and perhaps inordinate reminders about acceptable behaviour in Excerpt 7.3:

Excerpt 7.3 30 July 2010

1	Belle	Stop already. () put three dots there (to indicate unfinished work).
2		OK, now listen. Before you move around and look at your friend's work,
3		you're going to do this, ah. Listen! I've no more blue tack. So, some of you
4		have to hold up your work yourself, ah. Now, you've different groups
5		doing intro, conclusion and body. OK, you've a checklist with you which
6		is page 4. Put up your hand up again. You're going to move around with
7		your partner. You're going to edit on your friends' work using a different
8		colour. So, if it is a red marker : : Can you listen to me first?
		[There was some excitement generated at the back, adding to her annoyance.]
9		Then you edit it using a green, blue or black one. Now, you're going to
10		move around. Now, remember what is your purpose? Your purpose is not
11		to move around and socialize. Your purpose is to move around to look at
12		your friends' work using your checklist, and see and make comments.
13		Now, some of you have written pretty well, which is good. Now, some of
14		you don't. So, there are two things you're going to look for. OK, by now
15		you should know the characteristics of the different parts of report, right?
16		Intro: what are the things you should put there? If you do not remember,
17		turn to your page 4. Make sure you look at every one, and I do not want
18		more than two pairs crowding around one piece of work. OK? So you'll
19		find that the work has more than four persons already, you and your
20		partner will move to the next one. Now, do not make too many comments
21		because you want to leave some space for other people. Give comments
22		about work, or you can spot their mistakes. Editing? Spelling? Or
23		grammatical structure. Questions? Ready? Ready? OK, go.
		[The students started to go around and view each other's work. I (R) went over to Azura, one of the focal students.]
24	R	Azura, what are you looking for?
25	Azura	Errors.
26	R	What sort of errors?
27	Azura	Grammatical, structure and spelling.
28	Belle	1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.
		[She starts to count down as she wants the students to stop the exercise and returns to their seats.]
29	Ss	Jason, faster!
30		I don't believe I have to use this. I only use this in the N(T) class. Now,
31		you're very bad. Now, listen. You've at least got to see half of it. Because

32		of the time, you may not be able to see all. Can you leave it there?
33		Monday, do I see you? (she works up the emotions of the class) Now,
34		listen. You've at least got to see half of it. Now, Jocelyn will be collecting
35		all your markers. It's quite a pretty sight to see all your work up.
36	Ss	No ::

7.2.2.2 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.3

From the students' perspective, the lesson, compared to other normal ones, was certainly a welcome change from the monotonous, teacher-centred whole class lecture; they did not need to be confined to their seats as at other times. Thus, the class was excited that they could move about in class during the 'gallery view', relaxing and chatting a bit with each other. Seeing that the class was excited, Belle perceived that it was necessary to reiterate good behaviour lest they missed the whole purpose of the 'gallery view'. Here we see that after getting the class's attention at line 8, she reminded them that their 'walk around the class' should be 'purposeful'; it was primarily to edit each other's work, which included 'spotting' each other's mistakes related to the structuring of the paragraphs and grammatical errors from lines 12 to 17. In a regulatory tone, she emphasized that they should not 'move around and socialize' (lines 10 and 11) and that there should not be more than four people, or two pairs looking at a piece of work at the same time, since 'crowding around' (line 18) one particular piece of work would create unnecessary noise. Thus, if there happened to be more than four persons viewing a piece, they and their partner should go and view someone else's work. They were also told not to write too many comments and leave some space for the others (lines 20 and 21). When I looked at their comments, they mostly had to do with mechanical errors, rather than the style or content of their writing (lines 24 to 27). Some of these groups were

also quietly reading each other's work, and then making editorial corrections on their papers without exchanging any feedback.

When the bell rang, Belle had to spend some time to make the students return to their seats. When she realised the class was not giving her their attention, she began to use a regulatory tone to assert control by counting down at line 28. The class, sensing a change of mood, quickly responded to her instruction and urged Jason to stop whatever he was doing and return to his seat (line 29). Although she 'derided' them (in a non-abusive tone) for behaving badly like N(T) students, who are those placed in the lowest academic stream, at lines 30 and 31 (*I don't believe I have to use this. I only use this in the NT class. Now, you're very bad*), the class took her reprimand in good spirit and readily cooperated with her, thus showing that there existed a rapport between Belle and the class.

As demonstrated in another short episode, Belle 'humiliated' the class for their performance in Common Test 3. The talk about tests and exams between teacher and students, which had little to do with literacy learning, frequently occurred during class time, though in this case, students were joking with her, which shows again that she and her students had a reasonably good rapport.

Excerpt 7.4 28 September 2010

		[T gets an IT representative to help her set up the document camera.]
1	Belle	I'm going to give you your test papers (Common Test 3) and I can see that
2	S1	//I can see that I've done very well.
3	Belle	Self praise. You have done (2) you have (2) you have done a little bit better
4		than other classes I think because I haven't seen all the classes. However
5		having said that..it is default that you are supposed to do better than them
6		because your MSG (Mean Subject Grade), your percentage is 3.4. Theirs is
7		5 point something. So OK, you must compare like that. Class N is close to
8		yours. Class N is close to you, all right? But having said this, if you are

9		competing with Class N, then you are very shallow. Your target is not Class
10		N's. It's beyond them..(murmuring in the background) Ya, that's the whole
11		idea. Alright, can I have the visualizer (document camera) up?
		[The document camera is now set up.]
12		Listen. I don't want you to just look at the paper, and that is and just chuck
13		away. That's not my purpose. It is very important to learn from your
14		mistakes. OK, there are two schools of people here. Some of you are too
15		complacent, thinking that you have done very well, blah, blah, blah. You are
16		very shallow. Now, there's another group of people. You get upset with
17		your own marks because you thought you have done bad. HELLO!
18	Ss	Seng Chew, Ssh!
19	Belle	Having said that, do not be discouraged. OK? Now, do not be discouraged.
20		I'm very sure you will do very well for Paper 2 because you are 3.4.
21	Jason	Sec 3 Class M la, cher : :
22	Belle	You are 3.4. That is your lucky number, OK? (2) Now, listen. Do not be
23		discouraged. There are many many factors that come in during your exam
24		time. Whatever it is, you may not be performing up to your 100% potential
25		because you may be panicky. (2) Maybe that day, you woke up on the
26		wrong side of the bed. Maybe you are not well, all these. We're going to
27		eliminate all these. Alright, you must make sure you do well and your big
28		day is Thursday (referring to the End-of-Year English Language exam).
29		Now, it'll be all English in the morning, after which, next week, I can loan
30		out my periods to Mrs Kumar, your favourite teacher.
31	Ss	Don't want : :

7.2.2.3 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.4

In this excerpt, where Belle reviewed the results of the recent Common Test 3, she reiterated from lines 3 to 10 the importance of maintaining the class's expected standard in English performance vis-à-vis other classes. She reminded them not to be overly contented just because they had done 'a little better' than their peers in the other classes (lines 3 and 4). After all, being the first class in the entire level, they were expected to produce the highest MSG (Mean Subject Grade), which was 3.4. Otherwise, they would have been 'shallow' (line 9) for thinking that they had done better in comparison to the

rest of the classes. Rather than comparing themselves with classes with a 5-point MSG, they should make a comparison with their closest ‘rival’, Class N (line 9).

At this juncture, let us turn to look at the discourse patterns that predominately occurred during the scaffolding phase in Class S.

7.2.3 ‘I want you to identify this feature’: copying, decoding and underlining in the scaffolding phase in Class S

In the double period scaffolding lesson, Jenny lectured the class on the generic features of a personal response essay set out on her PowerPoint slides, and the students were copying down the model answers onto their Writing Module handouts. In the previous lesson, she had gone through with the class the purpose and audience of the personal response essay.

Excerpt 7.5 28 July 2010

1	Jenny	All right class, have you finished completing this one? Nadia, where
2		are you right now? (2) OK. Hurry up. Hurry up..Next, we look at the
3		structure : : For Personal Responses, it is going to be slightly
4		different from our narrative writing. So, what do we have for the
5		introduction? So what you have is you can bring in some facts from
6		the Internet, newspapers, and you can even start off with questions to
7		make the readers interested. You can also have some personal
8		comment, your own opinion, and also a summary of the points
9		you’re going to write later on in the body paragraph. Also, if you are
10		really good at this, you can even have quotation from famous people,
11		what they say. But in order to score, I’ll say the first one is very
12		good. It shows that you’re reading up and show the current () going
13		on.
14	Faizal	Now what ah, cher, after ‘evidence’?
15	Jenny	Anecdote (??). It is quite similar to the first two. Next one,
16		conclusion, I need about three to four sentences. And most

17		importantly, if the conclusion is there, and you end the compo well
18		enough, the impression will be better. Some of you, you write very
19		good essay. Yes, the intro is good. The body is good. But the last
20		sentence isn't that good. Some of you may not even have a
21		conclusion. There is no ending to the story (2) So how can you score
22		on that?
		[Interruption in the background. Some students protested at Jenny's
		question. S1 points out to her that a girl was sleeping in class.]
23		I hear noise. Can I assume you're done with these two? Pushpa and
24		Joyce, you're seated so far away and you can still talk?
		[Some students jeer at Pushpa and Joyce.]
25	Chee Seng	Cher, what's the meaning of 'bang'?
		[Students' laughters are heard in the background.]
26	Jenny	It means you have enough to impress the readers. You close it nicely
27		(2) Can I move on to the next slide?
28	S1	Wait : : Too fast.

7.2.3.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.5

The only three genuine questions Jenny posed in this monologic-centred instruction (Wells & Arauz, 2006) are at lines 1, 23 and 34, and 27. They addressed the progress of students' copying and were regulative in nature. There was only one instance of interaction at line 25 when Chee Seng asked about the meaning of ending their writing with 'a big bang'. Compared to Belle, who usually asked her students some recall type questions in the beginning of the lesson, it was observed that Jenny went straight into telling the class quite categorically her model answers (lines 2 to 13), instead of guiding them in discovering the lexico-grammatical features themselves. We also saw Jenny giving the class some strategic advice, which included incorporating facts from print and electronic sources as well as 'quotation from famous people', with the aim to improve the

their scores eventually (lines 11 and 12, 21 and 22). Thus, as in Excerpt 6.4, it was perhaps her tactic to engage the class's attention upfront (see 6.4.4), since writing entailed little personal meaning for them except to pass exams. However, throughout her lengthy procedural talk, there were not any attempts on the teacher's part to engage students in making meaningful connections between these grammatical features and the context in which they had been used. Compared to the scaffolding phase in Class M, which shows the occurrence of a clear IRF pattern, the scaffolding phase in Class S was more like a copying exercise.

Another noticeable activity in this excerpt is the teacher's management of class discipline. In fact, there were more of such instances in the rest of the scaffolding phase, which by this time had turned into a decoding exercise:

Excerpt 7.6 28 July 2010

1	Jenny	Rashid, why are you standing up?
2		Yes. Now I want you to identify this feature inside this essay..You
3		see how many you can find. So, the first paragraph you should write
4		down the introductory paragraph and identify the thesis statement
5		for me.
		[T goes around to address questions and checking on students.]
6		Yes, good. Faizal is coping well...Actually, it's quite easy to identify
7		the topic statement. It's usually the first sentence in each paragraph.
8		I just need something very simple. First paragraph, the introductory
9		paragraph...I only need what is the topic statement..Then the last
10		one, you just tell me the (). Do you still need this?
11	Faizal	Ya.
12	Jenny	OK. Then I'll leave it there. (2) Rashid, done? So, later on, I'll show
13		yours here. Topic sentence is only one sentence reading one
14		paragraph. That means if I have three paragraphs, I should have
15		three topics in that sentences. It is the main idea of each paragraph.
16		It tells you what the paragraph is going to discuss.

[She begins to put up Rashid's work. There is constant talking in the background.]

17 All right the rest of you, face in front. This is done by Rashid.
18 Rashid, go and sit on your chair. Ssh: : :! This is () introductory
19 paragraph (2) He managed to identify the thesis question. So, one
21 thing is this is the point the writer () Ssh: : : he would want to wait
22 for the movie to show up on TV instead of going to the theatre. So
23 did all of you manage to get this? ... So where exactly is the topic
24 sentence? How about Suhaili? Which one do you think is the topic
25 sentence?

26 Suhaili *First of all, just getting to the theatre presents difficulties.*

27 Jenny Good. This is the topic sentence. Then can you see the rest of the
28 paragraph on why it is difficult getting to the theatre? (2) So, must
29 you leave your house during a rainy or dark night to watch a movie?

30 Faizal Yes: :

31 Jenny YES?! I'd say 'no'.

32 Faizal (? ?)

33 Jenny And after that, there is still a human chain: you need to queue up to
34 get tickets. (2) Next one, Rashid mentioned that the topic sentence is
35 here. *Once you have made it to the box office all the way to the*
36 *smell of seldom-cleaned carpets.* Would you agree with this?

37 Faizal I disagree.

[T ignores him completely this time.]

38 Jenny Over here, he has already identified two sentences. I would say
39 actually you can stop here.

40 Faizal But the carpet that one - no problem, cher.

[T continues to ignore him.]

Jenny [She points to the paragraph on the paper.]

41 It tells you the side effects of the theatre. In fact, you can just stop at
42 the first sentence. (2) So, over here, the carpet is already elaborated.
43 And also, the next point they brought out: the sound of the movie
44 next door. So, e.g., you're watching the quiet love story, what's
45 happening in the other theatre? (2) It could be racing car, very noisy,
46 and it could be disturbing you. (2) Melvin, I don't want you to sit
47 like that. You go back to your own place.

[T caught him sharing a chair with another classmate.]

48 Melvin Very cold, cher.

		[He was sitting under the ceiling fan earlier on.]
49	Jenny	And the other thing..It is about all the food that people eat. Right?
50		After that, they spill it on the ground. Next point..next, they talk
51		about the customers, whose who visited the movie theatre. Would
52		you agree that it is the topic sentence?..Rashid, come back! 1, 2, 3.
		[Rashid pushes his chair backward which produces a squeaking sound. He walks reluctantly to his original seat.]
53		So, you go on to elaborate ‘the little kids run up and down, giggling,
54		and the teenagers talking to impress their friends, and the adults,
55		they behave as if they are at home.’ And Rashid underlined all this.
56		This one, I don’t understand why you underlined halfway? [She
57		turns and looks at Rashid.]..Yes, the last statement is the thesis
58		question. After reading this conclusion, you look at the last
59		paragraph. You know his stance is very clear-cut. This is what we
60		mean by ending your story ‘with a bang’. So, what is your stance
61		after reading just this one line? Do you think is he for going to
62		cinema (1) or do you think he doesn’t like?
63	S2	Doesn’t like : :

7.2.3.2 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.6

As in Excerpt 6.2, the class had to decode the organizational structure of a sample personal response essay by identifying the rhetorical features such as the topic sentence and thesis statement. Instead of clarifying Faizal’s doubt at lines 30 and 40, Jenny told him that the decoding could ‘stop here’ in a declarative tone (lines 38 and 39). It seemed that she was irate with Faizal, who consistently disrupted the lesson with his unwarranted comments (lines 30, 37 and 40) and attracted the class’s attention to him. As it was uncertain as to whether he genuinely disagreed with Rashid’s answer when he protested ‘But the carpet that one - no problem, cher’ (line 40), Jenny decided to ignore him and did not elicit any sharing of thoughts from the class. Subsequently, when she checked Rashid’s work, she also did not allow him to explain why he ‘underlined’ his decoded sentences ‘halfway’ (line 56).

Not surprisingly, there was constant movement on the part of the students. They either stood up from or swapped their seats with each other (lines 46 and 47, and 52), or talked about things (of their own!) with each other. Meanwhile, Jenny was laboriously trying to manage the class's behaviour with a strict, regulative discourse in order to keep the noise level down and get their attention. It is evident that they had no regard for her authority; as much as Jenny wanted to maintain order so that she could carry on with her lesson, these students resisted the asymmetrical power relations present in the classroom. Moreover, interviews with the four focal students showed that the class intentionally annoyed her as though they 'enjoyed' it.

The analyses herein point to two main differences between Class M and Class S. The first difference lies with the students' behaviour, which contributed to an overall attentive atmosphere in the former and a disruptive classroom climate in the latter. Although the students in Class M had also been observed to engage in private conversations, they were shorter in duration. Furthermore, they always stopped talking and turned their attention to Belle when they were reprimanded. The second difference relates to the frequency and nature of teacher-student interactions in the two classes. While there was some evidence that students in Class M were engaged with making meaning through dialogue with each other and with Belle (e.g. 'thinking cap' episode in Excerpt 7.1), there were hardly any occasions involving teacher-student dialogue in Class S, since Jenny usually delivered extensive monologic talk, or addressed questions by individuals in private during individual seat work.

Let us continue to see how Jenny conducted the rest of the scaffolding phase in the same lesson:

Excerpt 7.7 28 July 2010

1	Jenny	Next page, what I want you to look at is decoding the question. This
2		is the question. <i>Do you think you need to have long school vacation?</i>
3		So, I want you to look at the first three words first. (2) Ssh! Can I
4		have your attention? So, I need you to express and explain your
5		opinion based on these three words. I've already drawn the arrows
6		for you. I just need you to fill in all these...So your essay should
7		circle around the explanation..So, over here, they want you to
8		suggest ways to occupy your (). Alright, over here, I have three
9		questions.
		[T begins to delegate different question to individual groups to work on.]
10		So, this group here, you'll try to decode question one. Do exactly the
11		same as the example. This group here, you'll do question two..So
12		after that, I'll select students from each group and I'll want to see
13		your answers here. You're given three minutes.
		[There were discussions as well as chatting in the background.]
		[Three minutes later,]
14		Class, can I go through? I think it's about time? Question one, who
15		can give me a good answer?
		[Faizal nominates Rashid to answer the question.]
16		Class, I don't need you to come up with the set of rules. I need you to
17		follow sample one. That means identify the three words and so on. It
18		is identifying the key words...Alright, class, we look at question
19		one...This one is from Jeffrey. These two words <i>you think</i> , it tells you
20		your opinions, your comments. Good. Over here, it tells you rules for
21		a new school. So, what kind of rules are you going to set? But there
22		is one () he left out. Ssh! Rashid!..Alright, there's one portion that is
23		very, very important which is here. Why do you choose a few sets of
24		school rules? You should be able to tell me, explain and elaborate:
25		why do you choose these sets of school rules? In what ways are they
26		significant? Some of you, I think you don't even know what I'm
27		trying to do. At this point, I don't need you to identify all these rules
28		for me. I only want you to decode the statement. That means to tell
29		me what are the key words. Good, Jeffrey. (2) Second question. This
30		is taken from Weiming. OK, <i>Explain the impact that parents and</i>
31		<i>friends have on people in your age group. Which group of people has</i>
32		<i>a stronger impact?</i> So, yes, I'll say the 'people in your age group'

33		[underlining the key words as she speaks.]
34		So, what they are asking for is the people within your age group..So,
35		it's for opinion here, yes. Yes, first point pointed out. It's what I
36		agree. And another key word (2), they want you to tell them their
37		impact (2) <i>Describe</i> . Sometimes you don't understand these big
38		words, you can use another word to replace [pointing at the word
39		'influence' as she speaks.] (2) Describe the influence that parents and
40		friends have. Then, after you have identified the two groups, you go
41		on to which group of people has a stronger impact..Good, I like this.
42		[She puts a star next to the student's answer.] You need to answer
43		this question: which one will have a bet (1) I mean stronger
44		influence? Is it your parents or friends?
45		
46	S3	Parents : :
47	Jenny	Parents? Good (2). Next one, I to skip () but I'm going to guide you
48		through how to do these questions. What is the mind mapping? Just
49		now, I've already identified how many parts you can have inside the
50		question. So, you draw out the point. So, out of the three questions
51		you decoded, I want you to choose one of it, and draw the mind map.
52		So, your mind map consists of two bal (1) bubbles like that
53		[indicating on the page as she speaks]. So, what I want you to do
54		now is to draw the mind map. Out of the three questions, you decide
55		which is the easiest...So, class I've already guided you. I want you to
56		think of your points...I have five more minutes. Before the bell goes,
57		I want to see something.
		[The rain started at this point, and the class gets excited as they
		realized they wouldn't be doing PE in the open.]
58		OK, think about that later on when your PE teacher comes. Now, you
59		finish your mind map for me.

7.2.3.3 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.7

After decoding the rhetorical features of the sample essay in the previous excerpt, the class was asked to decode their assigned personal response essay questions in groups by first underlining the key words and then drawing a mind map to brainstorm the structure of the writing. Despite the usual disruptions from certain individuals and the general sense of disengagement in the class, most of the students followed her

instructions. Before going through her answers with the class, Jenny briefly mentioned two strategies they could apply in their writing. For example at lines 17 and 18, she reminded the class to use key words in the question when drawing up mind maps, and at lines 37 and 38, she told them to replace difficult words with simpler ones as a strategy of paraphrasing the question. A noteworthy point is that in going through Jeffrey's answer (lines 21 to 25), she prompted him to consider the kind of school rules he was going to implement, the reason for him to choose the rules, and in what ways the rules were significant. In fact, it would seem that her purpose of prompting Jeffrey and Weiming to 'think aloud' about the critical questions relevant to the essay topics was to assist them to construct their own discursive space when writing personal response essays. However, she also 'retracted' her suggestion almost immediately, after realizing that the 'thinking aloud' technique might in fact be too difficult for the class:

Some of you, I think you don't even know what I'm trying to do. At this point, I don't need you to identify all these rules for me. I only want you to decode the statement.

(lines 26 to 28)

As such, she told the class to 'only' decode the questions by underlining the key words in the question.

In addition, despite her explicit instruction on drawing up the mind maps (lines 50 to 54), the students did not seem to fully comprehend, though she thought she had guided the class (*So, class I've guided you*) at line 55. This explains why she had to go from individual to individual to tell them how to begin doing the mind maps. In fact, it was observed that she literally told some students the points to write about, instead of providing more prompts through the co-construction of ideas either as a class or in small groups. Her students were also probably accustomed to the 'easier' method of getting

ideas or concepts from her and not having to put on their own ‘thinking cap’, as in the case of Class M.

Once again, the practice of her doing the ‘thinking’ for her students is shown in the following excerpt taken from the individual writing phase:

7.2.4 ‘I’ll write down the format for you again: individual writing phase in Class S

Excerpt 7.8 2 August 2010

		[T writes down the question of the formal letter the class is going to do for the entire two periods. The topic reads: <i>Write a letter to Mr Ang Hock Eng (Teacher- in-charge) and let him know the activity your class is interested in.</i>]
1	Jenny	OK, basically I’ve two courses here. One is Leadership Course. It’s
2		three day two night where you’ll stay back in school and you need to
3		pay \$80. All right, meals are provided. Basically, you’ll learn team
4		building..(2) The other one. Study Skills Workshop... You don’t have
5		to stay in school. And it is conducted from 9 am to 5 pm. This one
6		costs \$50. But one day lunch is not provided so you have to go out of
7		school and eat...Yes, copy all these.
8	Ss	HUH? : :
9	Jenny	Copy down the questions. Rashid, go back to your own place. Hurry
10		up. So, it should be between 180 to 250 words.
		[Some students begin to move back to their own seats.]
11		Do you still remember the format?
12	Ss	No : :
13	Jenny	Cannot remember?...After you’re done with the copying, I’ll write
14		down the format for you again.
		[She reprimands two students for talking and not following her instructions.]
15		Once you’re done, I’ll run through with you how to write this.
		[A late-comer walks in the class.]

16		Meihui, can you check the date for her?...All right, class, who is still
17		copying? I'll give you another 3 minutes.
18	S1	Cher, 5 min.
		[Another late-comer walks in.]
19	S2	10, cher, 10.
20	Jenny	So the format is this way. First of all, I want your name then
21		followed by your home address...So, you leave a line. Then I want
22		you to put in your date.. After that, you leave another line... So what
23		I want you to do is you spell out the month. Then you can start off
24		with 'Dear Mr Ang'. And next is the title. Underline it. You can put
25		in <i>Choosing of Leadership Course for September Holidays</i> or
26		<i>Choosing of Study Skills Workshop for September Holidays</i> . Or you
27		can put in <i>Choice of Enrichment Course for September Holidays</i> .
28		Then after that, you can start writing three to four paragraphs (2). I
29		mentioned before no two finger spacing. Everything shifts to the left
30		hand side. Leave a line in between the paragraphs...OK? So, over
31		here for instance, I wanted to choose leadership course. Even though
32		this is \$80, but we've Edusave. You can mention most of them like
33		to try the camp because most of them have not stayed over in school
34		before...Remember, you need to argue for the course that you want.
35		Then you criticise the other one. And, the other thing: : you can also
36		mention we have many students who are school counsellors, sports
37		leaders and they are very interested in learning the skills for team
38		building... you can mention because you feel the class is generally
39		weak in academic studies, so most of them are very interested. Cite
40		me a figure?
41	S4	\$50
42	Jenny	Then after you said \$50 is more affordable than \$80 because you
43		have some students under FA (Financial Assistance). Lunch is not
44		provided but our students feel that they can bring in lunch box..and
45		also the skills...Drawing of mind map...Note taking which is also
46		relevant... Memory technique...and also your class likes hands-on
47		activities. Mention one that is good aspect. The other one you
48		criticize it. You compare the two. Can? (2) At 9.10, I should be able
49		to collect this.
50	S5	10.10
51	Jenny	OK. 10.10..10.10 I should be able to collect this...
		[About 10 minutes later, the third late-comer walks in.]
52		Rashid, hurry up...Class, to start off, you can re-mention that 'I am
53		the class chairman of 3S2, and I've conducted a survey, or you can

54	even put in your name again. I am the class chairman of 3S2, your
55	name..’ Then you can go on. No two finger spacing but leave a line
56	to separate each paragraph. Class, we’re following open punctuation.

7.2.4.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.8

In contrast to Belle, who referred the class to the checklist in the Writing Modules when she elicited answers on the ‘format’ from her students, Jenny was seen ‘giving away’ her answers straight to the class at lines 18 and 19 (*I’ll write down the format for you again*). Much like Belle, Jenny emphasized the stylistic presentation of the ‘format’ of the formal letter the class was to write in the two periods, albeit a little less overtly than Belle, as she categorically addressed the placing of salutation and reminded the students to leave a line after each paragraph, as well as keep to left-hand indentation and open punctuation (lines 20 to 30). In fact, throughout the entire excerpt, she repeatedly reminded the class to leave a line between paragraphs and keep to left indentation using formulaic patterns (lines 28 to 30; turns 55 to 56). Then, she went on to give students ideas for both topics and literally sketched the outline of the letter on their behalf (lines 35 to 39; lines 42 to 48).

Again, she was seen going up to different individuals to clarify her instructions. Meanwhile, some individuals were chatting amongst themselves in their mother tongues, which was not officially allowed in her class, while others were seen resting their heads on the tables. Interestingly, unlike the previous episodes, there was less movement in that students did not walk about the class as an expression of boredom. Rather, they seemed able to progress with writing mechanically. When the bell rang at the end of the double periods, most of them handed in their work to Jenny. This might suggest that Class S were in tune with writing practices in simulated test conditions, rather than with doing writing

in a communicative and process-oriented setting. Most importantly, the excerpt shows the evidence of Jenny spoon feeding the students by telling them the ideas to write rather than getting them to explore or develop the ideas themselves. The only time when she initiated dialogue with the class was when she asked them to suggest the fee for one of the courses at lines 34 and 35 (*Cite me a figure?*). This episode also reflects students' perception of writing, which was like a 'get-it-done-quickly' affair: one was counted as having finished writing after Jenny had told them what to write. On the whole, there was no facilitation of learning of literacy skills, except for the inculcation of good work habits.

Finally, let us proceed to the evaluation phase of writing and examine the way it was conducted in both classes.

7.2.5 'If you do, you'll be penalized': evaluating students' writing in Class M

Excerpt 7.9 27 August 2010

		[T tries to get the class in order before speaking.]
1	Belle	Now, I'm going to return you your report writing test. You need to
2		look at (2) er read the script again, and look at the comments the
3		markers gave you...all right, and do your corrections. All right,
4		before I return you your papers..it seemed like a good piece of report
5		writing but you suddenly realised that there are many, many flaws.
6		OK? What's the first thing? Can you recall the format of report
		writing?
7	S1	()
8	Belle	No, before that. Remember, that is one mistake you made...You must
9		have you 'to', your 'from', 'your date'....What is wrong with some of
10		you? You don't have your 'to', your 'from' you know? You must
11		have them. OK? It's different from your formal letter writing. You
12		get me? All right. That in paragraph after that very carelessly you
13		forgot to what's that?
14	S2	Signed off.
15	Belle	Signed off is for letter. You should write what?

16	S3	'Report written by'
17	Belle	Report written by and then your full name. You must write the full
18		name. You get me? So : : what is your intro? How can you round up
19		a report?
20	S4	Recommendations.
21	Belle	Recommendations. Suggestions. What else? Sometimes, you may
22		want to put down 'contact you if you...' because the person you want
23		to write to (2) wants to have further enquiry. Don't put in your
24		emotions or judgement. Don't put in words like 'I'm very sad or I'm
25		very sure.' Depending on the question...a report writing should not
26		contain most of the emotions because you have to be very objective.
27		All right? Any questions? Now, take out the question paper.
28	S5	Yes.
29	Belle	Now, I want you to look at the question again. Refresh your memory
30		all right? Spend about 5 minutes to look at your script and look at
31		your question again.
		[She gets two students to return marked papers.]
32		OK? Ready? All right? OK, what you've done right. Basically, I'll
33		say 90% of you, your format is correct. The scaffold. Except maybe
34		one or two of you your 'to' 'from' you know that kind? Now, most
35		of you are able to address the task (2) That means your focus is there.
36		You have no problem with the task basically. It's 10 marks. You
37		know the break down right? It marked () followed by language.
38		Task will give you 10 marks. Then language will give you 20 marks.
39		Altogether is 30 marks. (2) Now, why is it important to know the
40		break down? Because that will give you an idea of how to tackle the
41		question...most of you are able to get quite good marks because
42		you've addressed the purpose...OK, introduction should be to the
43		point. Direct. Just take it down. It'll help you refresh your memory.
44		Appropriate thematic vocabulary. Conclusion. Summing up with
45		suggestion. You see what you've done (right) is only so little. What
46		you've done wrong consists of three pages. Hm : : OK? You're too
47		complacent. Now, you're beaten. Please go and tell Class N 'wait for
48		me', we'll peak at the right time. (2) PEAK which is SA2, all right?
49		OK, areas for improvement...all right, you're going to write and
50		listen at the same time. (2) Tense inconsistency. Now, I get very mad
51		when I look at your script. These are all very, very glaring mistakes
52		that you should not commit. Now, let me remind you one more time.
53		It is default. You should not make such error. OK? What do I mean
54		by default? Means it's expected of you. If you do, you'll be
55		penalized OK? At secondary 4, you are expected not to make this
56		kind of silly errors. (1) Now, this is a past incident. So it should be
57		reported in the past tense. I would only think that only the last
58		paragraph is in present or future tense. Correct? Those of you with T

59		T T all over the place ah : : please give yourselves a big slap on your face.
		[Mohammad slapped his face. Some students giggled].
60		
61		OK, and it's a big no-no to have quotation mark in the reported
62		speech (2) I mean er in the report writing like that. You don't put
63		quotation mark to directly quote what a person said. You must you
64		must make use of the info and write it in your report speech I mean
		your report writing, not simply copying the info.
		[Students begin to copy marker's feedback onto their papers. Belle
		walks around to check on them.]
65		
66		Make your report writing more authentic. Keep your sentences short.
67		Similarly, paragraphing if you have a big chunk. Then you may want
68		to break down into two. OK? One main idea for one paragraph.
69		Standard. You've done it in term 1. Now the next error that you
70		made is..something to do with beginning. You must avoid beginning
71		your sentence with 'also', 'because' and 'and'. It is not incorrect OK
72		but in your written text, it is not preferred. OK? So : : (2) avoid that.
73		Be careful of over-use(ing) too descriptive approach in writing
74		reports. Now, then you'll be asking me, "how come you said I can
75		add info (2) all right but now you said 'don't be too descriptive?'"
		What do I mean by that?
76	S5	Unnecessary.
77	Belle	Unnecessary info you leave them out because you are reporting that
78		incident. OK? Some of you went on and described about the camp
79		just to lengthen your text. That will not do. OK? Your purpose is to
80		report about the incident...So, when you were too descriptive, then
81		you steered from your factual accuracy. You are you are not
82		objective anymore.
83	Dinesh	Then is there a difference between 'too descriptive' and normal
84		description? How do you (2) what is the difference?
85	Belle	OK, some of you may have the script written by the marker that says
86		'hum : : you're too descriptive here and there.' I think quite a number
87		of you have that... You just have to state what you see or the witness
88		has seen that part. (2) OK? You don't have to go on and say 'so and
89		so is tired. Er : : so he went to blah, blah, blah before he done that.'
90		(2) Now, relative pronouns. The 'whom' and the 'who' ah..Do you
91		see the asterisk here? So, what should be the right relative pronoun?
92	Seng Chew	Who.
93	Belle	It should be : : 'who' for both sentences, Seng Chew? ... Alright, now
94		these are all authentic errors from Class M which is coming. You
95		don't laugh. All right, draw a table. Ya, I'm just showing how many

96		are there? Twenty. So : : you draw a table that has twenty rows.
97	S7	//WOW.
98	Belle	OK, then on the right hand side, you do yourselves. Quick. Now, I'm
99		not surprised you can do these you know? But why are you making
100		these mistakes? Why? Who's the contributor? (2) All of you here.
101		ALL. It goes to show that you did not check before submission..
102		Hurry up. Copy down. Turn it around, and then do the corrected and
103		then write yourself. Start. ...Your scripts are moderated ah. I don't
104		want you to go and compare with other classes and say 'Oh, blah,
105		blah, blah. You're short-changed and all that.' I did look through
106		your scripts and I moderated your paper. So, the moderated ones, the
107		higher mark is your actual mark, OK?

7.2.5.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.9

A commotion occurred at the beginning of this lesson, and it took Belle a little longer than usual to get the class to settle down. There was a heavy downpour half an hour earlier before the class started, whilst the students were out for their Physical Education (PE) lesson. The window panes were left open and the rain splashed into the left side of the classroom. Consequently, the books and bags of those sitting there were wet. The floor at the back of the class was also wet from the rain that splashed in.

After the class finally settled down, Belle started off by doing the 'recall' ritual before returning to them their test papers (lines 6 to 27). This time, she spoke in a seemingly reproachful tone as she began her test-related talk:

What is wrong with some of you? You don't have your 'to', your 'from' you know?

(lines 9 and 10)

You see what you've done (right) is only so little. What you've done wrong consists of three pages. You're too complacent. Now, you are beaten.

(lines 45 to 47)

Tense inconsistency. Now, I get very mad when I look at your script. These are all very, very glaring mistakes that you should not commit.

(lines 50 to 52)

Now, I'm not surprised you can do these you know? But why are you making these mistakes? Why? Who's the contributor? (2) All of you here. ALL. It goes to show that you did not check before submission.

(lines 98 to 101)

It sounded as though Belle was disappointed with the class's performance when in fact 90% of the class produced the correct 'format' and most of them were able to 'address their task' (lines 35 and 36). The most serious reiteration of her exam-related talk seemed to be:

Now, let me remind you one more time. It is default. You should not make such error. OK? What do I mean by default? Means it's expected of you. If you do, you'll be penalized. OK? At secondary 4, you are expected not to make this kind of silly errors.

(lines 52 to 56)

Later on, she told the students to slap their faces for making the 'silly' tense errors (lines 58 to 60). One student, Mohammad, responded, and the atmosphere became a little more relaxed.

Here, we see that the students were given a serious reminder on the adverse consequences of making 'glaring', 'silly' errors in exams: being penalized in their marks. Underlining the discourse are two assumptions. First, the class was supposed to be 'good', and 'by default', they should not have made the errors. The second assumption seems to be that learning to write well was primarily aimed at the instrumental goal of meeting exam requirements. Likewise, her discourse also spelt out that practical knowledge about marking and competition have the greatest "currency" (Kramer-Dahl, 2007, p. 54) in her class:

Because that will give you an idea of how to tackle the question...most of you are able to get quite good marks because you've addressed the purpose
(lines 40 to 42)

Please go and tell Class N (the second best Express class of the level) 'wait for me', we'll peak at the right time. (2) PEAK which is SA2 (Second Semester Assessment), alright?
(lines 47 and 48)

The fact that Belle re-marked some scripts to award them higher marks also goes to show that she was eager that the students did well and maintained their standard as the best class (lines 103 to 107).

After her pep talk, Belle addressed some critical language features the class had problems with for the practical reason that being aware of the break-down would help them to 'tackle' the question in the exam (lines 39 to 41). Her useful feedback was nonetheless tightly organized around what they were allowed and not allowed to do when writing a report in the exam: tense aspect (lines 56 to 58); verb form and punctuation (turns 60 to 64); register and style of writing (lines 23 to 26, 65 to 67, 73 and 74, 78 to 82); use of linkers (lines 70 and 71) and relative pronouns (lines 90 and 91). All this while, she was systematically listing and explicitly correcting their errors, and the students were dutifully copying down the feedback, until Dinesh asked a genuine question that broke the monotony of the whole class lecture (lines 83 and 84). Finally, the feedback finished with Belle displaying a string of the class's 'authentic errors', which had been grouped into twenty rows. She then asked the class to produce the correct versions themselves, followed by further checking of their answers.

7.2.6 ‘This one, it is not acceptable’: evaluating students’ writing in Class S

Excerpt 7.10 12 August 2010

1	Jenny	All right. Remember those of you chose two questions. One is the
2		one on stress. The other one is the one on school rule...This one is the
3		one on school rule.. Some of you, you gave me very weird
4		production. Later on, I'll show you the example what you did. This
5		one I think generally is OK. So I allow the student to pass.
6	S1	Cher, whose is it?
7	Jenny	This one..Wendy. So, we'll look through what she did. <i>If I were to</i>
8		<i>set up a new set of school rules, it will be slightly different from other</i>
9		<i>schools. Nowadays, teenagers have mobile phone with them all the</i>
10		<i>time (). I don't understand: They'll hold their mobile phones with</i>
11		<i>them.</i> So, I told you, after full stop, I don't you to start with 'so',
12		'what' or 'because'. This introduction is okay but you can even
13		shorten it further as in the introduction could be all the points that
14		you are (-ing) on later. This one you're already () the hand phone.
15		This hand phone can be an individual paragraph on its own.
		[A late-comer walks in.]
16		(), hurry up. Why do you look so untidy?.. Next one, I like this
17		paragraph. This one is all about truancy and defiant (? ?) is one
18		paragraph. <i>Truancy and defiant will be deal according to the</i>
19		<i>incident. Students should be punctual for lessons because this is what</i>
20		<i>they should do..Zahid! Can you see this paragraph? It is well</i>
21		<i>elaborated. The main point, the topic sentence is here. And after that,</i>
22		<i>what Wendy did is elaborate the topic sentence. I allow the female</i>
23		<i>students to keep the fringe below the eyebrows.</i> This one I would feel
24		that it's a bit too long..yes, no doubt you can write your own personal
25		opinion, but make sure it is also logical when the marker reads this,
26		he'll feel that it is okay to accept your idea. <i>Lastly, I hope the</i>
27		<i>students would not take this set of school rules for advantage.</i> This is
28		something I don't understand. She tried to conclude <i>leaving their</i>
29		<i>hair beyond the school's standard or use the phone in class when the</i>
30		<i>teacher is not in class.</i> This one, it is not acceptable. So one thing
31		good about this compo is the introduction, followed by well-
32		elaborated paragraph on just one point. Some of you collected a few
33		points in one paragraph. Some of you just beat about the bush. You
34		don't even answer the question.
35		Akmal one, I read through, I feel that this is quite OK. I managed to
36		pass him. So over here, <i>school rules are always important because</i>
37		<i>the students will know what they should do and what they should not</i>

38		<i>do. If the school rules are perfect. The students will also be perfect.</i>
39		Do you find this a sweeping statement? <i>The students will also be</i>
40		<i>better behaved</i> ? (2) Class, do you understand what is ‘sweeping
41		statement’? (2) Now, it means it is a statement that people can argue
42		that what you say is wrong. (2) So, you protect yourselves, always
43		use the word ‘for (??) or most’. And one thing, he also has the habit
44		of collapsing all the points into one paragraph...Sshh! And third one
45		<i>the student must maintain attendance...</i> But the concluding paragraph
46		is not that strong. I’ve no idea what he’s trying to say. <i>Students do</i>
47		<i>not always complete their daily assignments or homework give..</i> So
48		what is the new rule you’re trying to maintain? This one is one of the
49		best. 18. So it is Fais.
50	Ss	FAIS! Hahaha : :
		[Some students are cheering and clapping hands for Fais. This annoys Jenny.]
51	Fais	Why mine one? (2) Mine one not good, cher.
52	Jenny	Over here, I would say the introduction is OK. But again, one thing.
53		Why is this isolated from this paragraph? Because if you’re talking
54		about the same rule, then you should lump everything in one
55		paragraph. I think this paragraph is okay. So here...he wanted the
56		time extended to 45 minutes. It is more logical and sensible. Next
57		one : : is to look at pairing of students’ seating. But this one, do you
58		feel that it is a rule? (2) It can be sharpened even further right?
59		School rule is ways to make students behave. But the conclusion is
60		[poor.
61	S2	//Ya : : Bull shit OK?]
62	Jenny	So you should conclude in such a way that there are advantages and
63		disadvantages to start school rules...I will show you one 23 one but
64		after what I showed you, () This one, can you see it overall what do
65		you think of this essay?
66	S3	UNTIDY
67	Jenny	Untidy and also lack of paragraph....Mardiana and Rohaya, actually
68		what is that? (2) The two of you are busy writing something.
69	S4	Copy la, cher.
70	Jenny	No, it is some other work.
71	S4	How you know?
72	Jenny	Or you can pass it to me : : under the task. (2) The TWO of you are
73		doing exactly the same thing. Homework is supposed to be done at
74		home, not during my lesson...And this one, is there any solution
75		being mentioned? You just look through: <i>Even though some stress</i>
76		<i>can be dangerous, it can be good for us. Stress can help you do</i>
77		<i>better at work. Almost 35% of adults is suffering..</i> ’ where did you get
78		all these figures from?
79	Ss	YA LA.

80	Jenny	It lacks paragraph. This is the worst thing. There's no solution
81		involved. And I want you to separate de-stress into various
82		paragraphs. See over here, he did have some methods. <i>Firstly, you</i>
83		<i>can talk to someone about your problems...</i> This one should be well
84		separated into two paragraphs, OK? He just touched and went. So,
85		this one not so good...This one, I think is too short. Again, the same
86		thing. Where is the solution? No solution mentioned. Many of you
87		who did this question is out of point because you have no solutions...
88		This one is the best. 23 out of 30.
89	S5	Who? Cher?
90	Jenny	Hwee Leng. (2) So, I like the intro...This one, can you see is partly
91		on the stress. Next, she also used words like 'firstly', 'secondly',
92		which is good. It is well organized...After that, she mentioned,
93		identified the three types of stress. Then she zoomed into solutions.
94		(2) Syed!...So, can you see she identified three types of stress and
95		also three solutions?...In fact, this one is the best...I also have a few
96		passes which are not that bad. Well, what exactly helped them to
97		score is the words 'firstly', 'secondly', 'thirdly' and they managed to
98		separate all these into various paragraphs with one point in each
99		paragraph with elaboration. So, now I'll return all these to you. Some
100		of you did not submit your essays to me...Nazira, are you
101		here?...Zahid! (2) Ridzuan, are you calling names? Zahid, face in
102		front.
103	Zahid	You shut up, can or not?...Teacher, begin.
104	Jenny	Class, I want you to do corrections. Those who didn't manage to do
105		well, you'll have to re-write one. Those passes, whatever paragraphs
106		that are not good enough, I want you to re-write the paragraphs...So,
107		these are just some pointers...So, that will be four paragraphs..So
108		conclusion, last paragraph. Taufiq!
		[She writes her instructions on board.]
109	S6	Re-write?
110	Jenny	Yes : : Re-write the essay for those who failed. Rashid, come back.
111		Asraf! I told you to take out the paper and start doing. Go back to
112		your own place now.

7.2.6.1 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 7.10

In this lesson, the class was 10 minutes behind schedule as the preceding lesson was PE, and the students had to make their way back from the school field. When the class finally settled down, Jenny began to tell them that she was going to review some of

their personal response essays. The essays consisted of a range of grades: good, average and below average. The students had selected one out of the four topics to write on, and most of them had selected either:

(i) *What are the ways in which you can relieve stress?*

or

(ii) *If you were drawing up a set of school rules for a new school, what would they be? Explain which of these you think are the most important.*

For the entire lesson, Jenny analysed seven selected essays with the whole class on the document camera. On the whole, the class did not do as well as she had expected. The main problem, according to her, was that they used an inappropriate register, as though they were writing a narrative; and they also ‘rattled’ their points without much elaboration. In reviewing the work of the five students, Wendy, Akmal, Fais, one unknown student and Hwee Leng, she listed the strengths and weaknesses in each of their essays as a way of demonstrating to the class ways to improve on their writing.

In Wendy’s case, Jenny pointed out that her topic sentence was ‘well elaborated’ (line 21), but her conclusion was ‘not acceptable’ (lines 30 and 31) as her arguments for the school rules she was advocating were not logical. However Jenny neither explained what was exactly wrong with her conclusion nor provided an alternative suggestion to her answer. Then in Akmal’s case, she posed an “epistemic question”¹¹ (Luke, et al., 2005, p. 92) ‘Do you find this a sweeping statement?’ (line 39), which could have turned the lesson into a whole class discussion at lines 40 and 41 (*Class, do you understand what is*

¹¹Epistemic questions require the justification of ‘knowledge claims by others using established or reasonable rules of interpretation, testimony, evidence, grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary norms etc’.

'sweeping statement'). However, as in the previous excerpts, she went on to tell them the answer straightaway, instead of making use of the opportunity to engage with and elicit responses from individuals. Furthermore, she could also have asked Akmal to comment on or clarify his intentions as well as inviting the rest of the class to contribute their thoughts. Instead, she abruptly finished reviewing his work with the brief remarks 'I've no idea what he's trying to say' (line 46) and 'So, what is the new rule you are trying to maintain?' (lines 47 and 48), without showing him how to connect his disjointed ideas together for better coherence. Although Fais's work happened to be 'one of the best', she found his concluding paragraph 'poor' (lines 59 and 60). The remark in turn triggered a negative and disruptive response from one student at line 61 (*Ya : : Bull shit OK?*). Like the other three cases, she did not provide suggestions on how the essay could be 'sharpened even further' (line 58) or ask him to share his thoughts, although she did ask the class what their overall impression of his work was, perhaps expecting the class to concur with her that it was 'UNTIDY' (line 66). For the fourth student, she highlighted to the class the 'worst' parts of the essay, which were the lack of paragraphing and content (lines 80 to 86). She explained that there were no solutions provided in the essay, and he 'just touched and went' on his points (line 84). Again, she did not show him how to rectify his weakness.

What then was Jenny's idea of a 'good' personal response essay? We see that in reviewing Hwee Leng's essay which scored the highest in the class, she pointed to her use of linkers such as 'firstly', 'secondly', 'thirdly', and proper organization of points in each paragraph, especially in the introduction and elaboration of ideas (lines 91 to 93), which made her writing 'well-organized'. Although Jenny's feedback episode was formative and

personal compared to Belle's, who was more systematic in her reinforcing of the appropriate format in writing a formal report, hers came across as haphazard, and her use of discourse 'non-supportive' to some extent, since her comments largely referred to the students' problems (like *beating about the bush* at lines 33 and 34) more than solutions. To be fair, none of Jenny's comments were really unkind. However, the excerpts show that Jenny had not given the students a chance to articulate their personal voices. It was as though personal message, voice and meaning-making did not matter as much as the prescribed way of writing the essay as Jenny saw fit. At the end of the class, I found myself asking if there could have been more affirmation given for personal ideas and if the input had been helpful in getting them to understand how to improve their weaknesses, given that some critical aspects of writing a personal response essay had been glossed over. Asked if she made the students draft their essays, Jenny commented that

Hm for this school, a little bit. Yes, summary I'll do all this but for compo, I'll teach them brainstorm. Then, after that, I get the final product. I'll skip the draft. In fact, it will help given that my students are more interested in writing. I mean it also depends on the type of students you have. If they're so keen on getting the final product, then it'll be a bit hard to carry out process writing cos' process writing involves the writing of drafts then after that you can even ask your classmates to peer edit all that. I tried before. I feel that after editing, asking their peers to edit, whatever I received is still quite similar to first draft.

(Interview, 28 July 2010)

Her remarks pointed to her students' complete lack of interest and diligence in doing drafts before submitting the 'final product'. Still, the question arises as to why the class was only keen on delivering the 'final product'. Although the purpose of doing drafts goes beyond editing the mechanics and the grammar teachers are usually preoccupied with, as Cheah (1998) points out, Jenny felt that given the students' weak

grammar, the drafts they wrote did not actually make their 'final product' any better but problematic to grade.

In all, Jenny was interrupted no less than nine times throughout the two periods. Thus, her instructional discourse was interspersed with a regulative tone. Zahid, in particular, was singled out twice for misbehaving (lines 20 and 101); Mardiana's and Rohaya's homework they were 'copying' was confiscated (lines 67 and 68); and a few others like Rashid were reprimanded for moving about and distracting others in the class (line 110).

7.3 The Discourse Pattern and Its Functions in Class M and Class S

The utterances in all the transcripts were parsed into specific turns, and those related to teacher talk were then coded into broad categories adapted from a pre-determined coding scheme developed by Luke, Cazden, Lin and Freebody (2005), which related to pedagogical functions, such as content of lessons and activities, types of skills and strategies taught, learning outcomes, and to specific organization of classroom activities, such as group and individual work, as well as teacher-student relationships and participation structure common in the Singapore classroom context.

7.3.1 Reinforcing, replicating, retaining in Class M

Overall, the structure and pattern of teacher-student interaction in Class M were dominated by whole class lecture, with some occasions of IFR sequences, student-initiated questions and informal exchanges with the class or particular individuals, which

had no bearing on the lesson. The frequency of IRF sequences and student-initiated questions is summarized as follows in Table 7.1:

Table 7.1 Teacher-Student Interaction & Frequency of Occurrence in Class M

Pattern of Interaction	Frequency (out of 120 turns of talk)
IRF sequence	30
student initiated questions	3

The nature of Belle’s talk, on the other hand, was coded into organizational, curriculum-related, regulatory and test or exam-strategy, and shown in Table 7.2. Organizational talk refers to the framing of activities or instructions during curriculum time, where there can be movement of bodies and space; curriculum-related talk applies to any talk about instructional content taught in class and can be further delineated into procedural, exploratory and connecting concepts; regulatory talk involves disciplining and behaviour management of students; finally, test or exam-related talk contains explicit reference to testing, exams or test requirements.

Table 7.2 Type of Teacher Talk & Percentage of Occurrence in Class M

Type of Teacher Talk	Percentage (out of 120 turns of talk)
Organizational	8.3
Curriculum-related	
<i>procedural</i>	40.0
<i>Exploratory</i>	3.3
<i>Connecting concepts</i>	2.5
Regulatory	4.2
Test/exam-related	5.0

From the table, it is clear that Belle's whole class lectures mostly centred on curriculum-related matters. As we have seen in Chapter 5, as well as the excerpts shown earlier in this chapter, her talk was essentially performative, focusing on the procedural knowledge of organizing, as opposed to generating or creating knowledge about texts and text types (40.0%), although she also practised some exploratory (3.3%) and connecting talk (2.5%), which functioned to develop the students' level of understanding (Luke, et al., 2005). Moreover, we see that whole class elicitation and discussion, as evidenced in Excerpt 5.3, was extremely rare. Even then, only a few students were briefly involved in the discussion about the people who should be saved from a sinking ship (lines 13 to 27). Further, we see that organizational talk featured as the second highest percentage of occurrence (8.3%). This implies that Belle placed a lot of emphasis on task requirement, and as we saw in the excerpts, the occurrence of this type of talk was frequently interspersed with the transmission of procedural knowledge.

Given the discourse patterns Belle practised, her approach to teaching writing can be described as ‘back-to-basics’ (Kramer-Dahl, 2007, p. 54), instead of one that was aimed to promote higher metacognitive or evaluative skills. It was observed that the students were expected to produce knowledge or answers that were confined to the packaging or presentation of their final draft. This explains why there was a lot of reinforcement on the appropriate ‘format’ of writing in her class. We have seen that she did this by emphasizing the acceptable register, style and language features, as well as ‘de-emphasizing’ the unacceptable ones, through her use of an IRF sequence of interaction that was organized around recall type questions. She seldom reformulated her question, which would have resulted in a more sustained teacher-student interaction. Consequently, there was little opportunity for an extended oral response and thus more substantive development of the skills of writing. Although Belle encouraged the students in a pre-writing activity to generate ideas for their report writing with the use of a visual stimulus in Excerpt 7.1, there is evidence to suggest that the class was not used to a structure that deviated from one that was normally teacher-centred. In such a situation that was dominated by a ‘back-to-basics’ approach to writing, the students apparently learnt that what was valued was the ability to follow instructions, and the kind of knowledge that was affirmed was what they replicated or reproduced from the templates in the handout, or from Belle’s instruction. Under the influence of this transmission model of imparting knowledge, the students were also expected to display good behaviour in class, such as not changing seats with each other (see Chapter 5) and keeping to their tasks during the ‘gallery view’ exercise (see 7.2.2.2).

What then is the purpose of writing as formulated by Belle's 'back-to-basics' approach? It is mainly to *reinforce*, *replicate* and *retain* the existing examination-oriented literacy rather than to inculcate new thinking and understanding about writing. As discussed in Chapter 5, the lack of time had restricted her use of an alternative questioning format to promote a 'thinking' classroom advocated by the *Teach Less Learn More* initiative (see 1.2.7). The 'reinforce, replicate and retain' type of discourse pattern then helped her to provide a quick and easy method of assessing what the students had learnt. Perhaps what is also worth pointing out is that, despite the negative aspect of constraining teacher and student practices with her use of the 'back-to-basics' approach, this actually served the ultimate function of maintaining the class's academic standard as the first class in 3E. The students were well behaved during class; they cooperated with her instructions; and were certainly responsive to her pep talks.

7.3.2 Spoon-feeding, regulating and distancing in Class S

In Class S, the overall structure of teacher-student interaction pattern was also dominated by whole class lecture, which entailed copying model answers as well as decoding the organizational structure and grammatical features in the sample essays provided in the Writing Modules handouts, with few instances of complete IFR sequences. Unlike Class M, there were more occasions of disruptions from students during class. The frequency of the occurrence for these interaction patterns is summarized as follows in Table 7.3:

Table 7.3 Teacher-Student Interaction & Frequency of Occurrence in Class S

Pattern of Interaction	Frequency (out of 115 turns)
IRF	7
Student-initiated questions	1
Disruptions by students	21

The nature of Jenny's talk is further categorized as follows in Table 7.4:

Table 7.4 Type of Teacher Talk and Percentage of Occurrence in Class S

Type of Teacher Talk	Percentage (out of 115 turns)
Organizational	5.2
<u>Curriculum-related</u>	
<i>Procedural</i>	39.1
<i>Sharing</i>	0.9
<i>Clarifying</i>	0.9
Connecting concepts	0.9
Regulatory	14.8
Test/exam-related	2.6

From Table 7.3, we see that there were only 7 complete IRF sequences in Jenny's class. The bulk of her talk, according to Table 7.4, was related to curriculum matters, of which 39.1% centred on the transmission of procedural knowledge. However, unlike Belle, there was no evidence of her engaging the class in a higher level of talk, and the numbers for sharing (0.9%) and clarifying talk (0.9%) were tellingly low. Although there was some

evidence of students initiating questions, they usually concerned procedural matters such as the date of the day. Apart from the whole class lectures, in which Jenny told the students her model answers, the rest of the time was usually taken up by individual writing and occasionally, peer conferencing.

Despite the fact that Belle, at times had given her answer when the students failed to produce the correct one, rather than allowing for a more sustained teacher-student interaction, there were still more instances of exchange and evidence of the co-construction of ideas with students in Class M than in Class S (see 7.2.1.1). For example, unlike Belle, who engaged individuals in a question-and-answer format in her 'recall' ritual, Jenny very seldom elicited students' responses. Hence, there was clearly a lack of inclusivity as well as voluntary reciprocity. Instead, Jenny would circulate amongst the students for one-to-one conferencing during individual writing (see 'mind mapping' episode, Excerpt 7.7). This suggests that little learning had taken place as the students were unable to do the writing on their own even after the scaffolding phase, and Jenny had to re-teach them the writing techniques (see 7.2.4.1). There are two possible causes for this. Firstly, sociocognitive apprenticeship, which Englert (2001; Englert, et al., 2006) regards as critical for helping students "emulate the performance of mature writers" (p.156) was insufficiently provided. Secondly, they lacked the 'stamina' to persist in writing when they encountered problems. Thus, they sought the easier way out by getting Jenny to tell them the ideas to write so they did not have to think for themselves. Hence, we see Jenny habitually spoon-feeding the students during her one-to-one conferencing when she literally told them what to put down on paper. Whatever the case, there had been minimal engagement with the process of writing the text types and the meanings

built into them for understanding the use of language the way Syllabus 2001 had envisaged (Kramer-Dahl, 2007).

Insofar as her discourse pattern is concerned, it can be described as shuttling back and forth between spoon-feeding the students her model answer and regulating their behaviour in class. What then can we say about the purpose of writing, as formulated by Jenny, with such a discourse pattern? In doing the spoon-feeding discourse, there was little opportunity for students to talk about their personal ideas and experiences in writing, which would have served to inculcate values and beliefs of ‘being and doing’ in society (Gee, 2006). For example, in the evaluation episode in Excerpt 7.10, we see that the notion of personal voice and identity did not seem to be recognized in the writing of the students’ personal response essay, as Jenny did not pause during her review lesson to encourage Akmal and others to explain how they derived their ideas. As discussed earlier, her spoon feeding mentality might have stemmed from her belief that the linguistic skills of her students were not good enough for them to construct a personal voice (see 7.2.3.3); or, perhaps, there was a strong sense of urgency to keep to the prescribed ‘format’ as required in the exam; or, she was trying to keep the students’ ‘nonsense’ to the minimum. A close examination of the transcripts further suggests that Jenny was attempting to distance herself from the unruly students, especially the Malay boys, who ‘bullied’ her and would not cooperate with her. Given the disposition of the class and, to some extent, Jenny’s perception of the Malay boys, and of her lack of ability to control the class, shuttling back and forth between a spoon-feeding and regulatory discourse could offer an easier way or “zone of relative comfort” (Johnston & Hayes, 2008, p. 121) for her teaching.

Finally, the shuttling discourse pattern really underscores the issue of receptivity towards Jenny as the teacher (Allwright & Bailey, 2004). With the exception of Gabriel, who was neutral, the other three focal students clearly had some problems with her. Chee Seng, for instance, felt that her class always gave him ‘headaches’ and Diyana strongly felt that Jenny was biased against the Malay students. As a result of the teacher-student ‘disagreement’, teaching and learning experiences had already been compromised. Still, all these comments are not meant to tarnish the image of Jenny as a ‘good’ teacher, although there was more she could have done to be effective in her teaching, instead of resigning herself to the fact that she did not have a stern demeanour to command respect from the class (see 6.2.3). It could be that, in the eyes of the students in other ‘better’ classes, she might have been regarded with more respect. Instead, this was an attempt to portray the classroom and institutional and, to some extent, the sociocultural contexts in which she taught so as to understand the kinds of constraints she faced.

7.4 Similarities and Differences between the Two Writing Cultures: ‘Effective’ vs ‘Ineffective’ Habitus

The analyses thus far show that Belle and Jenny practised somewhat similar discourse patterns to perform different functions. The former practised a discourse to *reinforce*, *replicate* and *retain* the existing examination-oriented literacy, whereas the latter shuttled back and forth between spoon feeding and regulatory discourse, such that the teacher was distanced from students’ literacy development. Despite the differences in the functions of their discourse patterns, it still can be said that they resulted in one commonality, that is, students learnt to write procedurally more than critically. Then,

what is really worth pointing out is the difference between the habitus (see 7.1.1) of the two classes. In particular, they differed in terms of their non-cognitive dispositions as well as academic performance. In Class M, we see self-regulated behaviour, a desire to succeed and favourable perceptions of the school and Belle, and of course, their good writing performance. On the other hand, in Class S, there was disengagement, negative perceptions of Jenny, and resistance towards writing. Thus, the elements present in Class M and not those in Class S seemed to have provided the students an “effective habitus” (Nash, 2002, p. 28) to succeed in doing writing in school.

The discourse analyses in this chapter therefore seem to support the deficit belief that students’ performance is a consequence not of classroom pedagogies, but of their habitus - home background, disposition and academic aptitude. To make matters more complicated, the institutional practices of the school and of the teachers, with their construction of “particular cognitive predispositions and value systems” (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 97) had likewise helped to shape the way writing was approached in the classroom context. Over time, these differences in the ways of thinking about and doing writing had been perpetuated through the discourse patterns practised at the classroom and institutional levels.

8 DISCUSSION: THE PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION OF THE INEFFECTIVE HABITUS OF DOING WRITING IN SCHOOL

8.1 Overview

Following the analyses in the preceding chapters, this chapter takes a critical look at the influences within the ineffective habitus which has ‘produced and reproduced’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) the ineffective habitus of doing writing at school, particularly for low achievers such as those in Class S. These influences will be discussed in relation to the broad canvas of teaching and learning English literacy in the mainstream Singapore school. Foremost, the perennial issue of the mismatch between the aims of Syllabus 2001 and their actual implementation at the classroom level needs to be addressed. This will set the stage for further discussion on the existing literacy as well as ideological practices, which have imposed a negative identity on low achievers through the discourse constructions at the institutional and societal levels. The circularity and persistence of these discourse constructions will continue to have unfavourable implications for the quality of learning and teaching for students and teachers alike if they continue to remain unchallenged. While discussing the implications of the findings, the chapter also attempts to answer research question 2:

How is writing literacy conceptualized in the best and low achieving class?

8.2 Influences within the Ineffective Habitus of Doing Writing in School

8.2.1 The Genre-Based Pedagogy in Syllabus 2001

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the English Language Syllabus 2001 is informed by the school of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994), as well as Derewianka's (1990) GBP model which has been highly influential in the primary school English curricula in Australia. At the core of the genre model is the premise that language use is functional, goal-oriented and socially situated (Derewianka, 2003; Hyland, 2002). Accordingly, texts are produced in response to, and out of, real social situations ranging from shopping lists to job applications (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Kress & Knapp, 1992, p. 5). In particular, four key emphases (focus on text; focus on social purposes; focus on meaning and choice; and focus on culture and ideology) which underpin the overall structure of the theoretical framework ensure that the purposes of writing are made meaningful (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Incorporating the four key emphases of GBP into Syllabus 2001 meant that for the first time, language appropriateness took on a more significant role than grammatical accuracy, with grammar becoming contextualised through the teaching of text types. In that aspect, it marked a shift away from a structural paradigm of language teaching and learning presented in previous syllabuses towards one that emphasizes communication as well as literacy skills (Cheah, 2004). As such, the syllabus is said to address the inadequacies of the previous syllabuses in preparing students to use English for education and real-life purposes (Cheah, 2004; Lim, 2004; Lin, 2003), an outcome with which the policy makers are highly concerned.

Lin (2003) further points out that amongst the three areas of language use (language for information; language for social interaction; and language for literary response and expression), the focus on ‘language for social interaction’ especially enabled clarity for planners of Syllabus 2001 in specifying more precisely the range of fiction and non-fiction texts to be taught in the classroom in relation to its aims. Further, the focus on meaning and choice also serves to promote real-life language use by emphasizing the appropriate selection of lexis and grammar, and so fosters creativity and thinking through the inventive use of language – an initiative which forms part of the larger imperatives of education in Singapore. Finally, the focus on culture and ideology addresses the need perceived by policy makers for appropriate and effective communication and interaction across cultures and social situations in a multi-ethnic setting such as Singapore’s. Together with the emphasis on social interactions within the context of learning English, the focus of language on the expression of self and identity aims to develop in students “a sense of their common Singaporean identity” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 6).

8.2.2 Discrepancies between the aims of syllabus and actual classroom teaching

Given the six principles of learning (see p.13) around which the three areas of language use are organized, Syllabus 2001, compared to previous syllabuses, is said to translate into a more learner-centred, holistic and progressivist approach to teaching writing. However, that is often not the case when the syllabus is implemented in the classroom, which then leads to a number of discrepancies between the stated aims and the actual delivery of teaching.

Firstly, the pedagogies teachers deliver in their classes actually do not align with the view of language espoused by the syllabus on many occasions. For example, referring to the classroom scenes in Class M and Class S, it is observed that the writing activities in both classes were largely product-oriented, as opposed to skills-focused, and rigidly governed by the teaching of ‘formats’. In the case of Class M, Belle used a ‘back-to-basics’, ‘reductive’ approach to teach the incident report text type (see 7.3.1). This is certainly attested to by her frequent use of the recall ritual whereby she emphasized the appropriate ‘format’ of the incident report text type, such as the presentation of acceptable styles and registers in the form of two-finger spacing, left alignment, etc, and ‘de-emphasized’ the inappropriate ones. To ensure that students engaged with her instructions, she used exam-related discourse to emphasize the performance and behaviour expected of the class.

Similarly, the reinforcing of the ‘format’ of the personal response essay was observed in Class S, albeit in a less pronounced way, though like Belle, Jenny relied heavily on the scaffolding templates provided in the Writing Modules handouts endorsed by the department to drill students on the structure of text types. As shown on one occasion, the entire lesson merely consisted of a decoding exercise whereby students broke down the structures of a sample essay along with copying of the teacher’s model answer onto their scaffolding templates (see 7.2.3.1). Belle was aware that the style of drilling ‘in theory, is going to defeat the purpose’ of real learning (see p130) while Jenny perceived that drilling her class in writing formal letters would ensure that they do well in exams, given the students’ limited linguistic skills (see p.152). The lack of time, as revealed in the discourse analyses of classroom observations, is another reason they opted

for the drilling since exigency often meant that drill and practice was in fact the most economical way of mastering language in this examination-oriented literacy.

Both the use of a 'back-to-basics' approach and a deconstruction method of teaching text types resulted in "purposeful and staged activities" (Derewianka, 2003, p. 138) in Class M and Class S. This is not at all a new phenomenon but is in fact a perennial pedagogical issue in the Singapore mainstream classroom (Kwek, et al., 2007; Lin, 2003). In fact, Lin (2003) reports that it is not uncommon that many Singaporean teachers rigidly regard all texts of a certain genre to have a particular generic structure or organizational pattern as well as grammatical features. Kramer-Dahl (2007) goes on to attribute the formulaic, prescriptive treatment of text types to teachers' general lack of understanding of text and grammar as a resource for making meaning "systematically and variably in different contexts" (Kramer-Dahl, 2007, p. 62), which explains why Belle and Jenny resorted to reducing text types to knowledge about grammar and structure, and even turned them into the major contents for teaching writing. However, such prescriptive treatment of text types as if they were 'given' structures imposed upon a text exactly contradicts the rationale of GBP, which serves to help students focus on the different moves or stages in the text that "arise naturally because of their functionality" (Derewianka, 2003, p. 148). Derewianka, in that regard, warns that the function of GBP is thwarted when teachers present the moves or stages in texts in a rigid fashion, with "little allowance for the possibility of optional stages or reordering of stages" (Derewianka, 2003, p. 139). Because students have not been taught to identify the moves or stages in the text and explore the roles they fulfil, thus undermining their ability to understand how the contextual purpose of various texts is achieved through "text organisation, grammar

and vocabulary' (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 74) they become unable to relate their writing purpose to an appropriate choice of genre.

The second area of discrepancy concerns the insufficient attention given to different types of texts, particularly in the case of Class S. For example, in the case of Class M, the type of texts specified in the department Scheme of Work included a range of genres such as narrative, descriptive and argumentative writing tasks, along with the formal letter and incident report, although there seemed to be a preference for narratives and report writing. Belle also conducted more varieties of writing activity with the students such as spontaneous writing. By contrast, the range of text types taught in Class S was more limited since the class mainly had to do formal letter writing in the semester the study was conducted. Although Syllabus 2001 specifies the teaching of various text types such as "procedures, narratives, explanations, information reports and expositions" (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 5), the fact that only particular text types, and not others, were reinforced perpetuates the notion that the acquisition of particular forms of knowledge is more culturally valued and privileged (Gilbert, 1994) than others in literacy learning, and thus the practice is consistent with Derewianka's (2003) observation that GBP in Singapore actually reinforces the "status quo" (p.150) of particular text types just as in the context of the Australian schools. The practice of honing students' skills of reproducing a set of text types that had immediate relevance in exams also limits their exposure to a "wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts from print, non-print and electronic sources", thus undermining the important outcome of building up their "critical appreciation" (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 3) towards other textual forms. The result is that students are deprived of the kind

of intellectual engagement with the genre of the text to be read and with the social practices they call for (e.g. to express opinion, to evaluate text for reasonableness of ideas, etc).

The third area of discrepancy concerns the lack of teaching of higher order skills and strategies required for critical literacy. While Syllabus 2001 encourages the teaching of skills and strategies, limited fostering of meta-cognitive or evaluative skills was observed in Class M but hardly any in Class S. For example, Belle directed the class in creating ideas in the brainstorming phase of the formal report writing with the ‘thinking cap’ episode (see Excerpt 7.1). The questions she posed on the cues to look out for whilst watching the video clip also served to regulate their thought processes. Likewise, she encouraged the students to evaluate each other’s writing by paying attention to the structural characteristics in the writing in the ‘gallery view’ exercise (see Excerpt 7.3). Despite her use of ‘pseudo’ questions to engage her class with performative talks, there was nevertheless some evidence of her guiding students by exploring alternatives and connecting concepts (see Excerpt 5.2 and 5.3).

On the other hand, in Class S, Jenny frequently spoon fed the students by getting them to copy down her model answers or telling individuals what to write in their personal response essay, instead of having them brainstorm ideas and co-constructing drafts with them. (see Excerpt 7.8). The activity of copying was in fact observed to take up a significant portion of class time in another lesson (see Excerpt 7.5). As discussed in Chapter 7, there was literally no teacher-student dialogue on text-type related content such as ‘what the text is about’, ‘who is interacting with whom’ and ‘what role language is playing’ (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Most importantly, in one episode, she retracted the

suggestion for students to think critically about the questions she posed, after realising that the ‘thinking aloud’ technique was too difficult for them. Eventually, she settled for something simpler, which only required them to decode the questions by underlining the key words (see Excerpt 7.7). Again, in another lesson, she also did not show the students how to rectify their weaknesses during the evaluative phase of writing their personal response essays, except to tell some of them that their conclusions were ‘not acceptable’ (see Excerpt 7.10). Often, there were indications that students were not given enough support to work on their tasks when she had to go up to individuals and explain her points all over again. This suggests that there was a lack of monitoring or scaffolding for the task, the very criteria described in the process orientation feature of Syllabus 2001. However, the one-to-one consultation proved problematic for her as she could only be involved with one individual at a time whilst neglecting others. This meant some students stayed off-task and started talking amongst themselves, creating disciplinary problems for her.

In short, the pedagogical practices employed by Jenny and to some extent, Belle did not promote or encourage the forms of creativity and critical literacy emphasized in Syllabus 2001. Rather, teacher-student transmission of knowledge characterized the pedagogical practices in both classes (Kwek, et al., 2007; Vaish, 2008)

The fourth area of discrepancy concerns the lack of ‘focus on meaning and choice’, which underscores the syllabus’s emphasis on language for “literary response and expression” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 5). The fact that both teachers, especially Jenny, minimized dialogue with the students contradicted the syllabus’s aims to foster learners’ participation and interaction in language learning. In

reality, the teachers' discourse format geared towards the production and reproduction of a particular type of knowledge and social behaviour failed to create opportunities to negotiate meaning with the class, and so build up students' ability to initiate ideas. For example, in the episode whereby Jenny evaluated her students' writing (Excerpt 7.10), she neither encouraged some to express their personal voices nor affirmed others', as was evident in her rendering of a non-supportive discourse. Insofar as language use for 'literacy response and expression' was concerned, she was not observed to teach students to respond creatively and critically to literary texts, connect them with personal experiences and prior knowledge or "use language creatively to express their identities" (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 5), which would be the necessary pre-requisites for a 'thinking' classroom. As suggested in Chapter 7, it seemed that she did not have high regard for personal message, voice and meaning-making, preferring instead a structured and fixed style of writing. Alternatively, it was also likely she had low expectations of students' abilities to construct a personal voice. Inasmuch as there was sufficient evidence to suggest that the class's disruptive and uncooperative behaviour was a deterring factor in Jenny's reluctance to engage with students over the critical dimension of their writing, one could also argue that the students must have had personal experiences and prior knowledge that they could have tapped into to express self and identity. Moreover, such personal engagement with text would enhance students' ability to "give reasons to support a response/point of view/an opinion" (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 76), which is another emphasis of language use for social interaction.

The four areas of discrepancy indicate that students in both classes were not engaged in ways intended by Syllabus 2001 or the two initiatives promoted by the Ministry in recent years (see 1.2.7). Firstly, it is clear that writing was taught procedurally in both classes, rather than critically, as dictated by the syllabus. Although students in Class M appeared behaviourally engaged (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) given that there was evidence of on-task behaviour and classroom participation, the instruction they received did not focus much on literary or cognitive dimensions of the tasks requiring higher-level mental processes. Instead, the students were concerned about their performance, which had been reinforced through Belle's 'back-to-basics' teaching. In the case of Class S especially, students were not 'habituated' (Nash, 2002) to be independent thinkers; it is as though they were habituated to rely on Jenny's model answers as well as into thinking that such and such a text type was beyond their intellectual ability to cope with, and would have no relevance for them when they left school. While it can be said that the class by nature did not have the disposition to engage cognitively (Newmann, 1992) with writing, it is also not difficult to see how these low-level tasks in some ways contributed to the students' behavioural disengagement.

The lack of congruence between the official and 'enacted' writing curriculum no doubt has implications for the literacy education of students in Class M and Class S, and it has inevitably impinged upon the learning and teaching experiences of students and teachers alike (Enright, 2010), as the discussion in the following sections will show.

8.2.3 The notion of literacy as conceptualized in Class M and Class S

In its opening page, the English language curriculum states that the primary imperative for every child is to be nurtured into “independent lifelong learners, creative thinkers and problem solvers who can communicate effectively in English” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 2). Further, with the emphases on the three areas of language use (language for information; language for social interaction; and language for literary response and expression), the aims of Syllabus 2001 clearly convey a notion of literacy that goes beyond a narrow focus on language acquisition espoused by the past syllabuses (Cheah, 1994). Taken in that light, the current syllabus promises teachers room for experimentation and “time to cater to the different learning needs and abilities of their students” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 5). This implies that a wide range of literate activities could be brought into the classroom and competencies taught. However, as shown by the findings, writing classes mainly consisted of the activities of decoding and copying limited types of text in Class S or the ‘check-the-answer’ recall rituals in Class M. Specifically for Class S, it was Jenny’s spoon feeding that led students to depend on her answers rather than making effort on their own. Hence, the school sanctioned literacy, (Wallace, 2003) constructed for students in Class M and Class S, where they were taught to regurgitate the acceptable ‘format’ of an exam-relevant text type rigidly fitted around the tightly prescribed stages of the genre, can be said to be reductive; it is limited and reactionary in principle and hardly a site for meaning exploration.

The limited opportunities for the exploration of meaning in texts also resulted in what Kwek et al. (2007) term a ‘technicist’ type of literacy. On the one hand, the ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ type of literacy, through its strong and systematic focus on

explicit, direct, and outcomes-driven pedagogy, has produced a powerful and sustainable foundation of basic skills and factual knowledge for the majority of students in the Singapore education system, evidenced by high scores on standardized achievement measures and international benchmarks; on the other hand, it has also inadvertently stagnated the development of higher-order, critical, creative knowledge and competencies (Albright & Kramer-Dahl, 2009) since, in the environment of an “authoritarian, narrowly conceived assessment regime” (Kramer-Dahl, 2008, p. 103) sustained by pragmatic instrumentalism, teachers tend not to set intellectually rich or cognitively demanding tasks in the classroom, thus causing students to be inclined towards conformity instead of creativity and variation. With regard to teaching, the result of a ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ literacy has likewise inhibited teachers from ‘imagining’ teaching writing and textuality, in general, in “critical and artful ways” (Albright & Kramer-Dahl, 2009, p. 219), so that the purpose of writing merely results in the meticulous packaging of students’ work (see 5.5), attested by Belle’s and Jenny’s reinforcement of good work habits and product presentation in the form of inordinately lengthy instructions. The findings have shown that within the paradigm of this type of ‘disempowering’ literacy, low achievers such as those in Class S were not encouraged or taught the meta-cognitive and linguistic skills to adequately represent themselves in writing and hence, develop their voice. Consequently, they were deprived of the ability to interpret issues through a critical lens as well as critique and challenge the dominant values and power relations transmitted through texts in the long run. If literacy learning is taken to be a process by which the individual is socialized for group membership in specific literate communities and, in turn, participates in shaping the social practices of these communities, then, the question

is whether these low achieving students will ever get to participate effectively in society through writing.

Additionally, the 'reductive-cum-technicist' type of literacy actually produces and reproduces certain roles and relationships in the classroom. For instance, as far as their professional role as teachers was concerned, Belle and Jenny regarded themselves as having the utmost responsibility to ensure that their students met the target pass rate stipulated by the English language department. However, the packed curriculum and lack of time had also given them more incentive to rely on the knowledge transmission model of instruction since, realistically, principles such as process-orientation, spiral progression and interaction, etc were too difficult to implement. The use of the transmission model of dispensing knowledge apparently encourages a hierarchical management of classroom order which in turn reinforces compliant student behaviour. For example, we mostly saw that Belle and Jenny managed their students through strict discipline. While Belle was able to seek cooperation from Class M, whom she described to be predisposed towards a good attitude and diligence, Jenny did not manage to obtain much cooperation from Class S because of receptivity issues (Allwright & Bailey, 2004).

In a setting that reflects a long history of tight hierarchical classroom organisation, school principals perceive that effective classroom management is an important component of learning, and teachers who wield control over their classes are 'good' teachers. As an insider in the system myself, it was usually quite common to see the principals patrol the classrooms during curriculum hours to quietly survey their state of discipline, as well as the teachers' classroom management skills. As discussed previously, the school management's expectation of good literacy practices being framed by this tacit

understanding explains Jenny's concern over her own failure in effective classroom management. In her own words, if she had been 'very very firm and very fierce', the students would then have 'feared' her and probably would have done 'better' (See 6.2.3). Perhaps Jenny felt she was being watched by her HoD and other members of the Management Committee, and therefore using the 'shuttling' discourse (see 7.3.2 on p.217) became her way of stepping up her control over the class behaviour whenever the noise level became intolerable to her. Ironically, some students such as Chee Seng and Diyana became more annoyed with her shuttling discourse, claiming that it contributed to their stress level, causing them to 'switch off' totally. Kwek et al. (2007) attribute the persistence of the 'reductive-cum-technicist' type of literacy to the structural "configurations" of the larger education system when they maintain:

Singapore's English language syllabus is structured to take into account 'higher levels of literacy': resource-based and self-access learning, 'evaluative' and 'critical reading' (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 8) of materials from non-school sources, the understanding and production of more complex texts and genres...But when the syllabus is translated into classroom practice, it is done through the layers of frequently idiosyncratic and localised 'mediation' and translation that are inevitable in top-down administered educational systems, such as textbooks, in-service programmes, departmental unit plans and their own lesson plans. When the curriculum is ultimately enacted in the classroom, it uses a narrow range of textual forms and organisational 'rules' that students are asked to reproduce. Thus, it has been recontextualised to the extent that it lacks the necessary in-depth understanding required to inculcate forms of creativity and critical literacy.

(p.74)

To this end, the 'mediations' and 'translations' of the directives at the school and Ministry levels within the entire education system have a large part to play in perpetuating the influences within the ineffective habitus of doing school-based writing for Class S especially.

On that premise, it is also not difficult to see why teachers are inhibited from “re-imagining” (Albright & Kramer-Dahl, 2009, p. 214) the English language curriculum, even when the official policy has significantly changed direction. After all, the ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ type of literacy was what teachers were most familiar with, having grown up with this model of literacy, one which had worked for them when they were sitting for examinations at school, and was inculcated over their years of schooling, such that this type of literacy practice became “equally venerated” (Kramer-Dahl, 2008, p. 100) by their teacher-educators and reinforced at work. Attributing the ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ type of literacy to the enormous influence of the examination culture (Cheah, 1998) that exists in the Singapore school system, Kramer-Dahl (2007) explains that

with nothing but minor adjustments made to the format and status of English examinations since then, chances are that it is their exigencies, rather than the desire to practise “a principled mode of teaching” that will drive what goes on in secondary school English departments and classrooms.

(p.51)

Her argument therefore supports Rudy and Tupas’s (2009) point that curricular changes in content only must be accompanied by corresponding changes to the examination system for them to be effective.

Perhaps, what is most insidious about the ‘reductive-cum-technicist’ model of literacy in a top-down administered educational system strongly focused on assessment outcomes is its subtle representation of students in neighbourhood schools as being deficient, and it is to an examination of the implications of this discourse that I now turn.

8.2.4 Deficient discourse constructions towards students at the institutional level and their implications

Gee (1996), in his influential work on literacy and discourse, terms discourse as specific practices of literacy in society relating to behaviours, social interactions, ways of speaking and value systems. In short, they represent “ways of being in the world” (Gee, 1996, p. 8), and on the basis of ‘being and thinking’, discourse is not to be taken as neutral. The construction of discourse in the classroom, for instance, reflects the ideology espoused by the school and the broader social institution (Gee, 2006), as well as defining the ‘personhood’ (Bloome, et al., 2005) of the teachers and their students. What is more significant is that the same discourse sometimes takes on different guises and when disseminated in educational policies, popular media and social networks, further impinge upon and reinforces stakeholders’ beliefs about their students by creating a considerable impact on the expectations and practices of not only policy makers, researchers and teachers, but also parents, through limiting what can be accomplished with low achievers such as those in Class S. As Shields, Bishop and Mazawi (2005) contend, the discourse construction of students by their teachers has far-reaching implications for the organization and management of the school or classroom environment, which in turn affects learning outcomes.

Returning to the findings, we are reminded that Belle’s and Jenny’s talk about their students reveals deep-seated beliefs about the students’ innate abilities or aptitudes, which have been framed by deficit discourses (Comber & Kamler, 2007; Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010; Shields, et al., 2005). Belle, for instance, attributed her students’ ‘shallow’ content in writing to their low socioeconomic home backgrounds as they did not possess

prior knowledge of topics and issues required of them to write certain genres. Compared to other students, she concluded that they were not ‘as knowledgeable as students from other schools’, given their limited access to resources outside of their habitus (see 5.2.4 on p.126). Hence, Belle concluded that they ‘lost out’ to students from better schools. Again, she drew on the common assumption shared by teachers that students in neighbourhood schools lacked sufficient exposure to English and the habit of reading due to their ‘neighbourhood’ backgrounds. To her, it was an innate disadvantage which hampered the quality of their writing:

Another problem is most of them is being influenced by their L2 (or L1 actually). That hampers a bit on their fluency..hm..in their writing. And, also the sad thing is most of them come from heartlander’s [low socioeconomic] background, they do not have a lot of life experiences. So, if you look at their writing, their content is a bit general shallow... as you know like kids who have seen the world. Our kids are not so privileged. Most of them have not sat on the plane before so I find that part, they are not exposed. Plus, they don’t read. That’s the problem.

(Interview, 28 September 2010)

The only redeeming qualities she could identify were the students’ positive attitude, and their diligence:

Hm, but with their attitude I think increasingly, I can see that they’ve improved, like the recent CT (Common Test), they’ve improved. They can pick up the language because they are hard working.

(Interview, 28 September 2010)

In a similar vein, Jenny alluded to the effects of the students’ home backgrounds in relation to their poor engagement with school-based writing:

I think one thing could be their cultural background..as in what language do they speak at home and the types of books they like to read. Some of them really like to read Mother Tongue books...If you’re talking about language, I think they

really have to do their part as well to read up and brush up their skill, grammar, sentence structure...

One thing I'd say I'm not too sure whether this is one of factor. I just feel that in Y area or Z area, one thing is we don't have very good schools. So, if you look at your peers, they're like this then needless to say, they'll have the tendency to behave like that.

(Interview, 28 July 2010)

However, unlike students in Class M, who Belle described as diligent and positive in attitude, the class exhibited low motivation and poor behaviour, and Jenny attributed this to their seemingly more problematic home backgrounds, especially of Malay students:

One thing I'll say is they usually come from broken families and so on...Diyana is one of them. Nazira is also having some of them as well. She hasn't been turning up for school. She also didn't take her CA3 cos' her parents are filing for divorce. And the other thing is she just realized that she's actually ADOPTED...

(Interview, 5 October 2010)

Her perception of her students' habitus somewhat limited her teaching practices, which was why she 'retracted' her instruction to get the students to think aloud about the critical questions they should address in writing the personal response essay (Excerpt 7.7). She further suggested that the class did not have the abilities to handle the advanced literate skills required in some text types, which her students especially regarded as abstract and difficult to apply in actual writing (see 6.2.3 on p.152).

The culture of attributing students' failure in learning to their home backgrounds, aptitude or personality is not uncommon amongst teachers when they speak of how their students are similar to other lower tracked students in what they perceive to be a better school. In fact, such deficit discourse about students could well have been perpetuated by Singapore's streaming policy, which has created the mainstream and non-mainstream

dichotomy. As mentioned, the streaming policy began in the late 1970s when the government implemented a massive restructuring of the school system through streaming students at both primary and secondary school levels according to their learning abilities, which were determined by exam results (see 1.2.3). Policy makers have since hailed the success of the measure in reducing dropout rates amongst students (Lim, 1999) through its “customization” of the “talents and abilities of students within the resource constraints of mass education” (Towndrow, 2001, p. 27), which is seen as an attempt to mitigate learning difficulties by grouping students into different tracks to facilitate learning. In so doing, the official curriculum is designed based on a stratified understanding of learning to cater to different levels of ability, and policies over the past few decades have centred on pacing, and introducing a ‘reduced’ and easier curriculum for lower-stream students while providing higher-order thinking and more advanced academic content for students in Express and Special streams.

Given the prevailing stratified model of literacy practice in the mainstream school system, basic competencies such as the decoding of texts are required prior to more advanced ones which are “reserved only for a select few” (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 174). For example, in her survey of in-service primary and secondary English language teachers’ perceptions of the teaching of critical literacy, Curdt-Christiansen (2010) found that young and experienced teachers alike held deep-seated beliefs that weaker students could not handle reading skills such as “reading between the lines” due to their “immaturity”. They regarded skills such as the decoding of texts or grammatical accuracy as a prerequisite for advanced literacy skills such as the construction of meaning from

text, although the relationship between the former and latter, according to Curdt-Christiansen, is “faint at most” (2010, p. 192).

While streaming rests on the premise that children have different inborn abilities and that the supposed benefit of streaming derives largely from teachers tailoring their instruction for a homogeneous group of students studying at the same pace, the idea of optimal learning for all, espoused in the streaming policy, has actually more often than not been found to be unfair and harmful, especially to lower-stream students (Caughlan & Kelly, 2004; Harklau, 1994a, 1994b). In fact, research has shown that weak students do not benefit from streamed situations, especially if they are late developers. Instead, studies have shown that such structures contribute to unequal literacy development among students in different tracks. As Gopinathan (1985) notes, streaming by itself “without sensitive teachers and improved teaching methods is likely to fail” (p.202). The dire reality is that primary school students who are placed in the lowest stream typically end up in the N(A) and N(T) secondary streams and few of these low achievers subsequently progress to Junior College for pre-university education. In short, not only has streaming created a highly stratified system of schooling and reified certain stereotypes of students and the roles they are destined for in society, but over time, it has also perpetuated teachers’ discourse on the low achievers as having learning difficulties attributable to their disadvantage outside the school.

My point of argument is not to discredit the achievements of the Singapore education system but to show that within such a context, Belle and Jenny became inducted into a particular discourse that refers to students in Class M as promising (despite their unprivileged home background) or students in Class S as deficient in their

personality and learning ability. The ‘deficit’ reasoning by teachers is not necessarily wrong, but Heller (2008), Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2010) warn that such discourses

in turn prevent those who are thus constituted from recognizing that the constructions are not natural but made. Instead, these students are coerced into accepting the validity of such constructed representations of themselves as lacking attributes and cultural resources, which a presumed ‘mainstream’ student possesses. Further, they are expected to view their learning difficulties as the result of personal inability and lack of effort, rather than their position within the social hierarchy and other structural factors.

(p.160)

Indeed, as they so succinctly point out, the real issue with the beliefs and mindsets embedded in deficit discourse is the insidious way in which schools and policy makers attempt to offer the “obvious, often visible or measureable and convenient” reason for school failure and learning difficulties while shifting the blame away from the pedagogies and materials teachers use in the classroom, and ultimately, from the “invisible but broader structural configurations and ideological practices” (ibid) that produce and reproduce the conditions for educational inequality. Instead of expanding access and opportunity for every individual student, schools have, more often than not, acted to “preserve the existing social order” (Heller, 2008, p.19) through the ‘pathologizing’ practice (see 1.2.8.1) of deficit discourse about low achievers.

What is equally worth noting is that these habits of pigeonholing low achievers and blaming their educational failure on lack of access to resources, dysfunctional family background, behavioural problems, lack of motivation to study, language difficulties or lack of innate intelligence have become particularly counter-productive, if not damaging, when adopted by teachers, who are, after all, the most important factor in making a difference for students in their process of learning (Lin, 1999). Ultimately, the discourse

has an overarching pessimistic effect that pervades the macro level in the larger society to the extent that “any alternative explanations for deficit constructs are rejected if they do not fit into existing belief systems” (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 160). As Shields et al. (2005) argue, the deficit belief system can be so deeply rooted within the current system, that

moving away from these practices is difficult because educators positioning themselves within the dominant discourses receive support from societal norms that suggest that the accommodation of minority students with (for example) differing knowledge codes will result in an attack on the very nature of society as a whole. In this way, the deficient discourse is self-justifying and circular, and very difficult for educators to change.

(p.6)

Over time, the deficit thinking has become the basis for the lack of structural change in educators’ ways of doing things in the schools, thus perpetuating a bleak status quo for low achievers as well as their teachers, especially as this deficit model of ‘being and thinking’ also extends to the deployment of teachers in teaching the different tracked classes. As Belle commented:

When you look at the deployment, it’s always very difficult to deploy the so-called good and patient teachers, you know, to the right class because both ends (the good and weak end), we also need teachers. Sometimes we don’t have enough. The sad thing is for English teachers, we are one of the highest rate of resigning and all that. Retaining English teachers is not easy...At the end of the day, good teachers are put to teach O and N classes. There are never enough of so-called good teachers. So where (2) Hm, that is a very tricky question..to ‘park’ them (the teachers).

(Interview, 29 September 2010)

Inevitably, the practice of deploying ‘good’ teachers to ‘good’ classes has cast a shadow of doubt over Jenny’s capability as Belle remarked:

Jenny's grappling with discipline problem. OK, the kids, they know who to bully OK? Ya, like Mrs Tan (homeroom teacher of Class S), she has no problems with this class.

(Interview, 5 August 2010)

However, when asked if Jenny should have been given a 'better' class that was easier to manage, Belle begged to defer:

This (Class S) is not the worst class. You haven't seen the N(T) classes. There are other classes that you won't want to go in..She's [Jenny] into her third or fourth year already so hm we haven't not been giving her NT classes so I think this is a good time for her to try out.

(Interview, 5 August, 2010)

8.3 Summary

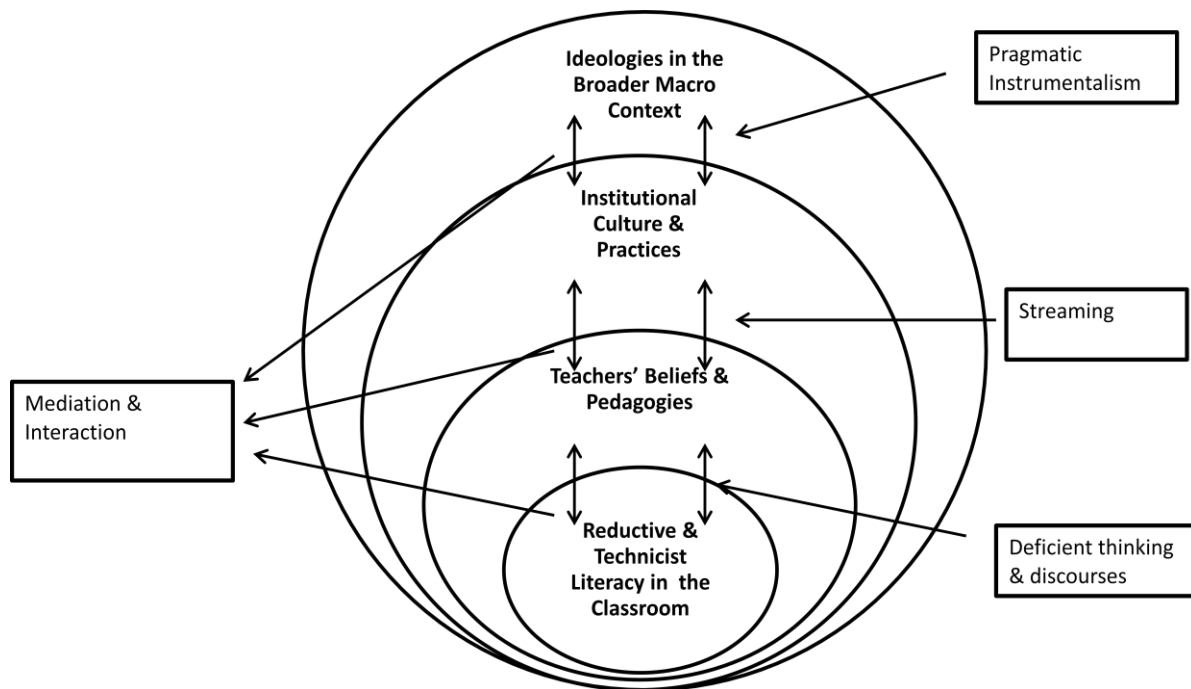
8.3.1 Making sense of the ineffective habitus of doing writing in school

The discussion points to the existence of the 'reductive-cum-technicist' model of literacy in Class M and Class S, which results in the production and reproduction of an ineffective habitus of doing writing in school, especially for Class S. In using a multi-layered strategy for analysis of findings in the study, the phenomenon of the 'reductive-cum-technicist' type of literacy is contextualized within Layder's (1993) levels of interrelated elements within the structural configuration of the Singapore education system: the classroom, the institution and the macro context of the larger society (see Figure 3.1). Each of these levels, as represented in Figure 9.1, impacts upon and in turn is influenced by the others through mediation and interaction to produce the influences that constitute the ineffective habitus of doing school-based writing in the mainstream school system.

Beginning at the situated level represented by the classroom, the practice of the 'reductive-cum-technicist' model of teaching writing has been influenced by a stratified

approach to literacy that has been endorsed by the policy of streaming implemented in the institutional setting and sustained by a culture driven by pragmatic instrumentalism in the broader macro context. At the same time, the prevalence of deficit beliefs held by stakeholders, especially schools and teachers, towards students in neighbourhood schools is reflected in the discourse about their behaviour, their home background and their innate abilities. In the findings, although both teachers held deficit beliefs towards their students, the effects were particularly detrimental for the learning outcomes of the low achievers in Class S.

Figure 8.1 The Influences of the Ineffective Habitus of Writing in School



9 THE WRITING INTERVENTION TASK FOR CLASS S

9.1 Overview

Given the ineffective habitus for writing in Class S, which was largely characterized by Jenny's spoon-feeding discourse and students' negative attitude, I initiated an intervention task, underpinned by the principles of the sociocultural theory of writing (sociocognitive apprenticeships; procedural facilitator and tools), in an attempt to offer a meaningful writing experience and, ultimately, better results. Apart from describing the rationale for the intervention task and its procedures as well as reporting the results, the chapter also serves to answer research question 3:

To what extent does a writing intervention task result in positive changes in the teaching of writing to low achievers?

9.2 Rationale for the Writing Intervention Task in Class S

Aligning the rationale of the intervention task to the aims of language learning as outlined in Syllabus 2001, I focused on two of the overarching aims which indicate that students would be able to perform the following functions:

1. speak, write and make presentations in internationally acceptable English that is grammatical, fluent and appropriate for purpose, audience, context and culture;
2. think through, interpret and evaluate fiction and non-fiction texts from print and electronic sources to analyse how language is used to evoke responses and construct meaning, how information is presented, and how different modes of presentation create impact

(Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 3)

Accordingly, the relevant and critical learning outcomes stipulated in the syllabus (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, pp. 73-77) were selected and adapted for the objectives of the current task, which was to be a personal response essay, as part of the quota of genres specified by the English Department. After discussion with Jenny, it was agreed that the students would have to primarily achieve the two overarching aims through the following learning outcomes provided in Syllabus 2001:

Table 9.1 Objectives of the Writing Intervention Task

-
- | | |
|----|---|
| a) | support point of view or argument by elaborating on ideas with relevant details such as examples, descriptions, explanations, evidence, etc |
| b) | infer and draw conclusions about meaning, intention, feeling and attitude communicated by the speaker |
| c) | organise and summarise information |
-

9.3 The Structure of the Writing Intervention Task

Essentially, the structure of the writing intervention task was based on Graham and Harris's Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) writing model (1993; Harris, et al., 2006), which is known for promoting strategy instruction and self-monitoring of writing (see 2.2.25). As discussed in section 3.4.5, the task was premised on three assumptions: (a) use of a real life topic which concerns the interests of the students will encourage students' construction of a personal voice; (b) intentional teaching of strategies will foster competency and lead to successful outcomes; and (c) collaborative learning in groups will enhance self-efficacy in writing. As such, the task incorporated three

characteristics: authenticity; instruction of writing strategy and metacognitive skills; and collaborative work and a dialogic process of interaction.

9.3.1 Authenticity

In view of the social situated-ness of the sociocultural theory of writing which positions writing in the cultural and institutional contexts in which it is produced, the topic of the writing intervention task needed to reflect authentic purpose and genre so that students could be more personally involved with writing and that meaningful communication could be achieved through real writing topics (Englert, 2001). After all, instilling authenticity in writing tasks would be in line with the important aim that pupils “will be able to write effectively to suit purpose, audience, context and culture” (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001, p. 8).

9.3.2 Instruction of writing strategy and metacognitive skills

The teaching of strategy and metacognitive skills was deliberately emphasized to help support students’ writing by planning, organizing, drafting to editing and revising. With the explicit teaching of critical steps of writing which involves guided instructions, explanations and scaffolding materials, students could be better ‘apprenticed’ to regulate their writing behaviour, and thus achieve a sense of accomplishment and success in their writing (Englert, et al., 2006; Hillocks, 1984). As well as key phrases that were taught so that students could use them to elaborate their point of view or argument, two particular mnemonics were introduced to help them remember steps relating to developing ideas, and editing and revising in writing.

9.3.3 Collaborative work and dialogic process of interaction

The writing task was carried out in groups where members co-constructed their texts by sharing their understanding of and findings from the task. Thus, by incorporating the element of collaboration in the intervention task, students were expected to exercise more ownership of one another's writing (De Bernardi & Antolini, 2006; Slavin, 1997). More importantly, participating in such groups was expected to create a higher frequency of interaction patterns in which teacher and students would engage in meaningful talk.

9.4 Description of the Writing Intervention Task

9.4.1 The text

The class was required to write a personal response essay, which was part of the quota of text types specified by the English Language Department, based on a news article featuring an initiative announced by the Ministry of Education at that time (see Appendix 7). The article was selected mainly because the topic concerned the future pathways of the N(A) students, and thus it was perceived that the topic was likely to be relevant and of interest to the students. According to the article 'More Thru Train Places for Normal Stream' (Leow, 2010), from 2013, some 2000, or the top 10% of, students in the N(A) stream like those in Class S, would be able to skip the O level exams and do a year-long foundation programme developed by the polytechnics. If they completed the programme successfully, they would get a place in a polytechnic diploma programme. In short, this latest initiative would allow low achievers to 'progress' to a faster academic pathway and in a sense, it would also cater to the 'personal development' of individual N(A) students.

9.4.2 The procedure of the task

There were six lessons planned around the intervention task, and this involved four critical steps adapted from the SRSD framework: *develop background knowledge*, *provide scaffolds*, *teach strategy* and *perform independent writing*. In the first lesson, Jenny presented the background of the topic, introduced new words and invited discussion from the class. Departing from the original SRSD framework, which emphasized detailed teaching of the organizational structure of text types covered at the *develop background knowledge* stage, she only briefly revised the distinctive generic features of the personal response text type as it was not the first time the class was exposed to the genre and thus, they would already have had some prior understanding of the style and register of the text type.

In the second lesson, the class was shown the four-paragraph organization of a personal response essay as the template to refer to when writing the essay (see Appendix 9). Jenny then went on to analyse the text structure with the class with another scaffold provided (Appendix 10). The first paragraph discussed the context of the topic; the second and third focused on survey findings; and the last included the students' personal opinions and the conclusion. Jenny also spent the bulk of the lesson teaching the class to use reporting verbs, transition linkers and structures for expressing causality when writing up the survey findings in the second paragraph.

In order to enhance the authenticity of the task, the students were asked to get into groups of four or five, and they were to interview their school mates and one teacher of their choice using a survey (see Appendix 8), which consisted of five statements about perceptions of the 'Thru Train' system. Statements one, two and three were close-ended and statements four and five were open-ended. Interviewees were asked to rate their

responses for statements one, two and three either as ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘not sure’, ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’. Statements four and five required interviewees to comment on or suggest what was needed for schools to prepare N(A) students for the new initiative.

When the class had their third lesson the following week, Jenny recapped the organizational structure of the personal response essay. As it turned out, only three of the groups had managed to obtain interview findings. Other groups were either unsuccessful in obtaining information from their interviewees, or had not done the interviews at all. Those who did not manage to obtain any interview data were told to do so after class that day.

In the fourth lesson, the groups were asked to begin working on the first draft of their essay entitled ‘Should All Secondary 3 Normal (Academic) Students in Mayflower Secondary School be Given ‘through-train’ Places at the Polytechnics?’ Some of them who claimed to have lost the template Jenny gave them in the second lesson were supplied a new one so they could refer to it while working on their drafts. Although most of the groups were not able to finish the first draft by the time the class was over, most of them were able to draft the outline of the second paragraph. For the first time, students were instructed to incorporate the LAP mnemonic (List-Add supporting ideas-Personal response) in drafting the second and third paragraphs. They first listed the results of their interviews by providing evidence and then commented on what could be deduced from their findings. The LAP mnemonic was therefore an approach by which Jenny attempted to show students the ‘thinking’ they could be engaged in while writing the paragraph.

By the fourth and fifth lessons subsequently, all students had attempted to write the first draft. Some who were more motivated went on to write the second draft, after which Jenny introduced the second writing strategy, the RID (Replace-Insert-Delete) mnemonic as an editing and revising strategy to ensure more effective writing performance by the students. For example, they were taught how to replace phrasing of sentences or ideas in their writing to achieve better clarity and tone. On top of this, they were also reminded to insert more appropriate structure, vocabulary and other grammatical features to improve their writing. Lastly, they were asked to delete whatever inappropriate parts they found in revising their final draft.

In the sixth lesson, Jenny focused on their personal responses for the concluding paragraph, and encouraged them to express their views on the initiative. However, as the initiative was expected to take effect only in 2013, they would have finished secondary school by then. As such, most students found it hard to make any personal comments since it would not have any relevance for them. Nevertheless, it was observed that most groups were able to do the task, and were able to apply LAP and RID to some extent by this stage.

Apart from four absentees who were not in class for the last lesson, everyone submitted their final drafts. A summary of all six lessons is shown in Table 9.2.

9.5 Classroom Observations of the Six Lessons

Excerpts 9.1 – 9.4 provide an analysis of Jenny’s discourse patterns as well as her interactions with the students from critical episodes during the six lessons. As in previous excerpts, it was necessary to ‘pull apart’ the teacher’s discourse in order to examine the

nature of her talk and the extent to which it mediated the learning of writing in the classroom.

In Excerpt 9.1, which was taken from the first lesson, it was observed that Jenny still had to deal with behaviour problems during instructional time, just like in other normal lessons. However, there seemed to be less ‘mucking around’ or movement this time, perhaps due to Jenny’s heightened effort to engage their attention, although the boys sitting at the back of the class appeared only passively engaged as Jenny explained unfamiliar words and checked the students’ level of comprehension of the topic.

Table 9.2 Overview of the Writing Intervention Task

Wk & Lesson	Description of lesson	Materials
Week 5 23 – 28 Aug Lesson 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain aim, purpose and outcome of intervention task which is to produce a piece of personal response essay.2. Develop the background information on the topic and the genre required.3. Include supplementary activities on vocabulary and comprehension questions related to the news article.	News article: 'More Thru Train Places for Normal Stream – New route, more places for students to skip O levels and enter poly'
Week 6 1 – 4 Sep Lesson 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Revisit organizational structure of personal response essay: intro, body and conclusion.2. Introduce phrases, connectors, reporting verbs and discourse markers commonly used to report survey findings and personal opinions.3. Discuss rhetorical pattern of personal response essay.3. Prepare students for interviews with peers and teachers after class.	Survey
Week 8 13-17 Sep Lesson 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Share survey findings of interview.2. Scaffold the structure of a survey report using a model.3. Write first draft (in groups)	Survey findings Scaffolding templates developed by teacher and researcher
Week 9 20 – 24 Sep Lesson 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduce key strategy 1: LAP (List-Add supporting ideas-Personal response)2. Revisit model for writing personal response essay.3. Insert personal opinions.	Survey findings Scaffolding templates developed by teacher and researcher
Week 10 Lesson 5 27 Sep – 1 Oct	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduce key strategy 2: RID (Replace-Insert-Delete)2. Revise first draft with teacher's support.3. Emphasize RID.	Survey findings Scaffolding templates developed by teacher and researcher
Week 11 Lesson 6 4 – 9 Oct	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Practise independent writing2. Revise second draft.	Final piece of writing

Excerpt 9.1 21 September 2010

1	Jenny	So, over here, I have a pie chart. You can see various components
2		and percentage, and also the colour. The other one, this is a bar
3		graph. So, it shows you the numbers here. How did you manage to
4		get the fig or percentage? Anyone wants to try?
5	Kok Wei	()
6	Jenny	Kok Wei, Yes?
7	Kok Wei	()
8	Jenny	It needs not exactly be people but you are somehow right. Whatever
9		figure you get, you divide it by the overall, the total...So today, I'm
10		going to lead you to a topic you're very interested in: <i>More Thru</i>
11		<i>Train Places for N(A) Students</i> . So, this is the article we've been
12		talking about. I will give each of you one set first. Then, we'll run
13		through what the article is about (2) Za'im, put away that book.
14		Amin, put away the book as well. Anand, put that away. I want your 100% ATTENTION.
		[The boys sitting in front of me begin to put away their books reluctantly.]
15	S1	Attention (jokingly).
16	Jenny	How many students do I have today?
		[T begins to distribute the news article.]
17	Irfan	Ah : : 15.
18	Jenny	Noryahati, also put that away. Ahmad? Zahiruddin?
19	Faizal	()
		[He talks back to T]
20	Jenny	I'm having a lesson now. How?
21	Faizal	No, la. I ()
22	Jenny	You take a few minutes to read through. Then, I want to tell you
23		what this article is about and also some of the words I want you to know.
		[About 2 minutes later, T writes the new words to be learnt on the board.]
24		At the same time when you read, you look for all these words, and
25		try to guess the meaning.
26	S2	Cher, I want to sit in my own place la, cher.
27	Jenny	Syed, can you wake up! [4 minutes later.]
	Chee	
28	Seng	Cher, can go toilet?

		[Jenny nodded her head to give her approval.]
29	Jenny	Anand, I think you have to put that away for a while. After my
30		lesson, then you continue. Norayati, the same thing. Joyce, Mardiana,
31		also. You should have done all this at home. Now, I'm conducting a
32		lesson, put that away...Guna, what is this article about? GUNA, I
33		cannot hear you. You stand. Yes, Guna? What is this article about?
34		This article is about skipping O levels. For who?
35	Ss	Normal kids!!
36	Jenny	Is it all the students from N(A) stream can skip the O levels? (2) For
37		those who are really doing OK and they are very likely to enter
38		Polytechnic. So this is the quota that can skip the O levels. So, over
39		here, I want you to look at all these words here. Are you able to find
40		them inside the article?
41	S3	Yes!
42	Jenny	Can you at the same time guess the meaning? I will give you about 3
43		minutes. You can (1) discuss with a partner.
		[5 minutes later.]
44		For the word 'cohort', what can you think of? (2) Jolene, your group,
45		what other word can you think of for the word cohort?
46	Jenny	Batch! Batch!
47		Very good. Or, a group. Next, 'eligible'?
49	Faizal	Eligible. Can qualify. Cher, qualify.
50	Jenny	Qualify. Yes. Suitable. Can. Fit the criteria. (2) 'Poly-bound',
51		Nazira?
52	Nazira	()
53	Jenny	It's not difficult wa.
54	Jenny	What about Joyce and Mardiana? What can you think of? 'Poly-
		bound'.
55	Joyce	Destination to Poly.
56	Jenny	Destination to Poly. That means these people definitely they'll be
57		able to enter Polytechnic. OK, what exactly is 'personal
58		development'?

9.5.1 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 9.1

One obvious difference between this excerpt and the earlier ones is that there was more interaction between the teacher and different individuals, although the questions Jenny initiated were still mainly performative in nature, eliciting monosyllabic answers (e.g. lines 33 to 35). Kok Wei's example (lines 5 to 7) shows that if given a chance, these low achievers were able to participate in dialogue with Jenny voluntarily. Overall, the use of the IRF format

was more consistent this time, despite the fact that teacher-student talk was still minimal and instances of sustained interaction were few. For example, from lines 37 to 42, instead of probing or checking with individuals to clarify their thoughts on the topic, Jenny immediately directed the class to discuss the meaning of the selected new words, which could have been challenging to students like Nazira (line 51). Reverting to the typical IRF format of interaction (see Chapter 6), in which student 1 responded to the teacher's question, the teacher provided feedback and then, at the same time, followed up with the second question, following which Jenny nominated students to give answers to the meaning of the new words taken from the article (lines 44 to 58). She could perhaps have developed activities, such as a dictogloss, to further complement the learning of the words. Let us continue to see how she engaged the class in answering the comprehension questions in Excerpt 9.2.

Excerpt 9.2 21 September 2010

1	Jenny	So now more of you are able to skip the O levels and they can enter the Polytechnic straight away. But this will only start in 2013. So, it
2		can be your younger brother's or sister's group.
3		
4	Faizal	Can retain la.
5	Jenny	No, I don't want you to retain anymore (smile). (2) Then, do you
6		think you can belong to the 13% who can go to Poly? Would they
7		consider you as that?
8	Ss	[No!
9		Yes!]
10	Jenny	OK, the rest of you, you turn to the next page. I have four : :
11		questions here for you to try. You write your answers in the space
12		provided. Turn to the next page. So after reading the article, you
13		should be able to answer all these questions here. This one is also
14		testing on your comprehension skills. Sshh! I don't want you to
15		talk about these (??). You finish the four questions first.
16	Faizal	Cher! Cher! ..Cher!
		[5 minutes later]
17	Jenny	Alright, Class. Just now I talked to Gilbert. Gilbert feels that this is
18		a very good solution as in you do not need to waste one year. You

19		just go to polytechnic straight away.
20	Chee Seng	Cher, give money ¹² . Everything settled already!
		[Some students giggle.]
21	Jenny	Would they accept your money? If they accept your money, are you
22		good enough for their courses first?
23	Amin	Cher, bribery!
24	Jenny	And how much are you going to pay them?
		[Talking in the background.]
25	Diyana	Shut up la! Shut up!
26	Jenny	Okay, back to this. First question. What does Thru Train System
27		refer to? Ahmad, you have the answer already? Can you share your
28		answer to question 1?
29	Rizduan	No : :
30	Jenny	No? You have the answer to question 1? Can you write on the
31		board for me? (2) Thanks. 2 and 3, simple one, I want
32		Mohammad's group. Either Mohammad or Zahiruddin, come out
33		and write your answers.
		[Mohammad's group members come up to the front to write their
		answers.]
34	Jenny	OK, 4. Question 4, there is no right or wrong answer. I just want to
35		hear your own opinion.
36	Syed	Yes.
37	Jenny	Chee Seng, do you think it is a piece of good news for you and
		why?
38	Chee Seng	Hm..ya. Can save time.
39	Jenny	Diyana, how about you? Do you think this system is good and
		why?
40	Diyana	Because I..because I wasted too much time already. I got no more
		time.
41	S8	Ya, lor ¹³ .
42	Jenny	So, basically most of you feel that it's the saving of time. So, you
43		agree you can save one year. You go to polytechnic. You can
44		continue to brush up your skills.

¹² Chee Seng meant that he could pay to skip his O levels and go straight to the polytechnic. Jenny's point was that he first needed to attain the criteria to enter the polytechnic first, even if he had the money to pay to go to the polytechnic.

¹³ Singlish expression meaning 'exactly the point'.

9.5.2 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 9.2

From lines 26 to 44, Jenny nominated some students to come forward after they had discussed the task with their group members and write their answers to the four questions on the board. They were:

What does Thru Train System refer to?

For who were the Thru Train places meant for?

How many percent of N(A) students will get to benefit from the new Thru Train places?

Is the new Thru Train system a good news for you? Why or why not?

Apart from the last question, which was meant to prompt students for their opinions about the topic, the first three were literal questions aimed to check their understanding of the text. Jenny appeared to be amused with Faizal's answer when he said that he could choose to be kept back at the same level in order to benefit from the initiative in 2013, to which Jenny replied that she did not want to see him retained. At lines 6 and 7, she posed the question 'Would they consider you as that?' in a rhetorical manner, as though she was expecting a negative reply from the class. Likewise, when Chee Seng jokingly responded, 'Cher, give money. Everything settled already!' (line 20), she quickly glossed over his answer, probably anticipating that he was up to some mischief. Her reply from lines 21 to 22 also seemed to imply that she was skeptical that Chee Seng would qualify for the 'Thru Train' programme (*Are you good enough for their courses first?*). By this time, there were disruptions from some individuals such as Amin and Diyana, who burst out in vulgarity (line 25). Thus, Jenny seemed eager to get the class back to the serious task of extracting information from the text at line 26, when in fact she could have stepped back from her on-stage persona (Stroud & Wee, 2007) to allow students to negotiate their answers and position their identities by

expressing their voice. In short, from lines 39 to 42, there seemed to be more opportunities to engage the students in more dialogic interactions, but Jenny did not capitalize on them.

By the fourth lesson, the students were expected to have conducted their interviews. Using the template she designed, Jenny scaffolded the structure of the personal response essay the class was to write up along with the sample essay which she composed herself. In the following excerpt, we see that, as Jenny instructed the class to write the paragraph on their survey findings, some students also expressed their attitude towards the task.

Excerpt 9.3 24 September 2010

1	Jenny	I've given you a guideline over here. So, not to worry. [T distributes the handouts.]
2		Class, do you still have the news article on 'Thru Train'? (2) For
3		those who have, take it out. I want each group to have at least
4		one... Alright, class, to make things easier for you, other than the
5		one I've given you, this one is the sample example. See, the first
6		paragraph, I asked you 'what is thru-train?' So, first paragraph,
7		definition. Second one, who have been interviewed, and over
8		here third paragraph, I have one example, so you can see what
9		kind of writing that they use: 'according to our findings'; '4
10		OUT OF 5 students'; 'All of them hoped to be in the thru-train
11		programme'; 'Similarly, they also wanted to be getting a
12		diploma after three years.' After that, you can start citing what
13		you've found: '4 out of 5 students' or '50%' feel that they are
14		good enough to take up the programme. So, you can use
15		percentage. You can use numbers. If yours is 4 students, this
16		person feels that he doesn't want to go, that means 20% of them
17		disagreed. But I want this one to be on the positive side. So you
18		give me the citation for 'strongly agree'. For example, 30%
19		strongly agreed or 80% agreed. After that, implications. What
20		does this show? And together with elaboration. So over here, I
21		give you one example 'This result shows that thru-train
22		programme is welcomed by many.' Chee Seng!
		 [He is talking with Gabriel, and not paying attention to Jenny.]
23	Chee Seng	Cher, the form ¹⁴ so silly.

¹⁴ Chee Seng was referring to the survey.

		[T ignores him and continues to distribute the handouts.]
24	Jenny	The main reason like ‘save time’, etc. I want your own opinion.
25		Second reason is what? Therefore we should go ahead with the
26		programme. Last paragraph is your own general opinion..and
27		over here, I have three columns that I want you to use.
		[T walks up to Amin and attempts to wake him up.]
28		I don’t want to see you keep using the word ‘said’ or ‘told’ so
29		you can use ‘commented’, ‘thought that’, ‘believed’,
30		‘reported’...You get into your grouping, I want you to try to
31		draft the second paragraph by first listing your figures. Everyone
32		will collate your findings in your group. Later on, I’m going
33		around to check.
		[15 minutes later]
34		Class, I think I really need to guide you. I think you don’t know
35		what’s going on. Can you stop and face here for a moment? Stop
36		and face here!

9.5.3 Analyzing the Nature of Teacher Talk in Excerpt 9.3

In this excerpt, the class was to draft the second paragraph by reporting the findings from their interviews, instead of drafting all four paragraphs as planned initially. In order to get the class started, Jenny referred to the sample essay and recalled the organizational structure of the different paragraphs of the personal response text type (lines 5 to 20): in paragraph one, they were to introduce the topic; in paragraph two, they were expected to present findings from their interviews with other teachers and school mates using statistical evidence (lines 13 to 19); in paragraph three, they had to comment on the implications of their findings; and in the last paragraph, they should insert their opinion. She also emphasized the use of reporting verbs in the second paragraph and discourse markers in the evaluation paragraph. Despite the scaffolding provided through the template and sample essay in the previous two lessons to facilitate students’ construction of their own texts, it seemed that

most of the students were not exactly sure of how to apply what they learnt (lines 34 and 35). Some of the groups which had not conducted any interviews did not have any figures to report on and appeared lost. Worse, Jenny had less time than would have been desirable to coach students on the use of the template so that they would be able to write independently. Hence, we see she reverted to a formulaic, teacher-centred discourse as she moved between the groups and repeated her instructions on ‘what’s there in each paragraph’. It is interesting to note that at line 21, Chee Seng voiced his negative attitude towards the task, calling the survey form ‘silly’. This implies that he had different assumptions about the topic, and he was actually reluctant to write. His opinion nevertheless reflected those of his classmates, as was evident in the post-intervention questionnaires, which will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

In the second to last lesson, Jenny reinforced to the class the two mnemonics for revising and editing their texts in their groups before they began to work on their independent writing:

Excerpt 9.4 *29 September 2010*

1	Jenny	Just to recap what you’ve done. The title is on the board. What
2		exactly is Thru-Train? Everything in first paragraph must be in
3		present tense. Second one, LAP. You list your findings. You tell
4		me who you have interviewed. How many of them. After that,
5		third paragraph, you report on the finding. This is what I meant
6		by ‘adding supporting ideas’. This one, I’ve already photocopied
7		for your group members. Try to use reporting verbs, percentage,
8		age range, etc. And after that, next paragraph. What does it
9		show? What does it involve? It shows that Thru-Train is a good
10		programme – how many of them strongly agreed? Tell me, does
11		it save time and what do the students have to do? This
12		conclusion, if you have it well, you will be able to score. That’s
13		where P, the personal response will come in. So here, personal
14		responses, and we’ll mark for this..who did not bring this
15		worksheet with you?..Only a small handful, the rest you have
16		right? So, later on I will make some notes on the board.

		[She writes the organizational structure on the board.]
17		...After that, third paragraph, you report on the finding...After
18		that, next paragraph, what does it show? What does it involve?
		[She reads from the board.]
19		<i>“The teacher feels that it is a good system, but the students also</i>
20		<i>need to do their own revision such as setting up timetable, doing</i>
21		<i>their own work, etc.”</i> all these. This is reporting on the findings.
22		This conclusion, if you have it well, you will be able to score. (2)
23		Asraf, can you throw away your ()?
24	Akmal	First paragraph, how to begin?
25	Jenny	First paragraph, I think I’ll help you start.
		[T begins to write on the board.]
26		If you still have this paper, you can take it out and refer to it for
27		elaboration...This one, you give me two finger spacing. ...Class,
28		I start off the introduction for you: <i>Through-Train is a</i>
29		<i>programme that is especially designed to enable the better NA</i>
30		<i>students to skip O levels exam, and to allow them to enter</i>
31		<i>polytechnic. From here, you can continue a bit more: they can</i>
32		<i>choose the course they like in polytechnic so as to save one year.</i>
33		So, first paragraph, I want everyone to have this opening.
		[The class starts to get into action.]

9.5.4 Analyzing the nature of teacher talk in Excerpt 9.4

From lines 2 to 14, Jenny recapped the move of each paragraph, using her template as the model. However, almost half the class did not have the scaffolding templates with them, and Jenny had to make more copies and distribute them in class. Using a whole class lecture, she delivered the familiar procedural talk on the use of LAP for guiding the students in systematically reporting the findings (lines 3 to 6). Again, to emphasize the importance of the task, she reminded the class that the ability to score depended on how well they factored in their personal opinions (lines 12 and 22). Here, there was a replay of the familiar spoon-feeding and telling discourse we saw in Chapter 7, as she was concerned that the students would not have been able to comprehend her instructions if she had used an alternative

discourse approach. When Akmal requested her assistance at line 24, she wrote the first paragraph (lines 26 to 32) for the class and told the class to copy it down (*I want everyone to have this opening*). Consequently, almost everyone started with the same introduction, and in the evaluation paragraph (as illustrated in three of the focal students' essays), we also see that they included a similar combination of ideas discussed before. The essays range from the one with the lowest marks to the highest and have not been corrected for mistakes:

Akmal, 19 marks out of 30

I feel that the 'thru train' system is effective to ensure a better future for N(A) students to study more to go to the polytechnics. From there, they can plan for their future. However, the negative impact of it is that the students who went through the system will only have N level qualifications.

Chee Seng, 22 marks out of 30

I think the Ministry of Education should give more students a chance to be in the 'Thru Train' programme because there are a lot of talented students out for who are in N(A) stream. And it saves time for them to realise their dreams and inspirations. They could learn more things in their desired courses rather than using a year in secondary school studying boring subjects.

Gabriel, 25 marks out of 30

I felt that I strongly agree that 'Thru Train' would definitely motivates the Normal (Academic) students to strive well in their 'N' levels. As a Normal (Academic) student myself, I was even tempted by this opportunity, as it saves a year of my time and I can focus fully in a year instead of two to sit for O levels. I believed that majority of the Normal (Academic) students in Mayflower Secondary School would also get tempted by this opportunity.

Kok Wei, a high-engaged writer, was one of the few who incorporated his voice in his concluding paragraph:

Kok Wei, 27 marks out of 30

The programme does help us to get in the polytechnic in a faster way, skipping the national exams, but it is far beyond our ability. By the time 2013 arrives, we may already be in junior colleges, polytechnics or even ITEs. Where could we able to get a placing in this programme, don't you agree?

By this time, Jenny was clearly going through the familiar motion of lecturing-disciplining/behaviour-checking in her effort to make sure students stayed on-task, as shown in her use of tight procedural development to apply the RID mnemonic in revising their writing in Excerpt 9.5.

Excerpt 9.5 29 September 2010

1	Jenny	Class, you still remember the concept of RID?
2	S1	Delete.
3	Jenny	Delete, yes. Insert..And what is this one?
4	S2	Replace.
5	Jenny	Replace. So after you have done your survey, I want you to
6		follow these three concepts. And this will help you produce
7		better write-up. (2) You know from the type of writing, we're
8		trying to move away from narrative writing, and you can see
9		some of this: 'Do you agree?' or 'what is your opinion, coming
10		out of N levels and O levels?' So, whatever findings you have,
11		those that are not relevant, you replace it, and you insert
12		information that is relevant, and you delete the info that is not
13		relevant, things that tell you something else that is not related to
14		this survey at all.
15	Faizal	For me, everything not important. How?
		[Chee Seng gave a loud yawn. Few others mimicked him. The
		class slowly gets into the mood to write. Faizal came back to his
		seat and started to rest his head on his elbow. He asked Jenny
		how to begin with his draft.]
16	Jenny (to Faizal)	OK, you write down the sub-heading and intro.
17	Chee Seng	Cher, cher, this one got inside Mid-Year?..I don't want to write
18		leh. Like that, very biased.
		[T ignores him and turns to another student.]
19	S1	Cher, Diploma or A levels, which one better?
20	Chee Seng	Cher, cher, can imagine since I didn't interview?
21	Faizal	Cher, if cannot finish, how? (2) Cher, if cannot finish, how: :?
		[T ignores him.]
22	Jenny	Try to use words like 'according to', 'commented', 'thought
23		that', 'stated that', 'according to our findings'. So for
24		implications, you can base them on this here: what does this

25		show? For example, 3 out of 5 students strongly agreed. So what
26		is your implication? “Based on my findings, it shows that Thru-
27		Train system is a very good system embraced by many students.
28		The teacher feels that it is a good system but the students also
29		need to do their own revision such as setting up timetable, doing
30		their own work, all these.”
	Faizal	[He lapses into singing!]
31		My second paragraph seven words only la, cher!
32	Jenny	You do whatever you can. If you cannot hit 250, at least 200.
33		Letter writing is already 180.
34	Faizal	Letter writing easy, wa!
		[Jenny goes up to Chee Seng and shakes him up. Chee Seng slowly rises up but still doesn't do anything.]

9.5.5 Analyzing teacher talk in Excerpt 9.5

The discourse of prescription clearly characterised Jenny’s talk throughout this last lesson of the intervention task. This was deemed a necessary approach as Jenny perceived that time was limited and that she needed to engage students’ effort as much as possible. Although the procedural talk on the use of RIP was critical, there was hardly any evidence of prior facilitation of meaning making or co-construction of ideas through dialogue with the students. Likewise, there was a lack of showing students how to think aloud the process of using the two mnemonics. Rather, there was the spoon-feeding of answers.

Not surprisingly, some students’ attention appeared to be flagging; others such as Faizal and Chee Seng had not bothered to conduct interviews outside of class time. Faizal, in particular, was defiant towards Jenny (line 15) and complained that the word length requirement was too much for him (line 31); and many kept losing the scaffolding templates they were given. To further engage students’ attention, Jenny resorted to using exam discourse from lines 7 to 10 when she informed the class that the text types tested in exams were increasingly becoming more challenging, unlike the narrative essays they were so used

to doing. For this, Faizal argued that letter writing was ‘easy’ (line 34) and there would be no problem for him to meet the target word length. Chee Seng, as mentioned previously, did not see the relevance of learning to write the personal response text types. He resented the exercise and thus felt that it would disadvantage him if the marks were included in his overall English marks (lines 17 and 18). Eventually, he decided to make up his survey findings (line 20).

In the last lesson, which consisted largely of individual writing, Jenny focused on constructing their personal responses in the last paragraph and editing the entire essay. As was observed in Excerpt 7.8, the class was working on the task quietly (and mechanically), except for some recalcitrant individuals. The only difficulty was that some students found it hard to contribute any personal comments as the initiative would be expected to take effect only in 2013, after they had finished secondary school. Nevertheless, on the progress made by the students, Jenny remarked that

Previously they may not see that it is very important – why are we writing survey report and it is not going to be tested in SA2 (Semester Assessment) but subsequently when they’re more in-tuned with what we are doing and they understand that oh er they are going to poly soon and the implications, I think they’re getting slightly better.
(Interview, 5 October 2010)

9.6 Scoring of Writing Intervention Task

In all, 36 scripts were collected from the class for marking. Each piece of work was photocopied into two sets and marked by Jenny and me separately using the GCE N level bands (see Appendix 8). The inter-rater reliability estimate, calculated by a Pearson Correlation, was .91 ($p < .01$). The final score was agreed by the two of us. In order to determine the effect of the intervention task, the scores of an earlier personal response essay (Composition 3) were used for comparison. The results are shown in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3 A Comparison of Scores of Composition 3 and Intervention Task

	Scores				
	N	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Highest</u>	<u>Lowest</u>
Composition 3	40	50.3	5.4	75%	45%
Writing Intervention Task	36	69.3	13.6	90%	40%

As the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the results of both sets of scores were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon matched-pairs, signed ranks test was used to find out if there was indeed any significant difference. The analysis shows that the difference between the mean scores obtained in Composition 3 and the intervention task was significant beyond the .01 level: exact $p < .01$ (two-tailed). The sums of ranks were 534.5 and 60.5 for the positive and negative ranks, respectively, therefore $W = 60.5$.

Further analysis of the scores with respect to the three categories of learners, high-, medium- and low-engaged, is shown in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4 Comparison of Scores by Category of Students

		Composition 3			Writing Intervention	
		N	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Low-engaged	L	7	48.1	6.37	59.0	16.0
Medium-engaged	M	19	50.1	5.00	70.6	11.1
High-engaged	H	10	52.3	5.34	72.9	14.1

A one-way ANOVA was performed to confirm the presence of significant differences between results of the intervention task obtained by the three groups of learners, and it was found that there were no significant differences. However, as it was observed that some non-Chinese students tended to be more disengaged than their Chinese classmates throughout the six lessons, a one-way ANOVA was also performed on the results by the three ethnic groups to investigate if the intervention task had any effects on their writing performance. The results show that the scores for the writing intervention task between the three ethnic groups are significantly different: $F(2, 33) = 12.5, p < .01$ (two-tailed). The Post Hoc Tukey HSD test shows that the mean scores for Chinese and Malay students as well as for Chinese and Indian students differed significantly from one another at $p < .05$ and $p < .01$ respectively. However, there was no significant difference between Malay and Indian students.

When a repeated measures of ANOVA was further performed on the scores of Composition 3 and the writing intervention for the three ethnic groups, it was found that there was again a significant difference between the two writing tasks across the three groups at 1% level: $F(2, 33) = 13.9, p < .01$ (two-tailed). The results are shown in Table 9.5.

Table 9.5 Descriptive Data of Scores of Intervention Task by Ethnic Group

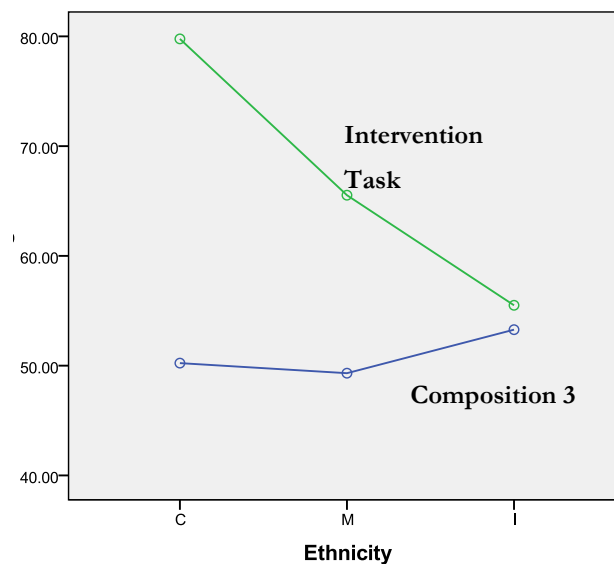
	N	Composition 3		Writing Intervention		F
		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	
Chinese	13	50.2	6.07	79.8	9.30	13.9**
Malay	17	49.7	5.56	65.5	10.9	
Indian	6	52.2	3.49	55.5	12.2	

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Referring to Figure 9.1, the comparison shows a general improvement of scores across all three ethnic groups. The percentage increase in the writing score for Chinese students was 60.0%; for the Malay students, it was 31.8%; for the Indian students, 6.32%. With the largest percentage increment of 60.0%, it could be concluded that the intervention task benefitted Chinese students the most.

Figure 9.1 Comparison of Scores between Composition 3 and Intervention Task by Ethnicity



9.7 Post Writing Intervention Task Questionnaire

Following the completion of the writing intervention task, a questionnaire was administered to find out students' perceptions of the task. The participants were asked to respond to 11 items, of which 9 were open-ended and 2 close-ended. Items 1, 2, 6, 8 and 9 addressed students' feelings towards the task whereas items 3, 4, 5 and 7 related to their self-efficacy towards writing. The responses, which are shown in Table 9.6, were rated on the same six-point Likert scale as for the previous questionnaire. Items 4, 5, 6, 9 were negatively

worded, and the mean scores reversed. Thus, the higher the mean score, the more positive the students' attitudes were towards the writing task.

Table 9.6 Mean Scores for Items in Post-Intervention Questionnaire

Item	Description	M	SD
1	The topic was interesting.	4.72	1.16
2	I found the topic useful to me.	4.75	1.25
3	I have no problems writing on the topic.	4.11	1.17
4	When I wrote on the topic, I felt my writing was not good enough.	3.11	1.15
5	No matter how hard I try, I still did not score as well as before for 'Survey on Thru Train Places for Normal Stream.'	2.89	1.28
6	I did not enjoy writing on the topic.	2.28	1.19
7	I felt confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing after the teacher taught me how to do the topic.	4.47	1.18
8	When my English teacher gave me good feedback for my writing, I felt good.	4.86	1.02
9	Writing on the topic was a waste of time.	3.36	1.28
Overall Mean		4.2	1.19

According to the table, item 8 (*when my English teacher gave me good feedback for my writing, I feel good*) obtained the highest mean ($M = 4.86$). This implies that the majority of the students were actually pleased when they received a higher score for the task. A high mean score of 4.75 for item 2 (*I found the topic useful to me*) and 4.72 for item 1 (*the topic was interesting*) indicates that the majority of the students found the topic relevant and interesting. The mean of 4.11 for item 3 (*I have no problems writing on the topic*) indicates that the majority of the students generally did not experience difficulty in writing.

Furthermore, a high mean score of 4.47 for the class' response to item 7 (*I felt confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing after the teacher taught me how to do the topic*) reveals that they could manage the intervention task with input from Jenny.

The class' response to item 4 (*When I wrote on the topic, I felt my writing was not good enough*) is a reversed score of 3.11, which is lower than the previous two items. This suggests that the class to some degree perceived that they had not performed as well as they could have. Again, a low score of 2.89 for item 5 (*No matter how hard I try, I still did not score as well as before for 'Survey on Thru Train Places for Normal Stream'*) confirms that the majority of the students thought that they did not do as well as they could have in other writing assignments. However, it is worth noting that a reversed mean score of 2.28 for item 6 (*I did not enjoy writing on the topic*) is an indication that they had low affective responses towards the task. A mean score of 3.36 for item 9 (*Writing on the topic was a waste of time*) further confirms a somewhat mixed response from the class towards the task.

Taken together, the responses to the items suggest that, although the task did not raise students' perceived self-efficacy towards writing to a large extent, they were able to complete the task with sufficient guidance from the teacher. This was indeed observed in class where the majority of the students seemed to be able to 'get the hang' of writing as they progressed further into the lessons. Nevertheless, a review of the students' feedback to the two open-ended items also reveals a mix of opinion. Only a third (12 out of 36) of the class clearly expressed a positive attitude towards the task. Some negative comments include:

- [1] 'Difficult because I had never done like this before so it is a bit awkward to write this in a good way.'
- [2] 'The difficult thing about writing is that we have to find a few friends to interview. When we want to interview him/her, they are playful and someone else already interviewed them.'
- [3] 'To do the findings, it was quite tough as we need to look for people to do the survey.'

- [4] 'It was difficult as the topics were a complex situation to most of the students but the help of the teachers we were able to go through these hurdles.'
- [5] 'The difficult is that the interviewing. We needed to find people to interview. After the interview, it gave use ideas and it makes our lives easy.'

On the other hand, the positive comments from some of these participants showed that they had benefited from the task:

- [6] 'The research helped me'.
- [7] 'The topic was hard but I later get used to it and I learn how to use linking words. The second topic is my most pleased writing of all my years of studying English.'
- [8] The group work is more helpful. We helped generate more ideas when we were in groups.

Judging from these comments, it seems that the students felt challenged by the nature of the task mainly because it was 'new stuff' to them. One student explained that they could attempt different writing tasks, but they needed to have sufficient time to understand how to go about doing them. Some of them did not have the cooperation of their interviewees, especially if they did not take an interest in the topic of streaming and opportunities in life.

9.8 Summary: Changes Resulting from the Writing Intervention Task

The quantitative analyses show that the writing intervention task, which was undergirded by the principles of the sociocultural theory of writing, resulted in a significant improvement in the students' writing performance. This points to the effectiveness of the four critical steps (*develop background knowledge, provide scaffolds, teach strategy and perform independent writing*) in teaching writing, especially if they have been implemented properly. Although the students struggled to get into the flow of writing initially, the fact that they were able to complete the writing task with the help of the scaffolding templates is evidence that making explicit the structures of text types, along with procedural support such as the LAP

and RID mnemonics, helps to facilitate the acquisition of metacognitive writing skills. Despite the fact that most students depended on one-on-one assistance from Jenny at some point of the writing, there were still some instances of students taking control over the process of their writing, when they learnt to combine their interview findings together in their groups. Hence, as far as the aim of this study was concerned, the writing intervention task resulted in a conscious focus on the practice of the sociocognitive apprenticeship, facilitated by guided scaffolding and collaborative learning.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that students' attitudes towards self-efficacy in writing remained essentially the same as before. First and foremost, they expressed mixed responses towards the task, mainly because it was not directly relevant to the type of question they normally would attempt in the exam. Further, classroom discourse analyses revealed that instrumental, prescriptive pedagogical practices, rather than dialogic interactions which promote meaning-making, still took precedence in Jenny's teaching, possibly due to the fact that students were not sure of what to do even after her 'teaching'. Jenny's discourse also reverted to spoon-feeding and disciplining/behaviour-checking, especially towards the end of the task, as she was hard pressed for time and tried to get the class to cooperate with her. Most significantly, apart from the lack of time, Jenny did not seem to find any resonance in the task herself as she was unconfident of how a more dialogic pedagogy would help to address the students' deficiency as well as maintaining class discipline. Perhaps this was why she kept a reserved attitude, when she only complied with my suggestions, without asserting a strong sense of agency over the development of the task. Although I was able to have her full cooperation in the implementation of the task, the overall results would have been more favourable if she had invested more ownership in the task.

The topic (the Ministry's decision to allow some 2000 students in the Normal stream to skip the O levels and advance straight into the polytechnics from 2013 onwards) was thought to heighten the interest of the class since the content concerned the future pathways of N(A) students. On the one hand, the task did provide opportunities for students to discuss and evaluate possible implications embedded in the article, such as the stereotyped pathways available to low achievers in most neighbourhood schools, their marginalization within the education system, and the limited opportunity for advancement they were now being offered. On the other hand, we have seen that the students were not sufficiently encouraged to think through the "meaning, intention, feeling and attitude communicated by the [writer]" (see Table 9.1), that is, the kind of intellectual engagement with the genre of texts which is explicitly promoted by the syllabus. The attempt to steer students in Class S away from the predictable letter and report writing text types was also not well received by the majority in the class since there was no necessity to attempt a personal response essay in the exams. The students completed the task for the sake of 'earning' the marks that would be included in their overall results rather than the fact that it appealed to them. As such, it was evident that both teacher and students had 'filtered' the task through the lens of the 'reductive-cum-technicist' type of literacy (see 2.3.1.2), such that writing was still regarded as a neutral, autonomous skill, and not in the literate sense espoused by Syllabus 2001. In this regard, the intervention task served to substantiate the findings of other studies that depicted the teaching of writing in Singapore classroom as prescriptive and reactionary (e.g. Kramer-Dahl, 2007, 2008) in many quarters, even when the syllabus was in its tenth year of implementation.

One issue to look into at this juncture might be "is there anything else teachers and the wider school system can do to create the possibility of a more 'progressive' writing literacy for low achievers"? Apart from having a conscientious and committed practice on the part of teachers and the school, the issue does merit a discussion in the final chapter where I focus on

how affordances might be changed to allow for and facilitate the kind of classroom practices that are more conducive to their engagement with writing in school.

10 CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

10.1 Summary of the Study

This classroom research examined the teaching of writing to low achievers in the mainstream Singapore classroom from a sociocultural perspective and explored the way forward for them. Three theoretical strands were used to underpin the study. Firstly, the notions of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), as well as deficit thinking (Shields, et al., 2005) by school authorities, provided insights into the reproduction of the existing writing practices in the classroom. Following that, some seminal theories of writing research from the broad perspectives of *text*, *writer* and *context* were reviewed. Lastly, the social lens of literacy (Barton, et al., 2000) was used to examine the critical issues relating to writing practices in the context of this study, and in particular, I argued that the teaching of writing should contribute towards the nurturing of voice and construction of meaning.

Two Secondary Three classes (n = 79) in one neighbourhood secondary school were chosen for the study, and qualitative and quantitative methods were undertaken to collect and analyze the data for the study. A questionnaire was administered once, and eleven classroom observations (approximately 20 hours) were conducted, along with eight interviews with four students from each of the two classes and with their teachers. It was found that students in Class M, which was the top class in Secondary 3 Express, and Class S, the last class in Secondary 3 N(A), shared a similar orientation towards writing in terms of all five subscales of the questionnaire, which were, Task Value and Interest (TVI), Self Efficacy (SE), Affective Feelings Towards Writing (ATW), Effort Regulation and Goal Orientation (ER) and Self Regulation of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies (SR), although the former had produced better writing results in their Mid-Year Exam. The results of the inter-correlation analysis between the writing performance and the five subscales further suggested that

students in Class S did not have sufficient metacognitive ability to evaluate their own writing skills as successfully as those in Class M.

Following that, a comparison between teachers' use of classroom discourse and its functions showed that there was little evidence of any regular promoting of higher metacognitive and evaluative skills or fresh understanding about writing, especially in Class S. Instead, the discourse pattern that existed in Class M reinforced, replicated and regulated a particular 'format' of writing deemed appropriate by the teacher. On the other hand, a spoon-feeding discourse was juxtaposed against a regulatory discourse in Class S, and the teacher shuttled between the two discourses so that, apart from spoon feeding students her model answer, she was managing their disengaged behaviour.

The findings from the discourse analyses in the two classes were further analyzed in relation to the broad canvas of teaching and learning English literacy in the mainstream Singapore school. The analyses revealed four areas of discrepancy resulting from a mismatch between the aims of Syllabus 2001 and its actual implementation at the classroom level. This accounted for the existence of a 'reductive-cum-technicist' type of literacy in Class M and Class S, which was framed by deficit discourse targeted at the students' home background and ethnicity.

Based on these analyses, a writing intervention task, underpinned by the sociocultural theories of writing, was implemented in Class S to offer students a better writing experience, particularly in terms of the construction of a personal voice. As reported in Chapter 9, although there was improvement in students' writing scores, the teacher's discourse in class remained formulaic and the activity of 'thinking' for knowledge construction was largely absent, not to mention that students also had mixed feelings towards the task. Nevertheless, the results showed that dialogic interaction and collaborative learning were not impossible to cultivate in Class S.

In this final chapter, curricular changes aimed at helping low achievers to improve their experience in doing writing at school will be suggested, and implications for future research drawn up. However, before that, it would be appropriate to return to the key principles of sociocultural theories of writing (Englert, et al., 2006) and their connection with literacy learning as the anchor for this study, to see what might best engage low achievers in writing and literacy learning.

10.2 Revisiting the Principles of Sociocultural Theory of Writing

Learning to write, as formulated by the principles of the sociocultural theory of writing, is dialogic (Hyland, 2007). It involves the co-construction of knowledge between the learner and teacher, or between learners themselves, in which ideas and resources are exchanged and expertise is shaped in order to produce a combined product (Englert, et al., 2006). This underscores Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD, whereby real learning occurs in the zone between what a learner cannot do alone, and what they can do with the help of an expert. The theory, in that sense, regards all students as having the ability to "reflect, theorize, and create knowledge" (Nieto, 2006, p. 320), and hence, its strong emphasis on students' potential achievement through the sociocognitive apprenticeship in dialogic interaction, rather than on their current levels of achievement in writing (Gibbons, 2006a, 2006b).

In the present study, the procedural facilitation of writing in the two classes was provided through the use of scaffolding templates in the Writing Modules Handouts, which the teachers conscientiously adhered to. In addition, it was shown that students in Class S were able to complete the writing task in the intervention phase with the support of the scaffolding templates along with guided support such as the LAP and RID mnemonics, which helped to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills. However, for students to develop deeper

insights into particular aspects of the writing process, the teaching of surface learning strategies such as decoding of the structural features of certain text types would not suffice. In particular, low achievers' reliance on Jenny for her spoon feeding of model answers, especially prior to the implementation of the writing intervention task, was indicative that they had not been explicitly taught metacognitive and self-regulatory skills concurrently so that they knew how to construct knowledge for themselves. By the same token, the habitual use of performative exchanges between Belle and Class M did not help the latter to reconstruct and redesign texts and, ultimately, to gain control over powerful forms of writing (Kamler, 2009), except to achieve the immediate outcome of reproducing acceptable 'formats' of writing. For affordances in learning to take place, meaningful, extended dialogue must be in use (Gibbons, 2006a).

10.3 Revisiting the Relationship between Writing and Literacy

Despite the fact that the notion of literacy espoused in Syllabus 2001 is one that goes beyond a narrow focus on language acquisition, Cheah (1994), in her ethnographic work on the relationship between the learning of culture and the teaching of English in Singapore, has long pointed out that for the majority of learners, English has never had any emotional or personal use, which explains why the dominant kind of literacy practices were still those devoted to the honing of linguistic skills for doing well in examinations, more than the constructing of meaning in writing. This phenomenon is undoubtedly reflected in the way that the writing intervention task was implemented.

Nevertheless, for literacy to have any true impact on an individual's life, it will have to be "centrally involved" in the ways personal identities and sense-making, social relationships and group memberships are "negotiated and constructed" (Hyland, 2003, p. 57). Literacy learning, as Ward (1994) conceptualizes it, is akin to social dialogue, and writing

must take on personal and emotional functions so that low achievers, such as those in Class S, can contribute their voice to the ongoing social dialogue when they engage in the construction of personal ideas. Taken in that light, teachers should undertake the responsibility of cultivating low achievers' "internal mechanism"(Ward, 1994, p. 45) to engage in the social dialogue of literacy learning, instead of merely focusing on grammatical accuracy and generic 'formats' of text types. Teachers, as Mercer (2008) contends, play a crucial role in augmenting students' literacy development through "the gradual induction of students into new perspectives on the world and the development of new problem-solving skills and new ways of using language for representing knowledge and making sense of experience" (p.34). In due course, it would make a difference to their life possibilities and pathways.

My argument here is not to downplay the priority of writing in grammatically correct English. Indeed, as Gee (2006) and Delpit (2006) maintain, the explicit teaching of 'bottom-up' language skills is critical in getting low achievers to achieve the proficiency needed to access the dominant discourse practised in higher education and the world of work. Rather, I contend that basic competencies such as grammatical accuracy with which most teachers are preoccupied, need not be 'sacrificed' in favour of higher literacy skills, when low achievers learn to construct writing in a way that reflects their affiliations and interests and thoughts, as demonstrated in Englert's (2001) study (see 2.2.3.3 on p.49) and, to a limited extent, the writing intervention task, in which some students expressed their personal voice with regard to the issue of life opportunities and pathways, and posed relevant questions (see p.262).

10.4 Implications for the way forward

Any realistic changes to current writing practices, within the framework of a sociocultural theory of writing, will have to involve compatible changes in an inter-related network of at least the following areas:

- (i) discourse patterns in the classroom
- (ii) pedagogical beliefs towards low achievers
- (iii) learning community in the classroom
- (iv) assessment
- (v) autonomy for teachers and institutional support

While (i), (ii) and (iii) relate to what teachers can do within their immediate capacity in the classroom, (iv) and (v) fall within the jurisdiction of the policy makers in the Ministry.

10.4.1 Changing classroom practices

(i) Discourse Patterns in the Classroom

Teachers' discourse patterns need to take on a dialogic function, in ways that are possible, such that students are encouraged to ask real questions and propose alternatives. This kind of discourse, which Gibbons (2006b, 2008) terms as progressive, requires teachers to first reposition low achievers as worthy interlocutors, loosen the traditional tight procedural control of lessons and be sensitive to students' contributions in expanding and enriching the semantic dimensions of the lesson.

Perhaps, for a start, it would be feasible for teachers to progressively practise a discourse pattern which is different from the traditional IRF interaction commonly seen in the exam-focused Singaporean classroom. For instance, they could work with one particular student by extending the initiation (I) move, rather than moving quickly from one student to the next for elicitation of short monosyllabic answers. By encouraging students to elaborate on or explain the reasoning behind their responses, individuals could be led towards

‘speculating and thinking aloud’ (Alexander, 2004; Vaish, 2008) about the answers, which would help them practise higher order thinking skills. Most importantly, in keeping with the sociocultural principles of learning, it is pertinent to change the existing spoon-feeding classroom discourse in Class S. When teachers begin to use purposeful discourse practices to engage low achievers in discussion, the classroom becomes dialogic and the “space of learning” (Lin, 2007, p. 80) is expanded.

(ii) Pedagogical Beliefs towards Low Achievers

In order to create the possibility of transforming the trajectory of low achievers’ social worlds, “critical spaces” (Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2010, p. 176) at the school level and beyond must be provided for teachers and educators to step away from the cycle of deficit discourse constructions towards low achievers and to examine the structural factors which have contributed to disadvantage or inequality.

Stepping away from the deficit discourse requires teachers to recontextualize or relocate the cause of deficit learning away from the low achiever to the classroom where pedagogies are applied and curricular policies are implemented. To do that, the usual logic of practice (Johnston & Hayes, 2008) or cultural model (Black, 2007) of teaching that attributes failure or learning difficulties to individual students and their families must be consciously changed to one that affirms the learning potential of all learners. Researchers such as Langer (2001) propose that teachers could make connections between concepts and experiences within lessons and students’ out-of-school knowledge and experience consistently throughout each academic term, so that teachers can then recognize ways in which skills and knowledge acquired outside school can be applied in the classroom. To a limited extent as well, the writing intervention task, in which authentic purposes and genres were involved, served to encourage the low achievers in Class S to make meaningful communication of their own experiences through writing.

Given today's digital age, teachers can certainly harness technology for multimodal construction of writing to engage students' interest (Edwards-Groves, 2010). Tan and Guo (2009)'s study, mentioned in Chapter 2, is one such example of using multimodal texts in meaning-making in the Singaporean context. Similarly, Comber and Kamler (2007), in their intervention study, practised 'turn-around pedagogies' to align teachers directly into their students' worlds. More recently, Teo's (2008) study shows that teachers in the Singapore classroom can bridge learning with students' prior knowledge and experience with what is taught in class, so that the value or applicability extends beyond classroom walls. By the same token, Kramer-Dahl and Chia's (2012) study describes how the strategy of weaving, which combines scaffolding and connection to "shift" between levels and kinds of knowledge across instructional episodes, lessons and units, facilitates students' "deep and flexible understanding" of concepts and skills over time, when used to "point backwards" to "challenge the already known" as well as "ahead to the broader...surrounding issues" (p.78).

These studies show that teachers become "intercultural actors" when they choose to bridge the gap between school-endorsed literacy practices and their students' "knowledge capacities" (Caughlan & Kelly, 2004, p. 383) or funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Nowhere is this more emphasized than in Luke's (2003) keynote address to the combined ALEA/AATE National Conference when he argues that:

connectedness to the world and engagement with knowledge – have to be there to turn around their medium to long term performance...basic skills are necessary but not sufficient to turn around the performance of your most at-risk kids...unless the activities are somehow connected to the world and unless there is critical engagement with knowledge – unless there is an educative act going on – we might as well pack up and go home.

(p.18)

(iii) Learning Community in the Classroom

Creating learning conditions that favour low achievers' engagement with writing not only complements the preceding two changes in classroom pedagogies, but more importantly,

it also supports the sociocultural principle of apprenticing or socializing them in the critical knowledge and skills necessary for them to perform various writing tasks expected of them at school. Two effective management strategies to establish a more conducive learning environment in the classroom, as pointed out by Brophy (2010), include setting clear explicit learning outcomes and responding consistently, predictably, and contingently to students' behaviour, which fosters a focus on effort and learning, and respectful interactions among peers and teacher.

A more critical aspect of the learning community in the classroom relates to the mood or atmosphere of the class. Studies have shown that a positive social environment correlates positively with students' expectations of success and intrinsic value for school and leads to a generally positive affective and emotional state that carries over into academic activities, resulting in academic optimism (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). In Ryan and Patrick's (2001) study, these positive facets of social environment include teacher support, promoting interaction, promoting mutual respect and performance goals. In view of the negative attitude at-risk low achievers, such as those in Class S, may exhibit towards their teachers, it is all the more necessary for the teachers to engage their students in a relentless and sympathetic manner, as their motivation to learn tends to be higher when their opinions are valued and they believe that teachers are sincere in what they say, as well as having their interests at heart. To do that, teachers could get to know their students' backgrounds and interests for a start, so that they can incorporate into their teaching ways that are compatible with curricular goals. Otherwise, low achievers can become disaffected when they do not perceive such involvement from teachers (Brophy, 2010).

10.4.2 Changing curriculum planning at the wider macro levels

(iv) Assessment

Corresponding changes in the current assessment practices are necessary for changes in pedagogical practices to be effective. In particular, for assessment to reflect the aim of teaching literacy for creativity and personal expression in writing (language for literary response and expression), the construction of meaning in writing needs to be emphasized in the grade of the final written product, so that it reflects students' ability to create texts that appropriately fulfill a communicative goal (Weigle, 2002). In view of that, the type of writing assessments could be widened to include low achievers' literacy practices outside the schools, such as in homes and communities, to inform and expand teachers' understanding of their students as writers. For example, as well as an examination of selected text types, teachers could refer to the songs they listen to or the cyber activities they engage in.

Perhaps the Ministry could also institute the use of school-based assessment (SBA) methods such as portfolios or peer assessment as part of the standardized GCE 'O' and 'N' Levels national exams¹⁵. Writing portfolios, which consist of 'in-class' and 'out-of-class' writing tasks (Ibid), represent one example of SBA that can be used to assess students' overall sense of writing performance across a range of genres. Ultimately, SBA should work to establish a writing environment rather than a grading environment, as this facilitates the transition from teaching to assessment as "seamlessly as possible" (Hyland, 2007, p. 161). However, the implementation of SBA is not without problems. Although it is known that it has the potential to instill a developmental culture of learning and thus help students become independent learners, its purpose of facilitating student learning can easily be defeated if it is not implemented in the right spirit, not to mention that the planning, organization, management and training can add an extra burden to teachers' already crammed workload.

¹⁵ There have been on-going attempts to develop school-based assessment by Singapore Examination and Assessment Board (SEAB) since its inception in 2004, but the main emphasis still lies with the development and administration of national examinations such as the PSLE and GCE.

Further, the tangible benefits resulting from the use of large-scale portfolios may not be reaped in the first two or three years of implementation, as pointed out by Stecher (1998).

A full discussion on how SBA can be implemented and on the perceived benefits and implications of its implementation is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it needs to be reiterated that SBA must be systematic and organized so that teacher and student can use it to measure growth of knowledge and skills. Otherwise, it will be another case of ‘old wine in new wine skin’.

(v) Greater autonomy and support for teachers

Despite the fact that teachers have a demanding workload and are expected by their school to defer to regulative discourse from the management level in their professional decision-making, it is still their first-hand classroom experience which should be capitalized on so that they can contribute their voices to curricular development and reform. If teachers can be given time, authority and resources to implement research on their own, or collaboratively with colleagues, research which aim at improving the literacy development of low achievers, and if schools build up a culture whereby teachers could openly share each other’s expertise, it is likely to further enhance their confidence, professional esteem and expertise.

Central to the context of this study, teachers’ professional development should be devoted to the conceptualizing of the principles of genre-teaching as envisaged in the current syllabus, since as Kramer-Dahl (2007) rightly points out, many teachers are still “fuzzy” (p.64) about the overarching purpose of genre-teaching, and are in need of more sophisticated training in linguistics and language pedagogy so that they know exactly how to engage students with text and the in-built meaning of the text. This is because the training they receive in pre- and in-service programmes, oriented towards practical skills and techniques in

lesson delivery, appear to “impart little more than reductive understandings of the syllabus-relevant conceptual and pedagogical tools” (Kramer-Dahl & Chia, 2012, p. 76). Thus, they lack confidence in showing students how to analyse and examine the critical aspects involved in the writing of text types. More importantly, in-service courses should also raise teachers’ awareness of their professional position and encourage them to reflect on issues relating to the teaching and learning of the English language in the larger sociocultural context. To this end, the teacher training programme should also include studies of literacy and observations of the social contexts in which teaching and learning take place, not just the linguistic aspects of language teaching.

Apart from teachers’ professional development, their voices in the area of their deployment in school need to be taken into account. As depicted in Jenny’s case (see 9.2.4 on p.241), as well as based on my personal experience as a secondary school teacher, it is often the norm for school management to deploy high-performing teachers (deemed as such by school management) to teach the top O and N levels classes, such that they get to teach students who are already categorized as ‘good’ by virtue of streaming, whereas inexperienced or ‘bottom rung’ teachers are assigned to teach the challenging low-end classes. This practice of allotting the ‘best’ teachers for the ‘best’ students needs to be reconsidered if there is to be educational equity for students across all streams. Teachers, especially the beginning ones, also need to be esteemed professionally and not made to think that their professional capability is tied to the types of classes they are deployed to teach. For better support in the quality of teaching experience, the school management should extend more understanding towards the constraints teachers work under as well as recognition of their effort in educating low achievers.

10.5 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

10.5.1 Issues of methodology

In terms of the research methodology, it should first be noted that the study was limited to two classes in one school. However, the research site was chosen to be representative of a typical neighbourhood school in Singapore, and the classroom activities and behaviour of the research participants were not likely to be different from those of their counterparts in other schools. On that basis, the teaching of writing in Class M and Class S would be similar to what happens in the classes of the same streams in other neighbourhood schools, since the sociocultural forces that impinge on instructional decisions and methods in the education system do not differ. On that premise, the findings are comparable to those from existing longitudinal studies on classroom teaching and learning of English in Singapore neighbourhood schools, such as Cheah's (1994) and Kramer-Dahl's (2007) as well as Curdt-Christiansen's (2010) survey of teachers' attitudes towards young and low-tracked students' ability in learning higher literacy skills. On the other hand, I would not claim that the findings are applicable to all neighbourhood schools. This is, after all, the story of two classes and their teachers, and the meaning of the events is derived from their very own context. How teachers and students co-construct their classroom life and how their practices have been constrained or facilitated by the different institutional and sociocultural worlds they originate from may vary, depending on the context.

10.5.2 Teachers as a constraining factor

My experience of working with the two teachers during the entire field work at Mayflower Secondary in some ways did not turn out as I had expected. Initially, it seemed that Belle would welcome the opportunity to be involved as one of the participants in the study, having completed her postgraduate studies in Applied Linguistics at a university

overseas. However, as it turned out, she was equally concerned with the need to cover her syllabus in time so that she could prepare Class M for the end-of-year exam, and allowing an outside researcher like me to sit in her class meant that her agenda would be interfered with (see 5.2.4). Thus, I was not able to observe as many of her classes as planned, and could only make the best use of the data collected from the five lessons I was allowed to observe. As the field work progressed, she also began to make known to me her positivist rather than interpretivist orientation (Bernard, 2000) towards the nature of good educational research. To her, my analysis of the ‘soft classroom data’ (see 1.5) did not seem to address any ‘serious questions’ of improving students’ scores on the surface. Her honest feedback about my study, as well as her practical need to cover the syllabus in class, thus underscores the issue of receptivity towards me as the researcher and towards the nature of the study.

Jenny, on the other hand, showed more receptivity towards the study and me as the researcher, and as such, I had expected to be able to work collaboratively with her, although she actually did not invest a stronger sense of agency over the planning and implementation of the writing intervention task. Most of all, she appeared reluctant to being totally open in the interviews, particularly when it concerned her negative sentiments towards the Malay students in Class S and Malay colleagues in the English Language Department. As mentioned, her deficit beliefs towards the Malay students in Class S and difficult working relationship with her reporting supervisor who was a Malay female, had affected the quality of her time at Mayflower Secondary, and consequently, her classroom instruction and her interactions with her students were negatively affected due to these difficulties she was facing. In that regard, the observations made of her in class S might not be reflective of her real professional self, which might otherwise have been different under normal circumstances. Indeed, it would be interesting to see how she actually delivered her lessons in another class in a different school environment.

In short, the discussion about teachers being a constraining factor in data collection is again a reminder that their practices are either empowered or disempowered by larger institutional forces and by the relationship between the school and its community and at times, by their sense-making or personal theories.

10.5.3 The writing intervention task

There are a few aspects that need to be addressed if a similar writing task were to be implemented in Class S in future. First, for a task of an unfamiliar nature, there should be sufficient time allowed for students as well as the teacher to fully comprehend the task requirement. In this sense, there could have been more time devoted to the implementation of the writing intervention task in Class S. Alternatively, the task requirement could have been simplified. For example, instead of getting the class, which was accustomed to being spoon fed and literally told what to write, to conduct the actual survey, it would have been less intimidating if they had been provided with survey responses to work on. That way, they would have had more time to focus on the exchange of ideas, and they would also have shown a less negative attitude towards the task. The second aspect that could be improved concerns the absence of feedback. Ideally, a full writing cycle should include the teacher giving feedback on students' writing in class, which constitutes part of knowledge construction and dissemination espoused by sociocultural theories of writing. Only in such contexts would students learn to communicate their knowledge, clarify doubts and engage with their own learning (Wells, 1999).

10.5.4 Suggestions for future research

Despite the limitations, the study raises a number of issues that call for further research. Firstly, in line with Ortmeier-Hooper and Enright's (2011) call for more research into the writing practices and literacy development of adolescent L2 writers, further longitudinal tracking of the identity negotiation of low-achieving adolescent writers and their overall trajectories within and beyond secondary school could be conducted for comparisons across different educational settings. Emergent theories about how influences within and outside of the school setting shape adolescents' experiences and perceptions of themselves as writers as they engage with classroom teaching could then be developed. Conversely, richer theories on how their ascribed identity markers as low achievers in turn affect the way they relate to writing instruction in the classroom are in need of development (e.g. Schoonen & Appel, 2005). This then will provide insights into the kinds of intervention programmes that might be effective for this group of writers.

In addition, more theories in the area of motivation in writing, which are usually supported by a non-positivist, deterministic epistemology associated with psycholinguistics, could also be developed through the lens of literacy, in order to provide further understanding of writing difficulties. Then, the question of what kinds of pedagogical remediation are effective in building higher literacy skills in low achievers with limited English proficiency could be further explored with the use of not just quantitative but also qualitative methodologies in future studies. The findings from these studies would help to alleviate teachers' deficit constructions of low achievers' ability in learning literacy for meaning construction.

Finally, there is actually the challenging problem of how the assessment of writing can be re-structured to better facilitate the teaching of writing for 'literary expression and response' (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2001) in educational settings with

a high-stakes examination and accountability regime (such as Singapore's), in which priority is given to the instrumental nature of test preparation (Enright & Gilliland, 2011). Kramer-Dahl (2008) however reminds us that the suggestion to bring about similar measures of change in the nature of assessment depends ultimately on the "willingness" of policy makers, who in the Singapore context of "an authoritarian, narrowly conceived assessment regime" will render the delivery of a curriculum aimed at fostering the construction of meaning and creativity in writing "near impossible" (p.103). That is to say, any "impetus for change" in the assessment structure has to originate from the Ministry in the first place, as changing "what is tested and evaluating what is learnt" will depend on what it endorses as knowledge and accepts as legitimate literacy (Cheah, 1994, p. 254). Still, this does not mean that seeking changes in the current assessment system should not be pursued by teachers, educators and researchers. In fact, the call for changes in the assessment system needs to be further supported by research on the relationship between ideological practices of schooling (that is, the influence of streaming and of teachers' deficit constructions towards low achievers) and the larger structural social order, so that policy makers could eventually be convinced of the need for change.

10.6 Final Analysis

This study has provided insights into the situated nature of second language writing in the context of the mainstream Singapore classroom and its role in the literacy development of students in secondary schools in the broader institutional and sociocultural contexts. Its detailed descriptions of the writing cultures in Class M and Class S, explicated through the analyses of classroom discourse patterns, have contributed to our understanding of the writing experiences of low-achieving adolescents who are typically marginalized by deficit constructions made about them, as shown in some existing studies such as Enright and

Gilliland's (2011). Nevertheless, findings from the intervention task implemented in Class S have provided a positive note on the advantages of using the sociocultural principles to master writing skills, although of course, improvement in the design of the task is needed to encourage the construction of meaning.

At this juncture, I wish to reiterate that the way forward for teaching low achievers in second language writing education needs to be framed as an ongoing dialogue between educators and other stakeholders on how best to nurture the individual. The reality remains that teachers of such classes not only have to meet the academic targets set by the institution, but are also expected to cope with students' behavioural problems at the same time. It is challenging and at times, discouraging for teachers such as Jenny. As it is, we may need a paradigm shift in policy making involving education and literacy, and as discussed, it may still be some time before we see a culturally progressive model of writing and literacy instruction in the mainstream Singapore classroom. In the words of Shields et al. (2005):

Change does not just happen. We must attend to contexts, structures, attitudes, positioning, and relationships. Each must be continually examined, deconstructed, and reconstructed to ensure it fosters social justice within a deeply democratic community of learners...As educators, we should and must continue in this quest to create educational systems and environments that are more equitable, more engaging, and more optimistic for all children.

(p.121)

On that note, it is hoped that this study has already begun to contribute a small part to the ongoing dialogue.

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Appendix 1 Questionnaire on *Engagement with Writing*

Name: _____

PSLE T score: _____

Gender: Male/Female

Race: Chinese/Malay/Indian/Others (Please specify : _____)

Language(s) spoken at home: 1. _____

2. _____

Secondary three MYE EL marks: _____

Goal in two years' time: Polytechnic/ITE/Others (Please specify: _____)

Circle your answers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6) to the statements below. Please do not leave out any statements.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
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(Example) If you strongly agree with the following statement, write this:

I like playing computer games very much.

1 2 3 4 5 6

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. I find the writing tasks in class useful to my life outside of school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Having good writing is more important than speaking skills at work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. To write well, my grammar knowledge must be good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. There is little connection between what I learn in English class and my life outside of school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. The topics we wrote in English class are boring to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. No matter how hard I try, I can't do better in English writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I can check and edit my own writing for spelling errors and correct grammar. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I can organize sentences into a paragraph to clearly express a topic or theme. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. Compared with other students in this class, I think I am good at writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. I enjoy writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

12. When my English teacher gives me good feedback for my writing, I feel good.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Expressing ideas through writing is a waste of time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I have fear of writing compositions when I know they'll be evaluated by teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I make sure I find out from my teacher or classmates when I don't know how to do my writing tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Even if I think the writing task is boring, I will do my best.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I practise writing on my own.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. I am strongly motivated to improve my writing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. I don't plan my ideas before I start writing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I notice my mistakes in writing and use that information to help me write better.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Write down three writing topics you have done this year (in class, test or exam). Rank them in the order of preference (from a to c).						
a.						
b.						
c.						

End of Questionnaire

Appendix 2 Questions for First Interview for Focal Students

Interview 1 (for focal students):

Trajectory of future self

Q1: Have you thought about your future after your N/O levels?

Q2: What do you want to do with your life?

Q3: What do your parents hope you can become?

prompts

- (a). What is your plan after you finish N/O levels? Polytechnic? ITE?
- (b). What jobs would you want to do after you finish your studies?
- (b). Are you good at studies? What's your best subject? What about Math or English?
- (c). Is getting a good score in English important to you in getting into the preferred choice of your course? Why or why not?
- (d). Have you considered going to ITE if you didn't get promoted to secondary 5/poly?
- (e). How confident are you about succeeding in exams?
- (f). Do you dream about succeeding in life?

Use of English and its place in their lives

Q4: Is English a useful language to you in your life?

Q5: Where do you make contact with English?

Q6: Do you think you will have to use a lot of English in your job?

prompts

- (a). Do you speak English outside of school? How often?
- (b). Do you read the Straits Times or any other newspapers? How often?
- (c). Do you do the following:
- (d). Reading English newspapers (not just for Morning English Reading Programme ERP)
 - Listen to English pop songs
 - Watch sports programmes or watch English dramas
 - Access English websites on Internet

Place of Writing in their lives

Q7: How important is writing to you? In your Mother Tongue? In English?

Q8: Do you like to write?

prompts

- (a). Do you write outside of English class? If yes, what kind of writing do you do?
- (b). Who do you write for when you write in English? Yourself? Friends? Teachers?
- (c). Do you practise writing on your own? How?
- (d). Is writing well in English important to get you a satisfactory job?
- (e). What are the kinds of comments your teacher gives you for your writing?
- (f). Do you think it's cool to write in English?

Perception of Writing Lessons in English Class

Q9: What do you most/least like about your English lessons?

Q10: Can you tell me an example of a writing lesson you like/don't like?

Q11: What is least/most fun about your writing lessons?

Prompts

- (a). Do you find writing lessons boring? Normal? Useful? Why?
- (b). Why do you think they teach writing in school?
- (c). How might learning writing help you with your life outside of school?

Perception of English teacher and class

Q12: What do you most/least like about your English teacher?

Q13: Is your English teacher popular with the class?

Q14: How does your teacher teach writing?

Q15: Do you like your class?

Prompts

- (a). Can you tell me something important your teacher taught you about writing?
- (b). Do you feel good/lousy being in the top/second last class?

Problems with Writing

Q16: Do you usually have problems in writing? If so, what are they?

Prompts

- (a). Have your teachers told you the problems with your writing?
- (b). What about other classmates? What makes writing hard for them?
- (c). Do you use any methods (strategies) in your writing?
- (d). What help (teachers, classmates, tutors, etc) do you look for in writing?

Appendix 3 Questions for Second Interview for Focal Students in Class S

Interview 2 (for focal students in Class S):

Experience working on the task

- 1(a). Which aspects of the writing task do you like/dislike? Why?
- (b). Are you happy with your marks?
- (c). What was successful or unsuccessful about your work?
- (d). What kind of topic you'd like to do in class? Why or why not?
- (e). Did your teacher comment on your writing? Did he/she give you any feedback?

Problems encountered while working on the task

- 2(a). What particular problems do you have with the task?
- (b). What would you like your teachers to do more of, to help you in your writing?
- (c). What types of things do you yourself do in class that helps you to write?
- (d). What problems did you have with the two tasks?
- (e). Do you know what you could have done to improve your writing?

Appendix 4 Interview Questions for Teachers

Interview Questions (for teachers):

Genres

Q1: What do you understand about genre approach to writing?

Q2: How important is genre approach to teaching writing?

Prompts

- (a). What genres of writing have you done with your class?
- (b). How many writing tasks are they expected to do this semester? What genres?
- (c). Are certain genres easier to teach than others?
- (d). How do you usually teach writing? (e.g. the steps or methods?)
- (e). Do you set goals for students to improve in writing?
- (f). Do you do process writing with your class?
- (g). Is there the 'best' way to teach writing?

Students' attitude towards writing

Q3: What would you say about your class' attitude towards writing?

Prompts

- (a). How much of the class is engaged/disengaged with writing?
- (b). What is the average score of Paper 1 in your class?
- (c). Talk about the characteristics of disengaged students (quality of writing, behaviour, strategies they use, beliefs they express, etc)
- (d). What helps them to engage in writing?
- (e). What keeps them from engaging in writing?
- (f). What are the problems they have in writing? Lack of planning, reviewing? Mechanics? What about their content? Thought patterns? Less lexical control, variety, and sophistication? Any other linguistic features or patterns?

Teachers' role in teaching writing

Q4: What role do you think you play in facilitating the writing task?

Q5: What are some of the most difficult aspects of teaching writing to your class?

Prompts

- (a). Do they normally ask you for help?
- (b). What principles or strategies have you used to help them engage more with writing?
- (c). What advice have you given the students regarding writing?
- (d). Does the EL department encourage the sharing of creative teaching techniques?
- (e). Does the EL department provide the necessary support for beginning teacher?
- (f). Does your HoD set goals for the teachers regarding writing standard?
- (g). Do you think the students are too weak to be helped? The calibre of students or their foundations are too weak?

Pedagogical beliefs

Q6: Do you see writing more as a matter of grammatical accuracy or fluency?

Q7: Which is your priority in teaching writing: accuracy or fluency?

Prompts

(a). What is the place of writing in your life?

Sense of place/role in the curriculum and school

Q8: How long have you been teaching at the school?

Q9: Have your attitudes towards teaching, the English curriculum, your students, the educational policy and your future prospect changed?

Prompts

(a). Is English Language your first CS (curriculum subject)?

(b). What other classes do you teach?

(c). What are the teaching concerns you have working at your school?

(d). Has the school changed since you started teaching?

Factors that influence engagement with writing

Q10: What do you think are the factors inside the classroom that facilitate writing engagement?

Q11: If the school were to be seen as a community of good writing practice, what is needed to get these unengaged students to develop the identity of a competent writer?

Prompts

(a). What do you understand about your class? Home backgrounds? Language proficiency?

(b). What do you think are the factors outside the classroom that significantly impact on writing engagement of your students? (e.g. family background, ability, influence from media, etc). If yes, can you give some examples of these factors and how you believe they have impacted on your students?

(c). What are the main impediments for learning to write in Standard English?

Appendix 6 Field Notes Schedule

Date and time : _____

Lesson/Text Type/Task	
Aims of lesson	
Classroom Interaction: feedback/support/ questions asked	
Episode	

More 'through train' places for Normal stream

New route, more places for students to skip O levels and enter poly

By LEOW SI WAN

THE "through train" for Normal stream students will stop at one additional station and will have more space on board.

From 2013, some 2,000 Normal (Academic) students from each batch will be able to skip the O levels, up from the current 500.

And they will be able to choose from two programmes – up from the current one – to take them to the polytechnic.

The top 10 per cent of each N(A) cohort can choose a new year-long foundation programme developed by the polytechnics. If they complete the programme successfully, they will get a place in a polytechnic diploma programme.

For a start, the polytechnics will offer a total of 1,000 places for the new programme.

In addition, a current programme which allows 500 N(A) students in each cohort to skip the O levels and go straight into a Higher Nitec programme at the Institute of Technical Education, will be expanded – 1,000 will be able to do so from 2013.

This leads to either a first or second-year place in a related polytechnic course if students attain the necessary scores to qualify.

Together, the foundation programme and the Higher Nitec courses will smooth the path to a polytechnic diploma for the top 30 per cent of the roughly 13,000 students in each N(A) cohort.

Now, most N(A) students take the N levels in their fourth year, and then the O levels in the next, if they do well enough at the N levels.

Last year, about 74 per cent of N(A)

students were eligible for promotion to Secondary 5.

Said the principal of Singapore Polytechnic, Mr Tan Hang Cheong: "The polytechnics suggested the idea of direct entry for these top N(A) students, who are poly-bound anyway.

"Rather than having them spend a year preparing for the O levels, we can make better use of that year to strengthen their skills in areas relevant to the poly course they want to take and to generate interest in certain topics."

Ernest Lee, 14, a Secondary 2 N(A) student at Ngee Ann Secondary School wants to be in the top 10 per cent to enter a polytechnic directly.

He said: "I am happy that we are given our own version of 'through train' as well. This will motivate me to work harder."

Not being left out are the Normal (Technical) students, who form about 13 per cent of a cohort.

From 2013, two specialised secondary schools for N(T) students will be set up, with each offering 160 to 200 places for the Secondary 1 intake.

They will focus on special programmes to address personal development, socio-emotional needs, and the learning of life skills relevant to these students.

They will also adopt interactive teaching methods and provide opportunities for attachments and internships for upper secondary students.

Kranji Secondary School's Madam Maureen Lee is one of several principals eagerly an-

ticipating the changes.

She said: "My students were very excited after hearing the possibilities awaiting N(A) students during the Prime Minister's National Day Rally speech.

"Allowing them direct entry into the polytechnics will motivate and energise them. Education is all about hope."

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BETTER USE OF TIME

"Rather than having them spend a year preparing for the O levels, we can make better use of that year to strengthen their skills in areas relevant to the poly course they want to take and to generate interest in certain topics."

Singapore Polytechnic principal
Tan Hang Cheong

Appendix 8 Survey for the Writing Intervention Task:

What do teachers and students think about 'More Thru Train Places for Normal Stream'?

1. I know how the through train system works. Strongly Agree/ Don't Know/ Agree
2. I hope to be in the through train programme. Strongly Agree/ Don't Know/ Agree
3. I think the 'through train' places should be given to all N(A) students. Strongly Agree/ Don't Know/ Agree
4. How many percentage of sec 3 N(A) students in Mayflower do you think qualifies for the 'through train' places for polytechnics in 2013?
5. What does it take to prepare sec 3 N(A) students for 'through train' places for polytechnics in 2013?

Appendix 9 Scaffolding Template 1 for Writing Intervention Task

Structure	Model of a survey report	Language feature
<p>1st paragraph includes a _____ of diabetes.</p> <p>2nd paragraph to include a summary of _____ have been interviewed and the number.</p> <p>3rd para to report findings.</p> <p>4th para to draw an implication on your finding.</p>	<p>New Survey Results Show Huge Burden of Diabetes</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>Diabetes <u>is</u> a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both. It is the most common cause of blindness, kidney failure, and amputations in adults and a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. Type 2 diabetes <u>accounts</u> for up to 95 percent of all diabetes cases and virtually all cases of undiagnosed diabetes. Pre-diabetes, which causes no symptoms, substantially raises the risk of a heart attack or stroke and of developing type 2 diabetes.</p> <p>Interviewee</p> <p>The survey <u>involved</u> 7,267 people, who <u>represented</u> a national sample of people age 12 years and older. Participants were <u>interviewed</u> in their homes and received a physical exam.</p> <p>Findings</p> <p><u>According to a research, nearly 13 percent of adults age 20 and older</u> have diabetes, but 40 percent of them have not been diagnosed, according to epidemiologists from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Diabetes is especially common in the elderly: <u>nearly one-third of those age 65 and older</u> have the disease. An additional 30 percent of adults have pre-diabetes, a condition marked by elevated blood sugar that is not yet in the diabetic range.</p> <p>Implication</p> <p>“These findings have <u>grave implications for our health care system</u>, which is already struggling to provide care for millions of diabetes patients,” <i>commented</i> Griffin P. Rodgers, M.D., director of the NIDDK. <u>Many of whom belong to vulnerable groups, such as the elderly or</u></p>	<p>_____ tense</p> <p>Use of _____ tense and technical verbs.</p> <p>Reporting verbs</p> <p>Use of _____ and age range.</p> <p>Use of fraction</p> <p>Draw a _____ or a</p>

<p>What does the result show? Any suggestion?</p>	<p>minorities. Of paramount importance is <i>the need to curb the obesity epidemic</i>, which is the main factor driving the rise in type 2 diabetes. These findings of yet another increase in diabetes prevalence are a reminder that a full-scale public health response is in order. <i>“Re-directing the trends in diabetes will require changing the nutritional and physical activity habits of people at risk, and also creative and substantial efforts by health systems and communities,”</i> <i>opined</i> Ed Gregg, Ph.D., epidemiology and statistics branch chief.</p>	<p>conclusion. Elaboration Solution</p>
<p>5th para Concluding paragraph</p>	<p>Conclusion It’s important to know if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes, because there’s so much you can do to preserve your health. You should talk to your health care professional about your risk. If your blood glucose is high but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes, losing a modest amount of weight and increasing physical activity will greatly lower your risk of getting type 2 diabetes. If you already have diabetes, controlling your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol will prevent or delay the complications of diabetes.</p>	<p>Use of reporting verbs. Your own general _____ and _____.</p>

Appendix 10 Scaffolding Template 2 for Writing Intervention Task

Introduction

What is through train?

Interviewee

Who have been interviewed, number?

Findings (Just an example)

According to our findings, 4 out of 5 students thought that...All of them hope to be in the 'thru train' programme. Similarly, they also wanted to be...There are various responses for the percentage of MSS N(A) students that qualify for the programme. 4 out of 5 students believed that 50% of the students are good enough to take up the programme. As to what is required for N(A) students to do well, they need to.....

Implication

This result shows that through train programme is welcomed by many. The main reasons are it saves time as students can

The second reason is

as..... Therefore, we should go ahead with this programme which benefits many.

Conclusion

My general opinion

Reporting verbs

Commented
Said that
Thought that
Felt that
Believed
Strongly agree
Reported that

reporting phrases

As far as I am concerned
As far as they are concerned
Based on our finding/research
According to our survey results
Responses show that
The majority of the respondents

reporting figures

1 out of 5 respondents
40% of them
two-third of them
use of pie chart and
bar graph

Section 1 (Free Writing) – 30 marks

BAND DESCRIPTORS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF WRITING IN SECTION 1

- 26-30 Marks
- Simple structures will be accurate. There will be variety of structures with generally successful complex sentences.
 - There will be instances of apt and wide vocabulary.
 - There will be a good sense of paragraphing demonstrating its use as a device for linking ideas and providing unity to the piece of writing.
 - Spelling and punctuation will be largely accurate. The candidate will be confident in the use of full stops to separate sentences.
 - There may be a sprinkling of grammatical errors, including some very occasional tense or verb formation slips, but this will not hinder conveying the intended meaning to the reader.
 - Response will be fully relevant, the register and tone consistently appropriate and the reader's interest will be aroused and sustained.
- 20-25 Marks
- Structures will be generally accurate and will show some variety with some successful complex sentences.
 - Vocabulary will convey intended meaning with some precision.
 - Paragraphs will be used appropriately and will show some sense of linking and unity.
 - Spelling and punctuation will be generally accurate. Full stops will nearly always be used to separate sentences.
 - There may be some grammatical errors, including a few tense or verb formation errors, but this will not confuse the reader.
 - Response will be relevant, the register and tone appropriate and there will be some attempt to arouse and sustain the interest of the reader.
- 15-19 marks
- Structures will be generally accurate though they may be repetitive with occasional errors. There will be some attempts to write more complex sentences but these may not always be successful.
 - Vocabulary will be simple but will convey intended meaning.
 - Paragraphs will probably be used but may lack linking and unity.
 - Spelling of simple vocabulary and elementary punctuation will be largely accurate. Full stops will be used to separate sentences but their use may not be fully secure.
 - There will be a noticeable incidence of grammatical errors, including some serious tense and verb formation errors, but this will not obscure meaning.
 - Response will be relevant, the register and tone generally appropriate and there will be an attempt to arouse interest in the reader although this may not be sustained.

- 10-14 Marks**
- Structures will be simple with frequent errors and perhaps breakdown if more complex structures are attempted.
 - Vocabulary will be simple and will usually convey intended meaning. There may be examples of misunderstanding or misuse.
 - Paragraphs may be absent or may be inappropriate.
 - Spelling of simple vocabulary will usually be accurate but serious error is likely in more complex words.
 - Punctuation, particularly of sentence separation, is likely to be weak and uncertain.
 - There will be frequent grammatical errors including persistent errors in tense and verb forms which may sometimes blur but will not obscure meaning.
 - Response will attempt to fulfil the requirements of the question but there may be some digression and loss of focus. There may be some awareness of the appropriate register and tone and there may be some attempt to interest the reader but this is unlikely to be sustained for long.
- 5-9 Marks**
- Structures will be simple and frequently confused. There will be frequent errors and some obscurity of meaning.
 - Vocabulary will be limited and show frequent evidence of misunderstanding.
 - Paragraphs are likely to be absent or may be haphazard.
 - Spelling and punctuation, particularly of sentence separation, may be sufficiently inaccurate to blur or obscure meaning.
 - There will be very frequent grammatical errors of all kinds sometimes extending across whole phrases or sentences such that meaning is frequently obscured.
 - Response may show significant deviation from relevancy and is unlikely to arouse the reader's interest.
- 1-4 Marks**
- There may be patches of clarity but these will be 'buried' by other passages which convey no meaning.
 - Grammatical errors will be multiple i.e. extending across whole sentences.
 - At this level responses will indicate an inability to write English of sufficient accuracy to convey even simple information or ideas.

Section 2 (Situational Writing) – 30 marks

The 30 marks are allocated as follows:

- Task Fulfilment – 10 marks
- Language – 20 marks

BAND DESCRIPTORS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF TASK FULFILMENT IN SECTION 2

Note: Addressing the required points is only one factor in the award of the Task Fulfilment mark – candidates should be awarded the mark which best fits the performance as a whole, as follows:

- 9-10 Marks**
- Response shows clear awareness of the purpose of the task and of the intended audience.
 - All the given points are used accurately and relevantly and they are well amplified although not necessarily equally so.
 - The format is entirely appropriate.
 - Response will be fully relevant, the register and tone consistently appropriate and the reader's interest will be aroused and sustained.
- 7-8 Marks**
- Response shows awareness of the purpose of the task and of the intended audience.
 - All or most of the given points are used accurately and relevantly and there is some amplification.
 - The format is appropriate.
 - Response will be relevant, the register and tone appropriate and there will be some attempt to arouse and sustain the interest of the reader.
- 5-6 Marks**
- Response shows some awareness of the purpose of the task and of the intended audience.
 - All or most of the given points are used but amplification may be sketchy. There may be occasional evidence of misunderstanding or a lack of clarity.
 - The format is generally appropriate.
 - Response will be relevant, the register and tone generally appropriate and there will be an attempt to arouse interest in the reader although this may not be sustained.

- 3-4 Marks**
- Response shows only partial awareness of the purpose of the task and there may be some confusion as to the intended audience.
 - Some of the given points are used but there is likely to be evidence of some misunderstanding and a distinct lack of clarity.
 - The format is likely to be inappropriate or confused.
 - Response will attempt to fulfil the requirements of the question but there may be some digression and loss of focus. There may be some awareness of the appropriate register and tone and there may be some attempt to interest the reader but this is unlikely to be sustained for long.

- 1-2 Marks**
- Response will show a failure to understand the purpose of the task and there will be confusion as to the intended audience.
 - There may be an attempt to use some of the given points but there will be serious misunderstanding and confusion.
 - The format will be inappropriate or very confused.
 - Response may show significant deviation from relevancy and is unlikely to arouse the reader's interest.

- Note**
- A mark of 0 should be given only when
- there is no response;
 - response is so weak that there is no evidence of understanding the nature of the task;
 - the candidate has merely copied out the question.

Appendix 12 Post-Writing Intervention Task Questionnaire

Name: _____

PSLE T score: _____

Gender: Male/Female

Race: Chinese/Malay/Indian/Others (Please specify : _____)

Language(s) spoken at home: 1. _____

2. _____

Secondary three MYE EL marks: _____

Goal in two years' time: Polytechnic/ITE/Others (Please specify: _____)

Circle your answers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6) to the statements below. Please do not leave out any statements.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
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(Example) If you strongly agree with the following statement, write this:

I like playing computer games very much. 1 2 3 4 5 **6**

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The topic was interesting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I found the topic useful to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I have no problems writing on the topic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. When I wrote on the topic, I felt my writing was not good enough. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. No matter how hard I try, I still did not score as well as before for 'Survey on Thru Train Places for Normal Stream'. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. I did not enjoy writing on the topic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I felt confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing after the teacher taught me how to do the topic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. When my English teacher gave me good feedback for my writing, I felt good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. Writing on the topic was a waste of time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

10. Was the group work or IT research helpful to your writing? Why and why not?

11. What was difficult or easy about writing the two topics?

End of Questionnaire

Appendix 13 Transcript Conventions

//	Simultaneous utterances
=	Speaking turn latched to a preceding one
[]	Contextual info
()	unintelligible items
(??)	items in doubt
: :	Lengthening of sounds
..	Short omission
...	Long omission
(1)	1 second pause
(2)	2 second pause
No.	lines in interview
Uppercase	Emphasis
R	Researcher
S	Unknown Student
T	Teacher