

**Learning Argumentative Writing in Australian
schools: Chinese International Students
in Year 12**

Chia Chuan (Gwen) Wu

**Doctor of Philosophy
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MONASH UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**Learning Argumentative Writing in Australian
schools: Chinese International Students
in Year 12**

By

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MA ELTD, BA Business

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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AMENDMENTS

- ✓1. p.6 L15 change 'including' to 'included'
2. p.6 para3 delete 'is needed'
L9
- ✓3. p.17 L5 add 'in tuition fees' after '1.5 billion'
4. p.21 L4 change 'were important' to 'was important'
5. p.26 L12 add 'This cultural capital refers to the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status' after '(p.200)'.
6. p.30 para2 change 'conceptual framework and pedagogy' to 'conceptual
L1 framework and pedagogical approaches which reflect particularly on genre theory and critical literacy theory'.
7. p.33 add at the beginning of first paragraph: 'In the Chinese education system, English is taught as a foreign language in China and Mandarin is the medium of instruction in the secondary schools. Obviously, this is not the case in Australia. The theorisation on discourse communities in Section 3.1 will have more detailed discussion on this distinction.'
8. p.35, 52, change all square brackets to parentheses
57
9. p.39 add at the end of para 2: 'The above introduction on the Chinese education system provides background knowledge to the readers for the discussion of English learning in senior secondary schools in China.'
10. p.42 add at the end of para 1: 'The reason is because cultural factors may influence many different aspects of second language learning and use, such as culture of the school, the classroom or the discipline. Moreover, literacy practices can also be seen as cultural ways of utilizing writing in everyday life.'
11. p.50 L13 delete 'persistent'
- ✓12. p.57 L2 delete 'a' after '2003'
13. p.75 delete Section 3.2 line 2 and 3 'in order to clarify ...teach them to write in L2' and change to 'to elaborate the relationship between genre, register and language and the implications for the teaching of writing of particular genres in a second language.'
14. p.77 L5 add 'The arrows in Figure 3.1 demonstrate that' before 'Genres are realized'
15. p.81 L2 add after 'to include more details' the following - 'and the curved arrows shows two steps can be joined together for designing classroom activities and preparing students to write individually.'
16. p.82 L8 change 'He' to 'Vygotskayan educators'
17. p.84 L8 replace 'Instead of creating her own' to 'Instead of creating an alternative cycle'

18. p.88 L4 delete 's' for the word 'ways'
19. p.91 para 2 delete 'This' from 'This critical literacy'
20. p.97 para 2 change 'different background than English' to 'backgrounds other than English'
21. p.105 L5 delete the sentence 'Due to the great emphasis ...student- oriented.'
Delete 'However', and capitalise 'Some studies'.
22. p.106 final para L5 delete repeated 'people'
23. p.112 L2 add 'from CHC countries' after 'the majority of CHC students'
24. p.122 L 7 replace 'about' with 'and'
25. p.122 L9 delete the sentences of 'Long (1988)...in the L2' and combine this paragraph with next one.
26. p.124 L2 'She' for 'He'
27. p.125 L1 delete 'I argue that...of the language.'
28. p.144 L13 add 'and they were given pseudonyms in the study' after 'Teachers who agreed ...consent form'
29. p.150 In column 2 of Table 5.3, 'recommendation' for 'recommendati-on'
30. p.155 L17 change 'provides' to 'provide'
31. p.155, 159 change the headings of 'Semi-structured individual interviews with students' and 'Semi-structured interviews with ESL teachers' to 'Individual interviews with students' and 'Individual interviews with teachers' respectively
32. p.157 L7 change 'shared' to 'to share'
33. p.158 L6 replace 'very much in the class' with 'extensively in class.'
34. p.160 L17 After 'data sheet', add 'in addition to the audiorecording of three lessons.'
35. p.161 L7 change 'uncomfortableness' to 'discomfort'
36. p.161 L9 change 'to comfort them' to 'to put them at ease'
37. p.162 L2 delete 'the' and 'from early years'
38. p.163 L9 change 'was collected' to 'were collected'
39. p.163 L19 change 'reflects' to 'reflect'
40. p.198 L3 delete 'performed'
41. p.220 L6 delete 'in' after 'essay for'
42. p. 226 L3 'came up with the ideas' for 'came up the ideas'
43. p.273 L16 delete 's' for 'relates'
44. p.283 L13 change 'Silliman's' to 'Silliman'
45. p.283 L18 change 'dealines' to 'deadlines'
46. p.284 L15 delete repeated 'the'
47. p.290 L8 delete repeated 'or mainstream'
48. The word 'Western' should be capitalised through the thesis.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "Learning Argumentative Writing in Australian schools: Chinese International Students in Year 12" and submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that the thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university of institution.

Signed..

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Dated 13th February

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Abstract

This thesis explores Chinese international students' experiences in learning to write argumentative genres in an Australian high school, and the ways in which they engage with Australian media texts. The school caters for international students studying English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE), the final two years of secondary schooling in the state of Victoria in Australia, prior to university entry. The genre-focused pedagogical approach used in teaching argumentative writing in VCE ESL is also explored. The study uses a sociocultural theoretical framework to interpret four aspects of students' learning. These are: writing in an English speaking academic discourse community; engagement with genre theory; understanding of critical literacy and writer identity.

A qualitative discourse-based case study was used to explore students' experience in argumentative writing. Participants were ten Chinese international students in their final semester of Year 12, and their three ESL teachers. The main data sources included individual student interviews, focus group interviews with students, individual teacher interviews, ESL classroom observation, students' written texts, official documents and materials. Data sets were coded using qualitative techniques and a range of discourse analytic techniques was used in the analysis.

The main findings of the study indicate that the students' writing difficulties in conforming to the institutional, cultural and assessment requirements in a new discourse community are influenced broadly by their practices, thinking, values and prior learning experiences in relation to writing. Students struggled to understand and discuss the effects of persuasive language and arguments on an audience, and to represent these in their writing. Time constraints were a key issue for these students in developing their academic language competence, and analytical and organisation skills. The study also offers some critique of genre approaches in writing pedagogy at VCE level. Although students need to work hard to engage with and acculturate to new textual practices, there was also a clear need for teachers to go beyond fixed structures in teaching the genres, and to make their teaching more explicit to cater for student needs and development in writing.

Table of contents

Declaration	3
Acknowledgement	4
Abstract	6
Table of Contents	7
List of Abbreviations	12
List of Tables, Diagrams and Figures	13
List of Appendices	15
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	16
1.0 Locating the research problem	16
1.1 Researcher's background and reflection	19
1.1.1 Chinese literacy learning experience in Taiwan	20
1.1.2 English literacy learning experience in Taiwan	21
1.1.3 Observations about my experiences	22
1.2 Purpose of the study	23
1.3 Rationale for the study	25
1.4 Defining argumentative writing in this thesis	29
1.5 Organisation of the thesis	30
1.6 Chapter summary	32
CHAPTER TWO LEARNING TO WRITE IN CHINA AND AUSTRALIA	33
2.0 Overview	33
2.1 The Chinese education system	35
2.2 English Learning in senior secondary schools in China	40
2.2.1 The English curriculum	40
2.2.2 English teacher qualifications in China	45
2.2.3 Pedagogy in English language teaching in China	47
2.2.4 Assessment practice in China	48
2.3 The Victorian education system	52
2.4 The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)	54

2.4.1	The requirements for international students undertaking VCE	54
2.4.2	An introduction to ESL curriculum and outcomes in VCE	56
2.4.3	The Writing Task	61
2.4.4	Assessment of the Writing Task	64
2.5	Chapter summary	65
CHAPTER THREE	WRITING IN A NEW DISCOURSE COMMUNITY	67
3.0	Overview	67
3.1	Writing in an English-speaking academic discourse community	68
3.1.1	Learning knowledge in a community	71
3.1.2	Power relations and ideology in literacy	74
3.2	Genre theory and practice: Audience and purpose as determiners in written discourse	75
3.2.1	Genre, register and language	75
3.2.2	Scaffolding writing and genre-based literacy pedagogy	80
3.2.3	Challenging the model	85
3.3	Critical literacy and pedagogy: Genre and power relations	87
3.3.1	Critical literacy, identity negotiation and power relations	87
3.3.2	Critical pedagogy	88
3.3.3	Limitations of critical literacy and genre theory	92
3.4	Writing and identity	94
3.5	Chapter summary	98
CHAPTER FOUR	REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES	101
4.0	Overview	101
4.1	Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) and learning to write	102
4.1.1	Chinese international students in the Western learning context	104
4.1.2	Chinese international students and their learning style preferences	110
4.1.3	Chinese writing traditions	113
4.1.4	Originality and plagiarism	115
4.2	Research on second language learning and writing	119

4.3	Studies on scaffolding writing	125
4.4	Teacher feedback to students' writing	128
4.5	Chapter summary	131
CHAPTER FIVE METHODOLOGY		132
5.0	Overview	132
5.1	Design of the study	133
5.2	Recruitment process	139
5.2.1	Gaining access	139
5.2.2	Research site	141
5.2.3	Participants	143
5.3	Primary sources	153
5.3.1	Collection of students' written texts	153
5.3.2	Individual interviews with students	155
5.3.3	Focus group interviews with student participants	157
5.3.4	Individual interviews with ESL teachers	159
5.3.5	ESL classroom observation	159
5.3.6	Official documents	161
5.3.7	Data collection schedule	162
5.3.8	Rigour and trustworthiness	163
5.4	Researcher's role	164
5.5	Data analysis	166
5.5.1	Approaches to qualitative data analysis	167
5.5.2	Discourse analysis	169
5.6	Chapter summary	172
CHAPTER SIX STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY		173
6.0	Overview	173
6.1	Engagement in oral interaction in class	174
6.2	Adapting to teachers' teaching style/pedagogy	178
6.3	Finding and analysing meaning in written texts: grammar and culture	182
6.4	Presenting one's views on an issue	187

6.4.1	Cultural knowledge and interest in the topic	189
6.4.2	Awareness of audience	191
6.4.3	Learning to challenge the model	193
6.4.4	Originality of the written text	198
6.5	Chapter summary	204
CHAPTER SEVEN	TWO CASE STUDIES ON STUDENTS' LITERACY	205
7.0	Overview	205
7.1	Natalie: "I write it for myself"	206
7.1.1	Motivation and writing performance	206
7.1.2	Natalie's challenges in argumentative writing	213
7.2	Jim: "Argumentative writing is like writing a love letter"	215
7.2.1	Use of persuasive techniques and their influence on Jim's writing	215
7.2.2	Audience versus fixed models	218
7.2.3	Use of textual evidence	220
7.2.4	Jim's challenges in argumentative writing	225
7.3	Chapter summary	230
CHAPTER EIGHT	OBSERVATION AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVES	232
8.0	Overview	232
8.1	One teacher's practice	233
8.1.1	Youth curfew	234
8.1.2	"I want to see you really argue"	240
8.2	Teachers on students' writing	246
8.2.1	Recognising genre and subtleties of the language	246
8.2.2	News as fact or opinion	252
8.2.3	Being critical	253
8.2.4	Accuracy: Grammar and vocabulary	257
8.2.5	Planning and writing	260
8.2.6	Plagiarism	263

8.2.7	Summary of the interviews	267
8.3	Chapter summary	268
CHAPTER NINE	NEGOTIATION IN LITERACY PRACTICES	269
9.0	Overview	269
9.1	Discussion of the findings	270
9.1.1	Engaging with Australian media texts critically	271
9.1.2	Engaging with students' own writing	275
9.1.3	Adapting to teachers' pedagogy	281
9.1.4	Learning in a new classroom culture	285
9.2	Limitations of the study	288
9.3	Recommendations for further research	289
REFERENCES		291
APPENDICIES		310

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAATI	National Australian Association of Translators and Interpreters
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAC	School-assessed coursework
SLA	Second language acquisition
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VCE	Victoria Certificate of Education
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Chinese education system	37
Table 2.2	Curriculum structure for senior secondary schools in China	38
Table 2.3	The Victorian education system	53
Table 2.4	The comparison of English and ESL assessment in the final year examination	57
Table 2.5	ESL written examination	62
Table 3.1	A comparison of Gee's and Lave and Wenger's theories	73
Table 3.2	Relations of text to context of situation	78
Table 3.3	Approaches to scaffolding writing	83
Table 4.1	The characteristics of four different learning styles	112
Table 5.1	ESL teachers' backgrounds	145
Table 5.2	Students' background information	149
Table 5.3	The students' study context	150
Table 5.4	Students' texts summary	154
Table 5.5	Students' breakdown into groups	158
Table 5.6	Formal data collection schedule	162
Table 6.1	Students' feelings about their ESL classes	174
Table 6.2	Students' writing difficulties	188

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	The English Curriculum Standards and its content and objectives in senior secondary schools in China	41
Figure 2.2	Classification of objectives in different levels of schooling	43
Figure 3.1	Genre and register in the relation to writing	77
Figure 3.2	Curriculum cycle	81
Figure 3.3	Framework for academic language learning	90
Figure 8.1	Past paper for the Writing Task in the Study Guide	237
Figure 8.2	A transparency from the Study Guide	242
Figure 8.3	A letter to the city council	244

List of Diagrams

Diagram 3.1	The relationship between the VCE and four theoretical strands	99
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Appendices List

Appendix A	ESL written examination paper in 2004
Appendix B	The approval letter from the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans
Appendix C	The letter of permission from the principal
Appendix D	Both English and Chinese versions of explanatory statement for students
Appendix E	Explanatory statement for teachers
Appendix F	Semi-structured interview protocol with students
Appendix G	Focus group interview protocol with students
Appendix H	Semi- structured interview protocol with teachers
Appendix I	Field note data sheet
Appendix J	Jim's essay on Commonwealth Game
Appendix K	Jim's essay on stem cell research
Appendix L	Table of English in VCE ESL
Appendix M	Narratives, mind map and implications for Kelly's lessons
Appendix N	The past VCE examination paper of the Writing Task used in Meg's lessons

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 LOCATING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

One comment from a Chinese VCE student provides insight into the focus of this study. He said,

I feel that Text Response is more difficult because when we discuss with the teacher, she always leads us. For example, she lists down all the points, emphasises the main reasons and asks us to use these as quotes, even though we have our own ideas. At the beginning, I would bring my ideas to the discussion, but later found out it's useless coz she will use my ideas as wrong examples to illustrate that hers are the standard, being her teaching experience and school norms. If I need to decide my own topic, I prefer to discuss my true feeling, not just follow what the teacher said is correct. That's why I find it very frustrating. She refers to many quotes, but also says you can't just use quotes, instead you need to talk about your comprehension of the topic. I follow my own comprehension, but she said it's wrong, and the quotes are correct. I don't know why I should apply them.

(Group Interview B, p. 4)

The above comment shows the concern of one student participant, Jim, in learning argumentative writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) in a Victorian senior secondary school. He was dejected to feel he had to follow exactly what the teacher wanted him to do and hoped to elaborate his ideas in the classroom discussions before writing his own piece of argumentative text. English language teaching in Australia and Asian countries, like mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Singapore is informed by different cultural perspectives. There are significant differences between the education systems of China and Victoria. These differences relate to the structure of the education systems, the aims of these systems, pedagogy and assessment. International secondary students not only have to enter English medium schools in a new country, they also have to acquire the understandings of specific learning skills

that underpin educational success in Victoria. This study centres on Chinese international students' experiences in argumentative writing in Australian secondary schooling.

International students are big business for Australia and the secondary school market is rapidly growing. International students contribute more than 1.5 billion in tuition fees to the Victorian economy every year. Indramalar (2004) states that more than 83,700 students from overseas are studying in Australia, with approximately 30 percent of these students in Victorian institutions. It can be argued that in accepting substantial fees, education systems and independent/private schools have a responsibility to strive to meet the distinctive educational needs of these students. Additionally, the families of many international students generally believe that by completing their secondary schooling in an English speaking country, the students will be well-prepared to succeed in English medium western universities (Arkoudis & Love, 2004). They perceive there to be a direct correlation between hard work and results and this places a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of students who might not be adequately supported by the education system and school itself.

China is the biggest source of international students (The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, 2006). Large numbers of Chinese international students studying in the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) programs regard the VCE as a preparation for tertiary education and wish to be offered a place at Australia's leading universities. These students pay substantial fees for these opportunities. Many colleagues and schools provide targeted intensive programs to support these international students in the VCE and claim to ensure their success.

The VCE comprises the final two years of secondary schooling in the state of Victoria in Australia, prior to university entry. International students' performance in writing various argumentative genres and analysing media texts are part of VCE ESL outcomes, which are assessed in the final examination and internal school-based tasks in Year 12, and taught through two years of VCE studies. These students' experiences in doing these forms of assessment are also the main focuses of the study. The details of ESL curriculum and outcomes will be introduced in Sections 1.3 and 2.4.

The reason for choosing writing is because it is one of the fundamental academic language skills and has traditionally posed a variety of challenges for secondary language teachers and students (Chang, 2008; Davison, 2007; Wu, 2002). Once the writing skill is placed within particular contexts, these challenges multiply. This thesis explores students' experience in learning to write various argumentative genres, the ways in which they engage with Australian media texts and their difficulties and the needs that arise as they write about media issues for the VCE in English as a Second Language (ESL) in a specific VCE English college, Tower College (pseudonym). The pedagogical approach to teaching argumentative writing in VCE ESL is also explored.

There has been considerable interest in finding ways to help international students succeed in university studies in English speaking countries. Many Second Language (L2) writing researchers and teachers have endeavoured to define what academic writing is and what ESL students need to know in order to produce it (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Phan, 1999). Their learning processes and their understanding of structural conventions of various argumentative genres and their ability to produce their own argumentative writing in secondary schools tasks are critical elements in influencing their success in tertiary studies. This has led to the

development of a number of different approaches to the teaching of writing. Despite the significance of this skill, and the fact that Chinese youth are the biggest source of international students in the Victorian education market, the extensive literature on second language writing includes comparatively little research on Chinese international students' writing in secondary education in Australia.

The context of this study also stems from my personal experience as an ESL teacher and learner. Taiwan and mainland China share some similarities. Mandarin is the main language for both education systems, which are also very similar in other ways. Both countries have undergone several educational reforms and the examination systems for access to university are alike. University entrance examinations in China and Taiwan require students to write a composition of approximately 100-120 words in English based on topics or subjects provided. Learning to write different genres is not a focus in either system. As a Chinese speaker, I am interested in the teaching and learning of English, but am myself afraid of argumentative writing. This thesis has brought me back to my prior learning experience as I explored Chinese international students' experiences in argumentative writing. In this way the study also serves indirectly to explore issues of writing for myself.

1.1 RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

As a Taiwanese student, I went through local education from primary to secondary school, and was never taught about argumentative writing in English classes. When I suddenly moved to do my undergraduate course in an English medium university in Taiwan, I was confused about how to write a good piece of argumentative writing. Imitating good model essays was what I usually did in university life. In the time I

studied in the university, I had a part-time job as an English teacher in a language school. During those few years, I worked in a range of language schools, teaching students with different ages and English levels. Even when I completed my master's course in English language teaching in Britain and worked as a qualified ESL teacher, I was still very anxious about writing an argumentative essay.

For as long as I can remember, I have loved to read almost as much as I loved to write. I enjoy writing a diary, writing about my experiences in life and how they have influenced me. I began writing in Mandarin and slowly turned to English when I started my undergraduate course. From that, I discovered more about myself and perceived a desire to develop more sophisticated English literacy skills, not simply to get a grade or pass a course, but to more truly reflect my deeper meanings, thoughts and ideas. However, when I need to write slowly in a more specific way for academic purposes, my fear emerged. I have never lost my passion and motivation in writing; nevertheless, the fear of writing academically is always close to the surface.

1.1.1 Chinese literacy learning experience in Taiwan

In my high school in Taiwan, we were taught to use Chinese literature for vocabulary development, often via recitation and memorisation of well-written articles and poetry in textbooks. I sometimes used composition sample books to imitate certain styles of writing in order to score well in the internal and entrance exams. Reading samples helped me to understand what a good piece of writing should look like. However, Chinese rhetoric and writing conventions were not taught explicitly, which made it difficult to actually understand how these good writers wrote.

Reading and literature were a focus in the Chinese classroom. Chinese composition practice was not the main focus in the class and not many types of

writing assignments were assigned by the teachers. Students were assumed to have an understanding of how to write a composition and writing composition only appeared in the mock or entrance examinations. In my Chinese writing experience, using Chinese rhetorical techniques used in the written texts was important to help develop writing competence or to score well in exams; for example, the use of idioms or reference to historical events were prominent rhetorical strategies, although this was never specified by the teachers.

The main focus in the classroom was the teachers' analysis of Chinese rhetorical skills in Chinese literature such as poetry, or classical literary pieces. However, the purpose and functions of reading were not expanded to address a range of demands in writing. I was often confused whether the reading was for comprehension, aesthetic appreciation, learning, critical thinking or writing. No explicit connections were made by teachers between reading and writing.

1.1.2 English literacy learning experience in Taiwan

During my secondary school years, recitations, drills and grammar exercises occupied most of the English class time. Memorising fixed phrases and idioms was another major task. I often used composition sample books to memorise the samples in order to apply the same sentence patterns in the exams. Although sometimes we were asked to write an English composition, practising English forms was the main purpose. We usually completed a writing task of 100-120 words in internal and entrance exams. Sample topics include "Students need more recreational activities" and "I love my country" (Chen, 1997). I was not explicitly taught the basic rules of English rhetoric such as the three-part framing strategy of a tripartite model (introduction-body-conclusion), or the inclusion of a topic sentence at the beginning or the end of a

paragraph. Structure was not the main focus in the classroom. We were required to express our opinions for approximately eight to nine sentences within the word limit.

In my experience, teachers in Taiwan usually paid more attention to grammatical mistakes than anything else. They helped us in how to use correct words and sentence patterns based on the textbooks used by the high school. Teachers did not assign a range of writing tasks, and recitation of texts and vocabulary learning remained the order of the day.

1.1.3 Observations about my experiences

Reflecting on my own literacy learning experiences in Taiwan, I noticed a consistency in both my native Chinese and English literacy practices – namely memorization of composition sample books was used in order to score well without developing any understanding of the structural and cultural conventions of various genres. Despite the linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic differences in writing, I still have problems in explaining my ideas at times. Another primary difficulty in my experience of learning to write was my concern at being unsure of the teacher's expectations of my writing in a specific way. Teachers' expectations always vary from culture to culture, which caused me anxiety and fear.

The differences between writing in my native language and writing in English baffled me and created more barriers in learning to write in English. It is quite different when I write in Chinese. However, writing in English takes me a long time because I have to think about grammar and vocabulary every time I write and I cannot always express my thoughts in well organized sentences. As I understand that language and writing are cultural phenomena, I hope to explore the kinds of challenges Chinese international students face in writing and also teachers'

expectations in writing. My study does not focus solely on the teaching of writing to international students, but also involves a consideration of international students' backgrounds and perceptions of learning to write in English. It is hoped the findings may have implications for improving curriculum and classroom activity choices which better meet students' learning needs.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the learning experiences of Chinese international students in the 'Presentation of an issue', which is an area of study in Year 12 in VCE ESL classes. There are two assessments in this area of study, School-assessed coursework (SAC, internal examination) and the Writing Task (final examination, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2003)). The Writing Task is part of the final examination and assessment in the VCE curriculum and comprises three parts: writing a note-form summary about a media text and analysing related media texts, then producing a piece of argumentative writing. This thesis investigates Chinese students' understanding of language use in argument and their written presentation of a point of view on an issue, which are Part Two and Three in the Writing Task.

This study has employed a qualitative discourse-based approach aligned with sociocultural theory to explore Chinese international students' experience in argumentative writing in a private secondary school in Melbourne, Australia. It is a qualitative case study which investigates the research problem in one private VCE English college, Tower College (pseudonym). Participants for this study were ten Chinese international students in their final semester of Year 12 and their three ESL teachers. The maximum variation sampling principle developed by Patton (1990) is

adopted in my study, as explained in Chapter Five. In this study, I chose to focus on the contrast between the students' and ESL teachers' perspectives on argumentative writing, while also using students' own argumentative texts as supporting material to answer the research questions.

Using sociocultural theory, the study explores how these students attempt to become competent members of the classroom and community culture. Understanding what these students bring to the academic community and what is expected of them in writing, especially argumentative writing, is vital to support them in the mainstream curriculum. Argumentative writing is a highly valued genre, which represents a powerful tool for the communication of collective and individual opinions in Australia and other English speaking countries. Observations of these students' argumentative writing experience may help to shed some light on the challenges they encounter, and may have implications for improving the effectiveness of ESL education.

The study also explores how international students articulate their membership of particular discourse communities, how they present their point of view in a written form and what kind of pedagogical approaches are applied in VCE ESL classes. Interpretations of the findings may help to provide us with an understanding of ESL students' learning of the structural conventions of various text-types in the VCE, and in turn may contribute to understanding the learning needs of international students within secondary education. Three main research questions are addressed. These are:

- 1) What kinds of challenges do Chinese international students face in analysing and writing argumentative texts in the VCE?

2) What are ESL teachers' perceptions of Chinese international students' abilities and difficulties in analysing media texts and producing argumentative writing?

3) What pedagogical approaches are used to teach argumentative writing in VCE ESL classes?

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Although considerable research about international students' learning needs in tertiary education has been conducted (Cadman, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1997; Phan, 2001), there is still a lack of empirical research into ESL students' writing experiences in secondary schools in Australia. Very few studies have focused on international students with Chinese background in higher secondary schools in Victoria (Arkoudis & Love, 2004; Davison, 2007; Love, 1999).

Arkoudis and Love (2004) looked at students' academic and language learning needs in business subjects for the high stakes university entrance examination. Their focus was on the linguistic and cultural demands of the test papers. The authors claim that Chinese international students face several challenges in linguistic, cultural and conceptual levels in VCE examinations in Commerce/Economics subjects and argue that more professional support should be made available to international students.

While Arkoudis and Love's study focused on business subjects, Love's (1999) study explores the teaching of argumentative writing in VCE English mainstream classes. It concerns the use of metalanguage to teach secondary students the language of argument, which means demonstrating an understanding of how arguments are constructed in texts. She analysed one local student's argumentative essay as an example of how the student demonstrated an understanding of how arguments are

structured in the Australian media. Using systemic functional grammar, Love showed how the student demonstrated her control of the generic structure of written argumentation and its linguistic features. However, the participant was a local secondary school student with English as her first language who received an A grade on that essay, which indicates it was considered a very successful piece of argumentative writing.

Love's study is different from mine because it is not about students' writing in a second language and it focuses on a monolingual high achiever. It is important to note that not all international students are so successful when they transfer to VCE from their home countries. As Love stresses, teachers cannot expect all students to have the access to the "cultural capital" needed to acquire English written conventions (p. 200). This cultural capital refers to the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status. This statement is especially relevant to my study because Chinese international students who transfer from their local secondary education in mainland China to Victorian secondary education may find that unpacking argumentative writing is difficult since they are moving to new discourse communities where ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, speaking and writing (Gee, 1996) are different from back home. This study may throw some light on the current teaching methods, which may enable ESL teachers to better present and teach argumentative writing to students from non-English speaking countries, and at the same time provide an understanding of ESL students' challenges in learning and mastering the structural conventions of argumentative genres in VCE and other secondary education systems.

In studying L2 literacy development, Davison (2007) also sought to define ESL students' development in argumentative writing. She analysed Hong Kong-born

Cantonese speaking students' argumentative texts which were produced in a government secondary school college. Her study is centred on many terms in the description of written argument and its development, along with examples provided by students, for example, in a view of argument as logic, persuasion, discourse, genre or culturally-situated practice. She adopts Martin's (1985) model of genre analysis and revealed systematic variation in the linguistic structure and features of the students' arguments. She found the students preferred to write hortatory exposition rather than analytical exposition. This preference is associated with the different expectations and socialisation practices between Australian and Hong Kong schools. Davison's study provided me with some background knowledge about ESL students' views of argumentative writing and how localised sociological and ideological forces may push students' development in particular directions which might not be what the individual learner expects or needs. However, it does not demonstrate exactly what challenges and difficulties students encounter in learning to write argumentative texts required for the Writing Task. Further, Davison's participants were Hong Kong students with better English instruction in their prior schooling than students from mainland China.

Chinese international students are present in large numbers in Australian school settings. Their writing practices in China were centred on word-sentence-paragraph translation practice, with no attention to how text is structured or what is considered appropriate within the context of English communities, especially argumentative writing (see Section 2.2.4). Yet, these understandings are regarded as essential outcome for students to achieve in the English VCE program. When Chinese international students transfer to the English education system, argumentative writing poses new challenges, both cultural and linguistic.

In my study, I explore these students' experience in dealing with Australian media issues and in arguing an issue in written form. Before transferring to Australian secondary schools, many international students from mainland China have experienced an alternative environment that differs, for example, in what is possible to do in relation to freedom of speech and in how much people can write about their opinions. Different stages of media reform in China have shaped its citizens and the present young generation has had some experiences of giving their opinions on social issues. These experiences have helped to shape the newly arrived Chinese students' different perspectives in arguing a media issue in Australian secondary schools compared with students from other Asian countries.

The Writing Task requires students to argue a point of view about media issues, and students need to critically analyse the use of language in the issues in the media. For example, they must consider different aspects of language and choices made by the speakers or writers to achieve the purpose of the texts. Therefore, the Writing Task is an integrated task that synthesises ideas from media texts making the task highly complex. Good reading comprehension is needed to identify and argue how other speakers and writers develop and present their arguments. Both Davison (2007) and Love (1996) insist that the senior secondary English curriculum in Victoria still seems vague and lacks the scaffolding and samples of argumentative written materials that help to make teaching more explicit and not simply implicit. Through the investigation of Chinese international students' classroom practices and both students' and their ESL teachers' perspectives on learning to write complex argumentative texts, the study may help to shed light on students' difficulties and their concerns in learning to argue an issue in written form.

1.4 DEFINING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING IN THIS THESIS

According to the VCAA (2003), the nature of the Writing Task requires students to give “a written presentation of the students’ point of view on an issue drawn from print and/or non-print Australian media sources” (ESL Assessment Guide, VCAA, 2003b, p. 8). In VCE ESL, there are no specific terms to describe Part Three of the Writing Task, either in the description of ‘Areas of study’ or ‘Outcomes’ in the Assessment Guide (VCAA, 2003b). Only in the Outcome Two of the final semester in Year 12, when the VCAA describes the selection of options of tasks, does it use the term “persuasive/argumentative writing”, specifying that “a large number of schools required students to complete a piece of personal/imaginary writing and a piece of persuasive/argumentative writing” (VCAA, 2003b, p. 7).

In addition, there are many supplementary materials, such as argumentative sample texts in bookshops to assist ESL students dealing with media issues in the Year 12 final examination. The authors of these books apply different names to describe this type of writing, for example, ‘point-of-view/persuasive writing’ (Breuer, Evans & Heintz, 2003, p. 109); ‘the Essay Task’ (Huggard, 2002, p. 59) and ‘persuasive writing’ (Wynne, Sarros & Baxter, 2002, p. 45). The teacher participants in my study also applied different terms to describe this type of written text. For example, Colin called it “argumentative pieces” and “analytical expository pieces” (Colin, Interview p. 10-11) and “a viewpoint essay” (p. 12).

In Davison’s (2007) study of Hong Kong students’ writing development in VCE ESL classes, she defines the Writing Task as argumentative writing, which is considered as an international term describing written arguments. Argumentative writing is a type of ‘exposition’, and different terms are used to describe the written presentation of an issue, the task is central to this thesis. In order to avoid confusion of

terms, I will use ‘argumentative writing’ in the thesis to avoid the usage of multiple terms.

1.5 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

In this introductory chapter, I have provided the foci of this research, purpose and rationale for the study. I have also included my background and reflection on the research problem and the primary research questions. The nature and outcomes of the current curriculum and assessment practices for both Chinese secondary schools and VCE are explored in the second chapter.

The third chapter sets out the conceptual framework and pedagogical approaches which reflect particularly on genre theory and critical literacy theory, exploring theories on second language (L2) writing and the process of second language learning. The theoretical framework has four aspects, namely becoming a member of secondary Discourses, genre theory, critical literacy and writing and identity. These are explored in this study as they are relevant to Chinese international students’ learning of argumentative writing in a high stakes assessment environment. They form a complex theoretical framework which enables the interpretation of students’ learning and helps to establish responses to the research questions.

In the fourth chapter, current, relevant research is reviewed so as to position this study in its related field. Many non-English speaking students come to study in English secondary schools with rich home cultural, educational, language and literacy backgrounds. In particular, some have acquired sophisticated literacy skills in their native languages. Therefore this chapter also explores topics such as the assumptions and characterisations of the perceived Chinese (Confucian) and western cultural

values, second language acquisition (SLA), scaffolding writing, and the role and nature of teachers' feedback toward students' writing.

The fifth chapter describes the methodology adopted for this study, in particular its qualitative discourse-based approach. To be more specific, the case-study compares the perceptions of two groups of participants – Chinese international students and their ESL teachers in one VCE school. In this chapter, I present the data sources and participants, the data analysis procedures and other methodological considerations.

In Chapter Six, Chinese students' perspectives on literacy practices in schools are explored. Data includes students' pieces of argumentative writing and some observation data. In this chapter, I provide a picture of these students' concerns in arguing an issue in writing, their values, struggles and expectations in the new discourse community. Two students' cases are explored in Chapter Seven to investigate the relationship of their English proficiency to classroom performance, comprehension of texts and argumentative writing.

Classroom observation data and ESL teacher's perspectives of Chinese international students' argumentative writing are discussed in the eighth chapter. Issues explored include, for example, teachers' comments on students' writing difficulties at different levels, critical thinking, the influence of first language in second language literacy and the relationship between students' oral and written skills. I chose one teacher participant to outline how she scaffolded writing practice and what happened in her English classroom. Observations of the techniques and approaches used by the teacher provide different insights on the research questions.

Chapter Nine provides a discussion and conclusion. The discussion section compares the similarities and differences between these two groups of participants.

This chapter also develops both the implications of the literature review and the analysis of the research to further elucidate broad principles which may guide the future development of secondary education for ESL students in argumentative writing. In the conclusion, I return to the research questions by reporting the findings of comparable research. This chapter also provides recommendations for Chinese international students' acquisition of argumentative writing at Year 12 level.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the research problem, along with my reflection on my own literacy learning experience, and a statement of purpose and rationale for the study. A definition of argumentative writing was established for use in this study. The next chapter moves to the discussion of the English learning and teaching environment in Chinese senior secondary schools and the ESL curriculum and expected outcomes in the VCE. Both learning environments are salient in the students' personal experience and attitudes to the challenges of argumentative writing.

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING TO WRITE IN CHINA AND AUSTRALIA

2.0 OVERVIEW

In the Chinese education system, English is taught as a foreign language in China and Mandarin is the medium of instruction in the secondary schools. Obviously, this is not the case in Australia. The theorisation on discourse communities in Section 3.1 will have more detailed discussion on this distinction. Davison (2007) indicates in her finding that students' previous educational experiences were heavily influenced by their own views of argument and their writing development. In order to gain a clear understanding of students' learning experiences and the writing they produce, is it not important to discuss Chinese students' prior learning environment in China and their current learning situation in VCE? The English learning and teaching environment in Chinese senior secondary schools influences students' personal experiences of and attitudes to the challenges of argumentative writing when they transfer to the Victorian secondary education system. The emphasis on the teaching of lexical and grammatical competence in mainland China and the lack of teachers' modelling of the context and the text in classroom practice result in students having difficulty in identifying and producing the discourse of argumentative texts when they come to take VCE. To fully understand the issues involved here requires a consideration of both the Chinese and Australian contexts.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the VCE comprises the final two years of secondary schooling in the state of Victoria in Australia and precedes university entry. International students' experience in learning to write various argumentative genres and in analysing media texts, which are the main focus of the study, are also part of

VCE ESL outcomes in the final examination in Year 12; they are taught through the two years of VCE studies.

In the final examination of Year 12, there are two parts to the examination- a ***Text Response*** and a ***Writing Task***. The Writing Task involves three sets of tasks in response to stimulus texts on a current media topic. Students must summarize a media text in note form (Part 1); identify and explain different kinds of persuasive language used in another media text (Part 2) and finally, produce a piece of writing in a particular form (Part 3). The stimulus text might be an editorial for a newspaper, an essay, a speech or a letter to the editor. For example, according to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), in the final written examination papers for Year 12, ESL students were asked to write an article for a student newspaper in 2004; to write a letter to a magazine in 2005 and to write an essay for a state-wide competition in 2006. The written examination paper for ESL in 2004 has been provided as an example in Appendix A.

Many international students are overwhelmed by the differences in teaching and learning styles between Australia and their own countries (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Burns, 1991). ESL teachers play a significant role in the lives and academic success of many students for whom English is a second or foreign language, and a supportive environment is necessary in language learning. The background context of this study is described below in two different directions. In Sections 2.1 and 2.2, the education system, English curriculum and English teaching in Chinese senior secondary schools are discussed. The Australian education system and the ESL curriculum and assessment in VCE are discussed in Section 2.3 and 2.4, in order to explore the differences between the Australian and Chinese education systems. The

impact on Chinese international students' learning in VCE ESL classes when they transfer from Chinese senior secondary schools is also considered.

2.1 THE CHINESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In this section, the Chinese education system, the English curriculum, teachers' qualifications and assessment in Chinese senior secondary schools are discussed to provide background knowledge about students' prior learning experiences. A huge diverse school system in China serves its population of students. For the purpose of the study, it is convenient to divide the education system into four components, basic education, vocational education, common higher education and adult education. Since the issuing of the Compulsory Education Law of China in 1985 (educational reform legislation), which went into effect on July 1, 1986, children throughout China have nine years of compulsory education (primary and junior secondary education), starting from age six.

Although the government has authority over the education system, the Chinese Communist Party has played an important role in education policy and decision making since 1949 (Apple & Wong, 2002; Chen, 2005; Dolan, Savada & Worden, 1987; Surowski, 2000). The party committees often have a significant role in managing educational institutions and assist the party in monitoring the government's implementation of its policies at local levels. In 1999, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council jointly promulgated the Decision on the Deepening of Education Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality Education, clarifying the direction for the establishment of a vital socialist education (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1999). This shows that China was going to formulate and implement the strategy of "revitalizing the country through science, technology and

education” and place the development of education as a strategic priority in the socialist modernization drive in the 21st century (MoE, 1999, p. 1).

The report published by The Ministry of Education in 2007 shows there are 341,639 primary schools with an enrolment of 107,115,346 students. At the time of the report, higher education institutions had a total enrolment of 17,388,441. These numbers show that by 2007, more than 89 million young people did not enter universities (MoE report, P.R.C., 2007). The reason is because of the scarcity of resources allotted to higher education, and so secondary school students are confronted with the fact that the university admission is still very limited.

Government spending on education in China for 2002 accounted for 3.41 per cent of GDP (Ministry of Finance, P.R.C., 2003). That compares with an average of 5.5 percent for developed countries, 4.6 per cent for developing countries and 3.6 per cent for undeveloped countries (Lieng, 2004). From the Figures above, it can be concluded that educational funding in China is lower than in other nations with comparable levels of economic development. The quality of teaching and learning environment in schools reflects this in some cases.

The schooling system in China comprised of pre-school education, primary (six years) and regular secondary education, which is divided into academic secondary education and vocational/technical secondary education. Secondary schools are provided for 12 – 17 year old children and the compulsory years are until junior secondary school. Academic secondary education comprises junior (three years) and senior (three years) secondary schooling, which are viewed as a training ground for colleges or universities (MoE, P.R.C., 2007).

Junior secondary school graduates need to sit and pass locally organized entrance examinations, on the basis of which they have options either of continuing in

academic senior secondary schools or of studying in vocational secondary schools.

The academic year for secondary education is divided into two semesters, 19 weeks each, with a total of 38 weeks of instruction and two weeks in reserve for one year.

The following table has summarized different types of schools with their length of study.

Table 2.1 Chinese education system

Chinese Education System		
Pre-preparatory (optional, ages between 3 to 5)		
Primary school compulsory (6 years, begins with the age of 6)		
Junior secondary school compulsory (3 years)		
Secondary technical school (3 years)	Regular senior secondary school (3 years)	Secondary vocational schools (3 years)
Professional college (2-3 years)	Undergraduate study (4-5 years)	Adult education
Undergraduate study (2 years)	Postgraduate study (3 years)	
Postgraduate study (3 years)		

(MoE, P.R.C., 2007)

In 2006, more than 16,153 regular senior secondary schools enrolled about 33 million students (MoE, P.R.C., 2007). Senior secondary education is now universal in large and medium-sized cities and the coastal areas where the economy is developed. The gross rate of enrolment is 52.7 percent (MoE, P.R.C., 2007) which means in some rural areas, 47.3 percent of people still have difficulties in accessing education.

Besides this, the size of senior secondary schools classes causes difficulties in implementing the government policy and school curriculum. There are only 15,676 classes with fewer than 35 students while 414,796 classes have from 36 to above 66 students. Based on Statistics from the Ministry of Education, it is significant that large classrooms (more than 66 students) in middle-sized cities and country areas are still the standard.

The current curriculum for senior secondary schools is composed of eight learning domains, subjects and modules (MoE, P.R.C., 2007). Subjects taught in senior secondary schools are divided into compulsory and optional subjects. The graduation examination subjects are determined within the scope of the general subjects taught and set by the state. In order to improve students' abilities in different fields and balance their overall development, students are required to acquire credits from eight learning domains (see Table 2.2) each semester. The table below shows the curriculum structure and different subjects in senior secondary schools.

Table 2.2 Curriculum structure for senior secondary schools in China

Learning domains	Subjects	Compulsory (total 116 credits)	Option I	Option II
1. Language and literature	Chinese	10	Based on the compulsory subjects, every school provides different modules for students.	According to the demands of local society, economics, technology and cultural development
	Foreign languages	10		
2. Mathematics	Mathematics	10		
3. Human and society	Politics	8		
	History	6		
	Geography	6		
4. Science	Physics	6		
	Chemistry	6		
	Biology	6		
5. Technology	Common technology; Information technology	8		
6. Arts	Music; Arts	6		
7. Physical education and health	Physical education and health	11		
8. Comprehensive practices	Research learning activities	15		
	Community Service	2		
	Social activities	6		

(Ministry of Education, P.R.C., 2007, p. 4-5)

While the idea of educational decentralization has a long history in many English speaking countries, it is a relatively new phenomenon in the Chinese secondary

school sector, where curriculum development was centralized for more than forty years (Mok, 2004; Zhou, 2006). In recent years, China has gradually transformed to a decentralised educational system in which curriculum requirements have been set out as general guidelines to allow schools to vary subject content and teaching approaches. However, Mok (2004) points out the challenges in implementing decentralization in China, such as designation of education responsibilities of governments at various levels and management structure, resource allocation, education performance and equity. Based on the challenges Chinese governments have faced in educational decentralization, both Mok (2004) and Ngok (2007) argue the importance of creating more educationally appropriate means of providing equal and balanced development in education to assure quality in the education sectors in China.

As Ngok (2007) points out, there are significant regional disparities in economic and social development in such a vast country. The conditions of different schools vary widely and multiple sets of textbooks at various levels are continually in development in order to meet the local needs of students. Textbooks and teaching materials are examined and approved by the State Textbooks Examination and Approval Committee before publication, to ensure the quality and appropriacy of textbooks and materials (MoE, P.R.C., 2007). However, Yuan (2005) indicates that many teachers have ambivalent feelings towards the new materials. New textbooks contain a greater variety of content and knowledge, which causes a new burden for the teachers. The above introduction on the Chinese education system provides background knowledge to the readers for the discussion of English learning in senior secondary schools in China.

2.2 ENGLISH LEARNING IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CHINA

The following sections introduce English curriculum, teacher qualifications, pedagogy and assessment in senior secondary schools in China.

2.2.1 The English curriculum

Since the implementation of the economic reform and open-door policies in China over the last two decades (Blejer, 1991; Li & Li, 1999; Sung, 1991; Pomfret, 1990; Qi, 2001; Zhang, 1999), the English curriculum in senior secondary school has consciously promoted improvement in English proficiency. Both the Ministry of Education and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which dominates the entire education system in China, support Western-style modernization policies (Adamson & Morris, 1997). The study of English, therefore, is regarded as necessary for fostering social development and economics and acquiring technological expertise and to reinforce cooperation and communication with other countries (MoE, P.R.C., 2002).

The previous English curriculum, called *English Teaching Outline* (MoE, P.R.C. 1999), implemented from 1993, focused on the students' control of basic language knowledge and skills. However, the new curriculum, called English Curriculum Standards, published in 2002 (MoE, P.R.C., 2002), reflects the basic education reform, which was an attempt of government language policy to keep up with current language teaching internationally. The student participants in my study had followed the English Curriculum Standards, since most of them came to Australia after 2004. The main aims of the English Curriculum Standards are quality- oriented education and development of students (MoE, P.R.C., 2002). Economic and cultural

differences in different areas in China are also considered in the English Curriculum Standards, along with the uneven school conditions in foreign language development, and the quality of teaching and teachers' qualifications. Based on the conditions of foreign language teaching in any school, the teacher can adjust the approach, according to the content and objectives of the English Curriculum Standards published by the Ministry of Education in 2002, which are described below.

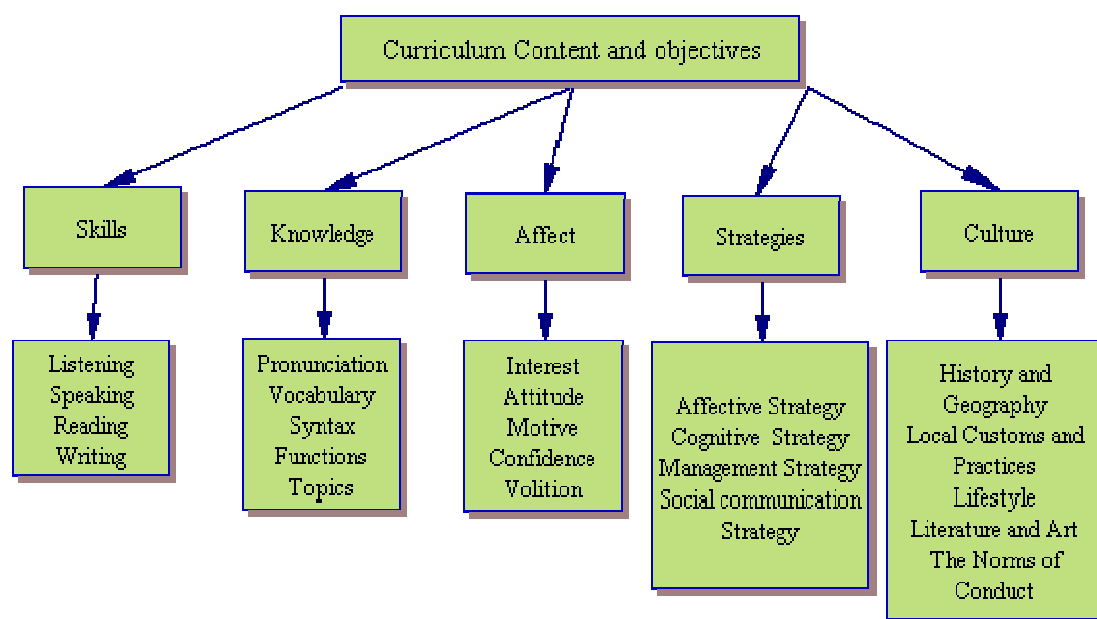


Figure 2.1 The English Curriculum Standards and their content and objectives in senior secondary schools in China (MoE, P.R.C., 2002)

A number of researchers (Chen, 2006; Hao, 2000; Liu, 2006; Teng, 2004) have focused on the English Curriculum Standards in China, in regard to challenges they pose for pedagogies, assessment practice and teacher qualification. Compared with the English Teaching Outline (MoE, P.R.C., 1999), there are significant changes in this new curriculum in terms of objectives, content, teaching methods and the evaluation system. Firstly, it emphasizes the application of the language learned and adds another three objectives (affect, strategies and culture) in order to promote all-

round competency development (Chen, 2006; MoE, P.R.C, 2002; Yang, 2005) which aims beyond skills and attempts to provide a humanistic education and whole-person development.

Secondly, in the English Curriculum Standards, objectives relevant to the development of cultural knowledge and outcomes for students are explicitly stated. Language learning is viewed in a broader frame, focusing on quality-oriented education (Erickson, Kang, Mitchell & Ryan, 2006). The study of English is also expanded to incorporate the culture of the target language. Besides basic training in the four macroskills, especially communication skills, the new curriculum aims to strengthen students' international understanding about cultural interaction and variation and to choose appropriate ways to interact with people in particular cultures. This cultural perspective can be seen as an important leap forward in language teaching in China. The reason is because cultural factors may influence many different aspects of second language learning and use, such as culture of the school, the classroom or the discipline. Moreover, literacy practices can also be seen as cultural ways of utilizing writing in everyday life.

In the English Curriculum Standards, primary, junior and senior secondary education are considered as an integrated whole. Diversity within cultures as well as between urban, rural, remote, large or small schools also means that implementation needs to take account of local contexts (MoE, P.R.C., 2002). There are different requirements for students to achieve in different year levels. The following figure shows the different requirements for different years of students published by the Ministry of Education in 2002.

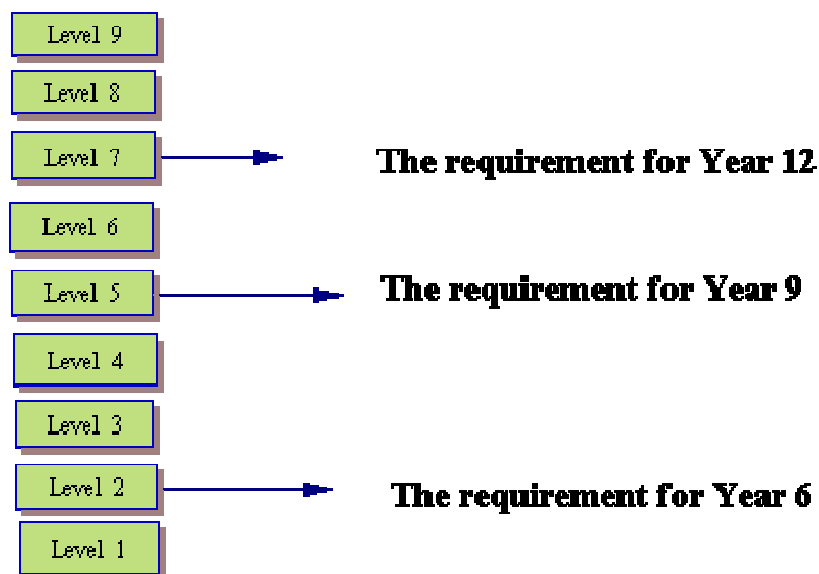


Figure 2.2 Classification of objectives in different levels of schooling (Source: MoE, P.R.C., 2002)

Based on areas and school conditions, the provincial government can determine whether students need to reach the particular level decided by the Ministry of Education. For example, students in Year 12 are supposed to reach Level Seven, but the provincial government can decide whether their students need to reach below or at Level Seven based on their future plans. Generally, students need to pass the English Level Seven Test in order to be eligible to apply for university. The Outcomes at Level Seven state:

having clear and continuous motivation and self-regulation volition, being able to communicate broad issues, raising questions and expressing his/her own opinions, being able to read English books at high school level and newspapers, having ability in basic writing, such as invitations, notices... and understanding cultural difference.

(MoE, P.R.C., 2002, p. 5)

Although in the English Curriculum Standards there are different objectives for each level about learning strategies, Liu (2006) points out that there are still some problems

with the objectives. For example, the classification method for learning strategies is not scientific and there is insufficient explanation of collaborative learning.

The previous English textbooks had followed the trend to set up ‘units’ in a logical linear arrangement, although the units looked independent. These units were based on topics and emphasised grammar use. For example, Unit One may focus on ‘present tense’ and Unit Two on ‘present continuous tense’. According to Guan (2005), new textbooks consider more aspects, such as phonics, syntax and the function of the language. Similar fields of language knowledge are recycled in different teaching stages, but are gradually expanded and deepened in the textbooks until students can master them. The design of textbooks has attempted to match the objectives of the English Curriculum Standards and requirements for different levels for students.

In the English Curriculum Standards, there are sequences between units and parallels between modules. In a three-year senior secondary school course, English learning is divided into eleven stages. Students are required to complete one module every ten weeks and each module earns two credits. While they are taking compulsory English subjects, they can take other optional English subjects, such as literature, business English and debating.

In compulsory English subjects, the four macroskills play an important role and the subjects emphasize the student’s thinking and expression. There are two different types of optional English subjects. One has a sequence with compulsory English subjects in terms of the content and structure. Another type is divided into three categories: Language knowledge and skills (such as English grammar and rhetoric, basic written translation and oral presentation and debating); language

application (such as technical English, tourist English and business English) and enjoyment (such as English literature, drama, movies and performance).

The Ministry of Education has trialled the English Curriculum Standards in some schools since 1996, while most areas still follow the English Teaching Outlines, which were published in 1993. The reason for this is because of the diversity within cultures and between different provinces, as well as between city, rural, remote, large and small schools, and the consequent need to take account of local contexts when implementing the new curriculum (Erickson, Kang, Mitchell & Ryan, 2006). The implementation of English Curriculum Standards is not without problems. For example, Cheng (2007) has stated that the targets specified in the curriculum have not been realized, invariably because the educational approaches and methods advocated have not been fully accepted and practised by the English teachers in senior secondary schools. Moreover, both Chen (2000) and Teng (2004) emphasize the role of teacher qualifications in the students' learning process, which presents another challenge in implementing the new curriculum.

2.2.2 English Teacher qualifications in China

Since the Curriculum reform in China involves changes in objectives, content, teaching methods and the evaluation system, it poses challenges for English teachers. Debates about qualifications of teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum, therefore, have been widespread in the past decade (Liu, 2006; Chen, 2006; Hao, 2000; Teng, 2004). Many teachers may lack skills in regard to the new objectives. For example, 'learning strategies' is one of the objectives in English Curriculum. They comprise three categories: cognitive strategies (such as the strategy of guessing the contextual meaning), communication strategies (such as increasing vocabulary for

communication purposes) and social-affective strategies (such as discussing English questions with others and increasing chances to talk with English native speakers). However, many teachers themselves lack knowledge of learning strategies (Liu, 2006), which may cause a gap between teaching and the English Curriculum Standards.

Teng (2004) also indicates a mismatch between teaching and the five objectives of the English Curriculum. He interviewed fifty English teachers in secondary schools, 90 percent of whom had not studied or read about Linguistics or pedagogy; 80 percent of teachers had not heard of the English Curriculum Standards; 60 percent of teachers only read textbooks and teaching materials, but not magazines or newspapers, or had no knowledge about the English curriculum for secondary schools. Teng questions how these English teachers can implement the objectives of the English Curriculum Standards and select and apply materials effectively and actively if they are still uncertain about the objectives, outcomes and strategies in the new curriculum, and have no experience of the outcomes stipulated.

In her paper “Discussion on English teacher qualifications”, Chen (2000) points out that Chinese traditional education has two strengths, namely the teaching of basic knowledge and ability in doing examinations, and two weaknesses, which are fostering creativity and application. It is fundamental for teachers to understand the new curriculum in terms of basic linguistic theories, course and material design and requirements for examinations, then to promote and support individual and institutional change in implementing it. This implies an upgrade of teachers’ qualifications.

2.2.3 Pedagogy in English language teaching in China

As the English language curriculum changes, there has been some criticism of teaching in China (Chen, 2000; Guo, 2001; Yuan, 2005; Zhang, 2000). For example, Yuan (2005) claims teaching methods still concentrate on translation practices, on grammar and memorisation, and there is a lack of teaching equipment in classrooms.

Since the change in teaching approaches has shifted from knowledge-centered to student-centred education, researchers like Erickson, Kang, Mitchell and Ryan (2006) have pointed to several important issues, for example, how to meet the unique needs of different students, create more diverse educational activities, develop the creativity and critical thinking of students and create a different type of teacher-student relationship in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. However, the biggest concern is still the size of senior secondary school classes. As mentioned earlier, in mainland China, only one percent of classes have fewer than 25 students, and twenty-seven percent of classes have over 66 students. Sixty percent of classes have numbers of students from forty-six to sixty-five (MoE, 2007), both in big cities and remote areas. Given this, it is not difficult to understand that many teachers still prefer ‘teacher-oriented teaching approaches’, as reflected in Teng’s (2004) research.

The English Curriculum Standards have brought an emphasis on knowledge of language functions which connect to the exploration of social and cultural knowledge. The previous curriculum had placed great emphasis on the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and reading). It ignored the connections between the form, the meanings and functions of the language, which can cause miscommunication. Therefore, teachers’ competence and confidence in their knowledge about these matters and appropriate pedagogical approaches, are significant to students’ success in English learning.

Cheng (2005) points out some teachers' reluctant attitudes toward including culture in language teaching, due to their own limitations in English, along with cultural knowledge and communication skills. One reason why many teachers still follow the traditional teaching approaches is identified by Guan (2005) and Yuan (2005), who claim that examination methods nowadays are still based on a great deal of Chinese-English translation and gap filling. This means that teachers cannot abandon the emphasis on vocabulary teaching, translation, grammar analysis, recitation of texts, and memorization of texts. The functions of the language remain neglected.

2.2.4 Assessment practice in China

The changes in the Chinese education system and educational reforms have reflected the vicissitudes of Chinese society in 20th century. The traditional education system in China had been implemented over one thousand years and closely associated with the recruitment of officials through examinations, which required extensive knowledge of the Confucian classics (Chen, 2006). It was finally abolished in 1905 and the westernized education system was introduced to China in order to promote the knowledge of science and technology and make connections with the western world.

Modern education is different from the traditional education in many ways and focuses beyond Confucian classics. Some people in China feel the examination system was a great achievement in the development of the Chinese education system and a positive movement to develop science and technology in China, which was the target of the Ministry of Education (2002).

However, there are more than ten compulsory subjects that all students need to study at the same pace in senior secondary schools. Under the pressure of

examinations, multitasking in many compulsory subjects and time constraints, students mainly choose to concentrate on memorization and practice activities related to each subject to prepare for the examinations, instead of developing deeper knowledge in each subject (Brennan & Durovic, 2005; Introna & Hayes, 2004).

In regard to the English language program, there is also some conflict between English teaching methods in senior secondary school and the criteria of the national matriculation English test. According to a new assessment system proclaimed by the Ministry of Education, the government encourages teachers to enable the overall development of students' English proficiency, focusing on both their learning process and learning evaluation at the end of the course. However, education agencies in many Chinese provinces still emphasize 'exam-oriented' education rather than 'quality-oriented' education (Zhang, 2000). Therefore, the national matriculation English test is still the core of the English requirement for entering a university.

Reform and improvement in the new evaluation system in English Curriculum Standards comprise formative evaluation (formative test, focus on the learning process) and summative evaluation (summative test, focus on the product, i.e. the English test). The combination of these two evaluation systems is to foster students' overall development and is useful for self-regulation, adjustment of their own learning objectives and strategies (MoE, P.R.C., 2002; Hao, 2000; Yang, 2005).

In the entrance examination, school coursework, school internal assessments and students' performance in class are not considered. Consequently, English teaching in senior secondary school is still centred on the macroskills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and on lexical competence and syntax, which are the primary focus in the university entrance examination. This suggests a gap between proposed teaching methods and the new curriculum, which cannot be implemented in the

present teaching situation, due to the great emphasis on the university entrance examination.

Another controversial issue in senior secondary school classrooms is that no written English in different text types has been practised or paid any attention, but writing ability is tested in the university entrance examination. Students are expected to compose a written piece of 100 to 200 words in English based on the topic provided in the examination. The ratio of skills tested in the university entrance examination in China is approximately: listening, 15%; syntax, 15%; textbook review with cloze (focused on tenses and phrases), 30%; reading (multiple choice and cloze styles), 30 % and independent **writing of a text, 10% - 15%** (MoE, P.R.C., 2002, 2004, 2005). However, a neglect of genres in writing and an overemphasis on syntax and lexis at the word and sentence levels persists in English classroom practice in senior secondary schools in China (Guan, 2005; Yuan, 2005). The example of written text tasks in the national matriculation English tests in 2004 as below (MoE, P.R.C., 2004).

Assume you were Haw Li and saw an advertisement on the newspaper about “Learning Chinese and singing Chinese songs” singing contest in July which is held by Beijing TV station. Your American friend, Peter, is learning Chinese in one of the universities in Beijing and you feel he should have a try. Please inform him of this matter by writing a letter, followed by the key points below and show your willingness to offer him your help.

Contest date: July 18th
Registration due: June 30th
Registration venue: Beijing TV station
Notice:

1. Word limit: 100
2. You can add certain details to have consistency
3. Related vocabulary: 才艺大赛-talent show

The new criteria for evaluating an English composition in the entrance examination are concerned with paying attention to major content: main ideas, the amount of

applicable vocabulary and grammar, accuracy and the meaning of the context (MoE, P.R.C., 2002), which increases the requirement for more precise, vivid language and contextualisation. The criteria are also associated with objectives at Level Seven in the English Curriculum Standards. Writing at Level Seven requires students to be able to “write formal and informal letters, complete forms about personal status, provide information and give basic descriptions” (MoE, P. R. C., 2002, p. 11). Before the implementation of the English Curriculum Standards, the criteria for writing English composition in entrance examinations depended on main ideas and language accuracy (Yuan, 2005). After 2001, the criteria for evaluating a composition have included an additional three key elements, namely variety, coherence and accuracy.

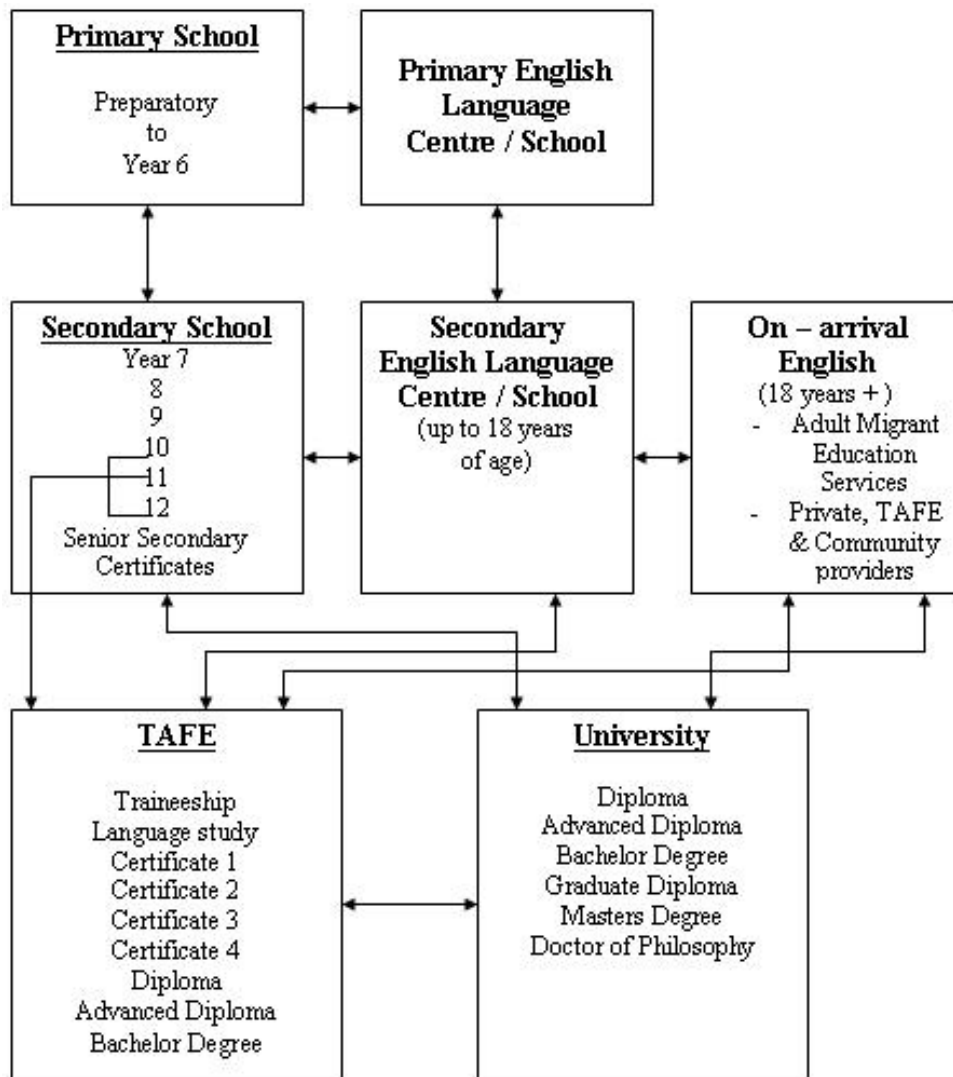
In the ten pages of the English examination paper in the 2005 entrance examination (MoE, P.R.C., 2005), there is only a small composition section at the end of the paper. According to Lin (2004), English teachers emphasize writing in the final year, not in the first two in Chinese senior secondary schools. Writing practice is usually placed at the end of the units or chapters. Before completing the units, teachers usually explain the topic briefly and assign it as homework. There is no systematic and organized teaching approach to help students to know how to build up coherent schematic structures in different text types (‘genres’) and help students make their written texts more understandable with appropriate language use, as found in Australian English courses. Writing practice is still centred on word-sentence-paragraph translation practice (Wang, 2006) without drawing attention to how text is structured or what is considered appropriate within the context of English communities, especially argumentative writing.

The treatment of writing in the Victorian curriculum presents a contrast to the practices in the implementation of the Chinese curriculum. The following sections introduce the Australian education system and VCE curriculum and outcomes.

2.3 THE VICTORIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Schooling in Australia generally starts at age five with a preparatory year followed by 12 years of primary and secondary school. The minimum age of enrolment at a Victorian government school is six years of age as at 30 April of the year of enrolment (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2005). In the final year of secondary school, Year 12, students study towards tertiary entrance and in Victoria for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which is the main requirement for further study by all Australian universities and vocational education and training institutions, although there are alternative entry pathways. According to the Australian government's Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in 2003, education in Australia is primarily regulated by the individual state governments, and generally includes a three-tier model, which comprises Primary education (primary schools), followed by Secondary education (Secondary Schools) and Tertiary education (Universities and TAFE (Technical And Further Education) Colleges). Education is compulsory up to an age specified by legislation. This age varies from state to state, but is generally between 15 and 17. Each individual state has its own curriculum authority and curriculum documents. The following is a diagrammatic rendition of the structure of the Victorian education system, including English as a second language provision.

Table 2.3 The Victorian education system



(The Victorian Settlement Planning Committee's Refugee Young People and Transitions Working Group, 2003).

Government schools are free for local students. International students pay an annual fee of \$11,550 in government senior secondary schools and more than \$17,000 in independent school sectors (The Department of Education & Training, Victoria, 2006). Both government and independent schools are required to adhere to the same curriculum frameworks developed by each state government. Victorian senior

secondary schooling and the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is the primary focus in this thesis.

2.4 THE VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

In this section, I introduce an overview of the VCE, including the requirements for international students undertaking VCE, ESL curriculum and outcomes in VCE, as well as the introduction of the Writing Task as the main focus of the study.

2.4.1 The requirements for international students undertaking VCE

The maximum age limits for international students undertaking Year 11 and 12 are 19 and 20 respectively (VCAA, 2005a). For academic requirements, students may enrol in a school at the level most appropriate to their academic standing in their home country. Applications are assessed regarding the students' academic records and are based on the references from their current school regarding their aptitude for and attitude towards study. Secondary students must have average passes in all core subjects in the previous two years of schooling.

Documents from the DEECD (2005, mentioned in Section 2.3) show that from 1st April, 2004, to gain entry into VCE, Chinese international students had to achieve an International English Language Testing System (IELTS)¹ score of 5.0 or above. Students who achieve a minimum IELTS score of 4.0 are required to undertake an English language program for up to thirty weeks before commencing in a school (The Department of Education & Training, Victoria, 2006). Whether the score of 5 is adequate to cope with VCE is open to question. Challenges may emerge for Chinese international students when they suddenly transfer from the Chinese secondary

¹ IELTS is a test of English language proficiency with different proficiency levels.

education system, where different conditions obtain, as they must adjust to new ideas of learning about the context as well as about language.

The VCE is accepted for entry to all Australian universities and most international universities. Chinese international students who have completed the VCE will be treated in the same way as local students who apply for local universities, without taking any language proficiency test or exams (VCAA, 2005b). International students without VCE who apply for universities need to reach the minimum IELTS score of 6.5.

It should be noted that an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score reflects the students' English proficiency but not their academic skills, their background knowledge, or their acculturation. Students applying for VCE from mainland China may be eligible for a waiver of the IELTS test if they can provide evidence such as the following:

- a. a letter from the education provider supporting the waiver of the IELTS requirement.
and either
 - b. Evidence of a satisfactory result in an alternative English language test (approved by the department for this purpose) conducted under appropriate test conditions
 - c. or both of the following
 - a letter of admission into the academic stream in a senior secondary school in the People's Republic of China
 - academic records showing a result of at least 75% in English in students' certificate of Graduation from a junior high school
- (The Department of Education and Training, 2006)

Some Chinese international students may have the minimum English proficiency requirements for VCE entry, which is Band Four in IELTS. However, students at Band 4 level can be considered as 'limited users' of English, and for entering a university in Australia, students with non-English background need IELTS Bands Six or Seven, indicating that they are 'competent or good user' (IELTS, 2007). After one

or two years of VCE study, it is doubtful whether all students have developed “the ability to use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations” which is the requirement for Band Six (IELTS, 2007), because of the big gap between Bands Four and Six. Moreover, many of the Chinese international students do not sit the IELTS test before entering VCE and it is even more difficult for them to build up English ability within two years of VCE studies prior to entering universities in an English speaking country.

2.4.2 An introduction to ESL curriculum and outcomes in VCE

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) includes four units and each unit is studied for a half year semester. Units One and Two are studied in Year 11 and can be studied as single units, therefore, some international students start undertaking VCE from Unit Two, not from the beginning of VCE. Units Three and Four are studied in Year 12 and must be studied in sequence (VCAA, 2003a).

Students in Years 11 and 12 usually choose a study stream, for example business, science or arts that will lead to and complement their selected university course or career path. Students study five or six subjects in each year consisting of one unit each per semester. Students must complete 16 units to receive their certificate. In addition to the core curriculum, most schools offer their own special programs and expertise, and may not offer the full suite of VCE subjects.

Students are required to take at least three units of English to receive their certificate. ESL students usually choose English or English as a Second Language (ESL) as their compulsory study. Students are eligible for ESL status if

- (a) they have been residents in Australia less than seven years immediately prior to 1 January of the year in which the study is undertaken for Unit Three and Unit Four

- (b) English has been the students' major language of instruction for a total period of not more than seven years prior to the year in which the study is being undertaken

(Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), 2003)

The English/ESL Study Design is a curriculum documents published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) in 2003. The areas of study, including the purpose and objectives in both English and ESL are very similar, but the structures of the end-of-year examination are different. In English and ESL Year 12 final examinations, students are required to demonstrate achievement of different outcomes, key knowledge and skills from the Study Design (VCAA, 2003a). The following table is a comparison between mainstream English and ESL assessment in the final year examination in VCE.

Table 2.4 The comparison of English and ESL assessment in the final year examination

	English	ESL
Exam Value	Worth 50% of the English study score	Worth 50% of the English study score
Duration	Reading time: 15 minutes Writing time: 3 hours	Reading time: 15 minutes Writing time: 3 hours
Dictionary	English dictionaries and/or bilingual dictionaries can be taken into the exam.	English dictionaries and/or bilingual dictionaries can be taken into the exam.
Section 1 Text Response	2/3 of final exam mark. Each answer is equally weighted. Text Response: Parts 1& 2 TWO separate analytical/expository written responses to TWO different individual texts students have studied from the set list of 30 texts. Part 1: One essay on one text. Part 2: One essay on a different text.	50% of final exam mark. Text Response ONE written response to ONE of the texts students have studied from the official list of 30 texts.
Section 2 Writing Task	1/3 of final exam mark. Each answer is equally weighted. Writing Task: Parts 1& 2 Two pieces of writing in response to an imaginary but plausible situation, as represented in a number of	50% of final exam mark. Part 1, 2 and 3 are equally weighted. Writing Task: Parts 1, 2 & 3 THREE set writing pieces in response to an imaginary situation as represented in a number of media texts. Students

	media-style texts. Part 1: One compulsory task that offers no choices. Part 2: One question from a choice of three tasks.	are required to complete all three parts. Part 1: Note-form summary Part 2: Language analysis Part 3: Point-of-view writing
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(Summarised from Huggard, 2002, p.5 & 52)

The primary focus of this study is on Chinese international students' understanding of language use or their language analysis (Part 2) and their ability to write a point of view on an issue (Part 3) of the writing task which belong to Section Two of the final year examination in ESL. According to the table above, the ESL final examination seems to be easier than English, however, there are still many aspects to be focused on in the different areas of ESL study.

The VCE ESL curriculum consists of three areas of study – *Reading and the Study of Texts*, *the Craft of Writing* and *Effective Oral Communication* (VCAA, 2003a). The first area of study, *Reading and Study of Texts*, is relevant to the main focus of my study. The area of study includes understanding language conventions and usage of a range of text types, both literary texts and current Australian media texts. The area is described as:

reading a range of texts with comprehension, enjoyment and discrimination. It encourages the development of critical responses to both literary and non-literary texts, including media texts. The ability to analyse the use of language for informative and persuasive purposes, along with the capacity to think critically, logically and creatively about a range of social important issues. (VCAA, 2003a, p. 22)

The *Craft of Writing* area of study was designed to “develop ESL students’ competence and confidence in writing for different purposes and audiences and in a variety of forms” (VCAA, 2003a, p. 22). The Study Design description emphasizes the relationship between purpose, form and audience in a range of text types, such as personal, imaginative, informative, argumentative and persuasive and the writer’s skills in drafting and editing.

Effective Oral Communication is the third Area of Study. Unit Three is called ‘The Presentation of Issues and of Argument’, and is focused on “the use of, and response to, oral language in different contexts to enable students to interact positively, critically and confidently with audiences in formal and informal settings, achieve a variety of purposes in speech, and develop an understanding of the power of oral communication” (VCAA, 2003a, p. 23).

These three areas of study in ESL are integrated and divided into two outcomes in each unit, which are required to demonstrate international students’ achievements in English proficiency and other abilities, such as their academic skills, their background knowledge or their understanding of different cultures. The outcomes also emphasize the integration of reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking. Proficiency in English and the ability to grasp complex concepts in the above three areas of study can be a struggle for many international students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

According to the Assessment Guide published by VCAA (2003b), VCE studies have two forms of graded school assessment: School-Assessed Coursework (SAC) and School-assessed Tasks (SATs). The form of school assessment and their weightings are specified for each study in the study designs, which are published and distributed by VCAA. The total mark from SAC contributes 25% to the final assessment. VCE scores are used by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) in the calculation of the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER score). Students’ SAC texts have been collected and analysed by the researcher in this study in order to explore students’ reflections on their own personal and cultural values in relation to ESL contexts, and their needs and difficulties in producing argumentative writing.

The SAC provides schools with the opportunity to make their own administrative arrangements for the internal assessment of their students. SACs provide individual subject teachers with the opportunity to select items from a range of designated assessment tasks in the study design. It also gives teachers the chance to develop and administer their own assessment program for their students and provides students the chance for pre-exam practice. The requirements for School-assessment coursework are set out in the VCE study designs and schools are responsible for administering and assessing School-Assessed Coursework. In end-of-year examinations, it assesses students' levels of performance on outcomes from both Units Three and Four. The tasks are set by examination panels using the criteria published annually by the VCAA. As mentioned above, the final examination in Year 12 contains two parts, text response and writing task. Parts 2 and 3 in the writing task are the main focus in this study.

In short, the VCE ESL curriculum discussed above was published in 2003 and contains two outcomes in each unit; it is also the focus of this study. The *English/ ESL Study Design*, which was redrafted in 2006 (VCAA, 2006b), contains more detailed information in areas of study, outcomes and assessment. Since the data collection occurred in Unit Four, 2006, the students in Year 12 were still following the 2003 Study Design. Therefore, the curriculum guidelines of this thesis are based on the 2003 curriculum document.

2.4.3 The Writing Task

The Writing Task in the VCE is a high stakes examination which has real consequences for students for their future study, Australian citizenship option and career. As mentioned in 2.2.2, the ESL curriculum and outcomes in the VCE Writing Task form the basis of this study. The Writing Task is the term used to describe the second part of the end-of-year examination in Year 12. It includes a note-form summary, language analysis and a written piece expressing writers' viewpoints. It is taught and practised in Units One, Two and Four, and treated as a primary focus in Unit Three, which is called 'Presentation of an issue'. Outcome One of Unit Three, the 'Presentation of an issue', which relates to the assessment in the final examination in Year 12 and which is called the Writing Task, points out that ESL students should "be able to discuss in detail the ideas, experiences and issues dealt with in a selected text and in current Australian media texts." (VCAA, 2003a, p. 24). Meiers (1999) also stresses the main aim of the 'Presentation of an Issue' task as follows:

The 'Presentation of an Issue' task has required students to make a close study of the language used in the media to present a range of viewpoints, and to analyse the use of language in the presentation of an issue current in the Australian media. The second part of the task has required the presentation of a point of view on an aspect of the issue.
(p. 217)

The underlying knowledge embedded in the writing task demands "the development of understanding of the nature and function of argument" (Meiers, 1999, p. 217). The persuasiveness of the argumentative writing is a primary demand of the *Writing Task*, and is assessed by a set of criteria, for example, knowledge and control of the chosen content and the effectiveness of the exploration of ideas and issues.

Meiers (1999) outlines the skills that ESL students need to acquire in VCE ESL classes, namely,

Whatever the form in which the argument is presented, students need to master many skills in presenting a point of view, in ‘seeking to influence an adult reader to share the point of view being presented’. They need to be able to make and support a case, and to generate evidence and claims. In preparing a point of view, they should consider different kinds of evidence, and develop and test ideas and alternatives.

(p.236)

According to the VCAA (2003), VCE English/ESL also attempts to enable all students to develop their critical understanding and control of the English language so that they can use it in a wide range of situations. This kind of critical understanding includes background knowledge of the texts, knowledge of different forms of persuasive writing and the ability to employ the language forms for specific purposes and audience. Clearly, the skill requirements above are difficult for any student, let alone international students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

One English co-ordinator in the VCE, Mayer (2002) has expressed her opinion about the relationship between high quality teaching and learning and the examination. She points out, “the Study Design may encourage flexibility but the exam does not” (p. 9). She found the English course in VCE is too rushed, because of the amount of assessment the teachers were expected to do. The following table shows the assessment criteria in three parts of the Writing task. All ESL students are examined against each criterion.

Table 2.5 ESL written examination

Part 1 Note-form summary	Clarity and accuracy in note taking
1	Understanding of the demands of the task
2	Knowledge and control of the material presented
3	Control of the mechanics of the English language to sustain meaningful note-form
Part 2 Language analysis	Understanding of language use in argument and presentation of an issue
4	Understanding of the demands of the task
5	Knowledge and control of the material presented
6	Control of the mechanics of the English language to support meaning

Part 3 Point-of-view writing	Ability to present a point of view on the issue
7	Understanding of the demands of the task
8	Knowledge and control of the material presented
9	The effectiveness and appropriateness of the writing in response to the specific task
10	Control of the mechanics of the English language to support meaning

(VCAA, 2003b)

The Study Design requires students to write an essay that expresses an argument. For argumentative writing, students may want to review both sides of the issue, however, in point-of-view writing or what is often called argumentative writing, students need to take one side or another on the issue and to represent a particular point of view, trying to get readers to agree. It may be called an ‘argumentative essay’ (any essay focused on an argument) or a ‘persuasive essay’ (an essay in which the writer attempts to convince the reader of a certain point of view) and it also can be called an ‘expository essay’ (Martin, 1993), which can demonstrate students’ understanding and attitudes towards issues discussed in the media. A variety of issues posted in the Australian media are discussed in ESL classes in genres as various as editorials, essays, feature articles, letters to the editor, opinion pieces and speeches.

The importance in learning media texts is to train ESL students how to use the written conventions in English media texts and to analyse linguistic techniques in the presentation of issues, which involves knowing culturally specific discourse structures and significant aspects of Australian life and society. This may assist international students to formulate their points of view on various issues and to consider different opinions in their argumentative writing (Huggard, 2002; Wynne, Sarros & Baxter, 2002). As mentioned in the previous section, students’ written texts, along with various drafts of the written arguments are assessed by the teacher.

2.4.4 Assessment of the Writing Task

Both assessment reports of 2005 and 2006 illustrate that “Assessment is holistic, assessors relate the standard of each response directly to the published assessment criteria...their judgments are assisted by the use of a set of descriptors” (VCAA, 2005c, 2006a, p. 1). In these assessment reports, the average mark for ESL students was 6.2 out of 10 in the note-form summary, 3.8 (also out of 10) in language analysis and 5.3/10 in argumentative writing. The Mark Range for the note-form summary indicates that the examiners can allocate up to “five marks for the main points, two marks for use of note-form and three marks for a clear and concise response.” (VCAA, 2005c, p. 22). In language analysis, there are two marks for each appropriate example of persuasive language use (up to five examples) and for the explanation of how persuasive language operates in each example.

The argumentative writing is assessed from the mark range (0-10) according to the Exam Assessment Criteria designed by VCAA (2005c). As can be seen from the average marks in issue writing, ESL students received 5.3 on average. This means they “show knowledge and understanding of material presented and some ability to select from it. Demonstrate some ability to organize ideas in response to the task. Display some control of the conventions of written English.” (VCAA, 2005c, p. 23).

According to the scores that average ESL students received in 2005 and 2006, students were very weak in language analysis (Part Two of the exam) and weak in issue writing (Part Three of the exam). In the VCAA’s (2006a) assessment report, the assessors point out that,

students who showed knowledge of what to look for were not always able to apply their knowledge to the context of Part 2. ...students’ difficulties appeared to be with explaining the examples rather than with finding them...Weaknesses included unnecessarily long explanations giving the meaning of the sentence, rather than the intended effect on the readers. (p. 7)

The task requires students to discuss and analyse the language used in the articles, not to simply state what the articles are saying. From the assessors' comments on language analysis, it can be seen that ESL students had huge difficulties to go a step further to discuss the intended effect of the persuasive language on the audience (reader, listener or viewer) and to think of how the argument was made.

There are usually three pages of material in the writing task, including three newspaper articles on each page. In the Assessment Report (VCAA, 2006a), assessors wrote about Part Three of the Writing task that,

the topic engaged students and more of them drew on the third page of material than in previous years, some of whom wove this resource material into the essay to good effect. Poor understanding of the material led to some intriguing responses...some responses directly copied large portions of the task material while other ignored the materials. (p. 8)

The study of issues and arguments is intended to help the students to become more informed about important aspects of life and society, and enable them to formulate their points of view on various issues after carefully considering the opinions of other people. Critically analysing and transforming the text (Freebody & Luke, 1990) was the major difficulty students faced.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, both the Chinese and Victorian education systems have been discussed, particularly in regard to English language education. The nature and outcomes of the current curriculum and assessment practices for both Chinese secondary schools and VCE have also been explored. In terms of English teaching and learning, both education systems have divergent focuses and teaching methods. One similarity among these two systems is that an 'examination-oriented' approach is used in order to lead students to academic success. It was seen that in Chinese secondary school

classrooms written English using different text types was not practised. By contrast, VCE writing is based on text types, whereas writing an English composition in China focuses generally on vocabulary, variety, coherence and grammatical accuracy. The criteria for the Writing Task in VCE ESL focus on students' ability to read and respond to issues and arguments, and also on students' ability to critically express their points of view, both in written and oral English. This contrast between the two different education systems shows why students may experience difficulty in conforming with the expectations of the new discourse community. The next chapter will shift to a discussion of the theoretical framework about writing in a new discourse community.

CHAPTER THREE

WRITING IN A NEW DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

3.0 OVERVIEW

This chapter addresses the theoretical aspects of writing in an English-speaking academic discourse community. It consists of an outline of the theoretical framework that has influenced the study and reports on pedagogical approaches which reflect genre theory and critical literacy theory in particular.

First, theories about becoming a member of a new discourse community are discussed. When Chinese international students transfer to Australian secondary schools, they are moving to new discourse communities where ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, speaking and writing are different from back home. Second, a critical explanation of genre theory is presented. This defines the structural elements of writing for specific purposes and is associated with Halliday's (1985) notions, broadly known as systemic functional linguistics (see Eggins, 2003; Halliday, 2004; Martin, 1989, 1993).

In a given discourse community, people use specific written conventions and structures to achieve distinctive goals in their own writing. These conventions and structures need to be learned. As Burns (2001) states,

In recent years much attention has been given to socially based theories of language and in Australia work drawing on systemic linguistics and notions of genre and register developed by Michael Halliday (1985) has provided a model for explaining language in relation to the context in which it is used, while at the same time taking into account language at the levels of whole text. I would also argue that systemic-functional approaches to language learning and teaching fit well with Communication Language Teaching, as they provide teachers and learners with a means of exploring language use within a framework of cultural and social purpose.

(p. 200)

Genre-based literacy pedagogy has had a significant influence in assisting students with non English backgrounds to explore language use within particular text types, especially in primary and secondary educational contexts in Australia (Burns, 2001; Derewianka, 1991& Ellis, 2004). This is discussed in the second part of this chapter.

The third section looks at elements of critical literacy and the power relations inherent in literacy. When critical literacy is taught, it can be seen as an approach to enhance the depth of students' reading and writing (Winch, 2007) and offers them alternative ways of reading texts which go beyond genre theory. All three theoretical frameworks are relevant to Chinese international students as they learn argumentative writing in a high stakes assessment environment. In the final section of this chapter, the topic of writing and international students' identity is discussed. Each of us is a member of many discourse communities and each community represents one of our different identities. For Chinese international students, Australian senior secondary schools are part of their new discourse community. Identity issues may underpin their ability to engage in VCE study within this community.

3.1 WRITING IN AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

The notion of a discourse community implies that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, such as academic disciplines or social groups (Gee, 1996). How a discourse community uses its discursal conventions to initiate new members and how it affects members' values and beliefs in terms of language learning are fundamental to this study. Swales (1990) proposes six defining characteristics for identifying a group of individuals as a discourse community, namely:

1. A discourse community as a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
2. A discourse community as mechanisms of intercommunication among its members, such as meetings, telecommunications, correspondence, newsletters and conversations.
3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aim.
5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.
6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discorsal expertise.

(p. 24-27)

Although Swales points out that there may be a definitional problem about the idea of 'discourse community', these defining criteria made by Swales provide a clear way to understand the term. Furthermore, Herzberg (1986) outlines the relationship between writing and a discourse community as follows:

The pedagogies associated with writing across the curriculum and academic English now use the notion of 'discourse communities' to signify a cluster of ideas that language use in a group is a form of social behaviour, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge. (p. 1)

For my study, I believe 'discourse community' is a powerful and useful concept that relates to the research questions. Below, I borrow Gee's (1996) notion of becoming a member of a secondary discourse community to discuss how institutional discourse communities position student writing and how students may reshape those positionings through their writing in VCE ESL classes.

Gee (1996) uses uppercase Discourse to refer to "social institutions" (p. 142).

The term is used to identify one as a member of a group, for example, ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, ways of thinking, behaving, valuing and feeling. He uses lowercase discourse to refer to the 'language' parts of Discourses. He points out that "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which

integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures” (Gee, 1996, p. 127). In this thesis, I use Gee’s notion of ‘D/discourse’ to refer to the more specific use in context.

Gee (1996) indicates that “a person’s primary Discourse serves as a ‘framework’ or ‘base’ for their acquisition and learning of other Discourses later in life” (p. 141). He also defines the role of ‘secondary institutions’. That is, beyond the primary Discourse, there are other Discourses which crucially involve social institutions beyond family, including schools, workplaces, stores, government offices and churches (p. 142). Secondary institutions are developed and associated with the primary Discourse and have access to and practice with (apprenticeship in) these secondary institutions. He refers to discourses within these institutions as ‘*secondary Discourses*’, which can be local, community-based Discourses, or more globally oriented (p. 142).

Secondary Discourses involve interaction with people where one cannot assume shared knowledge and experience. The two Discourses can interfere with one another. He extends the relationship between secondary Discourses and primary Discourses, stating, “these secondary Discourses all build on, and extend, the use of language and the values, attitudes and beliefs we acquire as part of our primary Discourses” (p.142). Gee’s primary Discourse can be equated with the set of interactional practices used in the family and the home language, which is not necessarily written. The secondary Discourses also include students’ learning in various school settings.

Gee (1996) borrows Odlin’s (1989) notion of languages transfer, which means that aspects of one Discourse can be transferred to another Discourse and interfere with another, as grammatical features can be transferred between different languages.

Thus for instance, the primary Discourse of many Chinese international students has been influenced by secondary Discourses from their secondary schools both in China and Australia.

Gee (1996) claims literacy learning to be “mastery of a secondary Discourse” (p. 143). When Chinese international students transfer from Chinese secondary schools to Victorian secondary schools, in their writing in VCE ESL tasks they must accommodate the dominant norms of the target Discourse (secondary Discourse). The writing norms which are considered as “community-based literacies” (p. 144) reflect what is valued by the community members – educated English native speakers. The rules of this discourse community are “unconscious, unreflective and uncritical” (p. 190). Yet such rules pose obstacles and challenges for Chinese international students in argumentative writing. Readers’ expectations towards the ways of making meaning in a certain academic discourses are shaped by institutional conventions which also influence students’ writing in schools. Gee does not focus on second language literacy specifically, however, in this thesis I adopt his notion of becoming a member of secondary Discourses and expand it to describe Chinese international students’ literacy learning in Australian school contexts, which can be seen as a secondary Discourse.

3.1.1 Learning knowledge in a community

Over the past twenty years, many researchers have changed their research direction towards a focus on social and cultural interaction (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Rogoff, 1994; Street, 1995). In this view, reading and writing are always situated within specific social practices and within specific Discourses. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of the situated cognition of learning has built upon the concept ‘communities

of practice'. This entails learning as a process of participation in communities of practice, and can be seen as related to Gee's secondary Discourses.

Gee (2000) states newcomers (Lave & Wenger (1991) call them 'apprentices') are 'trained' by being scaffolded in 'joint practice' with those already adept at the practice (p. 186). This is a Vygotskian view of the process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Collaborative practice passed on through the socialization of new members is the primary method for members in the communities of practice to gain knowledge, rather than via explicit teaching. This idea is also close to Rogoff's (1994) notion of "community of learners", which allows members to "coordinate with, support and lead others, to become responsible and organized in their management of their own learning, and to be able to build on their inherent interest to learn in new areas and to sustain motivation to learn" (p. 225). Collaborative practice seems to enhance the opportunities for learning and is a common approach in Australian classrooms.

Communities of practice concern the processes by which newcomers become part of a community, and participate in a shared repertoire of communal resources, including language, routines, sensibilities and styles (Wenger, 1998, p. 229). To be competent is to have access to this repertoire and to be able to use it appropriately. This is similar to Gee's notion of becoming a member of secondary Discourses. For example, regarding students' participation in the VCE ESL classes as cultural practice, the community of practice of Chinese international students in VCE ESL classes involves much more than the four language macroskills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Their learning outcomes are also affected by the social and institutional practices in VCE ESL classes, power relations between ESL teachers and students, and the learning conditions for study. The following table compares the nature of Gee's (1996) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) theories.

Table 3.1 A comparison of Gee's and Lave and Wenger's theories

Authors	Gee, J. P. (1996)	Lave, J & Wenger, E. (1991)
Theories	Becoming a member of secondary Discourses	Becoming a member in Communities of practice
Key points	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focus on situated learning of literacy2. Newcomers are trained by being scaffolded by those adept at the practice3. Primary and secondary Discourses can interfere with one another.4. Writing norms reflect what is valued by the community members.5. Readers' expectations influence students' writing.6. Writing is related to power in Discourses.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focus on social perspectives of learning2. Learning as a process of participation in the communities of practice.3. Collaborative practice is to gain knowledge.4. Communities of practice are everywhere.5. Identity is embedded in the practice as participants negotiate experience and achieve in community membership.6. Power is central in society.

In both Lave and Wenger (1991) and Gee's (1996) studies, the context of learning, understanding of Discourses and relations of power are very important. However, Gee adds the dimension of social language use, stressing that literacy practices are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices. (see also Barton and Hamilton's (1998) social theory of literacy and Street's (1993) across-cultural approaches to literacy).

Moreover, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, power is implicated when we look at students' written production. Gee (1996) points out that no literacy is politically neutral, especially institutionally based literacy. The following section discusses how power relates to literacy and Discourse.

3.1.2 Power relations and ideology in literacy

Power is conceptualized both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed (and hence the shapes of texts) in particular sociocultural contexts.

(Fairclough, 1995, pp. 1-2)

Students' writing is related to issues of ideology and power in conventional language practices in Discourses. The issue of power relations in discourse is of concern in many recent studies, such as those by Barton (1994), Barton and Hamilton (1992, 1996, 1998), Fairclough (1992 & 1995), Gee (1992; 1996) and Street (1993). Fairclough (1995) argues that ideologies are produced through Discourse, which is maintained by a range of conventions. Meanwhile, the relations of domination are actively exercised. As Fairclough (1995) argues,

We live in an age in which power is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion, through ideology rather than through physical force, through the inculcation of self-disciplining practices rather than through the breaking of skulls.

(p. 219)

In this study, the power relations in ESL classes are maintained through the ways the preferred writing practices and norms are reproduced by students and via ESL teachers' expectations, values and perceptions of written conventions. Fairclough (1995) argues that "educational institutions are heavily involved in these general developments affecting language in its relation to power" (p. 220).

Gee (2004) states that Discourses and the processes of acquiring them are inherently political in three ways, as follows:

1. Internal to a Discourse there are almost always hierarchical positions.
2. Discourses are partly defined in relationships of alignment and conflict with other Discourses.
3. Discourses are harder to acquire and often tension-filled for many of those who are "authentic beginners", people who are often marginalized by the Discourse.

In schools, students tend to write or present their ideas using the conventions accepted by the institutional Discourse and community readers' expectations. Students' success in participation in a written Discourse is determined by how much they conform to its conventions and practices, including cultural understandings. For students who come from a non-English speaking background, developing their ability to generate and access different genres is essential if they are to participate effectively in their secondary Discourse. Benesch (2001) indicates that it is important to "make these genres recognizable to their listeners and readers. Participation in these social acts solidifies one's membership in the community." (p. 18). Genres do not only focus on grammatical and discoursal features of a text. Instead "genres go beyond text to take social purposes into account, including ways members of discourse communities are guided by shared rhetorical purposes when they speak and write" (Benesch, 2001, p. 18). This important notion of genre is explicated in the next section.

3.2 GENRE THEORY AND PRACTICE: AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE AS DETERMINERS IN WRITTEN DISCOURSE

In this section, both genre theory and genre-based literacy pedagogy are discussed to elaborate the relationship between genre, register and language and the implications for the teaching of writing of particular genres in a second language and to reveal how teachers using a genre-based approach teach them to write in L2.

3.2.1 Genre, register and language

The term *genre* is widely used to describe a distinctive category of spoken or written discourse. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) defines genres as "conventional structures

which have evolved as pragmatic schemes for making certain types of meaning and to achieve distinctive social goals, in specific settings, by particular linguistic means” (p. 67). In Australia, the notion of genre is embedded in the teaching of writing and academic literacy approaches (Derewianka, 1991; Feez, 2002; Martin, 1992; Swales, 1990). Students are assisted to learn to write in particular genres, for example, argumentative writing.

In recent years, much attention has been given to socially based theories of language and language use. In Australia, this social or sociocultural view of language is based on theories from sociology and linguistics, especially contributions from systemic functional linguistics (Droga & Humphrey 2003; Eggins, 2003; Halliday, 2004; Martin 1993; Martin & Rose, 2003). It comprises four theoretical claims about language, namely that:

- 1 Language use is functional;
- 2 Its function is to make meanings;
- 3 These meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged;
- 4 The process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meaning by choosing.

(Eggins, 2003, p. 2)

Halliday (1985; 2004) claims that the genre of a text is partly determined by the culture in which the text is used and that different cultures achieve their purposes through language in different ways (also see Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000; Eggins, 2003; Martin, 1989,1992,1993). Genre theory entails a view of language that is concerned primarily with how people use language to accomplish tasks in social interactions and contexts.

The notion of genre includes how people achieve culturally agreed norms by using language. Martin (1985) and Halliday (1985) provide a more specific explanation about the relationship between genre and register. There are two

differentiated levels of context in a given text, genre and register, as shown in the following diagram of the relationship between genre, register and language.

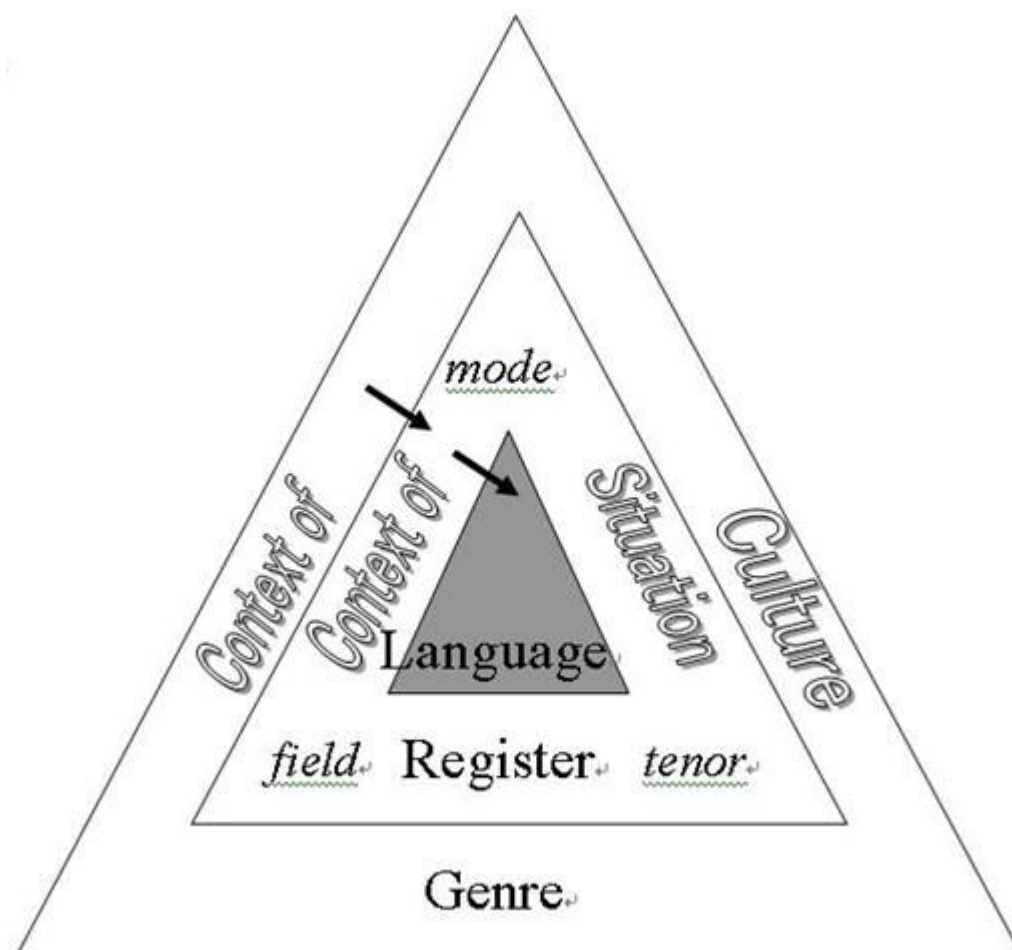
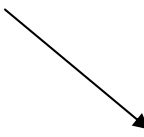


Figure 3.1 Genre and register in relation to language (Eggins, 2003, p. 34)

Genre relates to a text's schematic structure and recognized patterns while register is associated with the changing dimensions of specific contexts of situation (Eggin, 2003). The arrows in Figure 3.1 demonstrate that genres are realized through registers, registers are realized through language. In a systemic functional linguistics framework, Halliday (1985) explains the fact that genres constrain the ways in which the register variables of field (the subject matter of the text, such as topic or content of the communication), tenor (the roles and relationships constructed by the writer with

the intended audience) and mode (how the language is organized to make it more spoken- like or more written-like) can be combined in a particular society. Many authors also provide clear definitions for these three register variables (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Eggins, 2003; Jordan, 1997; Swales, 1990). The following table shows the relationship between the context of situation and the text itself.

Table 3.2 Relations of text to context of situation (Halliday, 1985, p.26)

SITUATION: Features of the context	(realised by)	TEXT: Functional component of semantic system
Field of discourse (what is going on)		Experiential meanings (transitivity, naming etc.)
Tenor of discourse (who is taking part)		Interpersonal meanings (mood, modality, person etc)
Mode of discourse (role assigned to language)		Textual meanings (theme, information, cohesive relation)

In Table 3.2, Halliday (1985) has provided a model for explaining language in relation to the context in which it is used, taking into account all levels of the text. Systemic-functional approaches are particularly relevant to Australian language education and have been integrated into many literacy programs (Callaghan & Rothery, 1988; Derewianka, 1991). Genre-based approaches offer teachers and learners a means of exploring language use within a framework of cultural and social purposes. In Australia, Martin (1985) has proposed a classification system for a range of written factual genres used in schools, for example, recount, narrative, explanation, exposition and discussion; these genres serve different social purposes.

In order to identify how a text is structured, teachers and students need to focus on distinctive features of each genre which help it to achieve its purpose and the overall structure of the text. For example, there are several different expository genres, which can be seen as argumentative genres, and choice depends on whether the

writers' major aim is to simply analyse, or to interpret, or to evaluate. These genres have their own distinctive features. According to Derewianka (1991), the emphasis of an exposition is on persuading someone to the writer's point of view and the schematic structure of an argument, for example, consists of a thesis (position and preview), arguments one to three (point and elaboration), and reiteration. In exposition genres, the focus of language features in "persuading to" and "persuading that" are very different (Derewianka, 1991, p. 75). In order to persuade readers, the text tends to include emotive words, generalized participants (plural nouns), present tense, and a variety of passive verbs or processes. If writers want to persuade people that something is true, connectives that structure the argument (firstly, secondly, thirdly) and logical connectives (so, therefore) are important elements in this genre. These concepts of language features in different genres have been widely used to analyse the genre or purpose of the social situation (register).

Swales (1990) claims there are important consequences for cross-cultural awareness and training in genre, because the text is partly determined by the culture in which it is used. Cope, Kalantzis, Kress and Martin (1993) also illustrate the relationship between culture and learning and suggest that understanding the genres of the culture can enable 'disadvantaged' students to enter academic life and to develop textual 'cultural capital' with some confidence. Therefore, teaching ESL/EFL students how to use language patterns to accomplish coherent and purposeful prose in particular genres is crucial in the teaching of writing. The following section moves attention from theory to pedagogical implications by discussing different genre-based approaches in the teaching of writing in Australia.

3.2.2 Scaffolding writing and genre-based literacy pedagogy

Although genre-based language theories have application to both spoken and written language, much of the work done in education settings has related to literacy development in the school context (Martin, 1985; Martin & Rothery, 1980, 1981). In order to identify the ways writing is used to create knowledge, aspects of genre-based literacy pedagogy have been adapted to help students engage with academic literacy needs and the knowledge needed to be part of an academic community.

In 1988, a three-stage model, called the ‘curriculum cycle’, was developed by the New South Wales Metropolitan East Disadvantaged School Program as a result of research by Martin and Rothery (Callaghan & Rothery, 1988). The model can be used to inform the planning of different classroom activities and it incorporates modelling the context and text under examination, additional activities in preparation for the joint construction of a text, then finally a stage of independent construction of a text by students (Callaghan & Rothery, 1988). The list below shows the nature of each stage.

1. Modelling (the context and text): read examples of genre; discuss the social function of the genre and analyse text structure and language
2. Joint Negotiation of Text: teacher and learners construct text; ongoing discussion of how to do this
3. Independent construction: learner writes own text; conferencing between teacher and learner; redrafting and editing to “publishable” standard.

This model is based on Martin’s claim for the need for modelling the genre first, and argues that students first have to know the genre thoroughly before they can attempt critique. In this model, the social context of the genre and field knowledge seem to be given too little attention, although the model moves learners through various spoken and written tasks related to the genre. Knapp and Watkins (2005) suggest that references to ‘modelling’ and ‘joint construction’ can easily be found in syllabuses

across Australia and elsewhere. Callaghan and Rothery (1993) expand this curriculum cycle to include more details and the curved arrows show two steps can be joined together for designing classroom activities and preparing students to write individually, as follows.

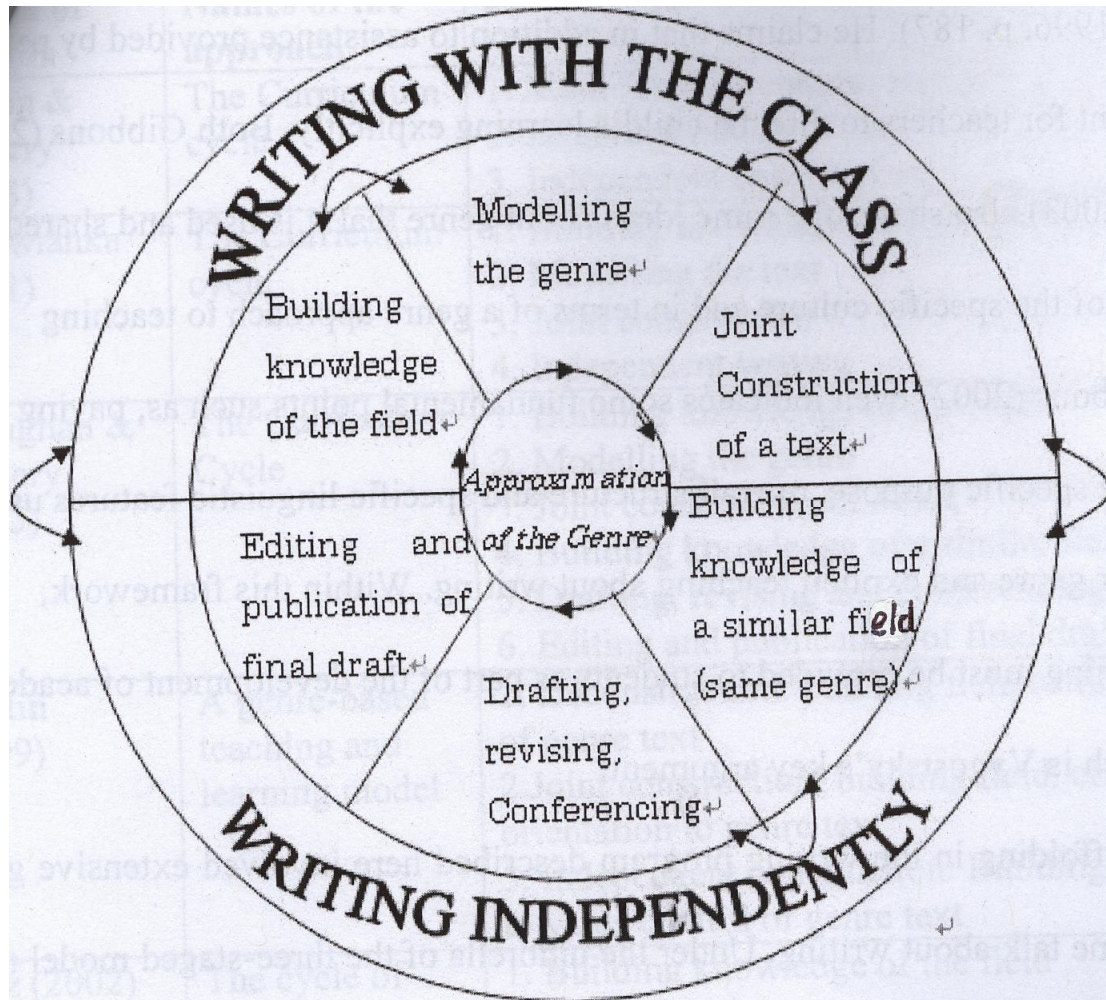


Figure 3.2 Curriculum cycle (Callaghan & Rothery, 1993, p. 39)

Many applied linguists and English for specific purposes (ESP) researchers focus primarily on texts and on analysis of written discourses, conventions and the values of a community or culture based on a given genre. The model above draws extensively on the work of theorists of language learning such as Halliday (2004), Johns (2003), Knapp & Watkins (2005) and Vygotsky (1978) and 'scaffolds' the learner through an

interactive process of analysis, discussion, and joint individual construction of texts (Feez, 2002). In the work of the above theorists, Vygotsky's theories on child psychology have provided useful perspectives for developing approaches to genre-based literacy pedagogy.

Vygotsky's model of 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) points out how important instruction can be, as one of the primary sources to build up a schoolchild's concepts and direct their evolution and mental development. The ZPD also sheds some light on the gap between a child's actual development determined by independent problem-solving and his/her potential development achieved when assisted (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotskian educators claimed that in addition to assistance provided by peers, it is important for teachers to direct a child's learning explicitly. Both Gibbons (2002) and Johns (2003) also share the same ideas about genre, such as that it is used and shared by members of a specific culture, and that a genre-based approach is needed to teach writing. Gibbons (2002) even indicates some fundamental points, such as paying attention to a specific purpose, overall structure and specific linguistic features used in the particular genre and explicit teaching about writing. Within this framework, explicit teaching must be provided to students as part of the development of academic literacy, which is Vygotsky's key argument.

Under the umbrella of the three-staged model, many researchers and educators have modified the curriculum cycle in their own way. Feez (p. 2002, p. 65) modified the curriculum cycle into five stages: Building the context, modelling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, linking related texts. Derewianka's (1991) four stages of curriculum cycle are discussed in Gibbons' (2002) article about writing in a second language across the curriculum, which comprises building knowledge of the topic, modelling the text,

joint construction and independent writing. The table below summarises what these authors have to say about genre approaches.

Table 3.3 Approaches to scaffolding writing

Names of authors	Names of the approach	Elements of scaffolding
Martin & Rothery (1988)	The Curriculum cycle	1. Modelling the context and text 2. Joint negotiation of text 3. Independent construction
Derewianka (1991)	The Curriculum cycle	1. Building knowledge of the topic 2. Modelling the text 3. Joint construction 4. Independent writing
Callaghan & Rothery (1993)	The Curriculum Cycle	1. Building knowledge of the field 2. Modelling the genre 3. Joint construction of a text 4. Building knowledge of a similar field 5. Drafting, revising and conferencing 6. Editing and publication of final draft
Martin (1999)	A genre-based teaching and learning model	1. Deconstruction: building field towards control of genre text 2. Joint construction: building field, critical orientation to genre text 3. Independent construction: Building field towards control of genre text
Feez (2002)	The cycle of teaching and learning	1. Building knowledge of the field 2. Modelling the genre 3. Joint construction of a text 4. Building knowledge of a similar field 5. Drafting, revising and conferencing

As mentioned earlier, the genre-based literacy approach focuses on the explicit teaching of the manner in which texts are structured and on their social purpose. Based on the curriculum model provided by Callaghan and Rothery (1993), the genre approach can be viewed as a valuable teaching method in its conceptualization of the student-teacher relationship as an apprenticeship. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) indicate that the need for genre teaching should go beyond focusing on how texts function to teaching the ideological underpinnings of form (the ‘why’). Based on their views, Cotterall and Cohen (2003) point out the strength of this curriculum cycle is that

rather than focusing on the decontextualized mechanics of writing, it helps the learners establish links between their beliefs, attitudes, and prior knowledge on the one hand, and the topic they are writing about, on the other. The sense of ownership is developed through the questions, such as why they are writing, who they are writing for, and what information they need to include in their texts. In classes, the curriculum cycle is also used by teachers to pay attention to learners' efforts at discovering and sharing information, exchanging feedback, and developing confidence in their role. Table 3.3 above provides a summary of different approaches of scaffolding writing in research. Note the development, yet similarities of the model over time.

Instead of creating an alternative cycle, Gibbons (2002) discusses Derewianka's (1991) curriculum cycle. No matter what names are given for scaffolding writing approaches, this kind of Genre-based literacy pedagogy emphasises the socially situated nature of language and literacy learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Johns, 1997). One of the central tenets assumed by the creators and users of the curriculum cycle is that non-native students can be assisted to gain access to opportunities to develop their literacy skills in second language by understanding and responding to the written texts to extend their ability to cope with a range of tasks common in the wider community (Burns, 2001). Non-native students are thus taught to realise that specific linguistic features are naturally embedded in texts and during the process of scaffolding writing, the cycle enables them to describe, produce, and critique a range of genres in the context of the discourse (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Moreover, Benson (2001) indicates the nature of scaffolding process in writing as follows:

The more successful curriculum-based approaches to autonomy do not simply leave the students to 'sink or swim'. Invariably, their effectiveness depends upon implicit or explicit scaffolding structures that support learners in the decision-making process. (p. 170)

Hyland (2003) supports Benson's (2001) point and furthermore argues that learners require more autonomy at later stages of the Curriculum cycle. As Fisher (2006) also indicates, scaffolding writing implies learners' control of their own text: teachers who wish to promote learner autonomy are essentially concerned with fostering the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). The same point is made by Cotterall and Cohen (2003) who claim that scaffolding includes a number of features. One is to promote learner autonomy by focusing on an authentic task, making the expectations of the task explicit, and providing flexible support for the learners as they approximate the target performance. In order to encourage learning autonomy, Weber (2001) suggests that students can raise their awareness of particular areas of difficulty by comparing their own texts with the models in the same genre. Scaffolding writing, therefore, is a strategy for providing students as individuals or as a whole class, with written prompts. In order to explore Chinese international students' awareness of argumentative writing, some educators promote the use of written scaffolds as a means to produce higher levels of reasoning in assisting students to build up their argumentation and discourse (Coleman, 1998; King, 1990; Nussbaum, 2002). Because the form of scaffolding involves less individualisation in classroom practice, there are still some strengths and weaknesses in different approaches to scaffolding writing.

3.2.3 Challenging the model

The teaching and learning cycle and the curriculum cycle are not without their critics. Johns (2003) points out the possibility for misusing the cycle, which comes from an apparent overemphasis on text product, which is the written text. Another weakness pointed out by Knapp and Watkins (2005) is that through the process of the teaching

and learning cycle, there is little possibility for creative manipulation or examination of the variability of textual form. In the original version of the curriculum cycle, shown above, the final stage of independent construction encourages “the creative exploitation of the genre and its possibilities” (Callaghan and Rothery, 1988, p. 39). In practice, however, this is rarely undertaken, and in syllabus documents and curriculum support material, both departmental and commercially produced practice books, replicating a set of mandated textual types tends to be the main approach. This poses challenges for teachers to provide explicit teaching of different genres, while encouraging a level of creativity.

Another issue is that writing is an activity bound with conventions such as grammar, spelling, vocabulary, as well as reader’s expectations about different genres. While using the Curriculum cycle, it is important for teachers to balance the teaching of formal written conventions in a creative way, used to encourage students’ individual responses. Regarding issues of control in the teaching of writing, Fisher (2006) indicates “scaffolding implies a stage where control is handed over to the learners” though he notes that there was “little evidence of these teachers handing over the control” (p. 193).

Moreover, the pedagogy underpinning the model is largely geared towards reproduction. Knapp and Watkins (2005) argue that the model for scaffolding writing leads to many students producing very poor attempts at writing these text types. The emphasis on a ‘product’ notion of genre may be centred on structure more than grammar, which needs to be avoided while planning teaching activities.

3.3 CRITICAL LITERACY AND PEDAGOGY: GENRES AND POWER RELATIONS

This section focuses on the theory of critical literacy followed by a discussion of pedagogy associated with this theory.

3.3.1 Critical literacy, identity negotiation and power relations

As discussed in the previous section, there has been considerable focus on functional linguistics (see Section 3.2) in Australia and its relationship to social ideologies and identities by educators and researchers in recent years (Hasan, 1996; Luke, 1996; Martin, 1993). Concerns with ideology and the social distribution of power have also had a substantial impact on the fields of language and literacy education (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Lee, 1997; Luke, 1996). This has resulted in new approaches to language and literacy development, and in particular, in an increased interest in critical literacy in both mother tongue and ESOL education. Winch (2007) suggests that critical literacy may enhance the depth of students' reading and writing. It can enable students to perceive how texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events, depending on their personal ideology and level of access to power (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Lee, 1997; Luke, 1996).

Gee's (1996) notion of D/discourse is embedded in critical literacy. Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) also make a clear definition of critical literacy, as:

the ability to engage critically and analytically with ways in which knowledge, and ways of thinking about valuing this knowledge, are constructed in and through written texts. We regard the ability to read resistantly and write critically as central aspects of critical literacy, particularly within the context of school education. (p. 529)

A review of curriculum documents from six Australian State Education Departments demonstrates that within syllabus documents, critical literacy is viewed as a teaching tool which aims to enrich a reader's understanding of their world (Winch, 2007).

Winch (2007) suggests that critical literacy offers readers a way of reading texts which can empower and contribute an understanding of the self and the world, and build up students' understanding that language use can define groups, disempower some and empower others. These notions are core to social linguistic theory, in which language is viewed as socially constructed. Winch (2007) also indicates that critical literacy includes how one reads any text, and foregrounds the ideological view that students should take an active role in their reading. This aligns with Lankshear and Knobel's (1997) notion of 'active citizenship'.

3.3.2 Critical pedagogy

Although critical literacy does not stand for a unitary approach, it makes out a coalition of educational interests committed to engaging with the possibilities that the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription offer for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement.

(Freebody and Luke, 1997, p. 1)

Freebody and Luke (1997) point out that critical teaching approaches help students to understand literacy as a social practice and link to broader social and political concerns. Benesch (2001) states her view that critical pedagogy is critical if it is concerned with institutional power relations, and entails studying how students' and teachers' multiple identities complicate teaching and learning. Critical pedagogy engages students in decisions affecting their lives in and out of school, which is seen as one way to help democratize societies. Critical literacy also implies that people from different backgrounds have different opinions about texts and participate in different sorts of literacy events. Although critical pedagogy views students as active

participants (Lankshear & Knobel, 1997) who can help to shape academic goals and tasks, rather than carry them out passively, students from non-English speaking backgrounds face challenges in their content classes. Alford (2001) indicates the relationship between critical literacy and second language learning as follows:

It is vital for ESL educators to identify the points of contention as well as the possibilities for promoting critical engagement with texts with adolescent ESL learners and to seek to create pedagogy that reflects the critical needs and capacities of these learners.

(p. 127)

One example of critical pedagogy is Cummins' (2000) transformative pedagogy, which is realized in interactions between educators and students that attempt to foster collaborative relations of power in the classroom. The orientation of this pedagogy challenges the operation of coercive relations of power in the school and wider society. It focuses not just on the student as learner, but on the students as members of wider society. It has the implied assumption that the teaching and learning process is not neutral with respect to social relations and power relations. This approach assumes that

the process of identity negotiation is fundamental to educational success for all students, and furthermore that this process is directly determined by the micro-interactions between individual educators and students. Micro-interactions are a function of the way educators have defined their roles in relation to cultural and linguistically diverse students, together with the educational structures that frame the 'delivery' of education.

(Cummins, 2000, p. 254)

Cummins' (2000) framework outlined in Figure 3.3 below provides a general guide to the implementation of pedagogy that will effectively promote second language learners' linguistic and cognitive development as well as encourage the growth of critical literacy skills. It assumes cognitive challenge and intrinsic motivation must be taken into account in the interactions between teachers and schools. Cummins (2000) suggests that the three foci of the framework for academic language learning can be

used by educators as a checklist to think about their own instruction, examine the activities and the extent to which cultural and linguistically diverse students are being given opportunities for both knowledge generation and identity affirmation. In the previous section, it was seen that scaffolding includes a number of features and stages. Although Cummins' (2000) framework does not use the word 'scaffolding', this approach nevertheless applies the concept of scaffolding to the academic writing process, and attempts to provide flexible support for student writers throughout their writing. Cummins outlines these phrases in transformative pedagogy, focusing on meaning, language and use.

- | |
|--|
| <p>A. Focus on meaning
 Making input comprehensible
 Developing critical literacy</p> <p>B. Focus on language
 Awareness of language forms and uses
 Critical analysis of language forms and uses</p> <p>C. Focus on use
 Using language to:
 Generate new knowledge
 Create literature and art
 Act on social realities</p> |
|--|

Figure 3.3 Framework for academic language learning (Cummins, 2000, p. 274)

Another literacy framework, the 'four resources model', is proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990). It can be used to examine existing and proposed literacy curricula and pedagogical strategies. Freebody and Luke propose that effective literacy draws on a repertoire of practices that allow learners, as they engage in reading and writing activities, to use four roles as follows and these four roles are treated as different types of competence:

- 1. Break the code of texts (coding competence):** recognising and using the fundamental features and architecture of written texts, including alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, conventions and patterns of sentence structure and text
- 2. Participate in the meanings of text (semantic competence):** understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts from within the meaning systems of particular cultures, institutions, families, communities
- 3. Use texts functionally (pragmatic competence):** traversing the social relations around texts; knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform both inside and outside school; knowledge that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality and their sequence of components.
- 4. Critically analyse and transform texts (critical competence):** understanding and acting on the knowledge that texts are not neutral, that they present particular views and silence other points of view, influence people's ideas; and that their design and discourse can be critiqued and redesigned.

In contrast to both Cummins' (2000) and Freebody & Luke's (1990) frameworks for literacy, much EFL teaching tends to focus on a bottom-up process of teaching written English. Top-down processes have been paid more attention in English speaking countries in mainstream literacy education. The concept of 'Using text functionally' is integral to both Halliday's notions of genre and Gee's idea of becoming a member of secondary Discourse. Yet the goal to 'critically analyse and transform texts', which is centred on power relations and critical literacy, is often the biggest problem for students for whom this is new.

Critical literacy pedagogy focuses on the language choices in the text and how participants in the text are constructed. It is usually used through the "interrogation" of texts; questions can be 'who wrote the text for what purpose or audience?', 'how are the participants named and shaped?' and 'how is the reader positioned?' (Alford, 2001). Regarding critical literacy, students have to be allowed the time and space to engage with the messy process of exploring (through talking, reading and writing) and find out who they are in relation to the authoritative voices in the field. Alford (2001) and Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) also indicate that time is of the essence in

learning critical literacy because engaging with the meanings of texts requires much time and effort on the part of teachers and students. To become members of their disciplines, students have to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation with critical reflection.

3.3.3 Limitations of critical literacy and genre theory

Both genre theory and critical literacy start with the same premise made by Halliday (1985, 1993) that people live in the world and that language and social semiotic systems co-operate to construct social and cultural realities. Some proponents of critical literacy (Lee, 1997; Luke, 1993, 1996) argue that the teaching of primary genres cannot change power or combat inequality, although it helps language learners to access discourses and texts. Luke (1996) writes,

A salient criticism of the “genre model” is that its emphasis on the direct transmission of text types does not necessarily lead on to a critical reappraisal of that disciplinary corpus, its field or its related institutions, but rather may lead itself to an uncritical reproduction of discipline. (p. 314)

Luke’s (1996) claim is that genre approaches may fail to provide students with opportunities to gain more equitable access to these discourses of power. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) also indicate that “students should be allowed to cross the generic line” (p. 10), rather than always adhering to how the text is conventionally structured or to what linguistic choices are legitimated when written in particular genres.

Genre advocates Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) argue that “literacy programs should at least be ‘reproductive’ in their provision of opportunities for access to the powerful discourses and genres of mainstream culture (p. 531). They claim students from non-English speaking backgrounds and minority groups are already disadvantaged by some programs. They write, “learning about genres does not

preclude critical analysis but, rather, that control of the linguistic resources associated with the study of genres provides a necessary basis for analysis and critique of texts” (p. 531). Martin (1993) also shares the same idea with Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) about the relationship between genre and critical literacy. He emphasizes the need for modelling genres first, and argues that students first have to know the genre thoroughly before they can attempt critique. Knapp and Bangeni (2005) stress, however, that students need to become critical members and contributors to the Discourse, not just instrumental reproducers.

There are many interesting developments in critical pedagogical approaches to English language teaching, however, these approaches remain open to critique. For example, Johnston (1999) indicates that although critical pedagogy has given insights into and understandings of the education process, it is still insufficient to capture the complex essence of teaching, especially ESL/EFL teaching. Pennycook (2001) also supports Johnston’s (1999) view, adding that, “Critical pedagogy seems more concerned with just letting everyone ‘have a voice’, and it is unclear how this enunciation and marginality can actually bring about social change” (p. 131).

As mentioned above, the focus of critical pedagogy is usually centred on the language choices of text and how writers represent themselves and position the participants in the text. In the following section, I will shift the focus to how writing relates to identity as a form of self-representation.

3.4 WRITING AND IDENTITY

A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as take on a particular social role that others will recognize.
(Gee, 1996, p. 127)

In order for students to become critical members or contributors to academic Discourse, who are recognised and legitimated by others, rather than instrumental reproducers, time and space are needed for them to engage with the exploring process, such as ‘talking, reading and writing’, ‘who they are’ and ‘who they are becoming’ in relation to the authoritative voices in the field.

Regarding the collaborative notion of power embedded in critical literacy, the application of critical literacy also results from the classroom interaction and extension of students’ identities. Cummins (2000) elaborates the connection between critical literacy and learners’ identity in the following statement,

Critical literacy enables students to relate curriculum content to their individual and collective experience and to analyse broader social issues relevant to their lives. This process of empowerment affirms and extends students’ identities and at the same time develops the linguistic and intellectual tools necessary for collaborative critical inquiry. It is important that affirmation of identity is a critical process that brings alternative perspectives into the open and encourages students to reflect on and evaluate their own experiences and beliefs.”
(p. 314)

Social constructionists state that identities are conceptualized, produced and negotiated in discourse through interaction (Edwards, 1997; Gergen, 1994; Pavlenko, 2001). As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003) state, identities are considered as discursive constructions and are “real” in the material world (p. 14). Identities and ideologies of language influence writers’ way of using linguistic resources in their self-representation. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2003) statement, identity comprises five characteristics:

- (1) location within particular discourse and ideologies of language;
- (2) embeddedness within the relations of power;
- (3) multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity;
- (4) the imagined nature of 'new' identities; and
- (5) location within particular narratives.

Regarding the relationship of Discourse and participants' identities, Lave and Wenger (1991) stress that knowing, learning and sharing knowledge are not merely abstract things we do for their own sake and that these aspects are interwoven in profound ways with participants' identities in communities of practice. Although the concept of communities of practice is not specifically about writing, it still concerns the process of the newcomers becoming members of a community who share a repertoire of the resources, such as language. Using this study as an example, what Chinese international students know about their own writing, what they try to understand and what they accept not to understand about argumentative writing, and what they share with each other, may not be merely a matter of writing, but also a matter of identity. Within communities and boundaries of different communities, we identify with some communities strongly and define ourselves by what is familiar and what we should know. We have multimembership which is "an inherent aspect of our identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 239).

Gee elaborates Lave and Wenger's notion of multimembership and extends it to a broader picture, "Each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities" (Gee, 1996, p. ix). The conflicts among different ideologies of language and identity have been a focus in research by Gee (1996) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003). The conflicts may affect the negotiation of identities in daily life and influence particular languages and varieties of language used by people in specific contexts.

Wenger (1998) stresses that identity is crucial to social learning systems for a number of reasons. First, our identities combine competence and experience into ways of knowing. They decide what is important, whom we identify with and with whom we share our understanding. Second, our ability in dealing with boundaries between communities is based on our ability to engage or suspend our identities. Third, communities and boundaries are realized as an experience of the world because of our identities. Similarly, Gee's (1996) interpretation of meaning-making in society is that what makes sense to one community may not make sense to another. He also extends this concept with language (as social practice) and society. To understand sense making in language it is necessary to understand the ways in which language is embedded in social institutions (such as families and schools).

Ivanič (1998) makes the overarching argument that writing is an act of identity in which people position themselves within societies and reproduce or challenge dominant conventional practices, discourses, values and beliefs and interests which they embody. In terms of the discoursal construction of academic community membership, she also illustrates the relationship between writers' identities and their adoption of an institutional voice (discourse conventions). She provides a very clear statement about discourse and actualities (see below) and how these two processes interact with each other.

Institutional interests, values and practices shape discourse conventions, and they construct the identities of the actual writers who draw on these discourse conventions. It is worth considering whether people are positioned directly by institutional values, beliefs and relations of power, and their discourse choices and practices are an inevitable outcome of their positioning.
(Ivanič, 1998, p. 256)

Ivanič (1998) claims that the discoursal identity is embedded in a writer's experience, especially in encounters with real people and real texts. Writers draw the voices of

others into their own writing, which she calls “writing as the product of the writer’s life-history” (p.181). Voices are “the sense of ways with words, accents, grammatical, lexical and broader discoursal choices, feeling at home in particular genres and discourses” (p. 183), the ways in which writers represent themselves in their writing. As the relations of power are involved in language learning are mentioned above, Ivanič attempts to examine power relations between the reader and the writer in relation to how writers position themselves, as the readers will also be their assessors. This is especially relevant to students when writing academic essays because they need to find their own “voices” to express new identity. To some extent, the accommodation and resistance to the reader’s expectations represent whether student writers accept the written conventions and the identities developed in the Discourse, and furthermore, their relationship with the academic community.

In terms of identities and teaching writing to international students from backgrounds other than English, Hyland (2002) argues that instead of treating academic discourse as uniformly impersonal, teachers might better assist students by raising their awareness of the options available to them as writers. This statement is especially useful for international students who struggle with the convention of impersonality and faceless discourse, which commonly are portrayed in style guides and textbooks.

The literature concerning Chinese writing traditions has shown that these are oriented by their cultural, religious, social, historical and political conditions, as discussed in Section 2.1. The process of learning to write in an institution often involves the process of creating a new identity which fits the expectations of the subject teachers (Fan Shen, 1988). However, Hyland (2002) argues that creating such an identity is generally very difficult for second language students. It is not only

because these identities can differ considerably from those they are familiar with from their daily lives or previous learning experiences (Cadman, 1997), but also because students are rarely taught that disciplinary conventions differ (Lea & Street, 1999). Furthermore, these authors focus mainly on students in university, so the investigation of international students' identity in secondary education remains a serious gap, hence the direction of the present study.

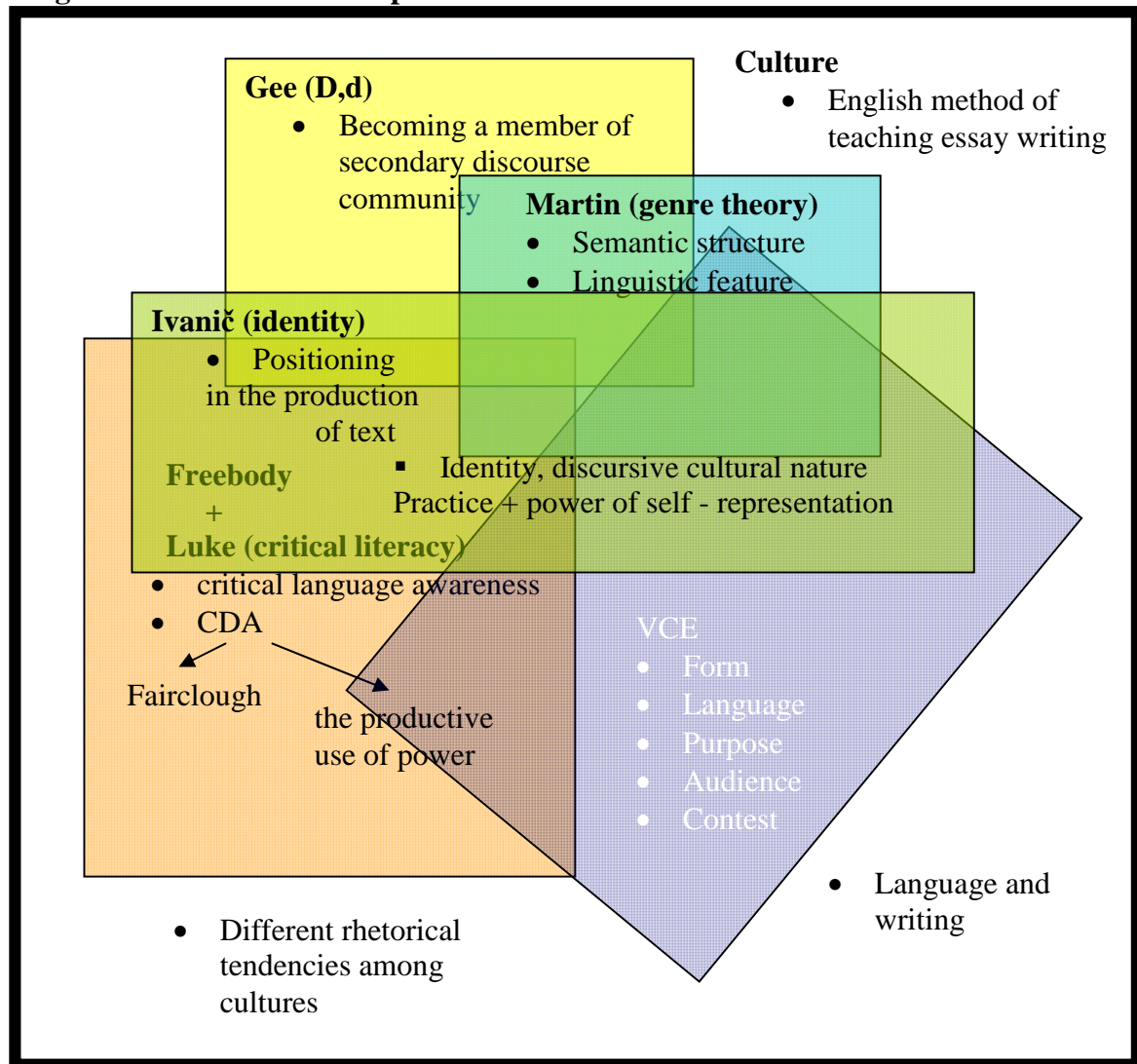
Assumptions about the role of identity in language use have encountered a number of criticisms. For example, some linguists argue that identity cannot be used as an explanatory concept in the studies of linguistic practices, because it needs explanation itself as well (Johnstone, 1996; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003). Another issue concerns language competence. Some international students from non-English speaking backgrounds do not have the linguistic competence or the resources to represent their argument clearly. Researchers such as Coffin (1997) and Gee (2004) claim that learning to make choices in genre and language resources are valued in school in order to engage in a social practice setting. However some students may have insufficient resources to express their ideas, due to a lack of exposure to English while learning the language and other social factors. This issue will be raised again and discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Gee (1996) states that literacy and socioliteracy studies are always “political matters” (p. 136), as Discourse rules which govern written conventions and students' writing are closely related to power. In this chapter, I introduced the notion of discourse and of theoretical aspects of writing in an English academic discourse, and addressed the relationship between writing, power relations and a discourse community.

Approaches to teaching writing, including genre, scaffolding and critical literacy were then presented. Genre-based literacy pedagogy was discussed to give a picture about how different approaches for scaffolding writing are applied in school contexts. Critical literacy, it was argued, enables students to perceive how texts position readers to take a specific view of people and events. These notions were then viewed in relation to identity negotiation and power relations. It was seen that to gain a level of access to power within a Discourse, it is important for students to build up the ability to perceive how texts position readers and how writers may use texts to position themselves. The final section discussed how student writers position themselves based on their existing identities and how their adoption of voice in a new Discourse can be difficult for them. This study is centred on the exploration of Chinese international students' learning in VCE ESL classes, and the following diagram helps to demonstrate the relationship and overlaps between the VCE and four strands which form the theoretical framework of the study.

Diagram 3.1 The relationship between the VCE and four theoretical strands



These aspects form a complex theoretical framework which helps this study to interpret students' learning in argumentative writing, and to answer the research questions. The following chapter presents a review of the empirical literature in four areas related to this study. They include research on learning to write in Confucian Heritage Culture; second language acquisition; empirical studies about scaffolding writing, and finally teacher's feedback on students' writing.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

4.0 OVERVIEW

Chapter Two described Chinese and Victorian education systems as contrasting and differently oriented and in Chapter Three I discussed how specific theoretical approaches account for students' experiences in learning to write argumentative genres. Assumptions and characterisations about four issues are explored in this chapter, and studies exploring these issues are also reviewed. They are:

1. Confucian heritage culture (CHC) and learning to write
2. Research on second language writing
3. Studies on scaffolding writing
4. Teacher's feedback on students' writing

The first issue underlies the fact that international students have unique needs and requirements and experience a range of learning issues and problems associated with the move to a Western education environment. Asian countries with Confucian heritage culture (CHC) such as China, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam have been shown to share characteristics of a collective society, and a number of studies have investigated CHC students' performance in Western school settings or compared 'Confucian-heritage' and 'Western' learners' learning experience (Tiong & Yong, 2004; Ramsay, 2005; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005). Some prominent factors which contribute to forming distinctively Chinese writing trends are bound to Chinese schooling tradition and Confucian ideology, and needed to be considered when investigating students' writing experiences.

Secondly, it is pertinent to mention different areas of second language (L2) writing research and especially studies relating to L2 writers' language competence and performance. The third section moves to how teachers plan instruction to build up L2 writers' language and literacy learning experiences, which includes scaffolding writing. The central features of teacher's oral and written feedback have consequences for students' writing performance (Hyland, 2003), and such feedback can be seen as one of the ESL teachers' roles to support individual students in their writing process. As a result, feedback is the fourth issue explored in this chapter.

4.1 CONFUCIAN HERITAGE CULTURE (CHC) AND LEARNING TO WRITE

Many studies in the field of contrastive rhetoric have found that Chinese English learners have their own unique way in writing (Lou, 2000; Wang & Nash, 2000). This section provides a general discussion of different authors' perceptions of the cultural and linguistic differences between Chinese and Western learning contexts. It is also important to note that many authors share different perceptions even about the same culture. Therefore, students' learning experience cannot be pre-judged or essentialised. Rather it should be understood in terms of the learning problems they may encounter in Western contexts.

A controversial argument is that teachers educated in a Western system are likely to appear unaware of the culture of learning in students' home countries, specifically when it is a Confucian heritage culture. For example, Scollon (1999) states:

Western teachers unaccustomed to a classroom full of Asian students all too frequently feel that their words are going to waste because they do not get the feedback they are accustomed to, not only in terms of comments and questions, but in head

movement and facial expression. (p. 27)

Australia's education system is Western and Asian international students have become a primary client group for many Australian secondary schools and universities. According to the Australian government (2007), more than 51 % of international students are of Chinese nationality, ethnicity or from countries that share a common Confucian tradition. In particular, large numbers of students with Chinese background have shared values which are different from those in Western countries. Some authors argue that Chinese international students are accustomed to a Confucian heritage tradition in which the social codes are based on respect, harmony and preserving face (Biggs, 1996; Conner, 1996; Ryan, J. 2000). Learning preferences are also very different. For example, Ballard & Clanchy (1997) indicate that many international students find verbatim learning and reproducing texts are powerful tools for their language improvement and concept reinforcement, skills which are not encouraged in Western classrooms. This may cause challenges for students in writing across different subject areas. The section below provides insight into the cultural assumptions and values that lie behind the choices Chinese international students make in their writing. I focus on studies related to four key concepts below in order to explore how CHC may influence Chinese international students' experience in learning to write various argumentative genres in VCE ESL classes. These are:

4.1.1 CHC students in the Western learning context

4.1.2 CHC students and their learning style preferences

4.1.3 Chinese writing traditions

4.1.4 Originality and plagiarism

4.1.1 Chinese international students in the Western learning context

This section discusses contrasting cultural perspectives on Chinese students' learning behaviours. Each culture tends towards specific thinking about the nature of human society and its practices. Chinese international students who come to study for the VCE may find their understanding of the nature of learning is very different from that of their schools in Australia. Brennan and Durovic (2005) indicate that CHC students, including Chinese international students, appear unaware of the culture of learning in Western countries. Ryan and Louie (2007) use higher education in the university sector in Australia as an example of their teachers' comparable lack of awareness:

The lack of training in teaching students from different cultural backgrounds has not helped matters, and lecturers understandably often feel that the demands placed on them are unreasonable. Such radical changes in workload and the types of issues confronting academics sometimes mean that their reactions are negative and hostile. (p. 3)

They challenge the practice of internationalisation of curriculum in higher education, which rarely involves an examination of the appropriateness of conventional Western pedagogical approaches for both local and international students.

Another point is namely that many misunderstandings and negative stereotyping about CHC students arise because of Western academic values (Fox, 1996; Ryan & Struhs, 2002). For example, some Chinese international students tend to socialise in their own cultural communities in their Australian schools, which can be seen by some teachers as a disadvantage to language learning. This so-called 'disadvantage' can, however, be seen from another viewpoint. The great number of students from mainland China in Australian schools provides an opportunity for them to form a strong community as a support network. However, some researchers point

out, many students are also learning to expand their social networks through their interactions with others, not only Chinese (Fox, 1996; Ryan & Struhs, 2002).

There are many studies on group participation and collaborative learning in relation to CHC students' learning experiences (Biggs, 1996; Teng, 2004; Yuan, 2005). Some studies about teaching practices show that collaborative strategies are not used in the classroom (Teng, 2004; Yuan, 2005). By contrast, Biggs (1996) indicates that much cooperative and group work exists in student activities in CHC learning environments. Some other research also shows the effectiveness of both these elements in students' learning process (Tiong & Yong, 2004; Guy, 2005). It is noted that students who learn in a small group demonstrate better academic achievement and express positive attitudes toward learning (Springer, Stanne & Donovan, 1999; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Biggs (1996) indicates that overall student activities and cooperative group work have become more valued in CHC learning environments than in the past.

Compared with Western-educated learners, many authors stress that CHC learners show a high preference for small-group collaborative learning environments whereas individualism is highly valued in Western cultures (Chan & Watkins, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Brennan & Durovic, 2005). While many researchers support the idea that CHC learners best perform in groups, Phuong-Mai, Terlouw and Pilot (2005) have questioned the fixed assumption that group-work always 'works' in CHC cultures. They argue that some forms of collaborative learning do not succeed within a CHC environment, because the implementation of a Western concept of collaborative learning may reveal a degree of cultural conflict and mismatch. Their argument demonstrates it is important not to oversimplify students' behaviours in

relation to cultural conflicts and mismatch in these two different learning environments.

Collectivism, which aims to promote in-group harmony and individual sacrifice for the good of the group (Hofstede, 1994), is more promoted in countries with CHC culture than in Western countries. Collaborative learning behaviour, such as forming study groups, is expected in China and a collectivist mentality supports cooperation (Biggs, 1996). Tiong and Yong (2004) support this idea and indicate that Chinese cultural background emphasizes relationship and interaction, for example, relationships between teachers and students or among students themselves.

Unlike collectivist culture in China, Western cultures tend to value individualism, in which self-efficacy, individual responsibilities and personal autonomy are highly promoted (Brennan & Durovic, 2005). The Western academic writing genre is regarded as a manifestation of individual students' achievement in producing an original piece of work. Chinese international students may therefore not realize the concept of "working alone to achieve academic goals in the same way" (Brennan & Durovic, 2005, p. 4) as do English native speakers. They often find working completely alone very challenging. In addition, language barriers may exacerbate these students' insecurity and loneliness in learning (Scollon, 1999).

With regard to establishing relationships between members of the group and members of other groups, it is noted that in a collectivist society like mainland China, many relationships are established from one's birth into a particular family and involve permanent social groups within a particular society (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). The boundaries which position people within the group or outside the group are carefully preserved by means of special forms of discourse. The findings of Guy's (2005) research show that Confucian societies and their education systems place an

importance on group membership and solidarity. In an individualistic society found in many English speaking countries, including Australia, the relationships between people are often negotiated within the context of the discourse (Scollon & Scollon 1995).

In terms of group participation, Tiong and Yong (2005) argue that CHC learners prefer doing group work and learn collaboratively in an informal learning environment, for example, after the class. They state that,

CHC students may find it more comfortable to have a group discussion with peers or lecturer after the class instead of asking the questions in the class as they think that they might draw back the other students in the class and are scared of being teased because of their silly question. (p. 3)

Guy (2005) takes a further step by claiming that language and cultural barriers may hinder the establishment of group membership by Confucian-heritage learners in the Western classroom. The stereotype of CHC students' low participation in the classroom discussion in Western school contexts has often been attributed to cultural reasons. Their participation is lower when their second language is used in the discussion. However, Bodycott and Waller (2000) indicate that when students are encouraged to have discussions in their mother tongue, interaction is more active and various and deep questions will be raised by students.

Despite the establishment of group membership, another reason why Chinese students tend to be regarded as passive learners is uncertainty avoidance. This is another issue explained by cross-cultural difference (Hofstede, 1998, 2001). Compared to Western- educated students, CHC learners seem to have a low tolerance of ambiguity (Guy, 2005). According to Hofstede's (1998, 2001) and Brennan and Durovic's (2005) research findings, conformity is enforced and people are guided by the concept of 'providing right answers' in CHC communities. Brennan and Durovic

(2005) indicate that getting the answers right is the most important thing for CHC students, even if they sometimes do not know why the answer is correct. The Chinese education system is more examination-oriented, and typical tasks are gap filling, multiple choice and matching different concepts and ideas. Students develop skills in providing correct answers in the examination, rather than in discussing questions and providing their own arguments. Ryan and Louie (2007) stress that “examination success does not always indicate deep understanding of problems posed” (p. 7). However, a structured classroom learning environment with ‘right answers’ given by the teachers is more familiar to CHC students.

Besides avoiding uncertainty in the learning process, Power Distance (PD) is identified by Hofstede (1998, 2001) as another factor underlying passive learning. Hofstede (1998) indicates that power is distributed unequally between the members of the community in every culture. In a strong hierarchy-based community, the less powerful members in the institutions or organisations tend to believe that people who are in power have the correct answers. In schools, teachers are the holders of power (Hinkle, 1999). The moral ideology underlying Chinese schooling practice is based on the concept that the teacher is both a moral model and a provider of knowledge (Barker, 2002; Chen, 1990; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Hinkle, 1999; Mao-Jin, 2001).

Brennan and Durovic (2005) state that,

In a high PD culture, teachers are treated with respect. There is supposed to be a strict order in the classroom. Teachers are expected to initiate all communication, and students speak up only when invited. Thus, challenging, criticising and actively discussing are not easy for CHC students. (p. 5)

Both Chen (1990) and Scollon (1999) indicate that the role of the teacher is to serve as a role model in order to cultivate moral values, to assist students in their development of ability and to answer students’ questions. However, in a Western

classroom, students are trained to develop the skills to challenge, criticise and discuss issues with their teachers and peers, which can be confusing for Chinese students in learning Western cultural knowledge. For example, the questioning approach underpins critical thinking, which is valued as a significant Western pedagogical practice (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Students who raise questions or provide their arguments in the classroom are viewed as ‘active participants’ and ‘critical learners’. CHC learners may seem to lack critical analytic skills and are viewed as unquestioning, passive, respectful and expecting hierarchy (Biggs, 1996; Hyland, 1994 & Park, 1997).

Scollon and Scollon (1995) also introduce the concept of face relationship, which has to do with two or more participants in discourse. In an individualistic society, the face relationship is to do with individual face. However, from a collectivistic point of view, one’s face reflects the face of the whole group. People from a collectivistic society have the face of others foremost in their mind before they do things, even just simply asking questions.

It is understandable that both Western and Confucian systems comprise very diverse and complex cultural practices. Ryan and Louie (2007) claim that,

Rather than taking either a ‘deficit’ or ‘surplus’ view of either Western or Confucian education, teachers need to recognise this diversity and complexity within not only other cultures, but their own. Teachers need to become ‘anthropologists’ of their own culture in order to understand how the normative assumptions underpinning their teaching practices can be problematic for international students or indeed, for other groups of students.

(p. 10)

English and Chinese schools tend to use different teaching approaches in the language classroom. Ryan and Louie’s (2007) recommendation is important for teachers in

Western institutions to better understand their own values before developing their pedagogical approaches to cultural practices in the language classroom.

4.1.2 Chinese international students and their learning style preferences

International students experience different ways of making sense of the world, which are inherent in their cultural assumptions and may cause challenges when they come to study in Western secondary or university sectors. Managing a multi-cultural classroom is an increasingly difficult task for English teachers. According to Ryan (2000), international students from different cultures favour different cognitive and learning styles. As a result of different ways of conceptualising knowledge and learning styles within different cultural practices between East and West, CHC students may bring unfamiliar approaches to the way they express their ideas and thinking in their new context. Determining these students' learning style preferences and problems may also improve their overall learning experience.

Fox (1994) indicates that there are analytical, descriptive or reproductive approaches to learning. CHC learners tend to adopt descriptive and reproductive rather than analytic approaches to learning, both of which are viewed as negative learning styles in Western schools (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Ryan, 2000). Ballard and Clancy (1991) point out that the Western education system tends to favour analysis and interpretation and Asian education systems seem to favour reproduction. These distinctive learning approaches, which are shaped by distinctive cultural and social communities, can be exercised differently by individual students from the same community. Moreover, these three approaches can be used as different logical ways of making meaning in writing between different cultural practices.

In their discussion of learning approaches, Fox (1994) and Marton, Dall’Alba and Kun (1996) distinguish between deep and surface approaches. A deep approach to learning is centred on the focus of meaning or message underlying learning material, and a surface approach is characterised by reproduction of material, without understanding. A surface approach may be associated with rote learning and teaching approaches and practices in Asia, especially in China. However, many researchers also try to argue against this Western misperception. For example, some CHC learners seem to prefer a collaborative learning environment which is seen as promoting deeper learning strategies (Chan & Watkins, 1994; Tiong & Yong, 2004). In Western countries, it is believed that memorization does not enhance understanding. However, Marton, Dall’Alba and Kun (1996) challenge the negative perceptions about CHC learners’ propensity for rote learning. They indicate that traditional Asian practices of repetition and memorization can also be associated with different purposes, and can be used for mechanical rote learning, or used to deepen and develop understanding. Repetition can in fact be seen as a method of developing understanding of material, a deep strategy for learning.

Beyond issues like language barriers, culture shock, racism and stereotyping, many CHC students are overwhelmed by differences in teaching and learning styles between Australia and their home countries (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997). Based on Kolb’s (1985) Learning Style Inventory, Honey and Mumford (2000) developed a Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) which identified respondents’ learning style preferences as Activist, Reflector, Theorist or Pragmatist, described below.

Table 4.1 The characteristics of four different learning styles

Learning styles	Characteristics
Activist	Prefer challenges and new experiences, involvement with others, such as problem solving, new knowledge, small group discussion
Reflector	Prefer to learn from activities that give them time to watch, think and review what has happened, such as using journals, brainstorming, providing expert explanations and analysis
Theorist	Prefer to think problems through steps, such as lectures, systems, models, readings
Pragmatist	Prefer to apply new learning to actual practice to see if they work, such as laboratories, observations, field work

(Honey & Mumford, 2000)

Barron (2004) investigated CHC students' learning experiences and their preferred learning styles in Australian tertiary education. The findings indicate that the majority of CHC students from CHC countries are reflectors, and some are theorists. Fewer CHC students are pragmatists and activists are even fewer. This contrasts with students with non-CHC background, where there are more activists than the rest, and reflectors are the least common. This learning difference indicates some significant learning issues and problems occur in their learning in Australian tertiary education, including degree of participation and CHC students' preference in learning.

Many CHC students are unaware of their own preferred learning styles and the differences of teaching and learning approaches between their Western school and the ones at home. They find it difficult to adapt to new learning approaches and teaching styles in the Australian classroom. In regard to CHC learning, however, Barker (2002) argues that CHC students' learning styles should not be prejudged based on their nationality, because of the diversity and immense size of the education system of China. This notion matches what has been claimed at the beginning of the section, that students' learning behaviours should not be assumed. A focus of this study is different teaching and learning approaches taken and understood by teachers and students, in relation to the cultural beliefs and norms embedded in different countries.

4.1.3 Chinese writing traditions

The characteristics of the Chinese writing tradition have been discussed broadly in the field of contrastive rhetoric, which examines the differences and similarities in writing across cultures. The nature of contrastive rhetoric research examines the written products only and ignores both the contrastive rhetorical contexts from which the L2 writers emerge and the process these writers may have gone through to produce a text (Leki, 1991). Several studies have indicated that the organisational patterns emphasised in school writing, students' pedagogical histories, broad political and historical contexts for writing, genre, purpose, task, topic and audience all need to be taken into consideration in text production (Leki, 1991; Soverino, 1993).

Regarding literacy learning, Carlson (1988) and Conner (1997) indicate that social values and ideologies embedded in the education systems have an impact on literacy pedagogy, for example, social harmony, respect of authority, loyalty and patriotism. Kaplan (1966) was the first to stress language and writing are cultural phenomena and indicated the need for exploring L2 writing from another perspective, which considers L2 learners' historical and cultural background in L1 writing.

Research studies in the field of acquisition of L2 writing indicate that L2 language writers tend to transfer writing concepts and conventions from L1 to L2 (Connor, 2003; Hinkel, 1997; Upton & Connor, 2001). Phung (2006) investigated Chinese and Mexican student perceptions of their native writing instruction and its implications for ESL teaching and learning in US. He showed that these two writing cultures have played an important role in forming the perceptions that students hold towards the purposes of writing and various writing tasks before they enter ESL classrooms. Based on this perspective, it is important to discover different writing

traditions in both their prior and new sociocultural environments when investigating students' experiences of learning to write.

Distinctive Chinese writing traditions are oriented by cultural, religious, social, historical and political conditions which include a range of the beliefs and values constituting writing within Chinese culture. Researchers on Chinese rhetorical practices tradition have observed that Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist precepts are associated with writing, and writers are expected to have authority, credibility and knowledge (Connor, 2003; Hinkel, 1999; Matalene, 1985).

Another reason for causing this implicitness is that the ideology underlying Chinese schooling practice regards the teacher as the moral example, authority and knowledge provider (Hinkel, 1999; Hvitfeldt, 1992). This cultural attitude leads Chinese students' L2 writing to be more ambiguous because fewer justification, persuasion, indirectness and reasoning devices are employed in writing (Carson, 1992; Hinkel, 1997; 1999). For example, rhetorical indirection in Chinese writing tradition has been seen as maintaining harmony and avoiding impositions on both the writer and the reader (Connor, 2003; Hinkel, 1997) and direct argumentation and persuasion are not common in Chinese writing discourse. Rather, politeness strategies play an important role in the development of written text (Hinkel, 1997; Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Both Fox (1994) and Stephens (1997) argue that culture-based writing norms should not be oversimplified in the interpretations of students' writing practices due to the inadequacy of relying on the assumption that students from the same cultural background adopt the same cultural writing approach. Personal experiences and backgrounds should also be taken into consideration. However, Connor (2003) indicates that explicit teaching of cultural differences is essential to acculturate

student writers from non-English backgrounds to enter to the target discourse community.

The next section moves to define the concept of plagiarism in different countries and how it relates to students' writing practice.

4.1.4 Originality and plagiarism

Is memorisation a valid way of learning? Introna and Hayes (2004) examine how some Chinese students have been taught to memorise precisely, in order to capture the exact expression and reality of the text. Yet if students memorise a text from the web and reproduce it in class or examination, this is considered in Western contexts as copying, cheating or plagiarism. There are diverse ways to define 'plagiarism' and plagiarism is often an unfamiliar concept for Chinese international students. It has been considered a problem in most Western institutions, with more than eight per cent of students found to pilfer large amounts of text from the web (Buckell, 2003). It has been estimated that twenty per cent of teachers ignore cases of cheating and do not report this to the authorities (Murray, 1996).

Many studies which are based in tertiary institutions have showed that there are differences between the Chinese students and Western students' attitude toward plagiarism (Banwell, 2003; Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Introna & Hayes, 2004; Murray, 1996; Brennan & Durovic, 2005). Although there are very few studies of plagiarism in secondary school settings, this issue is important for this study in terms of exploring whether Chinese students' attitudes towards presenting an 'original' piece of writing, as required of their Australian counterparts. It also helps to explain why these students may approach texts in a particular way when they search for

information, and the ways in which they engage with Australian media texts in order to write their own piece of argumentative writing.

Western schools follow Western academic written conventions and demand an accommodation of these conventions in ESL classes. In this respect, Chinese students may present unique problems that need to be addressed by the school community. Examples of plagiarism can be attributed to the pressure of expectation, lack of ability or cultural difference. Introna and Hayes (2005) argue that inappropriate assumptions about plagiarism and the way in which the new members of a community develop the skills to become full members of that community are problematic. Many scholars claim that students from non-Western backgrounds may have a different understanding of self, ways of communication, ownership of words and notion of authorship (Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Howard, 1999; Pickering, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Therefore, in this section I argue that the differences between expectations, norms and practices between students' previous educational background and academic written conventions in their Western discourse community can influence their ways of writing and using the supporting materials given to them.

Copying each other's work is also widespread for Chinese students. Some authors urge to clarify the borderline between students helping each other in acceptable ways and promoting citation techniques to help students avoid unintentional plagiarism (Taylor, 1997; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Some authors argue that Chinese students' tendency towards plagiarism is not necessarily a sign of dishonesty, but inappropriate assumptions about plagiarism can unwittingly construct international students as plagiarists (Introna & Hayes, 2004, Lyon, Barrett & Malcolm, 2006). The common practice of reproducing texts and class notes verbatim in China means that acknowledgement in Chinese learning contexts is not a goal or a

requirement. The concept of words and ideas as someone's property is unfamiliar in Chinese culture, and when students cite information. Studying Confucius and Mao's classic texts, students have learned to memorise and recite the texts without making any citation. In fact, a citation can be an insult in such a culture (Wang & Nash, 2000).

Banwell (2003) found the behaviour of citing authors' statements in their own words is uncomfortable for Chinese students. This is not only because the rhetorical written conventions in English are very different from those in mainland China, but it is also because of the Chinese writers' own cultural rationale. For example, Pennycook (1996) indicates that the ownership of texts is a Western notion and the importance of individual text ownership is not emphasized within Chinese culture. When some Chinese writers acknowledge the authorship of their own texts, they might be defined in their culture as deviant as the idea of textual ownership clashes with the cultural construction of self among Chinese writers (Pennycook, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

In order to contextualise students' behaviour, Ballard and Clanchy (1997) argue that the concept of plagiarism is alien in many countries, although these practices of acknowledgement to cited materials demonstrate scholarly respect and familiarity of established knowledge sources in Western countries. Many Western teachers teach Chinese students the concept of plagiarism based on Western academic norms, irrespective of students' attitude and positioning toward plagiarism. Based on the assumption that one's values are core to determining one's behaviour, Hornby and Pickering (2005) suggest the need to know the students' academic backgrounds and methods of learning is of obvious assistance in this.

Some authors indicate the greatest difficulty for ESL/EFL students can be the use of vocabulary or rhetorical techniques (Jordan, 1997; McKay, 1993). White (2000)

states that, “it is quite likely that the subtle control of this variety of resources is not fully within the competence of most non-native users of English” (p. 38).

Undoubtedly, electronic communication has brought the convenience of searching for different knowledge. But it also provides opportunities for plagiarism when students have a lack of ability, heavy workloads or pressure. The temptation of cutting and pasting the whole or part of an article from the web and putting it in an essay is real. Yet there is even some educational value in cutting and pasting, because it shows students’ understanding of relevant supporting material and the arguments they choose to put forth and present in a logical order (Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Lyon, Barrett, & Malcolm, 2006). For example, Lyon (2006) states that the behaviour of plagiarism comes from

...an approach in schools to the use of the Internet:
pupils are rightly encouraged to make use of this educational
resource, and earn credit for taking material off the web, but
not enough emphasis has, in the past, been placed on correctly
referencing the source. (p. 1)

Lyon suggests that plagiarism has an influence on students’ tendency to cheat in examinations and assignments. The emphasis on preparing students for examinations has led to a strong reliance on memorisation and rote learning and strengthened the tendency to accept authority (Brennan & Durovic, 2005; Ng, 2000) and cite information without acknowledgement. Collaborative learning behaviour is expected in Chinese culture (see Section 4.1.1), however, it is the Chinese teacher’s job to educate students about the line between collaborative and independent work, in order to avoid the moral or ethical issue of copying.

The term ‘patchwriting’ refers to a form of text production whereby students take whole sentences or paragraphs from a text and paraphrase them by changing a few words, which may also be considered as plagiarism. Hornby and Pickering (2005)

suggest that patchwriting is a relatively common behaviour among academics, while other authors have tried to challenge the notion of patchwriting as a form of plagiarism. For example, Howard (1999) argues that patchwriting is another form of imitation and should be considered as a normal part of the learning and writing process that everyone experiences at some stage. Lake (2000) even claims that the use of patchwriting text assignments can help to solve the problem of plagiarism, helping students to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable borrowing during the process.

The next section shifts the focus from students' different attitudes towards presenting original pieces of writing to some primary factors involved in students' second language acquisition and learning. This perspective is needed to help understand why some students take less time to break through the language limitations that hinder their learning and advancement in another language and in mainstream writing educational contexts.

4.2 RESEARCH ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND WRITING

How do limited-English-proficient students master a new Discourse for their learning in a second language (L2)? Gee (1996) advises that a Discourse which is acquired can facilitate meta-knowledge, but warns, "you cannot overtly teach anyone a Discourse, in a classroom or anywhere else" (p.139). As discussed in Section 3.1, Gee uses uppercase Discourse to refer to "social institutions" (p. 142) and the term is used to identify one as a member of a group about ways of using language, ways of thinking, behaving, valuing and feeling. Educators attempt to investigate various components that contribute to understanding of what is involved in promoting proficiency in student writing. Their research can be illuminating for us to understand the nature of

writing, learning to write and being a writer. This section involves three different directions.

Firstly, I will discuss different studies conducted in the field of second language writing to find out what other researchers and educators have investigated in relation to students' written texts, writing process and learning contexts. Secondly, I will briefly discuss the field of second language acquisition (SLA), although it is not directly the subject of my study, it provides a clear picture of how students acquire their L2 as background knowledge and helps me to bear in mind important issues that influence students' second language writing experiences. Finally, I shift the attention to some studies about the relationship between L1 and L2, since language learners' thoughts are usually formulated in the L1.

Empirical research studies in L2 writing provide a rich source of findings from numerous investigations and different angles in the field. Some authors focus on how student writers participate in the learning and teaching process (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Connor, 1999; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Silva, Reichelt, Chikuma, Duval-Couetil, Mo, Velez-Rendon & Wood, 2003; Raimes, 1985), while there are some studies focused on students' own written products, for example, Brinton & Holten, (2001); Frodesen & Holten (2003); Ferris (2003); Hamp-Lyons (2003) and Leki (1990). It is important to note that other studies that are focused on the context of L2 writing both inside and outside the language classroom cannot be simply neglected (Connor, 1996; 2003; Grabe, 2003; Johns, 2003; Leki, 2003). Regarding the context of L2 writing, some issues can be explored to investigate, for example, genre and ESL instruction, the concept of contrastive rhetoric, relationship between reading and writing on research and practice.

I will first focus on the issues related to L2 writers' finished texts because no new L2 writers can become better writers simply by producing huge quantities of written products and make maximum progress without benefitting from the contribution of teachers and peers through a variety of strategies in their language classroom. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of different forms of teacher and peer responses to student written output (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 2003; Leki, 1990; Truscott, 1996) and the issue of teacher feedback will be discussed further in the next section.

Secondly, I would like to discuss the issues in relation to L2 writing courses as they are situated in specific places and learning contexts, which involve a lot of variation in regard to how writing is taught and what students are expected to learn. The discussion of students' learning contexts is related to a wide range of learning aspects, including both the voices of teachers and students, the issues surrounding students' written texts; designing an L2 writing syllabus and teachers' understanding of teaching L2 writing. We can use the design of a L2 writing syllabus as an example. Many researchers and educators focus on what students' needs are by investigating their learning goals, backgrounds, their abilities and language proficiencies and the examples of different data collection methods on the various needs are also provided (Brown, 1995; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Richards, 2001).

When exploring the studies on L2 writing, the role of instructional materials and texts cannot be neglected because it provides the foundation for students' understanding of writing and the use of language. According to Hyland (2003), the issue of instructional materials includes the knowledge of selecting supplementary published materials, finding and using texts, designing and evaluating writing materials. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) indicate that for teachers to design

materials for the writing class, they need to demonstrate professional competence and find creative activities to meet students' needs. Therefore, there are good reasons for teachers to lean heavily on existing source materials in syllabus design and lesson planning.

Having discussed different areas of second language writing, I now shift to the issue of students' second language acquisition, looking at how they acquire their L2 and its relation to writing. Many researchers basically agree that younger learners are better at learning languages (Collier, 1995; Kinsbourne, 1975; Krashen, 1973; Singleton & Lengyel, 1995). Regardless of the exact timing of lateralization or other related factors, evidence is strong that most people who acquire a second language after puberty retain an accent in the L2. Some of the earliest studies of the effect of age on second language acquisition (SLA) focused on proving or disproving Lenneberg's (1967) critical period hypothesis. Lenneberg claims that the acquisition of language is an innate process determined by biological factors, which limit the critical period for acquisition of a language from roughly two years of age to puberty, which makes post-adolescent language acquisition difficult. This suggests one reason why Chinese international students encounter such difficulties when they transfer to VCE.

Critical period studies usually focus on child-adult differences and have suggested that younger learners, still operating within the critical period, should be superior learners. However, studies of oral language skill acquisition by children of different ages have led to the conclusion that, initially, older learners acquire faster than younger children (Collier, 1995). But individual variation means that every adolescent will perform differently in fundamental features of writing skills and different genres.

Regarding the relation between L1 and L2, Collier (1995) indicates that a learner's cognitive style, socioeconomic background, formal schooling in L1, and many other factors can have an effect on students' writing. Many studies explore the relationship between SLA and L1 learning (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Conner, 2003; McKay, 1993; Myers, 1998). For example, Myers (1998) points out that "the deepest apprehension of physical realities would be most naturally conceptualized and manipulated through the mother tongue" (p. 8). This reflects Conner's (2003) perception of how L1 influences L2 writing. He indicates that L2 writers transfer patterns and styles from their first language L1 to L2 because their thoughts are formulated in the first language. McKay (1993) narrows down his study from L2 to English language saying,

part of learning a language is learning that language divides up reality...English may not have categories that exist in their native language or ...the native language has items that do not exist in English. (p. 4)

Obviously, these categories are not simply a matter of translation, but complex second language discourse components. Metaphors are also embedded in the sociocultural contexts of different languages. As Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) illustrate,

When we speak our first language, we are constantly...drawing on vocabulary from a wide variety of contexts...When we learn a new language, we invariably gain exposure to that language in a more limited range of contexts than those in ...our first language. Furthermore, our opportunities to see that language will likely to be limited in the same ways. Therefore, the aspects of language proficiency that we need to master or even have the opportunity to learn depend on the particulars of these circumstances. (p. 206)

Pennington (1993) elaborates the importance of sociocultural contexts in L2 learning. She conducted a survey of writing attitudes and activities among Chinese graduate students at a U.S. university, and found that Chinese students sometimes use

‘thinking-Chinese’ writing patterns when they write in English. He wrote, “the majority of the subjects admitted to thinking in Chinese to some extent while writing in English” (p. 84), indicating that part of their L2 writing experience is constructed in sociocultural contexts through L1.

Friendlander (1990) explores the relationship between 28 Chinese-speaking university students’ writing and topic knowledge. He shows that ESL writers plan more effectively and produce texts with better content when they write using the language in which they learned about the topic. He suggests that if the topic knowledge was codified in their first language, it may be easier to access via that language. Deprived of the rich resources provided through knowledge in the first language, it is understandable that L2 writers are tempted to resort to harvesting needed words and expressions from second language texts. The results also relate to why many Chinese international students prefer to borrow words and expressions from other authors, often regarded as plagiarism.

It is important to note that there are also many other factors which affect learning of L2 writing, for example, time; exposure; a real need for English; and variety of input (Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Moon, 2000; Whiteman, 1981). For example, writing performance in both L1 and L2 is also determined by the exposure to extensive reading and effective writing techniques. Byrne (1979) claims that there are important differences between L1 and L2 writing, particularly in the learning situation. However, unless L2 or foreign language writers are truly bilingual, they deal not only with the usual problems of writing different kinds of texts, but also with the problems in a language in which they may have limited competence.

To conclude, the area of L2 writing is related to many different aspects as discussed above. The exploration of different variables which influence students’

writing proficiency and learning process significantly has helped me in the process of designing the study and analysing the data. The next section moves the attention to the discussion of empirical studies on different approaches of scaffolding writing.

4.3 STUDIES ON SCAFFOLDING WRITING

The term ‘scaffolding’ was first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to describe a strategy for making knowledge explicit, to provide access to socially desired forms of language. It also “offer(s) learners systematic explanations of how language functions in various social contexts” (Burns, 2001, p. 200). The concept of scaffolding in the academic writing process includes a number of features which have been developed in different scaffolding approaches (see Section 3.2.2). Social constructivist views support the need for adults to assist children through scaffolding in their learning process. Many researchers have stressed the use of scaffolding writing as a means to produce high levels of reasoning in students’ argumentation and discourse, while learner autonomy and flexible support are also promoted (Coleman, 1998; King, 1990; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994).

Wilkinson and Silliman (1994) have identified two styles of scaffolding, directive and supportive. Directive scaffolding is the most common and reflects the type of classroom discourse in which teachers control the discourse and predetermine acceptable answers. On the other hand, supportive scaffolding focuses on reciprocal teaching and avoids closing down the interaction. The activities are more dialogue-based and teachers usually adopt an active learning approach. Fisher (2006) indicates that no matter which types of scaffolding writing are used, the underlying premise of scaffolding is that only temporary support is provided and there is a handover of

independence. That is, scaffolding writing is a process for teachers to build a bridge from what the students know to what the students can do by themselves.

Many (2002) argues that scaffolded instruction underscores both the role of the teacher and students as “co-participants in negotiating meaning and in informing the nature of the instructional conversations.” (p. 379). He indicates that different kinds of moves occurring in classroom practice would influence the degree of openness. Regarding the process of scaffolding and control, Fisher (2006) observed different teaching moves used by three different teachers in order to find out whether scaffolding includes a stage where control is handed over to the student writers. In his study, little evidence was found of this handover. He argues that this handover of control is however essential when the students are learning written conventions and developing confidence to using them.

A lot of research has been done on scaffolding writing in different genres (Burns, 2001; Felton & Herko, 2004; So, 2004) and a few studies have centred on argumentative writing (Cotterall & Cohen, 2003; Nussbaum, 2002; Weber, 2001). For example, Cotterall and Cohen (2003) investigated and guided a group of intermediate students through the process of producing their first academic essays at tertiary level. Instead of using a pre-existing model of scaffolding, they created their own scaffolding, which mainly focuses on language and structure, while generating the students’ sense of ownership. The scaffolding structure was as follows:

1. Topics linked to concurrent study themes
2. Predetermined essay structure
3. Assistance locating appropriate texts and data
4. Staging of instruction

5. Modelling of composition process
6. Focus on language
7. Regular feedback from peers and tutors

(based on Cotterall & Cohen, 2003, p. 158)

Based on their findings, Cotterall and Cohen argue that the scaffolding approach they adopted promoted learner autonomy by focusing on an authentic task, making the expectations of the task explicit, and providing flexible support for them to reach the target performance. Their study shares some similarities with Weber's (2001) research on a concordance and genre-informed approach to ESP essay writing. They both stress that learner autonomy is promoted through a scaffolding process and helped students to address particular areas of their own writing difficulties. Weber takes a further step of giving suggestions about activities for genre analysis and investigate teachers' attitude to genre-based learning.

Nussbaum (2002) conducted a study on scaffolding argumentative writing in the social studies classroom with a group of Year Six students. The approach guided students to be explicit about how reasons and evidence related to their claims. This study was conducted in a class for a year to develop students' concepts and practice of providing opinions, evidence, reasons and supporting examples. Nussbaum claims that one advantage of the scaffolding he used in the classroom is that the variety of content materials and the approach catered to students with different abilities.

To sum up the empirical studies reviewed above and the discussion of pedagogical approaches in Section 3.2.2, there are some significant findings on scaffolding writing. First, explicit teaching plays a major role in classroom instruction about how texts are structured and their social purpose. Second, it helps students to build up the relationship between their beliefs, attitudes and prior knowledge. Finally,

scaffolding writing can promote learners' autonomy and flexible support for different students' needs to use these conventions in individual ways. The next section moves to the role and implications of teacher feedback to students' writing.

4.4 TEACHER FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS' WRITING

Second language learners' ability to write well is not a skill acquired naturally, but it is learned through formal instruction. When students encounter challenges in academic writing, teacher feedback is one way of providing assistance. Teacher feedback has been widely adopted in the process approach in ESL writing classrooms in North America (Ferris, 2003). The process of writing and redrafting assists learners in comprehending the context, building a sense of audience and understanding the expectations of the discourse community. It means that students have the opportunity to receive and review teacher feedback and submit revised versions of their written texts.

There are different forms of response to both L1 and L2 writing, such as teacher-student conferences, peer feedback and teacher written feedback. The affective advantage of peer feedback in the ESL writing classes was suggested by Zhang (1995), who used a native language composition class as an example in which peer feedback was widespread, more appealing and less threatening and disempowering than teacher feedback. However, Ferris (2003) argues that both teacher-student conferences and peer feedback are often alternatives to teacher written feedback, but they should not replace teacher written feedback. He suggests that they "are qualitatively and practically different from one another and that all three forms have their legitimate roles within L2 writing instruction" (p. 122-123).

Besides the different forms of responses to student writing, teacher feedback provides individualized attention to students. As Ferris (2003) points out, individual attention is hardly given to students under normal classroom conditions. According to Hyland (2003), there are different forms of teacher written feedback, for example, commentary, rubrics, minimal marking, taped commentary and electronic feedback. It is also recommended by some researchers that these different types of feedback need to take individual and contextual variables into account, such as the needs, desires and abilities of individual student writers (Ferris, 2003; Reid, 1994). As Ferris (2003) says, “one size does not fit all” (p. 125).

Many studies pay attention to different aspects of student writing. Some studies have focused on the discussion of grammar and error correction in L2 writing classes (Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Truscott, 1996). Leki (1990) points out that L2 learners particularly favour feedback on their grammar. Due to students’ prior learning experiences and their cultural value that accuracy is important to their written products, she indicates that error-free feedback becomes a major concern for many L2 learners. Zamel (1985) urges teachers to give feedback on content and organisation in the early stage of the writing process and to move to sentence-level correction at the end. On the other hand, researchers like Johns (1990) and Silva (1990) place the importance of feedback on students’ ideas, different forms and rhetorical perspectives.

Lee (2003) explored L2 writing teachers’ perspectives, practices and problems regarding error feedback. A questionnaire was administered to 206 secondary English teachers and 19 of them had follow-up telephone interviews. In his findings, teachers tended to treat error feedback as their responsibility, however, they were not convinced that their effort paid off in terms of student improvement. Meanwhile, teachers’ error correction practices are not always consistent with their beliefs and

their feedback does not always help students develop self-editing strategies and become independent editors. As suggested by Ferris (2003), different contexts for different research projects on teacher feedback offer different results because of researchers' interpretations of their findings, which may be inconclusive and contradictory. In order to avoid this, Goldstein (2001) suggests that teacher commentary, student reactions to commentary and student revisions should be triangulated with each other in order to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

Despite many studies on feedback to students' writing, whether teacher feedback to student writing has an effect on the quality of student writing has been questioned by many researchers (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981). For example, Zamel (1985) points out that,

ESL writing teachers misread student texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising the texts.
(p. 86)

This kind of feedback would make students find it difficult to make their own judgement in redrafting their written texts. Due to the inconclusive and even contradictory findings in the area of teachers' comments to student writing, Goldstein (2001) stresses that three elements, including teacher commentary, student reactions to commentary, and student revision, should be taken into consideration when investigating teacher commentary in ESL contexts.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The discussion in this chapter helps the study to discover the prominent factors and issues which may relate to Chinese international students' writing experiences and the consequences for their writing performance. For example, I have discussed many elements that may influence Chinese English learners' thinking model on their discourse formation in learning argumentative writing in the Western learning context, such as contrasting cultural perspectives on these students' learning behaviours, their learning style preferences and the nature of Chinese writing traditions and students' different attitudes towards plagiarism.

Regarding students' knowledge in cognitive development, L1 influences and certain characteristics of successful L2 learners were also discussed. Many aspects and studies about L2 writing were also explored. Furthermore, empirical studies of different scaffolding writing approaches and types of classroom discourse were presented in relation to the control between teachers and students and promotion of learner autonomy. This involved focusing on an authentic task, making the expectation of task explicit and providing flexible support for students.

Finally, teacher feedback and its effects on student writing were explored as a potentially significant component in students' successful development as L2 writers. The value of teacher feedback and contradictory points of view between different researchers on feedback were also discussed in this chapter. The next chapter moves to the design and methodology of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

5.0 OVERVIEW

Mackey and Gass (2005) state that research “is a way of finding out answers to questions” (p. 1), furthermore, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) stress the importance of a fit between research questions and the methodological design. This chapter explains the research design, the choices of the methodological tools for the collection of data according to the research questions and my perspectives on the nature of the contexts.

In this study, a qualitative discourse-based approach has been employed using a case study methodology, (Merriam, 1998; Nunan, 1992; Yin, 1993,1994) along with ethnographic perspectives which will be further explored in the next sections. The methodological framework was influenced by the research using sociocultural theories of literacy practices and discourse analysis. These perspectives include an understanding of language use in specific social and cultural contexts and representation of identity (Freebody, 2003; Gee, 1996, 1999; Hamilton, 2005). To be more specific, it was also a case-study comparison of two different groups’ perceptions about writing, namely international Chinese students and ESL teachers in one particular VCE English college context, which was designed to maximize success in the VCE for international students. The Victorian education system and the nature of VCE ESL were discussed in Section 2.3 and 2.4.

Regarding the case study approach applied in this study, many researchers claim that it is particularly relevant to investigation of actual real life practices (Freebody, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1994) and helps to reveal the uniqueness of the teaching

and learning in its context (Orr, 2002). Adopting a case study approach in this research study, I sought to identify what challenges Chinese international students perceive when learning to write various argumentative genres and analysing media texts in the Writing Task in VCE ESL, and how they deal with the challenges. A case study is also an appropriate tool for revealing the underlying reasons that generated these students' feelings and perceptions of their experiences. As the study is qualitative and non-experimental, it relied heavily on the descriptions and explanations about not only these students' perceptions but also their ESL teachers' perceptions.

In the first section of the chapter, the process of the research design, investigation of the main variables relating to the study, and the research methods used to answer the research questions are discussed. The second section moves to discussion of the process of gaining access to the research site, the selection process of the site and recruitment of participants in this study, and ethical issues for conducting the study in the research site. The third section focuses on description of the primary data sources and the reasons why they were utilized. The discussions of different methods used for data analysis and limitation of the study are made in the fourth and fifth sections respectively.

5.1 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

...qualitative research approaches have been aligned with a notion of subjectivity, they are sometimes offered as means of recognising or 'capturing' the unpredictabilities, idiosyncrasies and quirkiness built into the experiential 'life-world' of human beings.

(Freebody, 2003, p. 37)

In terms of methodology, this research draws heavily upon qualitative research traditions. This decision explains many reasons, for example, to consider the existence

of deep and hidden meaning structures; to encompass the idea of truth in society and to study the life world of human beings as it is experienced individually (Fink, 2000). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define qualitative methodology as “supported by the interpretive paradigm, which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and everchanging” (p. 2). Many researchers discuss the strengths of qualitative research, for example, Hammersley (1992) makes the following claims about the value of qualitative research:

- It is relatively flexible.
- It studies what people are doing in their natural context.
- It is well placed to study processes as well as outcomes.
- It studies meanings as well as causes.

(p. 125)

Reinforcing the value of qualitative research, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) point out its openness, saying that

The openness of qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right. Qualitative researchers avoid simplifying social phenomena and instead explore the range of behaviour and expand their understanding of the resulting interactions.

(p. 3)

According to Silverman (2006), the greatest strength of qualitative research is its ability “to get under the surface in order to understand people’s perceptions and experiences” (p.5) and to “analyze what actually happens in naturally occurring settings” (p. 351). He indicates that an important strength of qualitative research is that it particularly applies where the researcher sets out to record faithfully the “experiences” of some, usually disadvantaged groups (p. 5). For these reasons, the study used a qualitative lens to explore what actually happened when these students dealt with unfamiliar ways of learning argumentative writing in VCE ESL, rather than focusing on their incapacity, inexperience and confusion in their own writing and weak classroom participation.

Silverman (2006) claims that a central feature of qualitative research is its focus on theoretical interest rather than technical or procedural preferences. This means that there is a particular relationship between theory and practice and that relationship is one of the main interests in the study. In Section 3.1, I discussed Gee's (1996) definition of d/Discourses to elaborate how discourses operate in different discourse communities. He claims literacy learning to be "mastery of a secondary Discourse" (p. 143) where operating in secondary discourse communities involves interaction with people who may share different knowledge and experiences. When discovering how Chinese international students accommodate the dominant norms of the target discourse community (which can mean secondary or additional discourse community), this study uses a descriptive and interpretive approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to understand how an academic discourse community uses its discursual conventions to initiate new members. In the study, these students are considered as new members of the VCE ESL academic discourse community.

Regarding the notion of ethnography in my study, Barton and Hamilton (1998) view literacy practices as "the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives" (p. 6) and stress that ethnography is used to study real-world settings by focusing on a particular place at a particular time. Their statement has an association with Green and Bloome's (1997) definition of ethnographic practices. They state that ethnographic practices are like any set of social and cultural practices when "people in a site act and react to each other in the pursuit of an agenda: including research agenda, educational agenda, and social, cultural and institutional change agenda" (p. 199).

In terms of methodology, this research did not draw heavily on ethnographic research tradition, but adopted ethnographic perspectives. This study explored the

challenges of Chinese international students in a private college, in dealing with tasks required for the Writing Task in VCE ESL. These challenges centred on their experience of learning argumentative writing in a L2 classroom, including their values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. Due to the nature of the study, the students were not asked to take any contextualized English test to check their English proficiency because the study was focused on these students' real-life learning experiences and what they need to know, do, predict and interpret in order to participate in the construction of writing in VCE ESL.

As discussed earlier, a case study approach has been adopted in this study. Here I will shift attention to the appropriateness of using this approach. Freebody (2003) describes the nature of a case study approach as focusing on “one particular instance of educational experience and attempt(ing) to gain theoretical and professional insights from a full documentation of that instance” (p. 81). Elaborating on the significance of case study research, Brown and Rodgers (2002) indicate that it is an “intensive study of the background, current status and environment interactions of a given social unit, an individual, a group, an institution or a community...” (p. 21). This approach is appropriate since large numbers of Chinese international students with diverse backgrounds were the target group of the study. Moreover, Yin's (2003) notion also fits well with this study because he suggests that case studies are preferred when “how” and “why” questions are being posed and the contextual features receive careful attention.

Regarding the selection of data sources, it is important that the choice of methods should reflect the research topic, the overall research strategy and the broader, societal context in which methods are located and deployed (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In order to elicit rich and reliable data for this study, the data collected should encompass

a wide range of aspects in the teaching and learning processes. The adoption of multiple methods, which drew on a variety of research techniques, requires the study to explore the research questions from different angles and thereby enhances internal reliability. This is based on the notion of triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Freebody, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Mason, 1996). Triangulation means to gather different kinds of data bearing on the same issue, which commonly yield contradictory or “discrepant” results which may fit the study to meet reality (Gillham, 2000, p. 45). It is one of the basic methods used for ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the reality of the situation and an agreed construct perceived by the observer and the participants. It is also seen as a search for convergence of the information on findings and concepts for inductive qualitative research (Gillham, 2000; Wiersma, 1995). Therefore, six principle methods of data collection were used in the study and these were individual, audiotaped interviews with Chinese international students and ESL teacher participants, audiotaped classroom observations, focus group interviews with the students, students’ argumentative written texts and school documents.

Regarding transcription of data, I transcribed all audiotaped sessions for analysis. This included all interviews with students, teachers and classroom observation. It is important to note that transcripts are not an exact representation of the interview. As Kvale (1996) states,

“[t]ranscripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes. Transcripts are decontextualised conversations, they are abstractions, as topographical maps are abstractions from the original landscape from which they are derived.

(p. 165)

Therefore, the transcription itself is already an act of interpretation since the researcher interprets data in the form of word and sentences while transcribing (Kavle,

1996; Locke, 2004). Because the interviews with the students were mainly conducted in Mandarin as the participants preferred, a careful translation process was employed. As a Mandarin native speaker and an ESL teacher, I translated all the transcripts with the students into English and found an accredited Chinese- English translator from National Australian Association of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to check the accuracy of the English translation of the Chinese transcription. The translator had a PhD in the field of English language education and had taught in VCE ESL. Her understanding of context of the VCE ESL helped me to make appropriate decisions for word choices in translation.

After transcribing and translating all the audiotapes of the interviews and some parts of the classroom observations which were significant because they showed the focus of teaching or pedagogy, I started to select the segments and highlight aspects of interactions which were theoretically interesting to this study. The transcripts from the interviews and classroom observations were not only analysed qualitatively with reference to relevant literature but also compared to the findings of the students' written texts. The conventions were based on the transcription notation used in Conversation Analysis (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). The following list was the basic conventions used in this study.

- (3.0) timed pauses (3 seconds)
- (()) details of the conventional scene
- () utterance that cannot be retrieved
- ... gap in data transcribed

In this study, the processes of qualitative data analysis include data sorting, reduction, display, construction and conclusion drawing (Jorgensen, 1989; Miles & Huberman,

1994; Yin, 2003). These strategies were used to analyse data from the individual interviews with both students and ESL teachers and the focus group interviews with students. Discourse analysis methods from Gee (1996; 1999) were also further used to interpret the data and link to the relevant literature in order to answer the research questions. The next section proceeds to discuss explicitly about what was considered during the recruitment process of the research site and the participants and the reasons for making such decisions.

5.2 RECRUITMENT PROCESS

This section is divided into three sub-sections in order to explain how the researcher gained access to the data and describes in full detail how the participants were invited to take part in this study and how their contact details were obtained. The purposes and the criteria for selecting the research site and both the teacher and the student participants are also included.

5.2.1 Gaining access

Official approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) of Monash University in July 2006 and the principal of the senior secondary school. Both the approval letter from SCERH and that of the principal of the senior secondary school are provided in Appendices B and C. This case study took place in a private senior secondary college in Melbourne from July 2006 to December 2006, which was the second semester for Year 12 students. Complying with the requirements of SCERH, explanatory statements and informed consent forms were prepared for both teachers and students, along with the permission letter from the principal of the senior secondary school.

Before official approval was obtained to conduct research in a specific school site, for a few months I investigated different types of senior secondary schools in the state of Victoria, including the government, private and Catholic schools to find an appropriate site. Through personal contacts, I talked to many VCE teachers who were working in different types of secondary schools about their opinions regarding the nature of these schools and the one(s) they thought were the best for my study. Since the purpose of the study is to explore the different challenges that Chinese international students encounter in reading and writing the tasks required for the Writing Task (the final examination in Year 12 in VCE ESL), therefore, careful selection of the school site would ensure that the writing experiences from a range of Chinese international students across different parts of China and were represented. Through careful consideration, I therefore targeted a private senior secondary school which had a large population of Chinese international students from different parts of mainland China and which provided intensive programs to support these students in the VCE.

Before gaining access to the school, some ethical issues needed to be taken into consideration. The student participants' ages were assumed to be between 17 and 20 years old, and students under the age of 18 were unable to consent to their participation in this study for themselves. Their parents might be in their home countries or if the parents were in Melbourne, their ability to read the explanatory statement in English would be variable since they were from a non-English speaking background. These problems were solved by the following procedures. Firstly, the students who were under the age of 18 would ask their home stay guardians to give their consent if they wished to participate. Secondly, if the students lived in college accommodation, the college principal would be considered as their guardian to give

consent. Students who were over 18 did not need the consent of their parents or guardians and they were asked to sign the consent forms. Finally, a Chinese version of the guardian consent form and a letter that explained the nature of the study in plain language and what was required for their children to participate in this study, were provided before data collection began. The explanatory statements for both the students and teachers are presented in Appendices D and E as examples and the Chinese version is also provided.

In the next section, the nature of the research site chosen for this study will be discussed.

5.2.2 Research site

It is important to note that studies conducted in different sites would have different findings as there are some differences between students in different types of schools. For example, students in private schools are usually relatively privileged compared to the students in government schools. Therefore, a number of aspects were taken into consideration by the researcher. First, the main criterion was that the institution should be one that was reputed to consider and fulfil the various academic and cultural needs of a large number of international students from different education systems and cultural backgrounds. It was hoped that such a senior secondary school would be positive and enthusiastic to participate in this study and willing to give support during data collection such as providing curriculum documents, publicity materials and written samples, as well as answering any questions on discrepant data.

Second, a substantial number of Chinese international students and ESL teachers was another criterion for choosing an appropriate school in order to seek maximum variation of samples (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003; Gillham, 2000;

Patton, 1990). There are many government schools in Melbourne which only have one ESL class with less than or approximately ten ESL students in every Year level. The emphasis of this criterion was to choose a small sample of individual cases out of the available population of students, which would maximize diversity in order to reach '*heterogeneity*' between different subjects (Cohen et al., 2003). A large number of Chinese international students in many ESL classes provided by the particular college would give me the opportunity to select the students from different backgrounds and look at their learning issues from a wider range of angles. I checked three senior secondary schools located in different areas in the state of Victoria and one private senior secondary school, Tower College (pseudonym) was chosen in this case study.

Tower College has been part of the education landscape in the state of Victoria for over 80 years. According to the College Prospectus (2006), the institution claims a high academic reputation: 83 percent of the students in the 2004 intake were offered a university place at a number of different tertiary institutions, with 30 percent receiving an offer from the University of Melbourne and 16 percent from Monash University. 22 percent of the students achieved an ENTER score above 90. The college also claimed to offer preparation for university success and to provide a particular intensive yet flexible approach to the State curriculum and pedagogical methods which are aimed at preparing both local and international students for university success.

The College was appropriate for this study because it had large numbers of international students with diverse backgrounds and was focused on catering to their language and learning needs. According to the school document, in the student nationality report in 2006, 62 percent of students were from China, 12% were local

students, 13% were from south Asia and 10% were from South East Asia, which provides a wide representation of cultural diversity in the VCE program.

After obtaining ethical approval from Monash University to conduct research at the specific school site, I made an appointment with the principal from Tower College to discuss this study and sought his consent to conduct research in the school. He was keen to give his consent to the study and was delighted to provide assistance, meanwhile, referred me to the ESL coordinator of the VCE program.

When I first walked into the school, I noticed slogans on the wall encouraging students to speak English to each other. Students' name tags were printed the slogan "speak English to me". However, I found that a large population of international students from Asia tended to speak their native languages with their classmates and friends. As mentioned above, the main population in this school was students from mainland China and there were also many students from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia who also spoke Chinese, Cantonese or Hokkein (Chinese dialects) in the school. In spite of the slogans, Chinese language and its various dialects were dominant everywhere in the lifts, corridors, campus canteen, classrooms and meeting rooms.

5.2.3 Participants

Silverman and Marvasti (2008) point out that one of the strengths of qualitative research design is that it allows greater flexibility than in most quantitative research designs. Mason (1996) also states that "Theoretical or purposive sampling is a set of procedures where the researcher manipulates their analysis, theory, and sampling activities interactively during the research process, to a much greater extent than in statistic sampling" (p. 100). Therefore, purposeful sampling principles (Lynch, 1996;

Mason, 1996; Neuman, 2000) were adopted to help the study gain access to appropriate and detailed sources of data and investigate the answers of the research questions thoroughly. Ten Chinese international students doing Unit 4, three ESL teachers and the rest of their VCE classes were involved in the study. The main purpose for choosing the ten focal students was to cover students with different levels of English proficiency and to maximize coverage of students' perceptions by checking the background data sheet filled in by the students who were interested in participation in the study. The possibility of some students' withdrawing during data collection was another consideration for choosing this number of students.

The teachers

With the approval from the school principal, I introduced the study to VCE ESL teachers at the beginning of a staff meeting. ESL teachers, who were willing to be observed while teaching, including those willing to be interviewed, would collect explanatory statements along with consent forms, from a table near the exit of the staff meeting room. Teachers who agreed to take part in the study were asked to add their contact details in the signed consent form and they were given pseudonyms in the study. A box was placed in the staff room for teachers who were interested in taking part to return their consent forms and I collected the consent forms in the box after one week. Teachers' participation in the study was vital for a number of reasons:

- They would enable access to classes of students
- They would provide a model of the school's practices in teaching VCE ESL
- They would be invited to participate in thinking about their own practices
- They would also be invited to talk about their perceptions about Chinese international students' challenges in learning to read and write tasks required for the Writing Task

Three VCE ESL teachers out of twelve and their classes provided the context for the

exploration of the teaching of argumentative writing. In the selection of the three ESL teachers, criteria like age, gender, teaching experience and background were taken into consideration. After a brief discussion with the six ESL teachers who signed their consent forms to take part in this study, three teachers, Colin, Meg and Kelly, had been chosen. The following Table 5.1 demonstrates their teaching background.

Table 5.1 ESL teachers' backgrounds

	Colin	Meg	Kelly
Age	early 50s	mid 40s	30s
Gender	Male	Female	Female
Years of teaching ESL students	26	10	5
Schools where the teachers had taught	This private college was the first place where he was offered a job and he has been teaching there throughout his teaching career	Did emergency teaching in government schools; this private college was the first place where she was offered a job	Taught at the British Council in Penang, Malaysia for two and a half years. Age range from 4 to 40 years old. After this, she did Casual Relief Teaching (CRT) work. Then got a contract position in this secondary college and taught Year 7-11.
Professional roles	Panel chairperson of the new VCE ESL and an assessor of Year 12 examination in the state of Victoria ten years previously	An ESL coordinator for many years in the college	She used to teach students who were doing foundation programs in the college and began to teach VCE ESL one year previously

These three teachers were purposefully selected to cover different backgrounds and teaching experiences. For example, Colin did not feel like changing his job after twenty-six years teaching in this school, although the private education system did not appeal to him. Based on 26 years of teaching experience in Tower College, Colin had noticed changes in terms of curriculum; teaching approaches and the school's long

association with overseas education. He supposed that adapting to these changes demonstrates his ability to enrich his pedagogical repertoire. As he said,

We have a much more, I suppose, specifically focused curriculum and syllabuses. I've got a much stronger sense of specific skills that I am trying to get the students to develop in terms of language control and analytical skills, organisation skills.

(Colin, Interview p. 1)

Courses have changed and students have also changed in terms of the backgrounds they have come from. He felt the college had always marketed itself on the extra assistance, availability of staff, a more rigorous approach to getting through a curriculum, planning for exams, providing exam technique and exam advice.

Another teacher, Meg had very different experience from Colin. In her interview, she demonstrated her great interest in teaching in a senior high school and enjoyed teaching international students. As she said, she enjoyed "adult sort of conversation" (Meg, Interview p. 1) and preferred to work with more mature students. However, she also indicated that the biggest pressure in teaching Year 12 was the heavy assessment workload. A hundred pieces of work had to be assessed in a short period of time; this did not occur too often in other year levels.

Kelly was the youngest ESL teacher in the VCE program in this college and had previously taught in the foundation program in this school. When I asked her to make a comparison between government and private colleges, she pointed out the class size and the languages students spoke. In the government school where she taught before, there were eight to ten ESL students in one class, and students had to speak English every day. They were not so reliant on their first language due to the smaller population of international students. In Tower College, there was a very different student population compared to the government school – twenty to twenty-four ESL students in one class and her students were mainly Chinese. She perceived that they

did not have many local friends as this college targeted international students and claimed the main focus in the curriculum was “preparing them [the students] for exams” (Kelly, interview p. 2).

These three teachers provided different perspectives about Tower College and teaching in VCE ESL which was useful during classroom observation and data analysis. The next section moves to the discussion of student participants.

The students

The maximum variation sampling principle developed by Patton (1990) is adopted for this study. It places great emphasis on choosing a small sample of individual cases, which maximizes diversity so that facets of the subject matter can emerge out of ‘heterogeneity’ (p. 172). This principle matches the objectives of my study because it allows me to investigate the Chinese international students’ learning experience of argumentative writing from different angles as a result of their differences in terms of their writing ability, length of studying abroad and their writing experience both in China and Australia. Students from the teacher participants’ ESL classes were recruited in this study.

Before I began to recruit student participants, the three teacher participants, Colin, Meg and Kelly, introduced me and the study to their classes. Before actual classroom observation and interviews, they gave me an opportunity to sit in their classes for two weeks to familiarise myself with the students and to observe what and how they taught in the class. I gradually got to know the students and observed their interactions with their classmates and the teachers. Due to our common language background, we usually chatted in Chinese during class breaks about their backgrounds, learning experiences and their future plans. Many students from diverse

backgrounds in the same class also came to seek my suggestions about the selection of majors for undergraduate courses and their personal issues and learning difficulties.

After two weeks, when I introduced the study to the students at the beginning of VCE ESL lessons, almost every student from mainland China signed their consent forms straight away to show their willingness to participate. I had assumed that there would be some students under eighteen years old who would need their guardians' consent. Later, I collected all the consent forms and found that every student from China was over eighteen, which allowed them to give their own consent in taking part in the study.

Regarding the selection process of the student participants, I have followed the collective case study framework (Stake, 2000) which allows several individual cases to be studied jointly in order to gain insight into a phenomenon. Stake also points out that the choices should provide the opportunity to learn and give variety without typifying the cases. Thus, the consideration of student participation in terms of availability, access, motivation in English learning, learning situations, and English proficiency were significant. It was hoped the study would also offer students an opportunity to learn and reflect on their own writing process.

With the help of the teachers, potential students in Year 12 were identified. Ten individual students from these three ESL teachers' classes were invited to participate in the in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. At the beginning, students who were interested in taking part were asked to complete a background data sheet for the selection purpose. The background sheet encompasses questions like students' English ability, why this college was chosen, purpose of undertaking VCE, feelings about English and learning background in China. Their answers were taken into consideration for selection of the final ten students. Table 5.2 shows the ten students'

names and their background information.

Table 5.2 Students' background information

Names	Age	Gender	Place of origin (China)	Date of Arrival to Melbourne	Studied in what types of schools in China before VCE	languages are mostly spoken outside and inside the school
Nancy	19	Female	Jiang Su Province	May, 2005	Public	Chinese/English
Victor	18	Male	Fu Jian Province	Feb, 2004	Did Year 10 in a public school in Melbourne	Chinese/English
Amy	18	Female	Chi Feng	Oct, 2004	Public	Chinese/English
Jim	19	Male	Shang Hai	Sep, 2004	Private	English
Terry	19	Male	Shang Hai	Jul, 2004	Public	Chinese
Magic	19	Male	Lien Yun Yang	Apr, 2005	Public	Chinese
Monica	19	Female	Shan Dong Province	Aug, 2004	Private	Chinese/English
Leo	19	Male	Shan Xi Province	Jan, 2004	Public	Chinese
Mary	18	Female	Shan Dong Province	Aug, 2004	Public	Chinese
Ann	19	Female	Wen Zhou	Jul, 2004	Public	Chinese

The students' names are pseudonyms and they were intentionally and purposefully selected by the researcher. According to the table above, the student participants include five males and five females. The students' places of origin cover big coastal cities, medium cities and rural areas in inner provinces in mainland China. Most students had been to public secondary schools in China. Two (Jim and Monica) went to private schools in China and one (Victor) undertook Year 10 in a government school in Melbourne. Jim was the only student in this study who had gone to an English medium school in Shang Hai from Year Six to Year Nine. His previous English school in China was similar to Tower College in terms of pedagogy and small class size.

These students had arrived in Melbourne between 2004 and 2005. Most of them were required to take the English preparation course before VCE when they

transferred to Tower College. The students' study details from their background data sheet are provided in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 The students' study context

Names	Reasons for choosing this school	Purposes of undertaking VCE	Distribution of time in each subject	Feelings about English	Any practice before coming to Melbourne
Nancy	The agent's recommendation , Gain more knowledge, flexible teaching approach	She wants to study with local students and enters the University of Melbourne	ESL 20% Chinese 25% Specialist math 30% Math method 15% Accounting 5% Chemistry 5%	Listening, fast, but ok Speaking, pass Reading, pass Writing, try to improve	No
Victor	Develop his English and challenge himself	Enter a university, gain more knowledge, apply for permanent residency (P.R.)	ESL 10% Chemistry 15% Physics 15% Specialist math 40% Math method 20%	Confident about English, understands more than 90% of what people say and is on TV. Reading is boring so he does not spend time on it and wants to improve writing	No
Amy	The agent's recommendation	Enter a university in Melbourne	ESL 20% Math method 10% Further math 20% Economics 10% Chinese 40%	She likes both listening and speaking, feels ok about reading, and likes writing, but feels having problems with grammar and vocabulary	Yes, in school through English class, especially she tried to memorise a lot of vocabulary
Jim	The agent's recommendation , better opportunity for future	Get into the University of Melbourne	ESL 10% University Biology 30% Specialist math 30% Math method 10% Chemistry 10% Biology 10%	Listening and speaking are alright and grammar needs to be improved.	Studied in an English mainstream school from Year 6 to 9
Terry	The agent's recommendation	Enter a university, apply for permanent residency	ESL 10% Chinese 30% Economics 10% Biology 20% Math method 30%	Listening and speaking are ok, reading and writing are difficult.	Studied IELTS course in China for 3 months, IELTS results R, S 4, W5, L5
Magic	Practise English, Go to a better university	Enter a university	ESL 20%, Economics 5%, Chemistry 20%, Math method 25% Specialist math 30%	Listening, ok Speaking, ok Reading, ok Writing, lazy to write	Yes, in school through English class. Passed IELTS test before coming to do VCE, Band 5.5
Monica	The agent's recommendation , better environment to	Have more chances to choose a better university and a course	ESL 5% Specialist math 90% 5% for Math method, Chinese, Chemistry	Listening, the easiest Speaking, sometimes she	She took IELTS training course in

	learn English			can't express herself Reading, she can't understand every single word, but can guess Writing, extremely hard	Beijing for 4-6 weeks and studied in an English language training centre in Zi Nang (Shandong province) for 8 weeks
Leo	Have better future	Enter a university	About two hours in each subject, including ESL, Chinese, Chemistry, Math method, Biology	Listening, fair Speaking, easy Reading, fair Writing, not so easy	Yes, he took English training program. Reading strategy is to read as much, loud, fast and clear as possible.
Mary	Don't want to be educated in China	Want to study music in a university in Melbourne	ESL 20% Math method 30% Further math 40% Geography 10%	Listening, difficult Reading, good Writing, very difficult	In addition to taking English subject in the high school, she had a private English tutor.
Ann	The agent's recommendation	English teaching environment is not good in China, she wants to study International trading and helps her parents' business in the future	ESL 10% Accounting 10% Economy 15% 65% for Math method and Specialist math	All very poor	She had a private English tutor.

According to the enrollment information obtained from the manager of the college, these students' parents paid almost AUD 17,000 dollars a year for the course fee which was extremely high compared with government schools in Australia. It also demonstrated that these international students came from relatively wealthy backgrounds and had high expectations of successful academic outcomes according to their answers on the purpose of taking VCE.

Six students indicated that they chose Tower College were on the basis of the recommendation of Australian's overseas education agencies. This helped to explain the large population of students from mainland China and matches with Kelly's (one of the teacher participants) statement earlier that this school mainly targeted

international students. In the background data sheets, almost every student emphasised their passion to enter a good university and treated VCE as preparation for university success. This explains the reason for the large population of international students in the school.

It was noted that every student took two to three mathematic subjects in their final semester in Year 12 and both scientific and business subjects were popular among this group of students. Nancy and Jim were considered outstanding students and were capable enough to undertake six subjects in VCE. Jim took university biology which was only open to the top three percent of students in the VCE program in the college.

According to Table 5.3, no student participant spends much time on ESL, instead mathematical, scientific and Chinese subjects were given great attention. Most of the students felt that listening and speaking were much easier compared to reading and writing and some students took IELTS preparation courses or other English training programs before coming to Melbourne.

In contrast to most of the Chinese students who came to study VCE without passing an IELTS test, two students, Terry and Monica, had participated in IELTS training courses before they came to Melbourne. Terry received average Band 4.5 and he was still required to take a short English course in the college before undertaking VCE. It is important to note that Magic was the only student who had passed IELTS Band 5.5 and enrolled in the VCE program in the College without undertaking any language courses.

In this study, Victor and Jim had learning experiences in different English medium schools before undertaking VCE. Victor took Year 10 in a government school in Melbourne and transferred to Tower College in Year 12. His reason for making this

decision was “because I studied the language in the public school and my colloquial language has improved a lot so when I transferred to here, I was not afraid my English ability will get worse even there are many Chinese around” (Victor’s interview, p. 1). Jim was in a different situation. He was in an English medium school in Shang Hai from Year Six to Year Nine. He participated a lot in debating and writing competitions, and received many awards in both fields back in China. Due to his high academic achievement in Year 11 in VCE, he was allowed to do Biology in a University as an elective subject in Year 12. After this discussion of the participants, I will move to a discussion of primary data sources used in this study.

5.3 PRIMARY DATA SOURCES

Due to the complexity of various challenges in the process of learning to write, and to increase the trustworthiness of the study, six research methods were employed. The aim of this section is to be explicit about the methods used in this study, by describing what the participants were asked to do, and by explaining why the methods were used.

5.3.1 Collection of students’ written texts

In this study, two written argumentative texts from each student were collected, including texts from the School Assessed Coursework (SAC, school internal assessment) and practice texts completed in ESL classes during Unit Three and Four (Semester One and Two in Year 12). Teachers’ feedback and comments on the texts were also collected as supporting material. To provide the study with rich and focused data, students’ argumentative texts were used as supplementary materials to elicit their perspectives of their own writing difficulties, and the analysis of their texts was used to compare or support both students’ and teachers’ answers in the interviews. Since

the students did not write many argumentative texts in one semester, there was a limited number of appropriate written texts available. However, it is still an important data source because the selected texts entailed differences in rhetorical form, register, sources of information, and relation to personal experience. The following table provides the topics of the argumentative texts collected from each student participant and the marks awarded by their teachers.

Table 5.4 Students' texts summary

Students' names	Types and names of their written texts	Marks
Nancy	1. Practice text: We should not pay to go to the beach 2. Practice text: The Commonwealth Games were worth the cost	8/10 *
Victor	1. SAC text: The benefits of the Commonwealth Games for Melbourne outweigh the disadvantages 2. Practice text: Electronic surveillance of home detainees is desirable	27/35 7/10
Amy	1. SAC text: The Commonwealth Games are worth the cost 2. Practice text: Help the asylum seeker, please	25/35 22/35
Jim	1. SAC text: Stem cell research is essential 2. SAC text: The Commonwealth Game was not worth the cost	30/35 28/35
Terry	1. SAC text: The Commonwealth Games are relevant 2. SAC text: A speech to argue studying overseas is not the only way of learning English	19/35 *
Magic	1. SAC text: The Commonwealth Games were worth the cost 2. Practice text: Vicious breeds of dogs should be banned	27/35 27/35
Monica	1. Practice text: The mandatory detention policy is unjust 2. Practice text: The Commonwealth Games were not worth the cost	* *
Leo	1. SAC text: The disadvantages of the Commonwealth Games for Melbourne outweigh the benefit 2. Practice text: Electronic surveillance of home detainees is desirable	26/35 *
Mary	1. SAC text: A letter to an editor arguing that China's one child policy is a good thing 2. Practice text: The mandatory detention policy is unjust	17/35 5/10
Ann	1. Practice text: The Australian Government is right to place asylum seekers into mandatory detention 2. Practice text: Home detention for detainees	Good Good

* means there are no marks on the written texts

The reason for choosing students' argumentative texts is because written texts can be seen as a privileged resource (Coffin, 1997; Davison, 1999) which may reflect those students' cultural and personal writing values in relation to ESL contexts and their needs and difficulties in producing an argument. Kress (1989) proposes that culturally specific textual forms in arguments bring out differences and their fundamental

characteristics are to produce difference and hence openness. Also, Love (1996) argues that success in examinations in some subject areas can be determined by students' experience and expertise in this argumentative genre. This is the reason why argumentative genre is chosen as it is a suitable genre for exploring international students' writing needs in VCE.

With time and support constraints in the internal assessment, students' performance in the SAC tasks presents, their real ability and difficulties in writing. In VCE studies, the School-assessed Coursework (SAC) is one form of graded school assessment and the requirements for the SAC are set out in the VCE study designs (discussed in Section 2.4). The advice on coursework assessment provided in the assessment guides is the Authority's best advice upon which schools base their requirements of students (VCAAb, 2003). A comparison between their writing performance in the SAC and in the written texts for practice may add credibility for the study in order to differentiate between the difficulties students perceive during practice and examination.

5.3.2 Individual interviews with students

The advantages of the semi-structured interviews are that they provide a privileged access to other people's lives, meanwhile, give the interviewee a degree of power and control and give the interviewer a great deal of flexibility (Nunan, 1992). In this study, the forty-five minute interviews with students individually, which were audio-taped, were a discussion of a selected number of media texts used in their ESL class and one of their own written texts was discussed in detail. They chose whether they wanted to be interviewed in either Chinese or English. The reason for giving language choices to students was based on Miller's (2003) concern that English is a

barrier to productive communication with some ESL students. She suggested conducting interviews with ESL students in their first language where possible. It is difficult for Chinese students who only studied in an English medium school for one year to explain complex ideas and their opinions deeply. One student participant asked me before the interview began, “Do you want to hear the truth or just superficial answers?” and as a result, every student in the study chose to be interviewed in Mandarin with a little English when they feel comfortable.

The interviews included a discussion of their own writing difficulties, their own writing experience in ESL VCE classes, their attitudes towards written English texts, their feelings about their strengths and weaknesses in written English, the strategies they used to meet the challenges in writing and analysing media texts, and how they may improve their writing (See Appendix F for the interview protocols with students).

The reason for discussing students’ own written texts and the media text samples from their ESL class is to explore different levels of students’ understandings and challenges in relation to argumentative writing. Due to time constraints in the class, ESL teachers did not have sufficient time to check each student’s understanding and difficulties with the texts. The purpose of the individual interviews with students is to catch the reality close-up and provide a thick description (Kvale, 1996) of students’ lived experiences, thoughts and feeling.

The reason for discussing the media texts was to identify the particular challenges that Chinese students face when reading passages. These could include the attitude of the writer; different tones and persuasive techniques used by the writer and cultural and ideological concepts embedded in the media texts, the meaning of particular words or expressions, and the meaning of particular structural items. The students’ perceptions of their comprehension of different forms of media written texts

in relation to their argumentative writing experience could be discovered.

5.3.3 Focus group interviews with student participants

Focus group interviews are appropriate for a small group of people who share similar background and also a useful tool for discussing a particular topic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Hurworth, 1996; Patton, 2002). The decision was made to use focus group interviews to provide an opportunity for each participant to discuss and share the broad challenges they encountered and their own strategies in dealing with problems in reading and writing about texts required for the Writing Task. These groups, like the interviews were conducted in Chinese (See Appendix G for the interview protocols, prompts and questions with students). The overwhelming strength of the face-to-face group interview is the ‘richness’ of the communication that makes it possible to inspire participants to share their experience with each other. Semi-structured interview questions were designed to require an extended response. Prompts and probes were used to clarify the answers (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, possible discrepant and similar data regarding the interpretation of these students’ argumentative writing between the teacher and student participants were analysed.

Three 45 minute audio-taped focus group interviews were conducted during the same period of semi-structured interviews since the purpose of the two kinds of interviews was different. Ten student participants were divided into three groups according to their English proficiency, classroom performance and learning preference. It is important to note that Ann withdrew halfway after she participated in the individual interview due to the stress of her studies.

Table 5.5 Students' breakdown into groups

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Students' names	Nancy, Victor	Amanda, Jim, Tide, Magic	Monica, Mary, Lon

Nancy and Victor were in different ESL classes, but they knew each other. Nancy was a high achiever in all subjects and liked to sit alone in the corner. She was quiet in class, but asked and answered questions when she had to. Unlike Nancy, Victor was a very active student who always sat with another two students from different nationalities in the first row. Compared to other students in Victor's class, this group of young men interacted with the teacher extensively in class. Victor's writing performance was not as high as Nancy's, but he was very enthusiastic in terms of discussing writing issues with the teacher and classmates.

Four students from Group B (Amanda, Jim, Tide and Magic) were from the same ESL class. During pre-classroom observation, I got to know them better and they shared different ideas about their classroom activities, their teacher's teaching style and pedagogy during class break; therefore, I thought that it was significant to hear their discussion about their feelings and perceptions. Amanda was a shy girl with medium level of English, who always sat at the back of the class. She listened to the teacher and took notes very carefully. The other three boys, Jim, Magic and Terry used to sit in the front row. They were close friends and always shared ideas in the class. Jim and Magic performed better in terms of writing and Terry was an active student who often answered and asked questions.

Monica and Mary usually sat together in the middle row. Monica passed her language test within five weeks and also assisted Mary in classroom activities and group work. Leo used to sit at the back with a group of young men and kept very quiet in class. This group of student participants had lower confidence in terms of

language learning compared to the other two groups. They wished to improve themselves and struggled to find ways.

5.3.4 Individual interviews with ESL teachers

The semi-structured interviews with three ESL teachers in VCE were again audio-taped (see Appendix H for interview questions). Interviews were conducted in English to seek the teachers' perceptions of Chinese international students' argumentative writing challenges in relation to the texts required for the Writing Task and the available forms of support for international students. Studying students' writing experience and challenges in the target language encompasses a two-way relationship, not only measuring the students' proficiency, understanding or development in English, but also investigating teachers' planning, implementation of specified objectives in the lesson plans and classroom management and interaction with students. Therefore, open-ended questions were used in the semi-structured interview with individual ESL teachers to explore their perceptions and expectations of international students' argumentative writing. This type of interview can be the richest single source of data with flexibility (Gillham, 2000).

5.3.5 ESL classroom observation

A structured classroom observation method helps the researcher to understand what actually happens in the day-to-day reality, and is a fundamental tool to understanding another culture in order to answer research questions (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2006). The type of observation employed was passive participant observation, which means that "the observer does not actively participate in the classroom interaction and does not have a role to play other than observer" (Lynch, 1996, p. 121). Three

fifty-minute lessons nominated by each teacher participant during regular school hours were observed and recorded on audiotape. A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the observational categories were appropriate, exhaustive, discrete, and unambiguous to meet the purposes of the research (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 129). In the classroom observations, I focused on the ESL teachers' teaching methods of argumentative writing, the ways in which the ESL teachers constructed the field of the argumentative genres, the ways in which the linguistic features in different forms of Australian media texts are taught, and the ways in which a text is modeled by the teacher. Most importantly, I noted the forms of support offered in ESL classes to students, and the kinds of participation sought from students (see below).

ESL classroom observation plays an important role to answer my research questions as it was seen as part of a multi-methods approach and the most direct way to obtain data for this study (Cohen et al., 2003; Gillham, 2000; Jorgensen, 1989). The main purpose was to investigate the broad challenges the students faced in reading and writing and the strategies they used to deal with the problems. All of the observations were recorded using field notes (see Appendix I for the field note data sheet). In addition to the audiorecording of three lessons in order to listen to individual students' talking about their experience in learning to write an argument, and ESL teachers' perceptions of the Chinese international students' writing experience, participant observation was used to provide different kinds of evidence, which was a fundamental case study method to support other data and answered the research questions.

The weakness in participant observation is that it is both fallible and highly selective (Gillham, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a participant observer, the most important thing is minimizing bias from both researcher effects on the site and

the effects of the site on the researcher. To reduce the '*observer effect*', it is important to look out for the probable influence of researcher's presence. In this case, I asked the student participants of the groups and the ESL teachers in the institution about how they felt about my presence in their classes. The teachers said they felt fine since teachers had come to observe their classes previously. However, most of the students expressed their anxiety to me of seeing the tape-recorders all around the class and of seeing me writing things on papers in their classes. In order to reduce their discomfort, I explained to them carefully about what I was trying to find out in the observation and attended their classes more frequently to get to know them and to put them at ease during the pre-classroom observation. While investigator bias cannot be eliminated in this study, awareness about potential problems in the process of gathering data and employment of triangulation in relation to data collection methods can limit its impact (Cohen et al., 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998)

5.3.6 Official documents

A selection of documents and materials was obtained from different sources for this study. The media texts provided in the assessment or by the teachers in class as supporting material for their own writing were collected and used in the student's individual interviews to elicit their answers. Spoken reflections on their experiences of Australian culture, and issues discussed in the media texts were examined in relation to the extent of cultural and linguistic challenges in the texts. The differences between the Chinese and English linguistic systems and cultures of written conventions and language use were discussed during the interviews to obtain a glimpse of students' perceptions of the challenges they encounter in their writing in VCE.

The College prospectus and statistical information about the students' results, and nationalities were collected to support the background information they had provided. Classroom material, such as past examination papers from and the Study Guide designed by the department of Tower College, were collected and used in the individual interviews with students to explore their personal use of school materials and how these influenced their learning.

5.3.7 Data collection schedule

The formal data collection was conducted between August and October 2006, excluding pre-classroom observation of these three classes, discussions with the teachers about nomination of their lessons and selection of student participations.

Details of the schedule are listed below:

Table 5.6 Formal data collection schedule

Date	Activities
24-08-06	Colin's Lesson 1: note-form summary and persuasive language use
25-08-06	Colin's Lesson 2: note-form summary
28-08-06	Colin's Lesson 3: argumentative writing for the Writing Task, Meg's Lesson 1: note-form summary, Kelly's Lesson 1: persuasive language use
29-08-06	Meg's Lesson 2: persuasive language use, Kelly's Lesson 2: persuasive language use
30-08-06	Meg's Lesson 3: argumentative writing for the Writing Task
20-09-06	Victor's and Nancy's individual interviews
21-09-06	Jim's and Leon's individual interviews
22-09-06	Ann's, Mary's, Amanda's and Molly's individual interviews
25-09-06	Tide's individual interviews
03-10-06	Focus group interviews with Group A and B
04-10-06	Focus group interviews with Group C
06-10-06	Magic's individual interview
12-10-06	Kelly's Lesson 3: argumentative writing for the Writing Task
23-10-06	Individual interviews with Colin and Meg
31-10-06	Individual interview with Kelly

5.3.8 Rigour and trustworthiness

Some researchers indicate the importance of verification of data analysis, which concerns the generalisability, the reliability, and validity of findings, throughout the process and verification seems inevitable before reporting findings (Hyland, 2005; Kvale, 1996). However, examinations of generalisability, reliability or validity are always performed intuitively by the researcher during the research process.

According to Merriam (1998), “validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the ways in data was collected, analyzed and interpreted” (p.198). Yin (2003) points out the importance of reliability and validity for case study research as for other types of research. Many researchers argue that validity and reliability in case study still remain problematic due to some reasons, for example, the frequent failure of the case study researcher to develop a sufficiently operational set of measures; subjective judgments are used to collect data and difficulty of establishing reliability by the conventional process of repeated usage of the techniques (Jorgensen, 1989; Nunan, 1992; Yin, 2003)

In this study, a number of strategies were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings which were addressed in the overall research design as well as through specific process employed for testing and confirming the findings. One of the major methods for ensuring that findings accurately reflect the reality of situation, perhaps an objectively verifiable truth in itself is *triangulation* (Cohen et al., 2003; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As explained earlier, this involves the use of multiple data sources and multiple methods of data collection, which, according to Miles & Huberman (2000) “can provide corroboration of findings” (p. 267). In order to include the various aspects with which this study was concerned, data were collected from a range of sources as discussed above. This inherent multiplicity of

sources and methods enhances the process of triangulation and cross-analysis of evidence.

Data and findings were reviewed for clarification or correction by each of the participants. Both student and ESL teacher participants were asked to comment on the field notes from both the case studies and the sessional observations, as well as on the background information for each of the case studies and the general description of ESL classes. Interviewees were also invited to study the transcripts of their interviews and elaborate on or emphasize any areas not adequately dealt with.

Questions regarding concept validity in participant observation were centred on whether or not the researcher has been able to gain direct access to the insiders' world of meaning and action (Adler & Adler, 1987). Participant observation in this study helped to identify the ways in which ESL teachers construct the field of the argumentative writing and model an argumentative text, which results in highly valid concepts in answering the research questions. The next section discusses the role of the researcher.

5.4 RESEARCHER'S ROLE

The significance of qualitative research is that the researcher is the only interpreter of the complexity of human behaviours (Lave & Kvale, 1995; Merriam, 1998).

Although there are no methods which allow the researcher to be totally neutral and invisible, Hyland (2005) indicates that "All methods force us to rely on indirect evidence to (re)construct informants' implicit knowledge...inference will always be involved" (p. 186). Therefore, it is important that the researcher is as objective as possible.

Since qualitative researchers deal with multiple, socially constructed realities which are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, the researcher's role is important to understand and interpret how the various participants in social settings construct the world around them (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Regarding study designs in qualitative research, the researchers need to gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants by focusing on in-depth or long-term interaction with relevant people in research sites.

Kvale (1996) sees interview inquiry as a moral enterprise which has to do with the researcher's role. If the researcher does the interviewing and forms a relationship with respondents, then s/he may use his/her personal empathy to make the interviewees feel comfortable to tell 'their stories'. Fink (2000) argues that the researcher must often experience a (close) relationship with the interviewees and probably feel obliged to protect data from outsiders, such as other researchers. As a result, they might arrive at conclusions which may be faulty or wrong and this can be unfair to the interviewees and their point or analysis of data. These issues emerged in my mind before data collection process which forced me to consider how I should locate myself in the study.

Regarding observations, Silverman (2006) indicates that participants are often more concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the research itself. When I entered the field, I was considered new to the environment since I had never done VCE in Australia and I was a researcher from Monash University. To both the teachers and students in Tower College, I was a total outsider, who played two roles, a passive participant observer in their VCE ESL classes, and an interviewer to explore their writing experiences in argumentative writing. I was aware of the tension, this may cause in various situations in the field due to my presence as an outsider

when I sat in the classes, listened and took notes about them – both the teachers and students and interviewed them.

However, as a Chinese speaker in some ways I felt I belonged to this school community since over eighty-five percent of the students were from Asia and spoke Chinese or Chinese dialects. During the research design, I was worried whether my Taiwanese nationality was an issue due to the political conflict between China and Taiwan. However, being a passive observer in classes, I was able to develop friendship without much difficulty and made myself accessible to the teachers and students. During the data collection period in the school, I consciously avoided making judgments on the teachers' pedagogy and students' classroom performance. During pre-classroom observations, I gradually got to know the students and they became very interested in my study, because they felt that it was related to their learning needs and they hoped to contribute their voices in the study. I assumed this was because we came from a similar ethnic background and had encountered and were encountering similar challenges in studying overseas. The most important thing was that we speak the same language and I could sense their willingness to let me enter their lives and understand them. These advantages helped me to have more opportunities to hear their true feeling and experiences. The next section shifts the attention to the discussion of data analysis.

5.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Some researchers indicate that the difficulty of analyzing qualitative data is because the strategies and techniques have not been well defined in the past and there is still a lack of adequate discussion of data analysis procedures (Brice, 2005; Yin, 1994). In order to ensure the quality of qualitative research, Buchanan (1992) suggests that the

quality “cannot be determined by following prescribed formulas. Rather its quality lies in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity” (p. 133). Therefore, qualitative interpretations are constructed. In this study, the process of data analysis was divided into two-tiered, qualitative analysis method and Gee’s (1999) discourse analysis method, which are discussed below.

5.5.1 Qualitative analysis method

At the beginning, I transcribed all discussions with the ESL teachers and student interviews and classroom discourse. I read these data alongside other sources such as interview transcripts, field notes written in formal and informal observations and students’ written texts. I then approached the transcription data at the first level by employing content analysis (Hyland, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994) which classifies data into categories and then enters the categories on an analysis grid. To define categories, I reviewed and integrated all data sources and tried to ensure that they represented these students’ learning experiences as far as possible to the research questions, and then used discourse analysis which will be discussed later. The descriptive categories were produced and divided the data into five major categories: students’ data on reading media texts, teachers’ data on students’ reading of media texts, data from classroom observation, students’ data on writing argumentative texts, teachers’ data on students’ experiences of argumentative writing. Each category involved certain themes, for example, the category of students’ data on writing argumentative texts involved themes like students’ awareness of audience, writing plans, cultural knowledge and interest in the topic, following a fixed model in their own writing and originality of students’ written texts. These themes were identified by

the similar issues represented across cases and cross-checked with other types of data and evidence in order not to generalise the findings and to make reasoning plausible.

Drawing on the method of content analysis, Kvale's (1996) meaning condensation approach also helped the process of data analysis through data sorting, reduction, display, construction and conclusion drawing. The data from transcripts were coded and patterns were identified. For each theme, both the students' and the teachers' interview data were summarized into grids by creating tables on Word. The columns of grids were the questions in the interviews according to different themes and the rows were each student's name. An example of the grids for English in VCE ESL is provided in Appendix L. Later, the segments from each question and each student were compared, described, classified and presented into common themes. Later, the recurring patterns, differences and inconsistencies were also drawn out from the data and entered into the grids.

In this stage of data analysis, both the teachers' and the students' beliefs and values regarding argumentative writing, the students' learning experiences in both Chinese and Victorian education systems and teachers' experiences of teaching writing were compared and contrasted. Insights from social and cultural perspectives of students' language use in both spoken and written discourse were referred to in this stage.

Notes taken from the classroom observation were reviewed on a regular basis, identified and labeled (Jorgensen, 1989). I extracted relevant and interesting data from the field notes and transcripts from audio- recording. I observed three lessons from each teacher, therefore, I had three narratives for each lesson. Later, the three narratives based on each teacher's lessons were summarised; I drew out the key themes and then made them into mind maps and listed the implications for discussion.

Appendix M provides an example of narratives for one teacher, mind map and the implications for the study. The tables created for each teacher's lessons includes four columns, namely "observation data from the teachers", "observation data from the students", "transcripts" and "comments". This process of data reduction, display, construction and implication drawing helped me to have a clear picture of the characteristics of each teacher's teaching of argumentative writing and to make a comparison between different teachers' teaching and both the teachers and students' interview data. Due to the limitations of the study, the brief analysis of students' argumentative texts data was to understand some aspects of individual student's writing experience, meanwhile, to support the findings from both the teachers' and students' interviews.

5.5.2 Discourse analysis

Drawing on social and cultural theories, discourse analysis was used in the second level of data analysis, which involved using the principles and tools of discourse analysis to further interpret the data and offer explanations. Many researchers argue that ways of interacting with both spoken and written texts are constructed by identities or positions, which are defined by a discourse community (Cummins, 2000; Gee, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003).

Discourse analysis provided a language for me to describe how the teachers and students in the study behaved, acted, and interacted. Their experiences and their ways of using language in different ways to construct meanings for a particular field of knowledge relate to the conventions defined by the particular discourse community. In this study, Gee's (1999) analytic approach of seven building tasks, which are seven components of any situation, was employed for the analysis of all my texts, including

interview data, classroom instruction discourse and students' engagement of argumentative writing. These seven components were significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign system and knowledge. Gee gives a clear example that even when we are silently reading, the seven building tasks are carried out in negotiation and collaboration with the writer in various guises, for example, actual writer, assumed writer, related texts we have read, sociocultural knowledge we bring to the text, and discussions we have had with other people.

According to my understanding of these seven building tasks, I adapted the some representative questions suggested by Gee (1999, p. 110-113) as below to guide my analysis:

1. Building significance:

- What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?
- What situated meanings and values seem to be attached to places, times, bodies, people, objects, artifacts, and institutions relevant in this situation?

2. Building activities:

- What is the larger or main activity (or set of activities) going on in the situation?
- What sub-activities compose this activity (or these activities)?

3. Building identities:

- What identities (roles, positions), with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs, feelings, and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

4. Building relationships:

- What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?
- In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant in the situation? How are they made relevant and in what ways?

5. Building politics:

- What social goods (e.g., status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant in this situation? How are they made relevant, and in what ways?

6. Building connections:

- What sorts of connections – looking backward and forward – are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?
- How do connections of the sort help to constitute “coherence” – and what sort of “coherence”?

7. Building significance for sign systems and knowledge

- What system of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant in the situation? How are they made relevant, and in what ways?
- What languages in the sense of “national” language like English, Russian, or Hausa, are relevant in the situation?

Gee stresses that there are four elements, convergence, agreement, coverage and linguistic details, which help to ensure validity for discourse analysis. In contrast to other analytic methods, such as conversation analysis and interaction analysis, which can only be used with spoken texts, Gee’s discourse analysis approach helped me to analyse both spoken and written texts and pay attention to linguistic aspects, which was appropriate for this study.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the key issues of methodological aspects used to carry out the study were covered to explain the research design, and the choices of the methodological tools for the collection of data, according to the research questions. A detailed discussion on the recruitment process, such as gaining access to the research site, the selection process of the site and recruitment of participants, provided an understanding of the nature of contexts, participants' background as well as ethical issues. The description of the primary data sources and the reasons why they were utilized was also included in this chapter. Finally, a discussion of different methods used for data analysis was also provided. The following three chapters will shift to a discussion of findings in this study, including both teacher and student perspectives on what challenges the students encountered in learning to write argumentative texts and analysing media texts and how writing was taught in their VCE ESL classes.

CHAPTER SIX

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY

6.0 OVERVIEW

In the data for this study, nine students out of ten pointed out their frustration in learning to write about issues. Why is argumentative writing so difficult for these students? What are their concerns in learning how to argue an issue in written form? In this chapter I attempt to answer the first research question about Chinese international students' perceptions in regard to the kinds of challenges they face in reading and writing the texts required for the Writing Task in VCE ESL. I examine data on how expectations, norms and literacy practices are translated and negotiated by them as they grapple with the expectations of the new discourse community. Their literacy practices in the VCE reflect the process that literacy theorist Gee (1996) described. This is a process which entails new ways of using language which are connected to disciplinary processes of knowledge and identity construction in a particular discourse community. It is a social and affective process involving new ways of "behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking...and writing", in order to negotiate a sense of self (Gee, 1996, viii). Engaging with this negotiation process, where they represent 'who they are' and 'who they are becoming' in relation to authoritative voices in the field is a challenge for most of them.

Chinese international students arrive with their own sets of values, which may change during their VCE study. Their struggles to enter a new institutional culture and their occasional defensiveness about the new environment are included in this chapter. I also focus on students' use of media texts and their essays to open up a conversation

about the nature of the discourse. The analysis here comprises extracts from students' focus group and individual interviews, as well as observation notes regarding their literacy practices and activities in classrooms.

This chapter begins by exploring students' perceptions about their ESL classes, then narrows down to their views on pedagogical issues, challenges in reading media texts and writing their own texts. It is centred on an extensive examination of students' identity, literacy practices and learning to write in schools. This also includes a discussion of general characteristics of students' thinking and values in relation to their writing practices, learning and identity. It should be noted that interview transcripts in this chapter have all been translated from Chinese to English by the researcher, and cross-checked as described in Section 5.4 in Chapter Five.

6.1 ENGAGEMENT IN ORAL INTERACTION IN CLASS

At the beginning of the group interviews, I attempted to explore students' feelings about their ESL classes in Melbourne. I asked them to think of adjectives to describe their VCE ESL classes and the following table is the summary of their answers.

Table 6.1 Students' feelings about their ESL classes

Student's name	Nana	Victor	Amy	Jim	Terry	Magic	Monica	Leo	Mary
Expression used	inactive	dead	not meaning-ful	awful	boring, not exciting	sleepy	a bit boring, most of time is silent	dull yet active	a bit boring, most of time is silent

I was surprised students provided mainly negative answers. When I approached this college in 2006, 88% of students were from overseas and 62% of students came from

mainland China (College Prospectus, 2006). The school claimed it provided a flexible approach to the State curriculum and pedagogical methods, and prepared both local and international students for university success. In the three group interviews, ‘boredom’ seemed to be a theme. The following examples indicate how students engaged in ESL classes and interacted with teachers. Amy gives an example of how pedagogy influenced the ways students engaged in learning. When I asked Amy how she participated in her ESL class, she said,

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Amy | No, basically the teacher talks and I listen. |
| Researcher | So you understand everything? |
| Amy | Kind of. I don’t think of any questions. Normally, the teacher brings up questions and answers herself and I listen. I don’t really have any questions. |
| Researcher | You won’t suddenly come up with any questions to ask the teacher? |
| Amy | No, I often don’t ask questions during class, but with the exam coming, I’d talk to the teacher after the class if I have questions. |

(Group interview B, p. 5)

In the group interview, Amy stated that she felt her ESL class was not meaningful (Group interview B, p. 5). She felt neutral about the teaching style and just sat passively during the lesson as the teacher talked and she listened. Many students were quite confident in small-group discussions, but claimed they seldom spoke in their ESL classes and were reluctant to ask questions. Willis (1996) indicates that an optimal learning environment in the language classroom activates real communication by using the target language. Some educators also claim effective language teaching should enhance students’ willingness to engage in communication and their willingness to talk in order to learn (Dörnyei, 1998; MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, 1998; Skehan, 1989).

Regarding students' willingness to engage in communication, many researchers indicate Chinese learners are viewed as unquestioning, passive, respectful and expecting hierarchy (Biggs, 1996; Hyland, 1994 & Park, 1997). However, in order not to stereotype and in order to recognise the diversity and complexity within different cultures and individuality, students' low participation can be attributed to many factors in individual and social contexts, such as pedagogical, linguistic, cognitive, affective or cultural factors which are viewed as 'small culture' (Holliday, 1999). Amy indicated that she would ask questions after the class because the examination was coming. Examination success is the main focus in the Chinese learning context (see Section 2.2) and this can be seen as Amy's motivation to ask questions. What is interesting is that she would only ask questions after the class, instead of presenting herself as an active participant or critical learner in the class.

A few students indicated the language barrier as the main reason causing them to be unwilling to communicate in their classroom. However, theorists believe that interaction contributes to second language acquisition and the development of second language competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Meara, 1996; Seliger, 1977). In the following extract, another student, Ann, found speaking English in the classroom a problem.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | So why don't you like to talk with teachers? |
| Ann | Well, how should I say...I didn't mean I don't like to talk with teachers, but maybe because they all speak English, I think most of time I don't speak English clearly. |
| Researcher | When you talk with your homestay family, don't they think your English is okay? |
| Ann | But I feel it's easier to talk about daily things. When talking with teachers or if suddenly they assign a handout, I become a bit hesitant when speaking, especially when there is a lot of vocabulary. I'm that kind of person. |

Researcher Afraid?

Ann A bit. There are some fears in my mind.

(Ann, Interview p. 3)

She saw herself speaking a different language from the teacher and her dread of not speaking well enough hindered the opportunity to activate real communication and enhance her sense of engagement in learning. This is not a surprising answer among Chinese international students. The exploration and dialogues with teachers and students during classroom discussion provide an opportunity for developing ‘voice’ during the learning process. Ideally in order to become members of new academic disciplines, it is important for students to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation, and to reflect critically. However, the reality is that the language barrier indeed hindered some students’ motivation and participation.

In group interviews, Leo was the only one to give a more positive view of his ESL class, as is shown below.

Leo Erm...Dull yet active.

Researcher Dull yet active? That sounds contradictory?

Leo I mean the way the teacher talks sometimes is quite ...,
While he is talking, he makes people feel cold.

Researcher The air-conditioning makes the room cold?

Leo The way he talks is cold, you know? But sometimes he talks
quite funny so I feel ESL class is good.

Researcher Sometimes it’s cold, sometimes it’s active?

Leo Yep, it’s quite extreme or maybe it’s just my impression. I
feel maybe ‘teacher’ is the key component.

Researcher Why do you feel..., oh the teacher’s look makes you feel
cold. So when do you feel active?

Leo For example when he’s joking and talking nonsense, right?

Mary, Umm.

Monica

Researcher So the teacher is funny.

Leo Maybe the teachers here ((Australia)) are like that. I should
say he is the kind of person who can say something in such a
way that makes you feel ‘wow’.

(Group interview C, p. 1)

Leo gave an explanation of his comment on “Dull yet active” about his ESL class. He enjoyed the teacher’s jokes, which brought a different atmosphere to the class and sometimes made the class active and at ease. In China his English teacher at secondary school had helped him to cultivate his interest in English learning. He still loved reading sports news in the newspaper because the teacher helped him to combine his interest and English learning. Overall, students did not view their ESL classes in a positive light and reported a low level of oral participation. In the following section, I shift my attention from students’ feelings about their ESL classes to their awareness of pedagogy, since part of the challenge for them is to adapt to pedagogical practices that may be different in their new learning environment from those in China.

6.2 ADAPTING TO TEACHER’S TEACHING STYLE/PEDAGOGY

In this section, I look at the opinions of three students, Jim, Terry and Magic and the teaching approaches used by the teachers.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | OK, why do you feel it is awful? |
| Jim | I feel restricted and it’s like dogmatism. |
| Researcher | Dogmatism? |
| Jim | I feel there are too many limitations. |
| Researcher | What kind of limitations? |
| Jim | For me, I feel I can’t bring my skills or talent into full play. “We try the formula 2, let’s use the formula!...” |
| | (Jim, Interview p. 1-2) |

The explanations of these formulas were given by the teacher in the teacher interview. The formula refers to the strategies the teacher used to teach this class. For example, in the introduction paragraph, students were asked to follow a D.I.D format (D for definition, I for interest, D for direction). For writing a topic sentence, students were required to follow the format of C+MI (connector plus main idea). In the group interview, Jim

described his ESL class as “awful” and he felt no freedom was given which was like “dogmatism”. He felt the teacher stuck to the teaching plan without flexibility in meeting students’ demands and needs, which caused his frustration.

However, all the students in the group interview indicated that they tended to forget the formulas and expressed their frustration in following them exactly. Jim was one of the students who commented on this approach.

I feel that Text Response is more difficult because when we discuss with the teacher, she always leads us. For example, she lists down all the points, emphasises the main reasons and asks us to use these as quotes, even though we have our own ideas. At the beginning, I would bring my ideas to the discussion, but later found out it’s useless coz she will use my ideas as wrong examples to illustrate that hers are the standard, being her teaching experience and school norms. If I need to decide my own topic, I prefer to discuss my true feeling, not just follow what the teacher said is correct. That’s why I find it very frustrating. She refers to many quotes, but also says you can’t just use quotes, instead you need to talk about your comprehension of the topic. I follow my own comprehension, but she said it’s wrong, and the quotes are correct. I dunno why I should apply them.

(Group interview B, p. 4)

Text response is another writing assessment in VCE ESL classes and the final examination in Year 12. It requires students to write an analytic or expository piece to interpret one selected text, for example a novel or film (see Section 2.2). Jim presented here his identity as a participant, a student, and co-constructer of knowledge in the classroom practice. He indicated that at the beginning, he still wanted to contribute by telling his answers, but the teacher used his answer as a wrong example, to highlight hers, the ‘legitimated’ version. He was dejected about following exactly what the teacher said and hoped to elaborate his own ideas in discussions with the teacher. In this extract, Jim used a very strong sentence to describe the pedagogy - “she always leads us”. The adverb

of frequency ‘always’ was used by Jim to emphasise the teacher-centred approach which was dominant in the class. His peers, Terry and Magic expressed similar points of view.

Terry and Magic were very enthusiastic in English learning and both had IELTS training in China before they came. Magic was the only student in this study who passed his IELTS test before he came to study VCE, and had received an IELTS score of Band 5.5 overall, considered as the level of a ‘modest English user’.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | If you could have your wish, what would you want your teacher to do for you? |
| Terry | I hope she can follow my first teacher’s teaching style to teach us. I’ll co-operate well with this teaching style. That teaching style is hard to explain. |
| Researcher | Can you give some examples of what the previous teacher did before? |
| Terry | Followed the students, not just the curriculum, being flexible and less rigid. I didn’t do well in my first SAC, I didn’t have enough time to finish everything. Normally, SAC is considered as a formal exam, but she felt it was unfair so gave me another supplementary exam, which gave me a chance to improve. |
| Magic | Now, it’s impossible to ask her [the present teacher] to make changes. The only thing she can do is to help us practise for exams and try to increase our marks. |
- (Group interview B, p. 6)

In this group interview extract, Terry shows his preference for a teaching style that is flexible and responsive to students’ needs. He was aware that the teacher should not just follow the curriculum, but cater for students’ learning needs. Giving a supplementary examination and more time during an examination is perhaps not realistic, but Terry argues that for a student who is new to the environment, flexibility is a primary element to meet students’ needs. Some researchers claim that students with Confucian heritage culture tend to be unquestioning and passive, respectful of and expecting hierarchy (Biggs, 1996; Hyland, 1994 & Park, 1997). This view suggests Chinese students tend to

be trained to accept other people's ideas from textbooks and teacher's knowledge in their previous schooling in China (see Section 2.1). However, the data here show that these three students demonstrate their ability and preparedness to challenge, criticize and discuss teaching issues.

As discussed in Section 2.1, the Chinese education system is more examination-oriented and students tend to develop skills in providing correct answers in the examination without discussing or providing their arguments. In the two extracts above, there is a conflict between students' expectation of flexibility in teaching styles and the preference for an examination-oriented approach. Magic raised his concern about the teaching, which was to "help us practise for exams" and "try to increase our marks". His regard for educational success was thus associated with the marks in the examination, a focus transferred from the Chinese education system. Meanwhile, when the teacher tried to equip students with formulas in order to increase their marks, some students criticised the rigidity and inflexibility of the teaching style and demonstrated their unwillingness to employ the formula.

Below is another example provided by Natalie on a dimension of good pedagogy.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Natalie | I hope the teacher can increase the speed of teaching and depth of the content. She can make students open their mind more, not simply doing this and that, like kids playing games. She can increase the speed and pressure, make things compulsory and teach faster or discuss more with us. That's all. |
| Researcher | You mean more challenging? |
| Natalie | Yep, I'd rather do challenging tasks, not something everyone already understands. If you answer, people will feel you are so... |
| Researcher | Will be at laughed by classmates? |
| Natalie | If you answer simple questions, you seem to pretend to be smart or show off so no one wants to answer. If the question is more difficult, everyone can discuss and I feel this way is |

better.

(Group interview A, p. 4-5)

Natalie appeared to be hardworking, and always reviewed school subjects and did her homework. Although she did not explain what she meant by “doing this and that, like kids playing games”, she pointed out in the interview that the ‘speed and depth’ of the content could be more demanding and intensive. She indicated the reason for silence in the classroom was due to the simple and easy nature of the questions being asked by the teacher. She felt that without challenges, students did not want to answer simple questions or “pretend to be smart or show off”. Students have their specific purposes for learning English, preferences for teaching style and wish to receive challenges in learning. The teacher’s approach and how s/he activates meaningful communicative interaction with students influence students’ willingness to communicate in classes.

The next section moves from students’ awareness of pedagogy and teaching styles to their opinions of reading media texts in order to produce a piece of argumentative writing.

6.3 FINDING/ANALYSING MEANING IN WRITTEN TEXTS

Interaction between reading and writing is vital for students studying in another language. In the Year 12 final examination in ESL, students are required to demonstrate achievement of a range of outcomes. The primary focus of this study is centred on Chinese international students’ understanding of language use and their ability to produce a piece of argumentative writing based on their points of view in the Writing Task (see Section 2.4). Therefore, students’ reading ability in understanding language conventions and the usage of different genres is an essential skill to demonstrate their competence and

confidence in writing. Writing which draws on multiple texts as supporting evidence increases a certain degree of complexity in planning, processing and revising. The following interview extract described what Natalie and Victor thought about the media texts as supporting evidence for their writing.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Natalie | I feel there are two types of media texts. One allows you to become passionate during arguments and you can comprehend the culture, like why their citizens think this way...The writer may not be a literary talent, but is very passionate in writing. Another one is a long article, like an editorial. That one is for learning English, their writing structures, strategies and how they express their views. |
| Victor | She's right, sometimes I see a sentence from there, I feel inclined to write that way because I feel it's more formal and looks more comfortable. |
| Researcher | So you will pay attention to the structures? |
| Victor | Good phrases and good sentences. Like other magazines, they are all information. |

(Group interview A, p. 5)

Both Natalie and Victor showed awareness of the specific written conventions, structures and the use of language in the Writing Task. Natalie categorized media texts into two different types and described how different media texts can be used as supporting evidence for her writing. Although it is clear that there are various types of media texts, not just simply two, Natalie suggested that some media texts are very culturally specific, which helped her enhance her cultural awareness of different social issues and helped her comprehend why Australians thought in particular ways. She appreciated the passion of such writing, suggesting this was not her own style.

She felt the second type of longer editorial style of media texts was useful for improving her English. She paid attention to the structures, strategies and how the writers expressed their views. In the group interview, Victor agreed with Natalie's view that certain types of media texts can enhance linguistic competence. He said "see(ing) a

sentence from there, I will feel inclined to write that way, more formal, it looks more comfortable”. By reading these texts, Victor felt his language skills would improve, because “good phrases and good sentences” from media texts could guide him to write in persuasive ways. Both Natalie and Victor felt that different media texts assist them to practise writing, build up the competence in the integration of textual information and improve their English.

Unlike Natalie and Victor, Monica shared a different viewpoint about reading newspaper articles. The following interview extract shows her fear of reading newspaper articles.

- Monica Actually, I feel hesitant when reading English newspapers.
- Researcher Newspapers?
- Monica Because there is a lot of grammar that I haven’t seen before. I don’t get the meaning.
- Researcher So you pay attention to grammar when you read newspapers?
- Monica Yep, but I don’t get it so sometimes I am scared of reading newspapers, afraid to experience my pain. You read it, but don’t get it. Only reminds me that my English is so terrible and I think this way more and more...so this is one of the reasons I don’t want to read newspapers.
- Researcher How about Chinese newspapers?
- Monica Chinese, I don’t read Chinese newspapers here [Melbourne].
- Researcher How about in China?
- Monica Yes, I do.
- Researcher Do you dislike reading newspaper?
- Monica No, I don’t.
- Researcher But here...
- Monica I hate it because here, even the ads, too, locals read it and find it interesting. But I feel it’s meaningless. I don’t understand the underlying meaning as they do. I feel...so I am a bit scared.

(Monica, Interview p. 24-25)

Monica used a strong word, “pain” to indicate her experience of reading English newspapers and the key message in this transcript is that Monica did not “get it”. She made a very negative evaluation of her own understanding of the texts. In Monica’s interview, she located her difficulty in interpreting media texts as a grammar problem and stressed that even reading advertisements was difficult. It is important to note that reading requires many levels of readers’ prior knowledge and an ability to grasp ideas, content (often highly cultural), and purpose are essential to enhance the readers’ reading comprehension. Clearly these aspects of text are beyond grammar.

Newspaper genres are used as supporting materials for Part Three of the Writing Task, which is argumentative writing. Students need to be aware of the relationship between text and function, generic conventions, overlaps and distinctions between different genres. Monica identified her difficulty in interpreting the articles as a grammar problem. She had gone through intensive grammatical training in Chinese private secondary schools. However, when she transferred to VCE, she felt she still had a limited knowledge in grammar, which caused her fear in reading newspaper articles. Monica showed her difficulty, not only at a linguistic level, but also at a discourse level due to the fact that she was new in the culture. She compared herself with local Australians who had more access than she did, saying “Locals read it and find it interesting. But I feel it’s meaningless”. Her struggles demonstrate the importance of cross-cultural awareness for students’ comprehension of the contexts of media texts. She saw herself differently from “locals” who understand newspaper articles. She indicated her resistance to the secondary discourse community by saying “it’s meaningless”, “I don’t understand the underlying meaning as they do” and “I am a bit scared”. This indicates her difficulty in engaging

with media texts, which involves talking, reading and writing in order to gain an ‘authoritative voice’. She also assumes ‘locals’ do not have such problems.

I have discussed two student perspectives in reading media texts above. I now move to discuss one example of how students felt about analysing persuasive language used in the texts, one of the outcomes required in VCE ESL. As discussed in Section 2.4, the Writing Task in VCE comprises three parts, a note-form summary (Part One), language analysis (Part Two) and writing a viewpoint piece on one issue (Part Three). The expectation in language analysis is that students understand language used in argument and presentation of an issue (see Section 2.4.3). In the following interview extract, Magic expressed his view about this section in the examination.

- Researcher How about persuasive language analysis? Aren’t there Parts One, Two and Three? How do you feel about Part Two?
- Magic I feel Part Two is more difficult than other parts.
- Researcher Why difficult?
- Magic Because firstly, I need to find examples of persuasive techniques used in the texts.
- Researcher Is it difficult to find them?
- Magic Finding them are ok then the key point is that you have to analyse the language. It’s like what our teacher said about “feeling” and “effect”. I feel I need to summarize it by myself according to that sentence. Most of time, I probably can feel “its feeling”, but I need to find a word that can describe the persuasive techniques accurately then explain its reason. I feel it’s hard to write it accurately.

(Magic, Interview p. 9-10)

According to the VCAA’s assessment reports in 2005 and 2006, ESL students demonstrated very weak skills in language analysis in Part Two, compared to Part Three. Magic also found language analysis more difficult than writing his own argumentative piece. In the class, his ESL teacher attempted to ask the students to analyse the “feeling” and then “effect” of each persuasive language example from media texts. For example,

when the writer uses a rhetorical question in the text, students need to analyse how the rhetorical question makes readers feel, the effect of the text.

According to Magic, finding how the persuasive techniques were used to create impact on readers was not difficult, but paraphrasing the effect was complex. It demands awareness of the text-function relationship, as well as context and genre knowledge. Students must argue how the writer persuades the readers by using particular techniques. Magic showed his difficulty in detecting how the writers use language patterns for persuasive purposes and he felt he was not linguistically competent to describe the effect of language used in the texts. Students' knowledge and control of the media texts and their linguistic competence are intertwined in language analysis, which needs control of complex grammar and the use of metalanguage. This is also vital when they move to Part Three, writing their own argumentative piece in the Writing Task. The following section is centred on students' writing difficulties.

6.4 PRESENTING ONE'S VIEWS ON AN ISSUE

When I reflect on the students' writing experience, it seems that their personalities, life experiences and education background also contribute to shaping their own way of writing. In this section, I explore how students negotiate between their own interpretations of the writing values in VCE ESL class and their writing experiences in learning how to do the Writing task. To provide some context for this, firstly I provide a general picture of the problems which students expressed in the interviews.

Table 6.2 Students' writing difficulties

Student's	Difficulties in writing
------------------	--------------------------------

name	
Natalie	Always follow the same structure
Victor	Weak in writing a conclusion, always change sentences during writing
Ann	Weak in writing a rebuttal
Amy	People cannot understand her writing
Jim	Ideas come faster than writing
Terry	Vocabulary is a big obstacle for writing
Magic	Writing an introduction is difficult
Monica	Write very short articles, hard to come up with ideas, a lack of vocabulary
Leo	Write too much supporting evidence and cause confusion
Mary	Grammar and vocabulary are the biggest problems

(Source: Individual interviews with these ten students)

The table above is a summary of how the ten student participants felt about their own difficulties in writing. The main problems centre on the knowledge of genre, writing an introduction or a conclusion, using supporting evidence, lexis and syntax. In the classroom practice of the Writing Task, students are usually assigned a few media texts based on one particular issue, and are required to use these to develop their own piece of argumentative writing. When they begin to write an argumentative piece about an issue, they learn to define their positions within the debate to create the coherence in their argument. The scaffolding process of learning to write the genre includes exploration through talking, reading and writing (Callaghan & Rothery, 1993; Feez, 2002). Through this recursive process of analysing the arguments of others and composing their own texts, students learn to represent their role as critical participants in a debate. In the following sections, I focus on some key issues in argumentative writing. These are: knowledge of the topic; awareness of audience; learning to challenge the model; originality of the written text.

6.4.1 Cultural knowledge and interest in the topic

Students' ability to write depends partly on whether they have enough background knowledge of the topic. In an Australian school context, different stages of genre-based literacy pedagogy have been adapted to scaffold students' writing and help them engage with academic literacy needs (Callaghan & Rothery, 1988; Derewianka, 1991; Martin, 1992; Feez, 2002). Building knowledge of the topic is often the first stage of scaffolding writing in ESL classes.

An issue drawn from Australian media sources can be highly culturally specific (VCAA, 2003). The following extract shows what Ann experienced in dealing with unfamiliar topics in writing. In this interview, we talked about the topic 'home detention'. One media text about this issue was enclosed in the Study Guide for practice, and was also discussed in her class.

- Researcher In the Study Guide, there's an article about home detention. Did you read it before you wrote yours?
- Ann Yep, I did. I went through the key points in the article and which were new to me. There wouldn't be this kind of phenomenon in China, that you'll be imprisoned till the prison term is finished. I felt the idea was interesting and read it at home. When the teacher asked us to write an essay about it so I used the points inside the article. I didn't understand what home detention was at the beginning. Later the article helped me to understand.
- (Ann, Interview p. 16)

Home detention was a totally new concept for Ann. In schools, students' success to participate in a written discourse community is determined by how much they conform to its conventions and practices, which also includes cultural understandings. A lack of cultural understanding of a topic may lead students to be less effective writers.

Ann also indicated her interest in this topic which motivated her to explore more by reading this article at home. In the following part, Natalie also shared how interest influenced her writing performance.

For me, two types. One type is what I like and another type is what I dislike. What I like means if I see this topic, I'm interested in it, I will be enthusiastic and add a lot of things when I write. It's more like describing my own ideas and making people agree. This is what he ((Victor)) just said - 'persuade'. If I am not interested in a topic, like looking at people earning money which doesn't attract me, I won't write it well. In that case, I will mix the main points of view in the society and see whether I can squeeze out one of my own contentions and pull it together.

(Group interview A, p. 9)

In the group interview with Natalie and Victor, we discussed what they thought about 'argument' and Victor said it was to "persuade the readers" (Group interview A, p. 9). However, Natalie indicated that her feeling and interest towards the topic affected her reading and writing performance. She felt if she was interested in the topic, she would try her best to convince others. If the topic did not attract her, she would have difficulty in producing her own contention in writing, or no confidence in performing well.

Natalie's lack of interest in the topic 'earning money' at this stage, meant that she encountered difficulty in being persuasive and being involved in a topic like this. Clark and Ivanič (1997) state that "writers consciously or subconsciously adjust the impression they convey to readers, according to their commitments and what is in their best interests" (p. 144). Although students cannot choose issues that they are interested in, the teacher's ability to choose topics that engage students more actively is vital to scaffold students' writing. Students' awareness of audience is another important component which affects the purpose of writing and the strategies they use in their writing. This also has an

important consequence in their writing performance. The next section looks at students' viewpoints on 'audience' in writing.

6.4.2 Awareness of audience

Genre-based approaches applied in the teaching of writing require students to achieve purpose and overall structure in their texts. Having an audience in mind makes writing easier because it clarifies the decisions the writers need to make in their writing and gives the texts more unity of purpose and style (Derewianka, 1991; Feez, 2002; Martin, 1992; Swales, 1990). There are two types of audience in writing, real and intended (Hale, 2008). Normally teachers are not the intended audience, unless the main purpose is to persuade or inform teachers of some message. The real audience is someone who reads the text and the intended audience is the target group that the writer has in mind. A challenge for students is to recognise this distinction. In this section, I look at an example of a student who does this.

The text discussed below concerns a speech written by Terry to give advice to Chinese students who intend to study overseas and improve their English. During our interview, we discussed some issues in the text, which included the experience of studying overseas.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | When you wrote this article, who was your intended target audience? |
| Terry | The audience is the students who want to study overseas. |
| Researcher | In your mind, did you think your examiner was also your audience or you simply wrote for students who want to study overseas? |
| Terry | I should say if the article is for examiners, I would still write like this. If I simply write to students who want to study overseas, I will say more about my real life experience. If for examiners, I would not add much life |

- experience.
- Researcher If for examiners, how do you express yourself?
- Terry I would use formal sentences to describe and not make any jokes. If for normal readers or audience, I would adjust the atmosphere, more relaxed, not so...
- Researcher this is a speech.
- Terry This speech was embedded in my mind unconsciously. I knew what to write and what I would say to the readers. If they are not examiners, I can make jokes and be more relaxed. I would not use professional and formal sentences to express my meaning.

(Terry, Interview p. 19-20)

Terry showed awareness of different “discoursal choices” based on a specific audience (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 231). He thought if the examiners were the intended audience, he “would use formal sentences to describe and not make any jokes”. However, the intended audience was “students who intend to study overseas”. Choosing an audience affected the strategy he used in his writing. The style and the tone would be more formal for readers who were examiners. If the Chinese students were the real audience, he would reflect on his own experience of being an international student in an Australian secondary school to assist students with a clear picture of what life and study would be.

Yet Terry implied that personal experience is weak evidence and not expected by the teacher as examiner. Terry’s perception of real and intended audience demonstrated his knowledge of different language use and the selection of supporting evidence, which can reflect the requirements of the readership. His experience also gives us an example of how students meet the challenge of making decisions in their writing according to the readers in their minds. The next section moves to students’ perspectives on the model given by the teacher to support their writing.

6.4.3 Learning to challenge the model

Each genre has its particular overall structure and specific social purpose. Many ESL students have been gradually developing their writing skills, however, their ways of writing are not always the kind valued by Western discourse communities. According to the findings, the nature of academic literacy often confuses and disorients them, and they tend to follow the general structure given by the teacher, without necessarily understanding what a good piece of argumentative writing is. Through writing instruction, ESL teachers guide students to organize their ideas in a sequential and concise way. However, the model given by teachers about the organizational structure of different genres may make students confused about the extent to which they should follow that structure tightly.

The following three examples show students' struggle with the challenge of having to follow a model yet expressing their own views. The following interview extracts involve three students' points of view on the models of argumentative genres.

The first case is Monica, whose interview extract is shown below.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | Do you pay a lot of attention to structure when you write? |
| Monica | Yes, I try to pay more attention to structure, but then... |
| Researcher | I see your articles always use firstly, secondly |
| Monica | Yes, every one of my articles basically follows this structure. |
| Researcher | Why? |
| Monica | Because I feel more secure this way. I'm afraid to make mistakes. |
| Researcher | Don't you feel writing something with your own style is more individual? |
| Monica | Not now because I feel I am not like Jeff or Chang in my class. They have more foundation and now I am learning...I am just a beginner, so what I should do is to follow the model he has given us, so I'm learning slowly. If my English reaches a certain standard in the future, I will try to write with my own style. |

(Monica, Interview p. 24)

In Monica's argumentative written texts, I noted that each of her written texts used a fixed model to present arguments, using 'firstly, secondly, thirdly and to conclude'. She was committed to this particular pattern of text organisation because of her fear of making mistakes. In Monica's view, using a flexible way of writing could be applied only by experienced writers and she referred to two of her classmates as examples. Although following a fixed model may assist students to enter the academic discourse community, Monica showed a lack of confidence in individualizing her style or diverging from the model.

Similarly, Terry chose to write a speech by using fixed sentences to begin his introductions and conclusions. Note that the target genre is an oral presentation, but the task, as constructed, is written.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | So do you have favourite forms of writing, for example, editorial, a letter or speech? |
| Terry | Yes, speech. For example, if we do an oral presentation, I can speak five to six minutes in the introduction "Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming. I'm glad to stand here to do my oral presentation. The purpose of my topic is blah blah blah." I can talk a lot and basically I have memorized it. Later the most important part is the conclusion which needs to be based on the main body. For introduction and conclusion, I have 'fixed sentences' to stick to because when I write, I consider its main body so I should say I prefer oral presentation, this kind of speech. |
| Researcher | OK. Is it because you have done more practice about this type of writing so you are more confident of it? |
| Terry | Both, because when we practise, I probably just follow the rules, basically I always use oral presentation, this kind of speech. When I practise, I just change the topic. |
- (Terry, Interview p. 17-18)

Terry indicated that he has 'fixed sentences' to apply when he writes. He did not feel uncomfortable using a fixed model. For example, he used his own text about the topic of studying overseas to explain how he used a fixed model and fixed sentences to begin the

article. The requirement of this topic was to introduce lifestyle, or an experience in Melbourne. He had ‘memorized’ the fixed way of providing an introduction. He preferred the speech genre because he was confident in using this opening. The fixed sentences were strategies Terry used to develop the organisation of ideas in his written texts.

Unlike Monica and Terry who sought to follow the models given by the teachers, Natalie showed her frustration in using a fixed model, which she considered a less emotively powerful way of writing. Natalie studied six weeks in the language course prior to enrolling in the VCE.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Natalie | My weakness in argumentative writing is that it’s not authentic. My articles belong to a Chinese style of English writing which fits into a structure. |
| Researcher | You feel you still follow the structure? |
| Natalie | Yes, I feel my personal writing and text response are not bad, my weakness is ‘argumentative’ writing. |
| Researcher | Why do you try to fit into the structure and not use an emotive way of writing? |
| Natalie | One is because I learnt the basic way of argumentative writing...the teacher asked us to fit into the structure. She didn’t tell us how we can change our articles. We can only see it from the newspaper. The teacher never summarises and concludes how to write a good piece of argumentative writing. But for personal writing, you can write according to your emotion. Maybe you don’t know how to write, if you follow your emotion to write, follow your feelings, you will write a good article. But argumentative writing is...because....firstly, I’m not competent in it and I need to learn, but in the learning process, the teacher doesn’t teach us about different genres, but teaches us to fit into the structure. |

(Group interview A, p. 23)

In this extract, Natalie articulates the tension of fitting herself into a fixed model. She repeated twice that her weakness is argumentative writing and made a comparison with her strength – personal writing and text response. Text response belongs to one of the Outcomes in VCE ESL which requires students to write a sustained interpretative point

of view about a text, supported by detailed analysis and reference to the text, such as character, plot, setting, tone and language. She suggested that personal writing can be written by an inexperienced writer by following his/her emotions. In contrast with this, she showed her frustration at having to 'fit herself' into a fixed model as the teacher asked.

Natalie compared following a fixed structure to writing in Chinese. I assumed this structure was the most common tripartite model (Introduction, body and conclusion) often used in the teaching of argumentative writing in China. Natalie emphasised that the teacher seemed not to guide her toward a conscious awareness of how to develop a flexible construct of argumentative writing. She indicated that the target style of writing can only be gleaned "from newspapers", but used the strong mood adjunct "never" to emphasise that the features of good argumentative writing were not summarised by the teacher and the knowledge of different genres was also not taught. Natalie used the first person pronoun continuously to call attention to her responsibility for any writing weakness, saying "I am not competent in it" and "I need to learn".

On one occasion, Natalie's teacher brought a model text which inspired Natalie and the following extract showed the impact of the text on her.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | If you have enough time, will you write down all the sentences in your plan? |
| Natalie | Yep, in planning, I generally spend most of time on the introduction. For the body [of the essay], I only list main points then I don't usually write about a conclusion because I feel an introduction is important in an article. But one day, the teacher talked about one article which doesn't have a standard introduction. |
| Researcher | Which article? |
| Natalie | It's about a student talking about a curfew and the writer pointed out his feeling straight away, like 'I'm angry!' |
| Researcher | Is it a letter? |

- Natalie Yep, yep. He wrote down his opinions to the council straight away without describing the direct cause of the issue and talking about both sides. At the time, I umm...first time I see an English text, this kind of 'essay' doesn't have to fit into the model. Before I always felt, since I learn the language until now, all the teachers said 'remember this model and follow it.'
- Researcher You mean after you came here, you always follow 'firstly, secondly and thirdly' model?
- Natalie Yep, yep. Before I didn't. When I started learning the language, I wrote it in a kind of Chinese style which followed my ideas. After I came here, the teachers say structures are very important. The first sentence of the article, then umm...for example, three body paragraphs, an introduction and a conclusion, they are very formal. Then later I realized I always fit my writing into that model. But that day I read the article later, I just know sometimes I don't need to match with the model exactly.
(Natalie, Interview p. 11)

In this extract, Natalie described her experience of learning to write argumentatively as a kind of straightjacket. She felt that initially her English writing was similar to Chinese rhetoric. The teacher asked students to "remember the model and follow it" in the VCE, with an introduction, three body paragraphs and then a conclusion. The model letter displayed by the teacher was written by a student expressing his anger at the beginning of the article without writing an appropriate and standard introduction. She was very impressed about the unambiguous, subjective and opinion-rich format used by the writer and realised she did not always need to follow the standardized model.

According to Natalie and other student participants, the ESL teachers tended to encourage a formulaic approach to writing, rather than encouraging students to follow spontaneous impulses or interests. In the target discourse community, students learn via fixed models of writing because of the transition they are required to make when entering the academic discourse community, but also because of language limitations. Gradually

they acquire new knowledge of textual conventions, expectations and formulaic rhetorical expressions. Based on the data, it is clear that this kind of knowledge transformation is not achieved by ESL students with limited practice and linguistic resources.

The next section moves to the students' attitudes towards creating an original piece of argumentative writing, one of the main challenges for them.

6.4.4 Originality of the written text

In this section, I look at students' challenges to resolve the tension between paraphrasing and plagiarism, and note different cultures provide different guidelines and values to these issues. In the interviews, I discussed this aspect of their writing experiences with the student participants, using their own written texts as supporting examples. The first case concerns Monica's approach to the use of media texts as supporting evidence in her own writing. The second case shows how Leo used a pre-written and memorised text for this assessment task. The reason for choosing these two cases is because they were written for a School-Assessed Coursework (SAC, see Section 2.4) and are typical examples of the Writing Task which involves rewriting authors' statements in the student's own words. Paraphrasing is not always easy for these students because English written conventions are different from Chinese. The Western cultural rationale embedded in the texts is also not easy to grasp by students from different backgrounds.

In the following extract, Monica explained how she used the media texts as supporting evidence for her argumentative writing.

- Researcher What do you think of using the media texts [provided in the exam] in your own writing? Do you like to use the examples or does it depend on the situation?
- Monica I like to use examples and also like to use sentences from media texts. I feel this way will improve the whole article.
- Researcher For example?
- Monica For example, one of the media texts provided in the trial exam was very similar to my response. The writer used his friend's example to support his argument. I copied down the structure of his text. In this case, I won't have any marks deducted, and the teacher will feel...
- Researcher What do you mean by structure? Copying down whole sentences?
- Monica Yep, copying down the whole sentences.
- Researcher Do you mean quoting it?
- Monica Not quotation, but I would change a few words and copy down the whole sentence, its grammar use, then I feel... the teacher will feel that you really read this article seriously, you understand the article.
- Researcher So you changed it to your own meaning?
- Monica Yes, but the main contention and sentence structure is the same.
- Researcher How about the words in the article?
- Monica Change a little bit, yes, I like to use its [sentences] and they slowly become mine because "Articles are all about copying!" This was said by our teacher.
- Researcher The teacher here or ...
- Monica In mainland China. Here plagiarism is serious.
- (Monica, Interview p. 21)

In this interview extract, Monica indicated that her strategy for improving her written work was to copy down good sentence structures from media texts provided in the examination. She felt when she copied sentence structures from the media texts by changing a few words, marks would not be deducted. Indeed, she felt the teacher would appreciate that she completed reading all texts provided in the examination. The tendency of copying in Monica's case can be attributed to the pressure of her own expectation of her ability. She did not feel this was an act of plagiarism. This is referred to by many authors as 'patchwriting' and can be seen as a form of learning (Hornby & Pickering,

2005; Howard, 1999). Monica showed her interpretation of ownership of words and her notion of authorship. The reproduction of texts without any acknowledgement is still considered as a common practice in China (see Section 4.1.4). These expectations, norms and practices in her previous educational background seemed to influence Monica's way of writing and using relevant supporting materials.

In this extract, Monica demonstrated different writing values from those held in a Western education system and gave her perception of the expectations and the norms in VCE ESL. Although Monica showed her awareness of the danger of plagiarism in Western countries, she still indicated her belief that "Articles are all about copying!", a notion given by her Chinese teacher. She rationalised her behavior, believing the words "slowly they become mine" as copied and altered.

The next interview extract concerns Leo's reflection on his personal and cultural values in preparing his School-Assessed Coursework (SAC) text. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the SAC is a form of internal school assessment which contributes 25% to the final assessment and can be treated as pre-exam practice. Students are required to complete one SAC text over three separate lessons. For the first lesson, they are required to complete outline plans and begin to write their own text. In the following interview extract, Leo discusses how he prepared for the topic, "The disadvantages of the Commonwealth Games for Melbourne".

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | Have you tried to practise this topic? |
| Leo | No, no practice. About this topic, I didn't practise. |
| Researcher | Because you know this is the topic for SAC, have you ever thought to write many articles based on this topic and see which one is better? (Leo laughs) |
| Leo | Memorise it. I am like this...at the time, I was...the SAC...you see, except the beginning, the rest of the article is very neat? I wrote one. Because I didn't make any changes |

- for the upper part, I wrote in the class until here [this place in the essay]. You see, this was written in different coloured pens, probably I wrote it first then memorized it.
- Researcher I don't get it. I did see the different colours. But why?
- Leo You see I didn't make any changes, right? This is because I memorised it so I could write very fast.
- Researcher So you memorised the text? Did you practise writing?
- Leo I wrote half of the article at home.
- Researcher Only this part?
- Leo No, a lot. (Leo keeps turning pages.)

(Leo, Interview p. 15-16)

No redrafted fragments and no corrections were found from the second part of his SAC text, which is very unusual in the process of normal writing (see Appendix Nine). In the interview with Leo, firstly he explained that he did not prepare and practise for this topic after the first lesson of the writing assessment. He admitted that he finished writing the rest of the text at home, then copied it down on his SAC paper in the second lesson. In the extract, Leo clarified why the text was written in two different coloured pens. He kept using the term 'memorise', for example, "I wrote it first then memorised it" and "because I memorised it so I could write very fast". Leo wrote four pages of an argumentative text to persuade the readers how the Commonwealth Games had disadvantages for Melbourne citizens. He committed his own pre-written text at home to memory from the second page to the end. This is why, "except beginning, the rest of the article is very neat". Later I questioned how he could memorise so many pages without making any changes. He explained this writing process in detail as follows.

- Researcher So you mean after using the different colors, you've practised from the middle [of the article]?
- Leo Em.
- Researcher Memorised everything or ...?
- Leo Memorised everything.
- Researcher Memorised?
- Leo Actually it's like this. After the first ESL lesson because the teacher gave us references, then I wrote it. From here

- [beginning of the second page], everything is based on my memory.
- Researcher You mean from “Not all the countries are wealthy...to the end of the SAC text”?
- Leo I copied.
- Researcher You wrote it down on the paper?
- Leo Yes, if not, I couldn’t memorise everything.
- Researcher No wonder you wrote so much.
- Leo I wrote it at home.
- Researcher OK, did you show anyone after you wrote it?
- Leo No, after writing, I read it once myself.
- Researcher Why did you start from here, not the beginning?
- Leo Because I can’t memorise the first part. The teacher asked us to start writing so this was written in the first lesson. I started preparation after the second lesson.
- Researcher Say that again?
- Leo I wrote until here in the first lesson ((Page one to the beginning of page two)). Because we have three lessons, the later part was written at home.
- Researcher So you’ve done the plan first in class, then later...
- Leo Yes, I’d written some in the first lesson then started preparation and pre-wrote at home.

(Leo, Interview p. 19)

‘Copying’ can be attributed partially to Leo’s lack of confidence in writing, but he worried that his ability could be underestimated if he attempted to write in the class. Preparation at home can allow students to polish the use of vocabulary, rhetorical techniques and the overall structure. Meanwhile, students need enough time to read through the relevant supporting materials and comprehend them and choose the arguments to put forth in a logical order. It is questionable whether his memorisation for SAC texts in advance is appropriate in the Western learning context. Moreover, in this case, memorization of a pre-written text may not be a valid way of presenting his ability. Indeed, it may also be considered as copying, cheating or plagiarism.

However, Leo received a score of ‘B’, 26 out of 35. In this interview, he tried to rationalize memorizing precisely what he wrote at home as being an acceptable way of

preparation. I was unsure whether he copied down a text from the web and reproduced it in the class or committed his own pre-written text to memory and copied it in the class. Memorisation of Chinese classic texts and recitation of them without acknowledgement are common practices in the Chinese learning context (see Section 4.1.4).

In the individual interviews with students, Monica and Leo were not the only students pointing out their behaviours of ‘copying’. Ann and Magic also demonstrated their different ‘instant’ writing performance in the examination. Apparently, paraphrasing an argument is part of the writing skill. Ann tended to copy down the points and examples from the media texts given by the teacher and used these in her writing without acknowledgement.

Magic also borrowed ideas from media texts but changed them into his words. He always completed his whole SAC text as a practice at home, then memorised it and reproduced it in the class, which is very similar to how Leo prepared his text. Based on the interview extracts above, some students showed how they applied media texts provided in the examination to support their writing. Quoting from media texts should be encouraged if students demonstrate their understandings of the differences among opinion-rich texts, factual and unambiguous texts. In order to avoid unintentional cheating, many researchers encourage teachers to promote citation techniques and clarify diverse points of views of plagiarism to students from other cultural backgrounds (Taylor, 1997; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). It is important to note that Chinese students are not the only ones who struggle to produce original texts of this type with good quality and under tight time constraints.

6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, a range of issues were explored in relation to research question one on students' perspectives on their challenges in reading and writing texts required for the Writing Task. These included students' feelings about their ESL classes, their awareness of good pedagogy, challenges in reading media texts, and their different kinds of struggles in writing. Some students revealed how they met the challenges and how they learned in turn to challenge the expectations and norms in a new academic discourse community, for example, to follow a fixed model yet express their own views. Pedagogy does not always help students; sometimes their own practices help them to deal with the challenges which arise.

I have tried not to oversimplify students' writing difficulties in conforming to institutional, cultural and conventional requirements. Instead I have tried to open up a broader discussion of their practices, thinking and values in relation to writing, for example, their perspectives towards 'opinion', 'purpose', 'audience', and 'response'. Just as a text cannot be considered separately from its ideological context, students' writing practices are influenced by many perspectives, such as their own ways of text construction, and their thinking about readers and writers. In the next chapter I look at two students' experiences in classroom practice, comprehension of texts and writing of argumentative texts.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TWO CASE STUDIES ON STUDENTS' LITERACY

7.0 OVERVIEW

In this chapter, I discuss two cases, Natalie and Jim, presenting their process of learning the discourse, and its relationship to classroom performance and writing proficiency. As discussed earlier in Section 4.2, language learners progress at their own speed in mastering a second language and discourse. There are many authors who indicate various factors which affect the learning of a second language, for example, motivation and attitudes; learner preference; time; exposure; need for English and variety of input (Ehrman, 1996; Hayes, 1996; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Moon, 2000).

In this chapter, I explore two successful students in regard to their writing values and challenges in classroom performance, their comprehension of texts and argumentative writing. Their written texts are also analysed to reflect these aspects of their learning. It is noted that some weaker students in this study tended to feel confused and uncertain about their answers to the interview questions. The reason for choosing these two successful cases are because they were successful in many subjects and were the only participants in this study undertaking six subjects in the final semester in Year 12. They both liked writing and engaged with writing. They had substantial experience in English learning and demonstrated their confidence in providing examples and ideas of their learning situation and difficulties, along with how they surmounted their own difficulties. Their experiences need to be seen in context to understand how individual characteristics support and constrain Chinese

international students' success in argumentative writing. I focus on specific aspects of the two cases as follows:

1. Natalie's literacy practices and challenges
2. Jim's argumentative writing in relation to prior experience

7.1 NATALIE: "I WRITE IT FOR MYSELF"

Natalie went through the public education system in mainland China like most of the other student participants. She passed the internal test held by the college in Melbourne within six weeks and received high scores to enter the VCE program in that institution. In this section I focus on two themes, her motivation in relation to writing performance and her awareness of difficulties in literacy practice.

7.1.1 Motivation and writing performance

Natalie was the only student in the interviews who expressed a great interest in learning English, but a lack of interest in writing about issues. In the interview, she described how she engaged herself with English in her daily life, for example, reading novels and listening to the radio. She was interested in discussion on the radio about technology and history. In theories about second language acquisition (SLA), many researchers claim that not only age, but also 'practice' has a primary influence on learning (Norton, 2000; Young, 1999). Written performance can be impacted by exposure to extensive reading and effective writing techniques (Hyland, 2003). In the interview, Natalie indicated that she also practised writing at home, for example, "The teacher requires us to write one piece, but I would write two for practice" and "I also helped other students to write their written texts" (Natalie, Interview p. 3-4).

Through frequent writing practice, Natalie developed her understanding of concepts and knowledge in writing. In the following interview extract, she talked about reading and how it relates to her writing.

Researcher So you feel your method to improve writing is to read more books and listen to the radio?

Natalie Not about writing without feeling. You need to read the articles that can touch your heart and make you think then you will remember it.

Researcher What sort of articles?

Natalie It's a type of prose or a type of short novels, describing girls' lives or the feeling of living in the city, that's kind of an exquisite feeling, the connection to human's feeling which comes with a bit of criticism and a kind of objectivity, not too passionate and make people feel it's fake. After you read it, you can easily remember the forms and the feeling and you immediately know how to write it.

(Natalie, Interview p. 5)

The interrelationship between reading and writing can reinforce and accelerate the learning of content, the development of literacy skills and the acquisition of language abilities (Grabe, 2003; Grabe & Kaplan, 1997; Silva, Leki & Carson, 1997). Natalie's preference for reading was prose and novels which connect to human feeling with some 'criticism and objectivity'. She indicated the forms and the feeling in the texts could be easily perceived and connected to writing or in her words, "you immediately know how to write it".

Natalie also attributed her improvement in writing to a change of teachers. She compared two of her ESL teachers in Year 11 and 12 and how they had a huge influence on her writing development.

The teaching at the time ((Year 11)) made me feel I didn't have special comprehension in English and didn't feel passionate about it. The feeling was bad, for example, I felt English was routine stuff, just for exams. Now I'm learning English and doing my homework to improve my level and I like it. I write it for myself.

(Group interview A, p. 8)

She felt the teacher in Year 11 did not assist her to cultivate the interest in English learning, as she said “I felt English was normal stuff, just for exams”. Her biggest change in Year 12 was that she wrote for herself and did her homework. Through the intensive writing practice at home, she showed high English proficiency in writing which she attributed to enjoyment of writing after the change of the teacher in Year 12.

The data above also shows a contradiction between two types of motivations, instrumental (just for exams) and intrinsic (to improve my level). The motivation of preparing for examinations caused her to feel negatively about English and to treat it just as a subject. In contrast, after changing in Year 12, she felt a passion in learning English and doing her homework in order to improve her English proficiency. As she said, “I write it for myself”. Both motivation and attitude are primary factors in second language acquisition and in affecting the speed of acquisition and final proficiency of L2 learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1999), clearly reflected in Natalie’s case. In the following interview extract, Natalie described her feeling towards the Year 12 teacher’s feedback and how it influenced her writing performance.

It is because it’s the first time I gained confidence in writing an article and I got full marks in the oral presentation. Later whenever there was an oral presentation or a need to study at home, I would be very enthusiastic about it because you do it and the teacher encourages me then I feel I’m good at this aspect then work even harder. It’s just like you see a tiny flame and you want to protect it in your hands. As I said before my weakness was writing so I felt so horrible and felt I couldn’t do anything and was stupid. Then the first time I wrote and I got a very high score, 33.

(Natalie, Interview p. 4-5)

The score, 33 out of 35, given by the teacher showed that Natalie met the expectations in argumentative writing. In the extract, she indicates that the teacher’s encouragement played a big part in her achievement. In her words, “It’s just like you

see a tiny flame and you want to protect it in your hands”. From the two extracts above, we realize how powerful a teacher’s encouragement can be to students’ development. Natalie was desperate to grab the ‘tiny flame’ and she cultivated her interest in improving her writing.

In the following interview extract, Natalie indicates her preference of genres in reading and writing, and explains the reasons.

- Researcher So you like the Text Response more?
Natalie Umm... I don’t like writing about issues because I feel my level isn’t that high. It’s a bit easier for locals because they have better control of their language. Recently I read the newspaper at home and I feel the articles are so excellent.
Researcher Is that because you have less interest in the topics in the newspapers? It’s like you read novels because you are interested and you want to continue reading them.
Natalie No, novels always relate to the reality and life and always connect to you.
Researcher Newspapers connect to life as well.
Natalie I feel newspapers are more objective and always relate to some purposes and some benefits. It doesn’t relate to mind or spirit. It always discusses the scrambling for power or not and how to do it. I always feel this doesn’t belong to ...
Researcher Your interest?
Natalie Yep, that’s my feeling.

(Natalie, Interview p. 6)

In the interview extract above, Natalie gave two reasons why she did not like argumentative writing on media issues. She compared her writing ability to local students, who had more control of texts and higher writing performance in the newspaper. Another point is that she perceived that current affairs always relates to power relations which did not interest her. She was interested in narrative and emotion.

In the context of learning, understanding the link between discourse communities and relation of power is important. Natalie demonstrated her ability in perceiving how texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events, which relates to critical literacy. Meanwhile, the identity constructed in her interview

provides us with evidence that she was struggling with this identity, as well as with her writing, particularly in her comparison between her writing and local students' writing.

The three interview extracts have provided explanations of what she valued in her writing, values which were shaped by her interests, her experiences of different teachers and her interest in improving her English. In order to become a participant in the discourse community, Natalie spent time to engage with the messy process of exploring how to create an authoritative voice in writing. The following example is supporting evidence to what she has expressed in the interview. In her homework task, "We should not pay to go to the beach" (Year 12), Natalie provided an outline plan as below with a few keywords and used persuasive techniques and that she had learned in the class, along with her final written text marked by her ESL teacher.

Plan

Intro: Last summer, ^{syringes} councils, community, charges, beaches

- Users pay, NOT ratepayers
- beaches → common land
- However

Body: common land

- increase ^{angriness}
- Useful? rebuttal

Conclusion:

We should not pay to go to the beach.

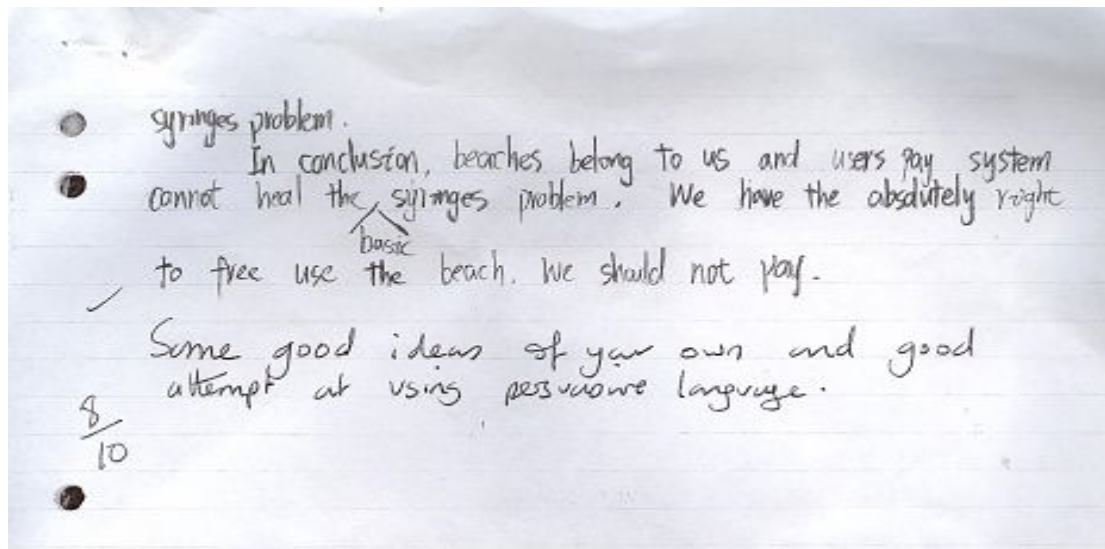
Since last summer ^{when} some people triad on the syringes at beaches, 'pay to go to beach' has become a hot issue. As ^{the} community requires the council to carry out protection strategies, the council thinks about ^{beach} cleaning which will involve charges. Some people argue that beaches are common land and ^{we} should not be charged for use. Some people [✓] argue that users should pay instead of ratepayers. ^{Your view?}

However, even if users pay for the beach-cleaning, more costs will occur. We should not pay for the beach use.

^{not} First, beaches are common land that belong to everyone. We are going to make a politic decision. We are ^{not} going to have a crime. We are going for only relax on our common land. We've already paid a lot for the country. Can't we only ask for a small [✓] free enjoyable trip to our own beach?

Secondly, users' pay system will produce more negative results, than positive. Visitors may leave the rubbish at the beach as they think they've paid. Responsible feelings will be changed. Therefore, more costs will take place. There will be also other costs associate with beach. Such as administration and supervision.

Lastly, users pay system cannot ^{basicaly} solve the syringes problem. Syringes are thrown onto the beaches by drug takers. Council can clean the beach. However, they cannot stop the drug takers doing wrong things. If drug takers ^{really} want to do, they can throw the syringes anywhere. Even your back garden. It's the police who are the best doctors for the



In this essay, Natalie demonstrates her linguistic competence and various language resources to represent her arguments. This includes a clear intention in the introduction and elaboration of each argument. The teacher gave positive comments on her original ideas and use of persuasive language. In her text, she used inclusive language, such as “we” throughout the whole essay; emphatic modal forms to convey her disapproval of paying for the beach, such as “We should not pay”; a rhetorical question, and repetition. She used a metaphor of modality, “absolutely” to strengthen her argument, although the grammar is not correct.

The relationship between writing and writer’s identity was discussed in Section 3.4. As Ivanič (1998) points out, writers’ voices are ways of representing themselves in their writing. Natalie demonstrates a connection between the reader and herself, which is an important skill for students writing academic essays. In her text, she demonstrates both her accommodation to the reader’s expectations, and compliance with the written conventions and the development of her identity in the discourse community by her well demonstration of the writing techniques and conventions.

The next section moves to discuss Natalie's awareness of her strengths and weaknesses in argumentative writing for the VCE.

7.1.2 Natalie's challenges in argumentative writing

In contrast to most of the student participants, Natalie had better strategies and the ability to produce a successful piece of argumentative writing. In the following interview extract, she indicates the challenges she faced in writing.

Writing about issues is harder because every Chinese student's argumentative piece is similar to each other, not powerful and not sophisticated enough. They seem superficial and seem to follow the models. I also can't write that kind of article.

(Group interview A, p. 3-4)

Here Natalie indicated some characteristics of Chinese students' argumentative writing pieces. Let us use "followed the model" as an example. In Section 6.4.3, Natalie described her own struggles, and frustration in using a fixed mode, which is the most common tripartite model in argumentative writing. She also claimed a lack of awareness of how to develop a flexible construct of argumentative writing. In her essay here, she applied persuasive techniques well and presented clear arguments, however she used the fixed model. She begins with a common way of starting a thesis, then presents arguments, using 'first, secondly and lastly' and reiterates the key intention by using 'In conclusion'.

The difficulties that Natalie pointed out in the previous paragraph may be associated with her limited knowledge of genre, for example, using conventional structures and linguistic means to achieve distinctive social goals in particular setting (Eggins, 2003; Halliday, 2004). Johns (2003) indicates that explicit genre teaching should enable students to describe, produce and critique a range of genres in literacy learning process. Promoting students' critical engagement with texts can assist

students to avoid being superficial and powerless in their argumentative writing. However, these goals are difficult even for native speakers in their own language and these forms are in fact not easily mastered by local students (Threadgold, 1997).

In students' engagement with texts, culture adds another layer of complexity to language. Liu (2006) stresses that, "writing also needs to be tackled adopting a complex understanding of culture" (p. 197). In the interview extract below, Natalie defined the cultural difference between Chinese and Westerners in relation to writing performance.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | Can you think of one particular thing you bring from China that helps you to cope with VCE study well? |
| Natalie | Only in English? Chinese students always think deeper, it is considered as a strength. The weakness is that they are not open-minded and having limited thinking. Umm...in writing, you look at the articles, you don't feel they are very passionate. |
| Researcher | How come? |
| Natalie | I feel maybe their English is not good or Chinese personalities are different from Westerners'. Westerners like to exaggerate their feelings, but Chinese, we encourage 'silence is golden' and in the West, "winners know how to defend themselves". |
- (Group interview A, p. 19)

To my first question on what resources she had brought from China, instead of using the personal pronoun 'I', Natalie answered by using the inclusive subject, 'Chinese students'. That means she included herself in this group. She felt Chinese students could think deeper, but were limited compared to local students. These assumptions about Chinese international students from Natalie's point of view were based on limited English but also on stereotypes.

She also pointed out difference in cultural emphasis on passionate and non-passionate expression between Chinese and Western traditions. She stated her perception that, "Westerners like to exaggerate their feelings". She used two Chinese idiomatic phrases to describe Chinese and Westerners' behaviours, which I translated

as “silence is golden” and “winners know how to defend themselves”. She sensed that Chinese students tended to keep silent because it was the moral character of Chinese to listen to what people said, instead of expressing their opinions. However, in Western culture, learning to defend yourself seemed to be more valued than keeping silent. This account of difference tends to frame Chinese students as less critical and struggling to participate in a new discourse community. Natalie’s perspective has provided an example of how Chinese international students position themselves as learners. This conflict poses challenges for them in the Western learning context. The next section moves to Jim’s experience in taking an active role in his reading and how this enhanced his writing ability.

7.2 JIM: “ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING IS LIKE WRITING A LOVE LETTER”

In this section, Jim’s writing experience from his mother tongue is explored in order to find the relationship to his writing challenges in English. I also describe how he built up his understanding of critical literacy and power relations between readers and writers within a new discourse community.

7.2.1 Use of persuasive techniques and their influence on Jim’s writing

In the interview, Jim talked about his learning experience in China and how this experience enhanced his ability to engage critically with different kinds of knowledge and thinking constructed through texts. Before Jim transferred to an English medium school in China, his mother was a Chinese teacher in a university and moved to a private secondary school with him. This school aimed to provide targeted intensive programs to ensure students’ success in the entrance examination for university in

China. However, he could not adapt to the school culture and later transferred to the English medium school and downgraded to Year Six because of his lack of vocabulary and lower English proficiency compared to students in the same age level.

He mentioned that he won many awards in Chinese composition and debating contests for the school. Jim felt his English written proficiency was based on his writing experience in first language and debating skills, because his mother started training him to write articles and a diary since he was in kindergarten. His debating experience had also helped him to detect writers' intentions and persuasive techniques in engaging the readers. Jim explained how debating training influenced his awareness of persuasive techniques in literacy practice as follows:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | When you receive media texts, what do you pay attention to first? |
| Jim | I pay attention to persuasive language use. For some articles, I begin with emotive language. |
| Researcher | You only pay attention to a particular text with its use of persuasive techniques or you always notice it when you read articles? |
| Jim | I scan every media text assigned by the teacher because I think for argumentative writing, there are only two sides, agree and disagree. Emotionally, agreement or disagreement is basically the same. If I can agree with the writer's contention based on the same emotion as him/her, after controlling the feeling, I can find a quote according to that emotion. |
| Researcher | So you always try to feel writers' emotion...while reading others' texts? |
| Jim | Yep, because I think if you want to persuade someone in writing, you need to make them follow your emotion and agree with you. |
| Researcher | Do you notice this when you write in Chinese? |
| Jim | Yep, For example, when I attended Chinese debates in China, based on my experience that if you want others to agree with you, it's useless to provide many examples or evidence. You must control others thinking by using the language and emotion. |
| Researcher | Where do you get this idea? |
| Jim | It's just my feeling that it is more effective this way. On the other aspect, I was trained to attend speech contests in China. At that time if I wanted the judges to give me high scores, I needed to affect them emotionally. It was |

the same as in a debate. If you wanted others to agree with you, you needed to affect them emotionally and let them feel it's wrong to contradict you.

(Jim, Interview p. 10-11)

Apart from Jim, almost every student participant in this study indicated their difficulties in analysing persuasive language use in writing tasks. The difficulties can be a lack of vocabulary and knowledge in describing the functions, tone, familiarity of the sequence and components which shaped the texts. However, Jim had different experiences from other students and argued that writing to argue for or against something is all about 'emotion'. He revealed the insight that detecting the writer's emotion in texts helped to sharpen his sense in persuasive writing and following the writer's emotion led him to find quotations to use as references.

In addition, he thought debating contests were the same as writing a good piece of argumentative writing because of the importance of emotional control. He argued that in order to control others' thinking linguistically and emotionally, it was useless to provide multiple examples or evidence, as debates rely heavily on evidence and both feeling and evidence are important. In this extract, he demonstrated his awareness of persuasive language forms and uses in different media texts. He showed his understanding of the knowledge that texts are not always neutral, but present particular points of view and silence other views to influence readers. His critical analysis and transformation of texts assisted him to situate himself within the academic conversation and to develop his own writing process. The next section moves to Jim's perspective on audience and the fixed models given by the teacher.

7.2.2 Audience versus fixed models

In Australian classrooms, genre-based literacy pedagogy is implemented in both English mainstream and ESL classes (see Section 3.2). The notions of specific written conventions and structures of different genres are embedded in the teaching of writing and literacy approaches. In Section 6.4.2, I discussed two different students' perspectives toward audience. For example, based on their own written texts, Monica and Terry indicated that having a particular audience in mind influenced their use of language, either attracting the audience's attention by thinking about their position in writing (Monica's case) or using formal sentences to express meaning (Terry's case). Instead of expressing his awareness of audience, Jim showed a different point of view of audience and the fixed models given by the teacher.

- Researcher Do you notice the audience when you write?
Jim Audience? I think if you pay attention to the structure too much in writing, you'll forget the audience. Because you always think how to make the structure more rational in order to fit into the fixed structure given by the teacher...(inaudible) But if you forget the structure, you can focus on how to make your audience agree with your feeling in the article.
- Researcher So when you write, you pay attention to the audience's feelings?
Jim Writing this kind of articles is similar to writing love letters. No one notices the format when writing love letters.
- Researcher Do you write a lot of those?
Jim Never. When I write articles, if I want to make the audience catch my feeling, want the audience to agree with me, my way of writing is to read my article after completion, write then read, later change my angle to read it from the audience's angle. By doing so, I can think from the audience's angle.

(Jim, Interview p. 17)

In the extract, Jim did not focus on the genre knowledge in relation to his writing. Instead, he emphasised that paying attention to how to make the audience agree with your feeling was more important than using the fixed models in the writing. He

defined this statement by using a vivid example – writing love letters. He was the only student out of ten in this study who showed great interest in writing about media issues. When I read Jim’s written texts, he still followed the simple structure for argumentative writing using an introduction, followed by three body paragraphs and a conclusion. But he wrote more vividly with the use of different sentence structures and persuasive techniques. His technique was to read his own texts from the reader’s viewpoint which was a sophisticated awareness and practice.

In the assessment guide published by the VCAA (2003), Outcome Two for Unit Four is centred on students’ ability to communicate complex ideas and information effectively through writing for different purposes and audiences. In Jim’s interview, he emphasised how important it was to keep the audience in mind to reach the specific purpose of the genre. He explained that in the VCE, general knowledge about topics was usually relatively simple and could be found easily in supporting materials given by the teacher or examination.

Despite often citing information from the supporting materials, he attempted to participate in the meanings of the texts and learned to integrate these texts into his own written texts. In the extract above, Jim demonstrated he had taken an active role in his reading, which aligns with Lankshear and Knobel’s (1997) notion of “active citizenship”, and enhanced the depth of his literacy practice (p. 95). In the following section, One of Jim’s articles was used as an example to show the use of references to convince his readers to agree with him, as well as how he represented his identity in the discourse.

7.2.3 Use of textual evidence

In the interview with Jim, we spent a long time discussing one of his articles, titled “The Commonwealth Games were not worth the cost”. I explored Jim’s ideas about his writing, the knowledge he tried to represent and what he rejected about argumentative writing, particularly in regard to references. He did this argumentative essay for the internal assessment (SAC) in Year 12, as shown below. There are five pages in total and the full text is provided in the Appendix J. In this section, I only display the first page as an example for analysis.

Year 12 E.S.L. SAC 1 - Issues

Attention: The Commonwealth Game was not worth the cost.

Outline Plan (may extend over page):

Recently, Melbourne has been hosted ^{the} Commonwealth Games. In that two weeks, 697 million tax has been spent, 47 people has been arrest and 19 athletes ^{are} still unaccounted for, further more, we can see police every one turn on the TV, they only talking about how does Australia winning during the game. This make us, who pay the tax, strongly doubt that can't we find anything better to do than wasting "our" money on Commonwealth Game. Although, some people thought say it's a great opportunity to develop the good will and good understanding in British region countries, We still believe the commonwealth Game was not worth the cost.

50 million Dollars spent on the opening and closing ceremonies. (The Age, 30/3, 2006)

697 million Dollars ~~totally~~ spent on the game. (Posted 11:42 am ET games Birden 27/3/06)

These number ~~was~~ is not only a lot, that's a great amount of money which require us — (who pay the tax) to ^{work} ~~work~~ for age to earn it. But our government, spend all these money in two weeks. What

? Can stop us from doubt that what our government has done to ~~take~~ our money? "not how much did it cost the government but how much of our hard earned money did they ^{lose}" said by Michael. (H-sun website 'Your views on the Commonwealth Game, www.heraldsun.news.com.au, 24/3/06) Just like Michael said, It's not something we should ^{be proud of} pride with, but it's something we should shame with. And in fact, the purpose of the game — "good will

In the beginning of the article, he introduced the context and then moved to how much money the government had spent, how many people had been arrested, then briefly summarized what happened to Melbourne, rather than simply stating how many

medals Australian athletes had won. The following interview extracts demonstrate how his writing competence and experience were bound to his identity.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | Did you decide to argue against the Commonwealth Games in the first place? I was surprised you used a number in the second sentence. Why did you do this? |
| Jim | I think giving numbers or statistics straight away has stronger impact than beginning the introduction and expressing your contention slowly. Numbers are an unchangeable fact so people can understand your contention by looking at this number and this strengthens your views and position. Although my teacher said quotes can't appear in the first paragraph, I feel sometimes if you use strong facts, such as numbers, you can let readers reflect, after all, numbers have strong impact to us to make people agree with our points of view. Similarly, our standpoint would be very firm. |
| Researcher | Do you always notice numbers when you write this kind of argumentative essay? |
| Jim | I think sometimes numbers is a good way to start. Then according to the numerals plus other quotes and you can explain the emotion. Because behind the numerals there can be many things, and the most important is that numbers are neutral. But even if numbers are just facts, how you explain it can lead to different results.
(Jim, Interview p. 19) |

Here Jim used “neutral” numbers to raise an emotive response in the reader which is a typical debating technique. He also described his application to argumentative writing. He built up arguments, drawing the audience’s attention to different views on subject matter, and using statistics as supporting materials. When I asked him the reason for using statistics in his writing, he answered that numbers are neutral and help people understand the contention. His view was that numbers are cold hard facts which help to strengthen arguments and the position taken. Although Jim’s opinion that numbers are indifferent and neutral is not necessarily true, he demonstrated his understanding that numerals have an impact on influencing the audience. In the extract, he explained why he liked to begin his paragraph with statistics, namely to reinforce that he was not the only person who made this argument.

In this extract, there seems to be a discrepancy between Jim's perspective and the teacher's model of the way to begin an article. Jim showed that he did not accept the teacher's authority uncritically. For example, he mentioned the teacher told him quotations should not appear in the introduction of the article, but he felt having a strong quotation, including the use of statistics, could consolidate his contention and make the audience agree with him. Based on his debating experience back in China, he demonstrated a critical awareness that the same numerals could be explained in different ways and lead arguments to different results.

Jim's case shows that students from mainland China can not all be placed into the same pot of compliant 'Confucian heritage culture' (CHC), and is consistent with the same arguments made by Ryan and Louie (2007). Nor can it be assumed that they all have the same values and writing experience. Indeed every student has his/her own ways of negotiating a sense of self in his/her writing process. The following extract shows how Jim's identity was taken into account when he learned to argue in a debating competition. This seemed influential on his writing practice in relation to building up strong arguments.

Researcher	When did you know the topic approximately?
Jim	We knew one week before the SAC.
Researcher	One week before.
Jim	But only the topic, not which side we had to argue. So you had to prepare both sides, then you knew which side you had ten minutes before the competition. So I was trained to think both sides. It was quite uncomfortable at the beginning, you had to prepare both sides. Sometimes when you felt you were well-prepared on the con side then you suddenly drew the pro side, so it made me uncomfortable, but I got used to it later. Because I study science, from a scientific point of view, being a scientist, you're asked to keep neutral without any personal emotion. So I got used to it. When I began to argue, I felt I had to express some thoughts about the other side, then use my own feeling to argue.

(Jim, Interview, p. 19-21)

Through the debating training, Jim indicated that he had learned to prepare arguments for both sides of various topics although it was not easy for him to balance his thinking for both sides. In this extract, Jim identified himself as “a scientist” and repeated three times his identity in this field - “I study science”, “from a scientific point of view” and “being a scientist”. He positions himself as a member in a scientific discourse community, therefore, ‘being neutral without any personal emotion’ is essential in arguing a case.

Invanič (1998) states that the discorsal identity is embedded in a writer’s experience when s/he encounters real people and texts. Both of Jim’s interview extracts indicate how Jim’s voice was developed in his writing process. For example, in the first extract he said that he believed ‘numbers are unchangeable facts’ and can be used in order to convince the audience. This writing value aligns with his claim in the second extract, namely ‘being a scientist, you are asked to keep neutral’. His writing process in the new institution involved the process of creating a new identity which fitted the expectations of the new discourse community. He was learning to make choices in genre and language resources to engage himself in a social practice.

There seems to be a discrepancy regarding Jim’s identity as a scientist and his skills in presenting particular views. One tension is that Jim showed his awareness that numbers are neutral, yet explained they can lead to different results and the main purpose of using numbers is to persuade readers which is what a debater does. That is, even numbers do not keep his position neutral in arguments.

7.2.4 Jim's challenges in argumentative writing

Jim was still a better writer than all the student participants in this study due to his immersion background. He was the only student who had attended an English medium school since Year Six. In the interview, he indicated that basic grammar had been taught in Year Seven, including eight tenses and sentence construction. By the end of Year Six, he said students were supposed to have over eight thousand words of vocabulary and in Year Eight and Nine, he had been trained to write compositions and practise recitation. However, the final extract indicates some of the aspects of writing Jim still found difficult.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | In here [his background data sheet], you said you don't think that writing, listening and speaking are problems. But you indicate that your grammar could be improved. Which part? Why do you pick up this aspect? |
| Jim | I think that in my writing, marks are particularly deducted for grammatical errors. One is use of third person singular and plurals, the other is verb tenses. |
| Researcher | Did you learn this when you studied in China? |
| Jim | Yep. I did, but I never cared about it while writing.
((He laughs)) |
| Researcher | So you tend to focus on the ideas? |
| Jim | Yep. Sometimes when I come up with the ideas too fast, I always have grammatical errors. Sometimes I misspell or spell half a word and jump to the next word already. |
| Researcher | So you feel you think too fast and just continue writing? |
| Jim | Yep. Maybe because (inaudible)...because my English isn't as fast as my Chinese so my writing speed can't keep up with my ideas. Sometimes I have the same problems in Chinese. |

(Jim, Interview p. 9)

Although quite a skilled writer, Jim attributed his problem partly to his unwillingness to pay attention to grammar in meaning-making. He stated he always made grammatical errors in agreement between the third person pronoun and the verbs and tenses. Although he was fairly confident in his writing skill, he noticed that his score was always reduced due to grammatical errors and misspelling. Grammar involves the

knowledge that we can make choices about language in context, but these choices require time and attention, which Jim was unwilling to do.

In the extract, Jim indicated that he came up with the ideas too fast and jumped ahead, unconcerned with accuracy. His tendency to speed in writing showed some unwillingness to be more careful about the mechanics and correct spelling, in a context where these skills are actually required and part of the discourse. Below, I provide another Jim's SAC texts in the internal assessment. The teacher's comment at the end is revealing.

(reference?)

Commence Draft here:

"People are dying. However the government ^{is} ~~are~~ stopping us from saving lives." said ~~the~~ ^{the} head of ~~a~~ ^{the} genetic department of Melbourne university Donn Gellan. This is the reality. We ^{are} facing ~~it~~. No matter how hard our scientists beg the government, these politicians ^{always} answer ~~always~~ ^{always} ~~the~~ ^{the} 'No' ~~only~~ ^{only} because they don't want to lose their votes. ~~However~~ ^{However}, people ~~don't~~ ^{don't} ~~listen~~. People may ~~don't~~ ^{not} have ~~the~~ ^{the} knowledge, but these politicians ^{are} the ones in charge.

← to what? In stead of doing what people ask them to do, they should try to correct people's mistakes and take care of them. However in this case, the real meaning of No is, "No. ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~world~~ ^{we} ~~can't~~ ^{can't} saving you ?? (Where is your contention?)

* Please see page 6 for introduction.

Research

It's ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~just~~ ^{just} ~~one~~ ^{one} of the greatest discoveries in 20 century. The importance of it is ~~just~~ ^{just} like the discovery of fire and electricity. It's ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~just~~ ^{just} ~~one~~ ^{one} that can make ~~us~~ ^{us} our society ~~evolve~~ ^{evolve}.

Have never ~~What's~~ ^{What's} stem cell? Many people will ask that. In fact stem cell ^{research is} around us every day. Every individual ^{is} ~~are~~ developing from a stem cell. As we all know, organisms are built by ~~cells~~ ^{cells}.

different type of cells There are so many ~~cells~~ ^{cells} ~~different~~ ^{different} in our body. Most of them are highly ~~special~~ ^{specialised}, and some of them ^{are} even more complex. Like ~~nerve~~ ^{nerve} cell, heart muscle, some cell ~~can't~~ ^{can't} replicate it self by mitosis. This becomes a limit for ~~humans~~ ^{humans} and also creating a grave problem for medical science. Even today, people ~~are~~ ^{are} still dying from heart attacks and cancer. ~~Nerve~~ ^{Injury} takes away the dream and life from a lots of people. Facing these problems, our scientists can do nothing? why not? Because there is ~~no~~ ^{no} way cell from ~~zero~~.

23/06 SLOW DOWN!
Plan first.
Grammar mistakes is affecting fluency

Jim wrote six pages on the topic of stem cell research. He argued that it can help human beings and attempted to persuade people opposed to such research of its value. The full text is provided in Appendix K. In the above extract, Jim crossed out almost two thirds of the page and in the middle, he asked the reader, "Please see page 6 for

introduction”. The teacher also questioned him “where is your contention?” By the end of the page, the teacher left the comment, “Slow down! Plan first. Grammar mistakes is affecting fluency”. Although there is unfortunately a grammar mistake in the teacher’s comment, in this extract it is obvious that the introduction is not at the beginning of the page and Jim was not in control of the mechanics of English. Planning was apparently minimal. The choice of words and careful planning of his ideas and arguments required more time and redrafting. Jim claimed that his written English speed could not catch up to his ideas, and said he had the same problem in Chinese writing.

On the other hand, grammar mistakes were in fact not the main focus in the assessment. In the assessment sheet below, the teacher provided feedback and showed how she weighted the essay.

ENGLISH (E.S.L.) UNIT 3 ASSESSMENT SHEET

ASSESSMENT TASK 3: ISSUES

OUTCOME 1: Discuss in detail the ideas, experiences and issues dealt with in current Australian media texts.

(35 marks)

Name:.....

Criterion 1 (8 marks)

Knowledge and control of the chosen content.

- Understanding of the issue and of a relevant range of views and broad social implications involved in the chosen issue.
- Clear communication of the writer's commitment to and conviction about the argument
- Appropriate selection of evidence to support the argument.

8

Criterion 2 (8 marks)

Coherence and development of ideas and information.

- Ability to shape ideas and present information in a logical order.
- Use of varied and appropriate connections to link ideas within and between paragraphs.
- Analysis of the various aspects of the text, relating them to and maintaining an overview.

7

Criterion 3 (7 marks)

Effectiveness of the structure.

- Ability to select and structure an appropriate framework.
- Relevance of the structure to the form and requirements of the task.
- Appropriate structure within sentences, paragraphs and the entire work.

6

Criterion 4 (6 marks)

Expressiveness, fluency and effectiveness of the language chosen.

- Precise, clear and suitable vocabulary.
- Variation of sentence length and pattern for specific effect.
- Well-developed sense of style and tone.

5

Criterion 5 (6 marks)

Control of the mechanics of the English language to support meaning.

- Accurate and coherent sentences.
- Clear, coherent paragraphing, appropriate connections between paragraphs.
- Spelling and punctuation that supports meaning.

4

N.B. Minor errors in spelling and punctuation should not be overly penalised provided the meaning is not compromised.

Comments:

Despite major weaknesses in grammar and expression you present an argument which is strongly expressed, particularly in your rebuttal paragraph and your conclusion. You keep control of the content and material throughout your essay well done!

30

In the internal assessment, there are five criteria and Jim's 30 out of 35 was considered very high among the ESL students in the college. He received both positive and negative comments on this piece. The teacher gave him full marks on the knowledge and control of the chosen content and high marks in the development of

ideas and information and the effective structure of the text. However, the teacher also commented that he had major weakness in grammar and expression, for which only six marks were allocated. Jim's writing shows that to reach syntactic maturity is not simply just developmental, but also a cultivation of a habit (Frodesen & Holten, 2003), and he needed to cultivate the habit of paying more attention to grammar.

Both Natalie and Jim's perspectives and experiences show they shared some similarities in relation to their English proficiency and writing. Because of the high-stakes testing focus in this college, all student participants in this study took a Chinese subject to increase their overall VCE scores, except for these two students and Victor. They reflected on the relationship between their interaction with teachers, individuality and the development of argument. They showed their abilities in the expression of individual thoughts and feelings and their passion in writing. Their feelings and passion in learning to write and participation in the class led them to grasp key aspects of persuasive argument, although they still found writing a challenge in different ways. Argumentative writing for them was not simply as a mechanism for social reproduction (Ivanič, 1998). Rather it was a way of demonstrating their expression of viewpoints, and their passion in engaging with writing practices.

7.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have presented a contrast between two successful students, Natalie and Jim, who engaged deeply with argumentative writing. I considered their writing values and challenges in classroom performance, and their comprehension of texts in argumentative writing. Due to their immersion in argumentative writing, both Natalie and Jim demonstrated their confidence in providing examples and ideas about their

learning, their difficulties and how they surmounted these. Their experiences have helped to explore how students' individual characteristics and prior learning experience support and constrain success in argumentative writing, for example, Natalie's opinions on differences in cultural emphasis (passionate versus non-passionate expression) in relation to writing performance and Jim's debating experience.

In the next chapter I look at teacher perspectives on students' argumentative writing, and the types of support they offer in class. Teacher perspectives are vital in this study, not just to compare with students perspectives about VCE writing, but also to develop and represent some of the pedagogical issues in the teaching and learning of argumentative writing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OBSERVATION AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

8.0 OVERVIEW

In the previous two chapters, I examined student perspectives on their negotiation of expectations, norms and literacy practices in VCE ESL classes and focused on how students position themselves in learning argumentative writing and analysing media texts. This chapter shifts to teachers who present the academic discourse expected of students in reading and writing about media issues, and their perspectives on international students' learning.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is a case study of one teacher participant (Meg), and focuses on how she taught Australian media texts, constructed the field of the argumentative genres and modelled a piece of argumentative text. The data presented here is based on Meg's lesson transcripts, field notes and my narratives of the lessons. Meg's case study provides a context for teacher perceptions in the second part of the chapter. It also helps to address the third research question on the pedagogical approaches used to teaching argumentative writing in VCE ESL.

The second section is centred on teacher perceptions of Chinese international students' abilities and difficulties in analysing media texts and producing argumentative written texts, which addresses the second research question. This is based on the teacher's interview data. The discussion here focuses on the three ESL teachers' perceptions of students' difficulties in reading media texts then moves to perceptions of students' writing difficulties. The three teachers in the study were Colin, Meg and Kelly. The findings of the teacher interviews are grouped under the

following themes. The first three themes relate to students' reading about media texts, while the next three relate to students' writing. Finally, it concludes with a summary and discussion of the interview findings.

1. Recognising genre and subtleties of the language
2. News as fact or opinions
3. Being critical
4. Accuracy: Grammar and vocabulary
5. Planning and writing
6. Plagiarism

8.1 ONE TEACHER'S PRACTICE

In this section, I present one particular teacher's methods of teaching argumentative writing. During classroom observation of nine lessons, three lessons from each teacher were based on the Writing Task for the final examination in Year 12. I chose to use Meg's lessons as an example because they were particularly clear in showing how she built up knowledge of writing topics in a structured way and modelled the argumentative genre. I focus particularly on the first and third lessons, since the second lesson was mainly concerned with reading strategies for analysing persuasive language in a text.

The Writing Task includes three sets of task material and is divided into a three-part sequence, a note-form summary, language analysis and a written viewpoint piece to argue an issue. Meg's construction of argumentative writing was based on the issue, 'youth curfew'. She taught how to write a note-form summary by using the first set of task material in the first lesson, analysing persuasive techniques with the second set of task material in the second lesson, then helped students to write their own pieces in the third lesson (see the Writing Task material in the following sections and

Appendix N). As discussed in Section 3.3.2, genre-based literacy pedagogy has been adopted in Australian school to engage students with their writing and to build the knowledge needed in the academic community (Callaghan & Rothery, 1993; Feez, 2002; Martin, 1989). Meg's teaching of writing a note-form summary in the first lesson was part of a scaffolding process, which demonstrated how she assisted students through an interactive process of analysis, discussion, and joint individual construction of texts. I also focus on her third lesson where she helped students to write a letter to the city council to express their viewpoints on the youth curfew topic.

8.1.1 Youth curfew

This lesson was fifty-five minutes long. Meg came into the class earlier to prepare for her teaching and students slowly walked in until there were twenty students in total. While most of the students were still chatting to each other or reviewing what they did in the previous lesson, Meg distributed a past VCE examination paper of the Writing Task to students. This consisted of three set tasks based on the issue 'youth curfew', and included writing a note-form summary (using the first task material of the past paper), analysing five examples of persuasive language and writing a letter to the council giving an opinion on the curfew.

Examination Focus

Meg put down the past paper on the table in front of her and began the discussion with the students about the nature of the final examination.

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Meg | Section Two is called 'Writing task'. How many tasks do you have to do in Section Two?
[A few students answered 'two' and some others answered 'three'. Many of them were laughing.]
Wrong, Daniel. What are the three tasks? The first one is ... |
| Vivian | Note-taking. |

Meg Note-taking. Second one is...

Natalie Language analysis.

Meg OK. Language analysis. And the third task is...

((More students were making a noise and one student's answer was inaudible))

Meg Point-of-view, OK? Your opinion on the issue. OK? So what are we going to do in these three days? We are going to work on each of these tasks from a past exam. So I will pass around the tasks. This is from quite a few years ago. So this is from an actual exam, students actually did the exam. Now, if this is from the exam, what is the first thing you have to do? Read the material. Read the questions and read the materials, OK? Because you have to work out what the issue is. It is very important you understand that you won't be able to do the task if you don't understand what the issue is, OK? So in the exam, what, when will you read the material and what points are in the exam? During the reading time, OK? You have 15 minutes of reading time. In addition, you will look at it again when you actually come to do the task. You spent roughly half an hour in each of those tasks. OK. Now...umm...because you haven't read it, we will read it together, OK? Just a couple of vocabulary things.

(Meg, Lesson 1 transcript 28/08/06)

Before Meg started the teaching of writing a note-form summary, using material in the past paper, she spent approximately 15 minutes to go through the nature of the final examination. During the 15 minutes, she attempted to check students' understanding of the Writing Task, such as time allocation, the requirements and the main focus of the tasks, referring to the word "exam" seven times and repeating students' answers. Through this conversation between Meg and her students, short and individual answers were provided by the students and expanded by Meg. She adopted a question/answer approach to check students' understanding of the examination. However, students seemed to sit passively during this discussion without much interaction with the teacher, as seen in the data above. Meg talked for quite a long time with many pauses, uses of the word, 'OK' and answering questions by herself. Many students were not paying attention.

Tower College (pseudonym) claimed a high academic reputation to prepare international students for university success (see details in Section 5.2.2). The classroom observation was done in the final semester of Year 12 and Meg spent

almost 15 minutes to discuss the nature of the Writing Task for the final examination. This also happened in Meg's third lesson (see Section 8.1.2), which shows the focus on preparing the students for the examination, a major aim of the college.

Meg's strategy: the three WH-questions

After exploring the nature of the examination, Meg moved to the first task material with the students. She wrote down the word 'curfew' on the board and asked for its meaning. While most of students looked up their electronic dictionaries to find the answer, one student answered, 'Stop someone'. Meg expanded his answer, saying

Stop someone. What? ((A few students were saying something very Quietly)) For example, they might have been people fighting in the street. The government may say, 'OK, we are going to introduce a curfew' which might mean that everybody has to be inside the house at dark, when it gets dark. Let's say seven o'clock at night and really you are not allowed to be out unless you have a good reason. It's a restriction on people's movement.

(Meg, Lesson 1 transcript 28/08/06)

Meg provided an explanation and example of a curfew to provide a context for writing. She thus helped to build up their knowledge of the field. Later, Meg called Andy to read aloud the background context of the task material before moving to the article, shown below.

Figure 8.1 Past paper for the Writing Task in the Study Guide, reprinted by the college. (Source: VCAA)

ENGLISH CAT 3

14

SECTION TWO – Writing task

Specific instructions for Section Two

Carefully read the following material and then complete **all three** set tasks on page 17.

Each task has the same weighting in the assessment. After you have read the material carefully, you should spend approximately the same amount of time on each task.

You will be assessed according to the criteria for the award of grades on page 18.

Task material

Bosman is a large regional city with a population of 80 000. Bosman is approximately 120 kilometres from Melbourne.

There has been an increase in the number of violent crimes involving young people in the inner city area of Bosman. Politicians, the police force, community groups, and social welfare workers have been discussing the problem.

The City Council has suggested a curfew for young people. If a curfew is introduced, it will be illegal for young people under the age of 18 years to be out in the inner city area between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am. Young people will only be allowed in the inner city area at this time if they are with an adult who would be legally responsible for their behaviour.

The city newspaper, *The Bosman Bulletin*, reported the most violent crime. A young man was injured in a knife attack. This is part of the report in the newspaper.

The police and community groups say that the number of crimes involving young people has had a bad effect on the reputation of the Bosman community. The council has tried to reduce violence in recent years. A Youth Outreach worker, Ms Barbara Thomas, has been employed by the council to help young people in the inner city area. Ms Thomas said that she was trying to help young people who often had nowhere to live, no family support and no hope of getting a job.

‘Keeping young people off the streets by force is not the answer,’ she said. ‘Force never works. The government tried to stop the sale of alcohol in the USA in the 1930s. That didn’t work and the curfew will not work either. The only way to change behaviour is to change the way people think. We must start by teaching young people how to behave. Families and schools are both responsible for this.’

‘The people of Bosman should be ashamed of the way young people are treated in this city. The kids have nowhere to go and nothing to do. If they come into the city to meet their mates, they get bullied by the police.’

Barbara Thomas believes that local government must put more money into programs for young people.

However, the City Council is determined to introduce a curfew on young people. A spokesperson for the council, Ms Elaine Foster, said yesterday that curfews had been successful in reducing certain kinds of crimes in other countries.

‘We know that this proposal may seem harsh, but we’ve tried other things and they have not worked. This is not an attack on young people’s freedom. We are trying to protect them so that they are free to grow up in a safe society.’

‘I would like people who are against the curfew to remember that many groups in our community are in favour of the curfew. In fact we received a letter from the student representative council at Bosman South Secondary College. The students there want a curfew to be introduced.’

The City Council will decide at its next meeting whether or not to have a curfew.

SECTION TWO – continued

Meg interrupted after Andy had read two paragraphs and checked students’ understanding. The following transcript shows how students were supported or

‘scaffolded’ during the teacher questioning about the background context of the task material.

Meg OK. The problem...the problem is...

Natalie Involving young people.

Meg Involving young people. OK. The problem is young people committing violent crimes. OK. Go on.

((Andy continued reading the rest of two paragraphs))

Meg OK. So we’ve got the problem, young people with violent crimes. The council has suggested a solution, a curfew for young people under 18. OK? They are not allowed to go out from 10pm until when?

((Some students answered 6 am))

Meg 6 am. Sounds reasonable to you? Would you mind if your movements were restricted? Can you imagine it might be something people will feel strongly about, both young people and older people? So you can see there’s an issue there. There will be disagreement. There will be people saying “We’re scared of violent crimes and that frightened us. We need solutions and a curfew is good.” There will be other people saying “It is not fair, we wanna have our movements unrestricted.” So before you read anymore, you should be given a feel for the issue and the controversy, the argument in that. OK.

(Meg, Lesson 1 transcript 28/08/06)

Before moving to the newspaper report, Meg asked students many questions to make students think, and helped them build up a stronger knowledge of the field. She provided examples for both sides of the arguments, and furthermore, created a sense of empathy by using a lot of inclusive language and rhetorical questions in her conversation with students. For example, she encouraged students to position themselves, asking questions like “Sounds reasonable to you?”; “Would you mind ...” and “Can you imagine ...?”

Later, Meg asked students to turn to the final page of the past paper which indicated the requirements of three phases of the task. She asked students to pay attention to the criteria for the first task, writing a note-form summary and to be aware of the purpose of reading the task material. After this, a few students were asked to take turns to read the newspaper report above.

Meg OK, so who can tell me before we move on, in summary what will you be presenting from what we just read? You have got two sides of an

- argument, haven't you? You've got one side arguing against the curfew and you've got the other side arguing for. Who is arguing against the curfew? And what is she? What gives her the right to present a point of view on this. What does she do? What's her job?
- Natalie Working with young people.
- Meg Yes, she works with young people. She is a Youth Outreach worker, that's someone who works with young people. Who is the other person speaking up here?
- Ryan Elaine Foster.
- Meg What does she do? OK, she is representing the council. The council is the one who wants to introduce the curfew, OK? So in here, you've got two sides of arguments. What does that make you think in your head about your note-taking summary.

(Meg, Lesson 1 transcript 28/08/06)

After several students finished reading the report aloud, Meg applied the strategy of using what and who questions to check students' understanding of the context and then later move to the construction of a note-form summary and reading of the another two task materials. In the transcript, Meg provides answers herself, and little 'wait time' was allowed for students to answer.

This shows the teaching process was heavily teacher-centred as students did not offer many responses, and answers given were brief. Two thirds of students were from mainland China and the rest came from Indonesia and Vietnam in this class. The stereotype of CHC students' low participation in the classroom discussion in westernised school contexts has often been attributed to cultural reasons. However, the causes for low participation may be explained by at least four possible factors.

Whether students chose to act passively is a key point. Guy (2005) claims that Confucian societies and their education systems place an importance on group membership and solidarity. Therefore it could be inferred that students who take an active role in the classroom break the solidarity of the group. Secondly, Bodycott and Waller (2000) indicate that a language barrier can be another issue for low participation. If students did not understand, this could explain their lack of participation.

The third point is the use of teacher-oriented approach. If the teacher dominates the lesson, students do not have a chance to speak. Meg used a teacher-oriented teaching approach during these lessons. As discussed in 4.1, student-oriented approaches are claimed to dominate westernised learning contexts, however, there were no cooperative or group work in student activities in this lesson, such as vocabulary building exercises, role-play or other reading exercises. Many researchers show the effectiveness of cooperative and group-work elements in students' learning (Guy, 2005; Tiong & Yong, 2004; Springer, Stanne & Donovan, 1999; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Students in some Western classrooms are trained to challenge, criticise and discuss issues with their teachers and peers (Scollon, 1999). Here Meg jumped in repeatedly, answering her own questions.

Fourthly, only minimal answers were provided by students, who did not attempt to raise questions or provide arguments in the classroom as 'active participants' or 'critical learners'. Meg did not nominate students to answer her questions or provide wait time when the students were silent or passive which is part of an effective teaching approach. To sum up, at least four possible factors can help to answer why Chinese international students tended to act passively in the class.

8.1.2 "I want to see you really argue"

This section centres on Meg's third lesson, the teaching of writing a letter on the notion of youth curfew. In the first lesson, Meg focused on building up students' understanding of the issue and teaching them how to write a note-form summary based on the first set of task material. During the second lesson, she made a note-form summary with students on the board and moved to the analysis of persuasive language use relating to the second set of task material. The first two materials used in the first

and second lessons helped students to gain a broader picture of different views about youth curfew.

In the third lesson, Meg started with the discussion of the final examination as in the first lesson, with a slightly different focus and quickly moved to the requirement of Part Three of the Writing task. The data here are from my narrative observation notes.

Meg began to talk about the weight of the exam, 50% for the text Response (30 marks) and 50% for the Writing task (30 marks). She explained that note-form summary, language analysis and point-of-view writing are equally weighted in the assessment, which are 10 marks each. She asked one student to read the requirement for Part Three, “Writing a letter to the council giving your opinion”. She referred to the strategies 3 Ws, what, who and why. Who are you writing to? What is your purpose? What are you asked to write? A letter? A speech? A persuasive essay? What is the form? Some students answered her questions by saying ‘to argue’, ‘to persuade’, ‘to give someone the reasons’, ‘to express your feelings’. She strongly stressed that “the purpose of your written texts will help to determine the style and tone.” She said “pretend you have strong point of view and in the exam, I want to see you really argue”.

(Researcher’s narrative on Meg’s Lesson 3, 30/08/06)

In the three lessons observed, Meg began two of them with the requirements of the final examination before she moved to the task materials. The final examination is critical for university entry. Given this assessment pressure, Meg tended to dominate classroom talk as seen above. She also distributed notes from the Study Guide designed by the college to provide past papers and strategies for students to practise.

The notion of genre was embedded in Meg’s teaching of writing, to help students understand how people achieve culturally agreed norms and purposes using the target language. Using the WH-questions, Meg emphasised the importance of understanding the purpose of written texts, as this influences the tone and style students use to position their readers.

In the narrative above, Meg asked students to really argue the issue and ‘pretend’ that they had strong points of view. One student participant gave his viewpoint regarding the real and intended audience. That is, students did not really write to the council, but to Meg as the teacher. In this case, Meg urged students to argue whether they supported or were against a youth curfew. She asked students to pretend to have a strong point of view, but also stressed having a grasp of who their intended reader is. This process was to help them choose their tone and rhetorical strategies, based on their sense of the intended reader.

Later, Meg moved to an overhead transparency about examiner expectations from the Study Guide on the Writing Task.

Figure 8.2 A transparency from the Study Guide provided by Meg, Lesson 3, 30/08/06

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>What are the examiners looking for?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An awareness of purpose• An awareness of audience• An awareness of the issue and a link between this and any proposed solutions you may offer• A depth of awareness of the issues and an avoidance of ‘simplistic’ solutions• Students who answer in their own words and DO NOT copy large slabs from the text• An ability to use language persuasively• An understanding of the information presented and an ability to use ideas from it to support the point of view the student is presenting• Use of planning skills to plan a carefully structured and well-thought-out response.

Showing what the examiners want serves to highlight the focus on examination-based teaching in this college. The notion of genre was implied in this criteria sheet, with its emphasis on the awareness of purpose and audience, as different genres serve different purposes and audience (Eggins, 2003; Halliday, 1985; Martin, 2003; Swales,

1990). Students' awareness of the issues, ability to use persuasive language, supporting material and planning skills were also mentioned. Meg spent approximately three minutes on this transparency but did not discuss each criterion with students. Instead, she moved immediately to the stage of joint construction of the text (Callaghan & Rothery, 1993).

First she explained the most common tripartite model for argumentative writing, including introduction, three body paragraphs and conclusion. She encouraged students to follow this model to structure their letter and provided them with a letter layout. During the discussion of layout, a few students asked questions, such as whether it was appropriate to use the word 'idiot' in the letter and how they would know the council's name. Students participated keenly in writing the letter to the city council, which surprised me because in earlier classroom observation, students tended to be less responsive.

During the modelling process, Meg discussed the social function of the genre and briefly introduced text structure and language by demonstrating a model letter she herself had composed. Her addition of annotation regarding the genre features is provided on the left of the text.

Figure 8.3 A letter to the city council, written by Meg, Lesson 3, 30/08/06

letter layout and relate to the question	<p>3 Smith St Bosman 333</p> <p>The Mayor Bosman City Council PO Box 75 Bosman</p> <p>29 October 2004</p> <p>Dear Sir/Madam</p>
Introduction, clearly gives writer's point of view on topic	I feel personally insulted and am outraged by the Council's plan to introduce a night curfew for young people.
Show personal involvement	Do you think all young people are thugs and vandals? I assure they are not! Why should all decent, hard-working young teenagers suffer because of a handful of hooligans?
A relevant objection	I am a 17 year-old VCE student and I have to work to support my widowed mother and younger siblings. The only time I can work is at night. Are you going to deprive my family of their income? I know I am not the only teenager who needs to work to supplement the family income or to go gain necessary pocket money.
Refers to extra material	I think two of my friends under 18 who study hard all week and would like to relax one or two nights a week by seeing a movie and eating at a fast food outlet. Are you going to deprive them of this harmless relaxation?
Again, refers to extra material and refuse a curfew	What about the financial loss to cinemas, games arcades, fast food outlets and other restaurants? Hungry Jacks, McDonalds and Pizza Hut are mainly patronised by young teenagers. I am sure those firms and others will not thank you for a down turn in profit.
Conclusion, uses strong words	Furthermore, your statistics do not support your case. While showing that teenage crime has increased, they do not indicate when the crimes occurred. Recent police statistics show that over 80% of thefts occur in homes between 8am and 5pm. Your curfew will not make any impact on them.
Ends a powerful note	Thus, I strongly urge you to reconsider your draconian, reprehensible plan. Have some more faith and trust in teenagers. Do something positive for us, instead of always making us scapegoats. We are your future!
Letter layout	Yours faithfully
Sign off	Lisa Simpson

Meg used the model to teach students how to develop an argument in a letter form.

She also expanded the tripartite model into a more flexible construct of argumentative writing. It is important to note that when Meg and students moved to the stage of joint

negotiation of text, ongoing discussion of how to write a letter still referred back to the tripartite model (introduction, body and conclusion). I wondered whether students were confused with two models, the tripartite model then her own more flexible model. Did they have an awareness of how to apply a flexible construct of argumentative writing by simply reading a sample letter?

After demonstrating her sample, she left 20 minutes for students to write an outline plan and asked them to write a letter for homework. During the planning process, Meg again referred to the tripartite model on the board and students were asked to structure in that way. While she was checking each student's outline plan, she suggested different approaches to tackle the topic, asking questions and reminding students about the audience and the tone appropriate for this genre.

Different scaffolding approaches are used by teachers to bridge from what students know to what they need to learn. In this section, I used Callaghan and Rothery's (1993) curriculum cycle (see Section 3.2.2) to analyse Meg's planning of classroom activities for teaching writing. In Meg's third lesson, she used a genre-based approach, paying attention to purpose, overall structure and specific linguistic features used in the particular genre. Meg had explicit teaching strategies to scaffold the writing task which demonstrated a clear picture of her pedagogical approach. She seemed to offer a good model of the curriculum cycle (Callaghan & Rothery, 1993; Derewianka, 1991; Feez, 2002).

During the period of classroom observation of three teacher's lessons, I noticed they always gave students sufficient time in planning and constructing their texts independently and asked them to complete argumentative texts for homework. According to the interviews with the teachers, the drafting and revising seemed to

take place at home, while individual meetings with the teachers were used for conferencing as needed.

8.2 TEACHERS ON STUDENTS' WRITING

In the assessment reports in 2005 and 2006 published by the VCAA (see Section 2.4.4), ESL students were reported to encounter great difficulties in understanding and discussing the effect of persuasive language on an audience, and how arguments are made by writers. In what follows, I begin the second part of the chapter on teacher perspectives on students' difficulties in engaging with Australian media texts. The three teachers were Colin, Meg and Kelly.

8.2.1 Recognising genre and subtleties of the language

As discussed in Section 3.2, the notion of genre is embedded in the teaching of literacy and academic approaches in Australian schools. Students' effective literacy learning draws on a repertoire of practices and culturally agreed norms (Freebody & Luke, 1990). These include knowing about and acting on different cultural and social functions of texts, their tone and the sequence of components at the discourse level of a language. Different genres have different text-specific schematic structures and recognised patterns to serve a purpose and audience. Colin was one of the teacher participants and had taught VCE ESL for more than twenty years. He was an ESL assessor and a panel chairman for the Year 12 examination. After discussing his educational and teaching background, we moved to the topic of Chinese students' strengths and weaknesses in reading media texts and producing argumentative writing.

Colin	One of the problems they have I suppose, is not always understanding. And even after you've been with them for many months and you've done the same sorts of exercises, they don't always appreciate,
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- they don't always grasp what a Letter to the Editor is, or what the distinction between a Letter to the Editor and an editorial is, or an opinion article.
- Researcher So really, they are not very clear about different forms of writing?
- Colin That's a very difficult thing to get them to understand: the different genres, the different forms, the different parts of say, a newspaper; that's one problem.

(Colin, Interview p. 2)

Colin indicates one of students' major difficulties in engaging with Australian media texts was significantly associated with discourse level of language, recognising different forms of genres. Different forms of media texts treat issues in various ways, for example, some can be factual and others can be subjective. ESL students need to develop the ability to recognise some texts as opinion-rich while other texts involve interpretation.

However, Colin pointed out his frustration in teaching students how to distinguish different genres. He felt that even if the same concept had been taught and practised for months, some students still did not grasp different forms of media texts. As mentioned in Chapter Two, many ESL students, including students from mainland China come from an educational background where the teaching of lexical and grammatical competence is the primary goal. Identifying and producing the discourse of argumentative texts is not part of this background.

When I asked these teacher participants about what influences students' difficulties in reading media texts, both Colin and Meg attributed their difficulties to not only cultural, but also to linguistic factors. Colin gave his opinion as follows:

Yes, well I think one of the problems is that most of the sorts of text that we give them, which are from previous ESL Year 12 exams, they can be culturally very specific. And part of the pre-teaching usually needs to be, okay, give them an introduction, give them some background. Perhaps the issues aren't culturally-specific, but the language with which they're communicated can be very much, well, sometimes it can be too sophisticated. Sometimes it can be too

idiomatic.

(Colin, interview p. 5)

Australian media texts used in ESL classes can be culturally specific and students' understanding of how writers use language patterns to accomplish a coherent and purposeful way in writing particular genres is another issue. Therefore, a key challenge for them is to recognise the subtle textual differences between different forms of argumentative genres, and the registers of formal, idiomatic and informal language.

Time constraints are a key issue for teachers who teach the VCE. Recall that Colin also mentioned that linguistic barriers take time to work on, involving sophisticated and idiomatic language. Within two years, teachers need to get these ESL students to develop not only language control and analytical organisation skills, but also the subtleties of the language. Levels of linguistic competence which is associated with Freebody and Luke's (1990) concept of coding competence impact dramatically on using these kinds of texts, and spelling, conventions and patterns of sentence structure and vocabulary; all are salient to this competence.

In section 3.4, I argued that some students from non-English speaking backgrounds may lack the linguistic competence or resources to represent their arguments clearly in writing. Colin's response shows that ESL students' insufficient linguistic knowledge may not only have a strong relationship with their writing performance, but also with their comprehension of the language used in media texts. For example, in Part One, the notion of youth curfew was new to students, along with new vocabulary, such as 'arson', 'assault with weapons' and 'vandalism'.

Meg is an ESL co-ordinator of the college and had been teaching ESL students for 15 years. She shared similar ideas with Colin about students' reading difficulties in media texts.

- Researcher For reading media texts and writing their own piece of writing, can you tell me their strengths and weaknesses respectively?
- Meg Okay, they are good at reading for the literal meaning, you know the literal meaning, so they are good at it. I mean the obvious meaning. They understand, you know they can read and understand on one level, you know, something when they're given it, but they are not very good always at reading the sub-text, you know, the meaning beneath the meaning.
- Researcher You mean the culture?
- Meg Some of it's cultural, some of it's linguistic. It's understanding of words and how words can have more than one meaning, which is hard. I mean, when I say they find that hard, all students find that hard. I mean local students find that hard too. But another problem that they might have with reading, some students, particularly students who are not so strong in English is that they are constantly stopping and either looking up words in their dictionaries, or stopping because they....
- (Meg, Interview p. 3)

In the above, Meg used the terms of “literal meaning”, “obvious meaning” and “understand on one level” to describe what students can easily absorb from texts. Meg attributes the students’ reading difficulties to both linguistic and cultural factors and indicates that students have the ability to grasp the literal meaning of words in texts, but not “the meaning beneath the meaning”, especially weak students. She elaborated on lexical meanings, which comprise literal and subtextual or ‘connoted’ meanings. As Colin said, the language used in media texts can be sophisticated and idiomatic which needs time, as students slowly develop their linguistic ‘cultural capital’ (Love, 1996).

In this extract, Meg points out “local students find that hard too”, not just ESL students or Chinese international students. She used inclusive language, “all students”, to include every student taking the VCE. The repetition of the sentence pattern, “they find that hard, all students find that hard”, reinforces this. An experienced ESL

teacher, Meg draws attention to the problem of limited vocabulary. Besides linguistic and cultural factors, there are other elements influencing students' reading skills.

During the interview with Colin, I asked whether students' difficulties in reading media texts are correlated with their literacy skills. By way of answer, he described a situation which occurred in his class.

No, their problem in persuasive language is because they are, well yes, it is literacy skills, but understanding the nuances and the subtleties of the language and tone and register... And most of the students, even by the time the exam comes around, all they can really do with that task, which is an awful task to give at Year 12 ESL level, and it shouldn't be there. Most people argue it should not be there, but it is. I think we have to deal with that. All they can really do is go around and around in circles saying he's saying this, or the writer is using this to show that he... and then they'll repeat what the writer has said or paraphrase what the writer has said. They just go around and around in circles. They don't go onto that next step, and they find it very difficult to explain why.

(Colin, Interview p. 12)

Colin pointed out three major points which hinder students in going "on onto that next step" of deep analysis of language used in media texts, namely the nuances and the subtleties of the language, tone and register. Colin had already cited examples of the nuances and the subtleties of the language as a problem. Here, he pointed out another two major points, tone and register. 'Tone' is as an important element for students to engage with media texts. Wayne, Sarros and Baxter (2002) compare the tone of a piece of writing to the 'voice' of texts. Students' ability to identify what voice the writer is trying to achieve, and how the voice is being used to persuade, inform or entertain is essential for them to cross the borderline to being 'a member of secondary Discourse' who can accommodate the dominant norms of the secondary Discourse. Becoming 'an apprentice of secondary Discourse' who is learning to make meaning through collaborative practices in a secondary Discourse (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991) is thus no easy feat.

When texts share the same context of situation, they belong to the same register which shares the same experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings (see 3.2.1). Texts which belong to the same register share the same general meanings and patterns of lexicogrammar (Butt et al., 2000; Eggins, 2003). Students' knowledge of register helps them to understand the discourse level of language which is vital for creating their own texts and knowing the grammatical patterns to use. But these notions, and their practices involved in using them, are clearly complex.

In the interview extract above, Colin indicated his concern about the compatibility between persuasive language analysis and the VCE ESL examination by saying the media task was "an awful task" and "it shouldn't be there". He felt that synthesizing ideas was too complex for these students. He said many students "go around and around in circles", and repeat or paraphrase what the writer said. For Colin, presenting complicated ideas using conventions accepted by the institutional discourse community and readers' expectations, for example, their ESL teachers and examiners, was both arduous and unrealistic for ESL students. Students' success in analysing Australian media texts in the target discourse community is indeed determined by how much they conform and are accustomed to its conventions and practices, including cultural understanding. However, their weakness in generating and assessing different genres, that is, in participating effectively in the secondary discourse community, poses great obstacles and challenges for them.

The next section moves to another difficulty, which is familiarity with the nature of different media texts.

8.2.2 News as fact or opinion

In the interview with Colin, he described his teaching of media texts, and also indicated students' difficulty in recognising news as fact or opinion. He said,

That takes a lot of energy and a lot of work, because perhaps they are not familiar with letters to the editor as a concept. They're perhaps more familiar with a news item and taking - now I might be wrong here – but it's a sense I think most of us have, that if it's in a newspaper it's a news report, not necessarily the opinion of an individual being expressed. And I think it takes them a great deal of time to understand that a newspaper can be a platform or a forum for discussion on an issue, rather than just relaying news and information; that's what we tend to spend a lot of time explaining.
(Colin, Interview p. 2)

In the extract above, Colin points out that it takes energy, work and time to help students to discriminate between fact and opinion, yet mastery of this aspect of media texts is expected in students' writing of different argumentative genres in the VCE examination. He assumed that the knowledge of the nature of media texts “(is) a sense I think most of us have”. Here, I am uncertain whether he meant all people, all English speakers or all ESL teachers. But the key point is that the students found it difficult to recognise news articles as fact or opinions.

In the VCE ESL classes, editorials are the most commonly chosen media texts for analysis (Wynne, Sarros & Baxter, 2002). Editorials are treated as the editors' ‘voice’ of the newspaper. Wynne, Sarros and Baxter (2002) point out that “Editorials are generally conservative in language and approach and argue in a reasonable and knowledgeable sounding tone” (p. 27). However, in letters to the editor, writers usually have strong feelings of the issues and express themselves by using powerful and emotional language. Colin indicates that students' difficulty is to understand the concept that “a newspaper can be a platform or a forum for discussion on an issue, rather than just relaying news and information”, which influences students' writing

performance. There may also be a contrast between the source material genre, and the response genre.

8.2.3 Being critical

Perceiving how media texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events can depend on personal ideology and level of access to power (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Luke, 1996). Knapp and Bangeni (2005) also raise the concern that students from non-English backgrounds and disadvantaged students need to become critical members and contributors to the secondary discourse community, not instrumental reproducers. In a Western learning context, students are encouraged to express their points of view. Questions, activities and tasks are often designed to allow students to be critical participants in debates in both written and oral modes. However, Meg's lessons were not like this, and a gap lay clearly between the real teaching situation and the concept of critical literacy.

Three teacher participants in this study shared their viewpoints about the students' critical engagement with media texts. In the following two interview extracts from Colin and Kelly, they shared similar ideas about Chinese international students. When I asked Colin whether students' understandings about media texts are influenced by content knowledge, Colin pointed out students' ability to question is even more problematic. He said that,

Oh it can be, depending on the level of difficulty of the content. But it's more to do with the fact that they're probably not conditioned to question why someone, you know, just accepts that this is what is being said. Many of them can't make that leap. Now there is a huge leap from saying what is being said to how it's being said, identifying the means and the why, the intention; that's the big one. That's the hurdle that they don't all get to. Sometimes you can see, with your better students, they are able to do it. And with your middle-range students they come so close but they just don't have the language. They don't have the tools to explain why.

See they've got to have a better language; they've got to have that language of analysis in order to analyse, and that's a hard thing.
(Colin, Interview p. 12-13)

Colin felt Chinese international students tend to accept what is being said, rather than questioning. He demonstrates his awareness of their lack of opportunities to question in their prior learning experience. As discussed in Section 4.1, China is a strong hierarchical community where the less powerful members in the institutions or organisations believe that people in power have the correct answers. The ideology underlying Chinese schooling practice is that teachers are knowledge providers and even moral models. Students are not, in Colin's words, 'conditioned to question'. Besides meeting the requirement of outcomes in VCE, students are being trained to develop the skills to challenge, criticise and discuss issues with their teachers and peers which are elements of critical thinking, valued in Western pedagogical practice.

Colin stressed that the students' difficulty is in the shift from the literal meaning to the subtext, a viewpoint also expressed by Meg (see Section 8.2.1). He indicated it is "a huge leap" to identify how and why language is used in media texts. He attributed this to their language ability, saying better students are able to do it and middle-range students come close, but don't have 'the language'. He used the word 'tools' to refer to the language of analysis. In this extract, he repeated the word 'language' three times within three sentences - "they just don't have the language", "they've got to have a better language", "they've got to have that language of analysis", to emphasise how language knowledge is correlated to reading proficiency of media texts.

Kelly supported this view. She is a young ESL teacher who had taught in public, private and overseas schools. This was her first time teaching Year 12 level. Here is what she said about teaching persuasive language.

- Researcher How about persuasive language? Can you think of, maybe we talk about Chinese students, their strengths and their weaknesses?
- Kelly Which section?
- Researcher Finding and analysing persuasive language, section 2, give 5 examples of persuasive language, part 2 in the Writing Task?
- Kelly Okay, personally overall I would say I have a big struggle with them trying to find their own opinion.
- Researcher Trying to find their own opinions?
- Kelly Yes. Sometimes they just want to know what your opinion is, whether you agree or disagree and they think that's the right one. And so they are not confident to develop their own opinions sometimes. They are too often used to learning what the teacher says is right in black and white, whereas in their educational systems or backgrounds a lot of them are just rote learners like that, and so sometimes I find it is a big struggle for them to say, 'Well okay, what do you think?' and 'Where's your proof?' or 'How are you going to argue that?' instead of saying, 'Well, I don't know' and waiting for you to give them the ideas.
- (Kelly, Interview p. 3)

In regard to eliciting students' opinions, Kelly felt Chinese educational systems and backgrounds had influenced their learning experience. They were used to accepting what the teacher says as correct or to waiting for teachers to give them the ideas (Hinkle, 1999; Hofstede, 1998). Both Colin and Kelly's opinions are similar and give us an idea how ESL teachers in VCE ESL classes accept this stereotype of Chinese students in relation to the values of being unquestioning, passive, respectful and expecting answers.

In the following extract, Meg shows students' also struggle with another aspect of 'being critical'.

- Researcher So if you look at three parts of writing tasks, which one do you think is the most difficult?
- Meg The second one.
- Researcher Even more difficult than this one (part 3, point-of-view writing)?
- Meg Yes. Because of what I said before, it's hard for them to talk about how language works on an audience. It's hard for students to understand that the words that you

choose can actually affect audiences in different ways. When they come to write the point of view themselves, they can often use language in that way, but it is very hard for them to say the effect that language has.

(Meg, Interview p. 6)

Meg felt the analysis of persuasive language in media texts was the most difficult section of the Writing Task in the examination. She pointed out students' difficulty in 'talking about the language critically'. Students' ability to perceive how texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events and the power relations inherent in literacy reflect the depth of their reading and writing (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Lee, 1997; Luke, 1996). Meg pointed out that students are capable of using language to make the reader agree with their viewpoints, but not to analyse texts critically. But if they do not have a necessary basis for analysis and critique of texts, for example, understanding how writers control linguistic resources in order to achieve a purpose, how can they successfully produce their own texts?

Another important point to make about critical literacy is that "to get the critical, you need to get the cultural". As we discussed earlier in the chapter, the different types of Australian media texts used in the VCE ESL examination are highly culturally embedded. We can use examples in the past paper for the Writing Task in the Study Guide and Meg's lesson in Section 8.1.1. In this task material, the term "Youth Outreach worker" is an Australian local government term and is not easily understood by an outsider. There is also historical and cultural knowledge embedded in the texts, such as 'Prohibition in USA in the 1930s' and the term of "the student representative council" which is part of school administration in Australia. Another cultural concept is embedded in the sentence, "If they come into the city to meet their mates, they get bullied by the police". The word "bullied" in the article may mean both verbally as well as physically bullied. Analysing these texts is critical and

influential which helps them to develop the awareness of meaning, language and use of different text-types. Without such awareness, students struggle to produce argumentative pieces with good quality. The next section will move to these students' writing difficulties.

8.2.4 Accuracy: Grammar and vocabulary

As writing is a process of making writers' ideas accessible and convincing to readers, students' knowledge in how to use various syntactic patterns, lexical items or verb forms in a given context is vital to make their ideas accessible. This is associated with Freebody and Luke's (1990) concept about coding competence, which means breaking the code of texts and recognising and using the fundamental features of written texts (see Section 3.3.2). Both Colin and Kelly indicated students had the ability to present the structure but weak control of the mechanics of English to support meanings in their writing. The following are the extracts of their opinions.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Colin | In terms of language... Actually I'll talk about, in terms of structure, once you can teach them the basic structure of essay writing, usually they are very good. Usually they can formulate an introduction which is addressing the issue. They can usually grasp the structure of first, second, third paragraph, conclusion. They, on the whole, can grasp topic sentences to introduce ideas. In terms of structure and organisation, because it's a very mechanical thing, they tend to be able to absorb and grasp that reasonably well. In terms of language, across the board, very, very weak. The fundamental problem I think we've all got with our students from China is very, very limited background in English structures. |
| Researcher | Do you mean vocabulary or grammatical structure? |
| Colin | Tense, grammatical structures, vocabulary, omission of words; that's one issue. That's a very serious one. And even though a student might be highly committed and enthusiastic and work really hard, still the literacy skills are very weak. And that's pretty well across the board. |

(Colin, Interview p. 3)

Colin felt students could grasp the basic structure of essay writing well, and the specific social purpose of text-types. However, he emphasized the students' problem in using accurate and coherent sentences, clear and coherent paragraphing and spelling, describing the issue as "serious". He repeated the phrase "very, very weak" to demonstrate his students' struggle with grammatical structures and vocabulary to develop their coding competence.

According to the assessment sheet of SAC (School-Assessment Coursework, which is an internal assessment and contributes 25% of marks, VCAA, 2004, 2005), students' minor errors in spelling and punctuation are not penalised. However, in the extract Colin emphasised how weak the students were in grammar and vocabulary, even students who were committed, enthusiastic and worked hard. The implication here shows that most students had a basic "literacy" problem.

Some language educators point out that grammar instruction in the second language writing classroom has been assigned a less prominent role recently (Frodesen & Holten, 2003; Lightbown, 1999). The writing process, content, purpose and multiple drafts are viewed as central and grammar is often neglected. However, grammar does matter in VCE assessment (VCAA, 2004, 2005). In this interview, Colin did not state how he dealt with this problem and whether grammar and vocabulary were part of his classroom practice to help students to develop their writing proficiency.

In the following extract, Kelly pointed out Chinese international students' strengths and weakness in writing. Firstly, we talked about the structure of argumentative writing.

Kelly	Yeah, what you need to put in is an introduction, how you need to structure your body paragraphs and then what to do for conclusions and things like that. So they've kind of got that structure in their head and so
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- they can transfer that skill across to this section, so I find that's generally very good already. And they can use persuasive language as I said, but they are not very good at analysing it, Part 2.
- Researcher Okay so how about their weaknesses?
- Kelly Weaknesses, as I said before, I think it would be overall ideas, whether it be in text response or persuasive Part 3 like coming up with their own ideas and explaining it in their own way, and using the text or the given material to help them. I think that's a weakness and also just sentence structure a lot of the time.
- Researcher So what do you mean by sentence structures?
- Kelly Like their grammar and the word order and the tenses they use and the words that they use.
- Researcher So you mean you are not very clear about the idea they try to present?
- Kelly No, they're fluent overall, but that's a weakness like with some of them you would expect them to have improved, whether it's agreement between the noun and the verb, you know, putting -es on the end or whatever, you know to agree. You know, simple things like that that by the end of the year you are still going, hang on, they're still making these mistakes, and so a lot of them, that's a weakness still, sentence structure. Overall, I mean when you assess pieces in year 12 you are looking at overall idea fluency and logical kind of development, but another section is for grammar and the mechanics of English. So that's where their weakness lies.

(Kelly, Interview, p. 9)

In this data, Kelly creates the description of “idea fluency” to indicate concise ideas, which is very important in argumentative writing. She also raised the students’ two main strengths in writing, namely persuasive language use and structure. Kelly agreed with Colin about students’ ability to use the tripartite model and felt that the students could apply persuasive techniques well in their own writing. Her students seemed to have good generic knowledge, to structure the variability of textual forms then engage critically with texts (Part Two of the Writing Task), which requires more time and practice for ESL learners.

Kelly stated the student's main difficulty in writing was grammatical competence and generating ideas. Her viewpoint on students' control of the mechanics of the English language matched with Colin's opinion up to a point. However, in the extract Kelly felt that students' writing showed fluency, but not accuracy in the mechanics of English. It is important to note that her main point here is that the students' weakness of control over mechanics has a significant impact on their writing performance. The next section moves to teachers' perceptions of how planning influences students' writing performance.

8.2.5 Planning and writing

Student writing is assessed on how well they argue and how well they organise their arguments, worth seven marks out of thirty-five in the assessment task (VCAAb, 2003). Meg provided the criteria of what the examiners focus on in the assessment, which were also attached in the students' Study Guide (supporting material in the College). Planning skills constituted one criterion.

In the following extracts, three teachers claim that planning helps students formulate ideas and ensures that the structure of written texts is logical and appropriate to the purpose of the subjects. In this section, the teachers indicated a strong relationship between planning and writing. The first case shows how Colin operationalised writing practice in the classroom, as well as his students' resistance to planning.

Researcher Because I noticed you give them maybe twenty minutes to plan their...

Colin Yes, I use lessons to plan rather than to write. And that's when I'll say, "Okay, now you've planned it, write it for homework. I'll give you three or four days to do that." Usually, not always. But no, because it's an essay they need longer to do it. But I think one of the other big problems we have with overseas students,

- was it Chinese students? Probably not; it's probably students in general actually – lack of planning. Lack of planning is a huge issue. They just...
- Researcher Are they slack in planning or they just ignore planning?
- Colin They ignore it. They ignore it. And I try to explain to them if they don't plan it won't be a good essay. You'll leave something out, you'll repeat it, you'll forget the wording of the question, whatever. So lack of planning is a huge issue for, well, all students, but overseas students aren't an exception to that. They think it's much better to start writing the essay quickly. I'm trying to explain to them...
- (Colin, Interview p. 14)

Colin tended to make students write an outline plan in the class and write the text for homework. He indicated that lack of planning is a huge issue among all students. He emphasised the problem, repeating twice, "They ignore it".

As discussed in the chapters of the theoretical framework and the literature review, different scaffolding writing approaches provide a process for teachers to bridge from what students know to what they are to learn. Colin pointed out that time was given in class for students to plan their written texts. In the following extract, Meg shared a similar perspective.

- Researcher So can they get any support?
- Meg They can. They can certainly come and see me for a tutorial and I can spend time going through. Not very often grammatical things, but more structural things, like how to put the essay together, using topic sentences and so on.
- Researcher Do they like all those structural things?
- Meg Mmm some yeah, they are okay. Once they understand the structure they usually use it. They are not very good at planning but that's not just Chinese students. I think a lot of students find planning difficult. Well, not difficult, but they don't like to plan because they don't see the value of it, even though you tell them that if they plan something it will be better. You know, if you plan or practice something first it is going to be better.
- (Meg, Interview p. 5)

In the extract above, Meg indicated the key focus in her tutorial with students is the structure of texts. She tried to assist students to construct their written texts with planning. During the classroom observation in Meg's third lesson (see 7.2), she gave students twenty minutes to plan their own argumentative pieces based on the issue of a youth curfew. She walked around the classroom and discussed planning with some students. In this extract, we note she also made herself accessible to students to discuss how they planned to write in their own texts, which showed how important she thought planning was. However, she also indicated students' reluctance towards planning because "they don't see the value of it", meanwhile, emphasising how planning enhances the quality of the written work. Meg reiterated Colin's idea that not only Chinese students have this problem, but also many other students.

Below, Kelly described herself as "an ogre" in teaching the importance of planning in writing.

Researcher How about an outline plan? Do you encourage student to make their outline plan before they start writing?

Kelly Oh, absolutely. Oh about planning, oh, I'm an ogre when it comes to planning. I always make them plan, always.

Researcher Always?

Kelly And I always check it. I always refuse to look at their essay until they show me their plan, because a lot of them will say, "No, no". And I'll check their essay and I can tell if they've planned or not. And I'll say, "Did you have a plan?" And they'll say, "No." And I'll say, "I knew so." And then what happens is that I'll ask them, "How come you didn't plan?" And they'll say, "Oh, it's a waste of time." That kind of thing. And I'll say, "Well, that's because you don't know how to plan properly. If you plan effectively it should only take you 5 or 10 minutes." You know, so, it's a matter of training them also how to plan effectively, and use it as like a set of instructions for an essay. So planning, yeah, I'm very tough on my plan.

(Kelly, Interview p. 14)

Kelly pointed out that she tended to refuse students' written texts if they did not attach their plans. She provided examples from her conversations with the students about planning. Kelly reiterated Meg's point about the student's unwillingness to plan because they did not see the value on it. She also raised the pedagogical issue that training students how to plan effectively provided a set of instructions for writing.

Vygotsky's (1978) idea of explicating the teaching of academic literacy has been used in many scaffolding approaches (Gibbons, 2002; Johns, 2003). Planning was a significant issue pointed out by all teachers in this study, but was planning explicitly taught during lessons or did teachers simply give students 15 minutes to write a plan and then check their plans were attached to the completed written texts (Kelly's approach)? Data from these three teachers indicate that at least twenty minutes were usually provided for students to write their outline plans; Meg tried to make herself accessible to students to discuss their plans and Kelly asked to receive students' argumentative pieces with their outline plans. However, the teaching of planning was not mentioned.

The following section moves to the topic of 'original' written work, and its opposite, plagiarised text.

8.2.6 PLAGIARISM

Before we explore the teachers' attitudes to this issue, Kelly describes a situation in her class before the SAC (an internal assessment) as below.

Yeah, you see them even before the SAC when you're unlocking the door they are standing there trying to memorise their essay they wrote themselves and they are trying to memorise it so then in the time they can just come in and start...you can't stop what's going on in their heads.

(Kelly, Interview p. 14)

In 4.1.4, I discussed diverse ways of defining the term, ‘plagiarism’ in both Chinese and Western contexts. What are teachers’ views towards plagiarism, and the ways some ESL students approach texts as they search for information, and engage with media texts as supporting material for their own writing? In the following extract, Colin and I discussed his understanding of plagiarism.

- Researcher How do they copy and paste?
Colin They copy and paste very easily by...(inaudible)
They don’t work. We have, in the ESL faculty we have extremely rigorous – this is one thing that has changed greatly over the years – we have an extremely rigorous set of rules by which, for example, if they’re doing a SAC over several days they can’t take it home with them, they can only work on it in class, we collect it at the end of every lesson. But still, what they will do is go onto the internet and they will find something, and they will learn it. They will commit it to memory, and then they will regurgitate it in their pieces of writing. That’s a huge issue that we still haven’t solved.
(Colin, Interview p. 10)

Colin indicated what kind of ‘copying’ is unacceptable in the ESL faculty in his school and the penalties applied when students plagiarise. He defined two kinds of plagiarism, namely copying and pasting, and rote memorisation. He used the negative verb “regurgitate” to show the strong impact of how he felt about “committing texts into memory”. In the following extract, Colin indicates plagiarism occurred with many Chinese international students, which he attributes to the Chinese ‘system’.

- Researcher Does it happen with Chinese international students a lot?
Colin Often. Much more so with the Chinese students than anyone else. Much more so because they have come from a system whereby it’s okay to borrow other people’s work. “My friend helped me,” is an acceptable... But if you say to them, “You didn’t write this.” “Yes I did.” “No you didn’t.” “Yes I did.”
Researcher So do you need to find out the evidence about plagiarism?
Colin I’ll answer that one after I answer the first one. I’ll

say to them, “You did not do this. This is not your own writing.” They will argue that it is because they physically wrote it. But then I say, “Did you have any help?” “Yes, my friend helped me write it.” So the friend helped them write it by telling them what to write. They committed that to memory, but they wrote it out. They don’t see that as wrong because apparently that’s quite familiar, quite acceptable in their own culture.

(Colin, Interview p. 11)

In this extract, Colin emphasised Chinese international students had a higher tendency to plagiarise compared to other students. He felt the problem was associated with the Chinese learning system where ownership of words and the notion of original authorship are paid less attention than in Western countries. He provided ‘imagined dialogues’ to students to support his argument that plagiarism was unacceptable.

In addition, he felt it was also a cultural issue, commenting on differences between the expectations, norms and practices in students’ previous educational backgrounds and academic written conventions in western discourse. Lyon, Barrett and Malcolm (2006) stressed that acts of plagiarism can be attributed to many aspects, such as the pressure of expectation, lack of ability or cultural difference. He indicates that inappropriate assumptions about plagiarism and the ways in which Chinese international students develop the skills to be full members of the English academic discourse community need to be treated carefully, because they influence their ways of writing and using relevant supporting materials. Therefore, the problem of plagiarism should not be simply placed under the big umbrella of ‘culture’.

Meg looked at plagiarism from another angle.

Meg You will find that a lot of students will just copy arguments from the material here. There is no doubt that it’s a serious problem. A lot of it is not so much that they are deliberately trying to pass off someone else’s work as their own. It is more that they are not confident in what they do and they think it is better to copy from somewhere else because they know that

- what they do will
- Researcher Does it happen a lot in SAC?
- Meg It does yeah. A lot of it is how to stop because they memorise. It's memorised. It's not even notes that they bring in and copy, they actually memorise great ...
- Researcher So can teachers like you always pick up the copied texts?
- Meg Try to, but don't always.

(Meg, Interview p. 8)

Students usually receive three media texts in the Writing Task for the final examination of Year 12 and Meg pointed out that copying arguments from the media was a serious problem. Students usually receive more than three media texts from their teachers in order to prepare the internal assessment. Unlike Colin, who felt students pilfered large amounts of text from websites and committed this memory, Meg felt that they also tended to copy arguments from the media texts provided.

Meg agreed with Colin that it is difficult to stop student committing texts to memory. However, can memorisation be seen as a valid way of learning, because this procedure works for learning many things? In China, many Chinese students have been taught to memorise texts precisely (Introna & Hayes, 2004). The ways of approaching texts in the Australian context is unfamiliar to them and they may tend to use a familiar and accustomed approach to engage with texts. The tension between these concepts of learning and original thought needs to be pointed out explicitly to these students, along with help to develop like paraphrasing skills.

The teachers do not fail students who plagiarise. Instead they usually provide a backup plan, providing a chance to redo another task, or they reduce the marks. They attributed acts of plagiarism to various factors, yet the problem remains. This section has helped to explain how the teachers saw these students approaching texts.

Students' memorisation can be attributed to many factors, such as Chinese rhetorical

written conventions, cultural rationales and lack of confidence in second language writing. The value and validity of memorisation in learning remains a moot point.

8.2.7 SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEWS

In the second part of this chapter, I have examined teacher perspectives on students' difficulties as they engage with Australian media texts and argumentative writing based on interview data. Reading difficulties related to the stimulus media issues were discussed, including limited awareness of different genres and subtleties of language, difficulty in distinguishing fact from opinions, and students' use of a questioning approach. Later, I moved to writing difficulties that students encountered, for example, use of syntactic patterns, lexical items or verb forms in a given context; problems in planning and writing and the issue of plagiarism in summative assessment tasks.

The three teachers emphasised that Part Two of the Writing Task (analysing the persuasive language used in the media texts) was much more difficult than Part Three (presenting point-of-view writing form based on an issue). Overall teachers agreed that students had strong generic knowledge of structure and textual forms, but had trouble in engaging critically with media texts. Time constraints were a problem, as the subtleties of language and language analysis are slow to be acquired. The students' weak knowledge of various syntactic patterns and lexical items made their ideas less accessible in argumentative writing. In addition, their reluctance to plan hindered them in formulating ideas and ensuring the structure of the written texts was logical and appropriate to the purpose. Analysis of the teacher interviews provides a clear picture of students' challenges in learning to write various argumentative genres, and the ways in which they struggle to engage with Australian media texts.

8.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, there were two sections. The first part centred on one particular teacher's lessons on the Writing Task, and the pedagogical approach used to teaching argumentative writing in VCE ESL. This provided a context for the discussion of teacher perceptions in the second part of the chapter. This was based on the discussion of teacher perceptions of students' engagement with Australian media texts and their writing difficulties. The observation data shows Meg had explicit teaching strategies to scaffold the Writing Task, including using the three WH-questions strategy to build students' knowledge of the topic and modelling the genre. Yet there was a tension between the models shown, and her own more flexibly structured text.

The findings from the teacher interviews show that teachers felt students had a bigger problem in analysing media texts than writing their own pieces. This fact, together with obvious time constraints, is a serious barrier to student improvement. Teacher perceptions of the students' study of media texts and argumentative writing highlighted a number of difficulties, such as recognising the discourse level of language in different genres, discriminating between fact and opinions, becoming critical participants, struggling to achieve accuracy in both vocabulary and grammar and attempting to produce original work.

CHAPTER NINE

NEGOTIATION IN LITERACY PRACTICES

9.0 OVERVIEW

The previous three chapters presented the findings of the study on Chinese international students' experiences in learning to write various argumentative genres and the ways in which they engage with Australian media texts. Chapters Six and Seven addressed research question one on the students' perceptions of their struggles in entering a new institutional culture. Their translation and negotiation of the expectations, norms and literacy practices in the new academic discourse community were also discussed. The exploration of two successful cases of literacy practices provides a picture of how individual characteristics support and constrain students' success in learning to write argumentatively. According to these students, their writing challenges are influenced broadly by their practices, thinking, values and prior learning experiences in relation to writing. Some student participants expressed difficulties in analysing media texts and in argumentative writing, while providing their own insight into how they surmounted these.

Chapter Eight provided the teacher participants' viewpoints to answer research question two on the various factors which may affect students' abilities in analysing media texts and writing argumentative texts. Teachers described a range of challenges faced by students, including lack of knowledge in distinguishing different genres, understanding the subtleties of the language, discriminating between fact and opinion and critical analysis. Secondly, the teachers attributed these difficulties to various factors, such as students' decoding competence, lack of planning strategies and their ways of approaching texts. The teacher perspectives provide a different angle on what students face when engaged in the Writing Task in VCE ESL.

Although issues relating to these questions provide the main focus for the study, question three about pedagogical approaches used in the teaching of argumentative writing in VCE ESL was also discussed in Chapter Eight. Analysing pedagogical approaches helped to contextualise students' literacy practices and to provide a context for teacher perceptions on international students' learning.

The aim of this chapter is to compare and contrast the student and ESL teacher perspectives and to discuss possible contributory factors. I also link the findings and discussion to relevant theory and research. The chapter concludes with a summary of key issues from the findings and discussion sections to provide an overview of how the students grappled with the expectations, and norms of the new discourse community and their negotiation in relation to authoritative voices in the field. Implications of the study for classroom and recommendations for further research will be outlined at the end of the chapter.

9.1 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Four important issues that emerged from the findings and literature review are presented in this section, which compares and contrasts the teacher and student perspectives. These are students' challenges in:

1. Engagement with Australian media texts
2. argumentative writing
3. adapting to teachers' pedagogy
4. participating in a new classroom culture

The discussion of these issues represents and provides insight into international students' experience in learning to write and the relevance of this research to the key research questions: What kinds of challenges do Chinese international students face in

analysing and writing argumentative texts? What are ESL teachers' perceptions on this issue? What pedagogical approaches are used?

9.1.1 Engaging with Australian media texts critically

Students' success in studying for VCE ESL draws on their use of texts in a functional and critical way and their abilities to perceive how media texts position readers to take a particular view of people. Both teachers and students indicated that their biggest difficulty in doing the Writing Task was in Part Two, analysing persuasive language used in the media texts. They all agreed that finding the persuasive techniques used in media texts to create impact on readers was not difficult, but using the students' own words to describe the effect of the particular persuasive techniques was complex.

Students needed to demonstrate their awareness of the text-function relationship as well as context and genre knowledge. Below is a discussion of the students' three major challenges to critical engagement with media texts: linguistic competence and cross-cultural awareness; recognising genre and the related subtleties of the language, and talking about the texts critically.

Students' knowledge and control of the media texts and their linguistic competence are intertwined in reading and analysing media texts. This has more to do with the students' control of complex grammar and the use of metalanguage. As reading requires many levels of readers' prior knowledge which is beyond surface grammar, there are many essential elements which are correlated to readers' comprehension of the media texts, such as context and genre knowledge. In the interviews, many students indicated their difficulty at both linguistic and discourse levels. They felt that their weak linguistic competence and cross-cultural awareness hindered their ability to grasp ideas in media texts. Australian media texts used in

ESL classes are also culturally specific and students reported their struggle in developing understanding of how writers use language patterns to accomplish coherence and purpose, and of cultural implications. Some students indicated a fear and resistance to the secondary discourse community (Gee, 1996), which added more difficulty when engaging with the texts, which involves talking, reading and writing in order to gain an 'authoritative voice'.

The teachers indicated a major difficulty for students was associated with the discourse level of language, including subtle textual differences between different argumentative genres. Different types of media texts treat issues in various ways, some can be factual and involve comprehension and interpretation and others can be subjective, and are more opinion-rich. Students from an educational background where the teaching of lexical and grammatical competence was the primary language focus had great difficulty in identifying and producing the discourse of argumentative texts. They found it hard to discriminate between fact and opinion in the media articles, yet mastery of this aspect of texts is closely connected to and expected in students' writing in the VCE examination. The 'voice' of newspaper articles can change often, requiring students to distinguish between the source material genre, and the response genre.

Teacher responses showed that ESL students' insufficient linguistic knowledge in recognising the subtleties of language may not only have a strong relationship with their writing performance, but also with their comprehension of the language used in media texts. They attributed the students' reading difficulties to both linguistic and cultural factors and indicated that students have the ability to grasp the literal meaning of words in texts, but not subtextual or 'connoted' meanings, especially weak students.

Another difficulty involved reading and talking about media texts critically. This relates to students' ability to perceive how media texts position readers to take a particular view, and is associated with personal ideology and access to power relation inherent in literacy (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Luke, 1996). This ability enables students to reflect the depth of their reading and writing and identify the voice of the writer. Recognising how voice is being used to persuade, inform or entertain is essential for them to cross the borderline to being 'a member of secondary discourse community' who can accommodate the dominant norms of this new community, and learn to make meaning through collaborative practices, such as questions, activities and tasks (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The relations of power and understanding of discourse communities are thus influential in the learning process of literacy practice (Cummins, 2000). Ivanič (1998) states that discursal identity is embedded in a writer's experience and writers draw the voices of others into their own writing. One of the student participants, Natalie is a good example. One of the reasons that she did not like argumentative writing on media issues is because she perceived that current affairs always relate to power relations which did not interest her. She did understand that texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events. The identity constructed in her interview provides us with evidence that she was struggling both with her identity and writing, particularly in her comparison between her writing and local students' writing. Wenger (1998) indicates that our identities combine both competence and experience into ways of knowing. Natalie's example demonstrates both her efforts to accommodate the reader's expectations, and to comply with the written conventions in the discourse community, as evidenced by her essays.

What were the pedagogical issues in relation to students' challenges in analysing media texts critically? The analysis of Meg's lessons (see Section 8.1) showed there seemed to be a gap between the teaching and the concept of critical literacy. Few questions, activities or tasks were designed to allow students to be critical members and contributors to the secondary discourse community. In Meg's lessons, genre-based literacy practice was indeed used to help students establish links between their beliefs, attitudes, prior knowledge and topics (Cotterall & Cohen, 2003). However, there was little possibility for creative manipulation (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Many educators have proposed critical pedagogical approaches to help students understand literacy as a social practice with political concerns (Cummins, 2000; Freebody & Luke, 1990, 1997). Some researchers have advocated critical literacy in the second language classroom as a means to help to improve students' weakness in the use of metalanguage. Lee (1997) and Luke (1996) argue that the teaching of main proponents of genres cannot change power or inequality, but it helps learners to access discourses and texts. Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) also propose that learning critical literacy can provide students opportunities for access to the powerful discourses and genres of mainstream culture. However, a key premise of such approaches is that learners have opportunities to interact and to engage with texts collaboratively. This was not always the case in classrooms.

To conclude, students' understanding of language conventions and the usage of different genres is essential to demonstrate their competence and confidence in VCE writing. Many students in the interviews had reached a negative evaluation of their understanding of the media texts and analysing them. The comparison between teacher and student perspectives in this section discussed provides a basic guideline for both teachers and students to pay more attention to scaffolding interaction and

writing outcomes. For example, students can explore more media texts to be aware of the relationship between text and function, generic conventions, overlaps and distinctions between different genres. More explicit and communicative teaching of critical literacy would help students to deal with the challenges above. The next section moves to discuss students' challenges in writing their own argumentative texts.

9.1.2 Engaging with students' own writing

The students' common challenges of using various syntactic patterns, lexical items or verb forms in their argumentative writing, and organising their arguments to make their ideas more accessible and convincing to readers were discussed in Chapter Six and Eight. Two questions need to be explored further in this section. These are: To what degree should students follow a fixed model in writing tasks? And how do they perceive the originality of their written texts?

How fixed is the model?

One major challenge for students was to find the balance between following a model and expressing their own views in writing. Students' difficulty to find the balance was also associated with teaching approaches used by the teachers, which is explored in the following section. As discussed in early chapters, the most common model used in the teaching of argumentative writing was the tripartite model (introduction, body and conclusion) (see Section 8.1.2). Issues evident in both teacher and student perspectives on following a fixed model in writing revealed contradictory views between students; and the problem of style versus applying a magic formula in writing.

As seen in Sections 6.4.3 and 7.2.2, some students demonstrated their frustration in following the organizational structure of different genres given by the teacher and some students felt more secure with a model to follow in their own writing. For example, Monica and Terry explained their strategies of using fixed sentences and structures in argumentative writing. Others such as Natalie and Jimmy identified a struggle to develop a conscious use of a more flexible construct of argumentative writing.

All students felt they had developed their writing skills, however, some noticed that their ways of writing were not always valued by the new academic discourse community and were not perceived to be what is considered as a good style of writing. Natalie emphasised that a good style of writing can only be gleaned from newspapers, and that the features of good argumentative writing were not summarised and taught by the teacher. She indicated her challenge in writing was that “every Chinese student’s argumentative piece is similar to each other, not powerful and not sophisticated enough. They seem superficial and seem to follow the models” (see Section 6.4.3). She also emphasised that the teacher seemed not to guide her toward a conscious awareness of how to develop a flexible construct of argumentative writing. This struggle was not only associated with pedagogical issues, but also with the students’ limited knowledge of genre, and critical engagement with texts. Moreover, cultural factors also added another layer of complexity to language when students attempted to write with creativity. This is discussed further in the following section.

Jim had a different point of view of audience from the fixed models given by the teacher. In the interview, Jim claimed he did not pay great attention to the genre knowledge and fixed models in his writing. However he demonstrated a sophisticated awareness and practice by emphasising how important it was to keep audience in

mind to reach the specific purpose of the genre and to write more vividly with the use of different sentence structures and persuasive techniques.

From Jim's interview extract and his written texts, we saw a discrepancy between his perspective and the teachers' model of the way to begin an article. This is what the teacher called the "little magic formula". One of the ESL teacher participants indicated that many of her students benefited from her "little magic formula" to start the introduction or body paragraphs in both the Text Response and the Writing Task. However, in the focus group and individual interviews with students from her class, none of them were positive about these formulas. The students tended to forget the formulas and demonstrated their frustration in following them rigidly. They described their experience of learning to write argumentatively as a kind of straightjacket in VCE ESL. It seems likely that a rigid approach to academic literacy practice may confuse and disorient students, or cause students to follow the general structure given by the teacher without any understanding of the flexibility possible in argumentative writing.

Plagiarism and rote memorisation

In this study, the students indicated their challenge to resolve the tension between plagiarism and originality of their written texts. Different cultures provide different guidelines and values around originality in writing. In this section, I discuss the discrepancies between teacher and student perspectives on this issue, including the reasons for the tendency to copy rather than to paraphrase; the concept of authorship; commitment of pre-written texts to memory and different learning approaches.

Firstly, paraphrasing may be unfamiliar to Chinese students due to different rhetorical written conventions between English and Chinese and different cultural

rationales (Banwell, 2003; Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Introna, et al., 2005; Pennycook, 1996). Many authors argue that Chinese students' problem of plagiarism is not simply a sign of dishonesty, given the common practice of reproducing texts and class notes verbatim which do not need acknowledgement in Chinese learning contexts (Introna & Hayes, 2004; Lyon, Barrett & Malcolm, 2006).

Secondly, Ballard and Clanchy (1997) indicate that the concept of authorship of texts is still new to many countries and students coming to study overseas struggle to identify the borderline between established knowledge sources and ownership of words in different cultures. In the interviews, many students did not see the behaviour of 'borrowing ideas' from media texts or the internet as an act of cheating in examinations. Instead, they described confidently how they 'borrow' ideas and used these in their own writing without acknowledgement. I argue that the expectations, norms and practices between two different education systems need to be made clearer to students. Further, inappropriate assumptions about plagiarism by teachers and students can hinder L2 writers from cultivating the skills needed to become full members of the discourse community.

Here is one example of a discrepancy between teacher and student perspectives about plagiarism and rote memorisation in argumentative writing. Monica's strategy for upgrading the quality of her written work was to copy down good sentence structures from the texts provided in the examination. Monica assumed that the teacher would appreciate that she finished reading the media texts and used them. She did not view this as an act of plagiarism. This interpretation of ownership and authorship was a common practice for her in China. However, the behaviour was strongly objected to by Meg, one of the ESL teachers. Meg reported the dangers of copying arguments from media texts when students prepared their SAC texts and

emphasised to students not to “pass off someone’s work as their own” (Meg, Interview p. 8). She acknowledged in the interview that copying can be attributed to lack of confidence in the learning process, which is supported by other research (Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Introna & Hayes, 2004). Although all the teachers showed they worried about students’ tendency to copy, solutions were not suggested during interviews or ways around it taught explicitly by the teachers.

Thirdly, all ESL teachers pointed out their frustration at students committing texts to memory. Some students claimed this was the way to avoid poor grades in their writing performance. The teachers agreed that this behaviour of preparation for SAC texts at home helped to polish students’ use of vocabulary, rhetorical techniques and the overall structure. However, the memorisation of a pre-written text in advance was seen as inappropriate in the Western learning context, and was considered as cheating and copying. In this case, teaching paraphrasing and promoting citation techniques seems to be essential as part of the pedagogy for students from different cultural backgrounds (Pickering, 2002; Taylor, 1997; Thompson & Tribble, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). During classroom observation, it was noted that although the teachers felt that plagiarism was a serious problem in their classes which needed to be solved urgently, none of the paraphrasing techniques or citation techniques were emphasised during the teaching of writing. This is surprising given that observation was conducted at the final semester of Year 12 which was just one month before the final examination.

The last issue concerns the different learning approaches of students. A deep approach to learning is focused on the meaning underlying learning material and a surface approach is characterised by reproduction of material without understanding (Fox, 1994; Marton, Dall’Alba & Kun, 1996). Students’ tendency towards the latter,

namely rote memorisation caused me reflect on my own literacy learning experiences in both my native Chinese and English classes in the secondary school in Taiwan. In order to score well, memorisation of composition sample books without deep understanding of the structural and cultural conventions of various genres was common practice and encouraged by teachers. When Monica rationalised her behaviour of copying and applied the Chinese colloquial saying, “Articles are all about copying!”, which originated from her Chinese teacher, I was not surprised. Students from mainland China or other Asian countries with strong Confucian heritage culture (CHC) have been taught to memorise the exact expression of texts precisely and sometimes this way of learning has indeed helped students to perform well in their academic fields (Introna & Hayes, 2004). Marton, Dall’Alba and Kun (1996) challenge negative perceptions about CHC learners’ propensity for the practices of repetition and memorisation, which can also be associated with many purposes, including rote learning of content and deepening and developing understanding. Repetition can actually be a method to develop students’ understanding of material, which can be seen as a deep learning strategy (Fox, 1994; Marton, Dall’Alba & Kun, 1996).

In conclusion, the problem of plagiarism and memorisation of pre-written texts or media texts, or pilfering texts from websites remains due to various factors. From the findings, the teachers tended to provide a backup plan or second chance for students to correct the mistake, but a further step should be made by the teachers. Teaching paraphrasing more explicitly and promoting citation techniques more rigorously would support students in the new discourse. It is important for teachers to understand that students from non-Western backgrounds may have a different understanding of self, ways of communication, ownership of words and notion of

authorship (Hornby & Pickering, 2005; Howard, 1999; Pickering, 2002; Scollon & Scollon & Scollon, 1995). On the other hand, students need to understand that citing information with acknowledgement and developing paraphrasing skills is actually enabling in writing and it is essential for them to learn to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable borrowing from texts. The next section looks at the challenges the students encountered when adapting to their teachers' pedagogy in VCE ESL classes.

9.1.3 Adapting to teachers' pedagogy

According to the findings, one of the main challenges to students emerged from the switch of pedagogical practices between their previous schooling in China and the new learning environment in VCE. From the challenges reported by the students and their ESL teachers in the interviews, several key issues emerged. These were: the usefulness of the pedagogy to students; the impact of a teacher-oriented approach; and developing voice in the learning process. Additionally, the findings indicated some need for a critique of genre writing pedagogy.

It seemed from the findings that pedagogy did not always help students. Sometimes their own experiences were of more value to deal with the challenges. Some students struggled to find a balance between following a fixed model given by the teacher and expressing their viewpoints in their writing and there were some students who did not accept the teacher's authority uncritically. Jim's critical engagement in the classroom practice caused him to question the teacher's authority. He spoke passionately in his interview about how his debating experience had a powerful effect on his critical thinking and argumentative writing and explained how he often took positions with which he agreed or disagreed and made allowances for

other positions. His debating and writing experience in China seemed influential in his writing practice in relation to building up strong arguments, and he demonstrated his critical awareness that different persuasive techniques could be applied in different ways and lead arguments to different results.

Aspects of genre-based literacy pedagogy have been adapted in the Australian school context to help students engage with academic literacy. However, a key critique of genre in writing pedagogy is that teachers taught to a formula, giving students a fixed model which reproduced the same structure or style of argumentative writing. Both Ivanič (1998) and Hyland (2003) illustrate the importance of voice and the problems of a rigid genre-driven approach which inhibits individual creativity. They advocate awareness of genre features and their variability so that the writer feels some agency in engaging with text.

A more detailed understanding of teaching a fixed model was seen in Section 8.1.2, where one teacher (Meg) explained the common tripartite model for argumentative writing used in her class to guide students in how to structure a letter. She also discussed the social function of the genre and provided them with a letter layout during the modelling process. Later, she showed the students a letter sample written in a more flexible construct of argumentative writing. During ongoing discussion of how to write a letter, she referred back to the simple tripartite model. It is unclear whether the students knew how to apply the flexible model without explicit teaching and to what extent the teacher had directed students with other supporting approaches to write in more flexible ways.

Cotterall and Cohen (2003) argue that scaffolding writing approaches should promote learner autonomy and provide flexible support for students to reach the target performance. In writing classrooms, scaffolding approaches should guide students to

be explicit about how they provide opinions, evidence, reasons and supporting examples. This goes beyond any fixed structure. On the other hand, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) stress that students' ability to write is related to their strategic knowledge and ability to transform information to meet rhetorical purposes. Following fixed sentences or forms does not always demonstrate students' potential in writing. Both strategic knowledge and language awareness that students bring to the interaction of a particular context should be taken into account when assisting them in the writing process.

Many researchers indicate that the underlying premise of scaffolding writing is a handover of independence to support students in the writing process, in which teachers and students are co-participants in terms of negotiating meaning and informing the nature of the instructional conversations (Fisher, 2006; Many, 2002; Wilkinson & Silliman, 1994). Wilkinson and Silliman (1994) identified two styles of scaffolding writing, directive and supportive. The classroom observation of this study showed that the ESL teachers used a directive scaffolding approach to build a bridge from what the students knew to what they were required to produce.

Teachers were perhaps concerned with an economy of effort in using the writing models, as they were pressured by examination deadlines. However, Knapp and Watkins (2005) assert that there is little creative manipulation and examination of the variability of textual form occurring in genre-based pedagogy. When comparing the findings of both students' interviews and class observation, I would argue less teacher dominance and prescriptive attention to form should occur when giving instructions to students. In any case some of them expressed an unwillingness to employ a fixed model.

The analysis of Meg's teaching practice showed that when a teacher-oriented approach dominates in a lesson, students may have fewer or no chances to speak. Students did not attempt to raise questions or provide arguments in the class, and there were few openings to help students to become active or critical learners. Many researchers propose that cooperation, group-work and student-oriented approaches help students develop the ability of criticising, challenging and discussing social issues (Guy, 2005; Tiong & Yong, 2004; Scollon, 1999; Springer, Stanne & Donovan, 1999; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Pedagogy based on such approaches seems important to help develop student voice and writing expertise.

The final issue concerns students' difficulty in developing voice in the learning process. Students' ability to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation, and to reflect critically seem to have a striking effect on learning to become members of new academic disciplines (Gee, 1996). Exploration and dialogue between teachers and students helps students develop voice in the learning process. In designing pedagogical approaches, the language proficiency and the notion of power in classrooms need to be taken into account, as both may impact on students' motivation and participation. The notion of power embedded in the discourse community has often been associated with classroom interaction and the extension of students' identities (Cummins, 2000; Edwards, 1997; Gergen, 1994; Pavlenko, 2001).

Researchers like Coffin (1997) and Gee (2004) point out that learning to developing a repertoire of language usage and genres is valued in school, yet some Chinese students showed their dread of not speaking well enough to do this. Reticence hindered the opportunity to engage in real communication and enhance their sense of participation in learning. Some students tried to overcome their language barrier, in

order to keep themselves more engaged in the classroom practice. That is, not every student saw the language barrier as a problem in classroom communication.

In the interviews and classroom observation, some students showed a developing voice during the learning process. For example, Magic, Terry and Jim attempted to challenge, criticise and discuss teaching issues. They indicated that a good teaching style should be flexible and responsive to students' needs and not just follow the curriculum. Furthermore, Jim also represented his identity as a participant, a student, and co-constructer of knowledge in the classroom practice. He emphasised that a teacher-centred approach was dominant in the class and showed his unwillingness to follow exactly what the teacher said, wanting to elaborate his own ideas in discussions.

To conclude, the students' learning of argumentative writing needs to be a two-way street. That is, students need to understand their own writing processes and to address their challenges, while teachers need to provide space for more interaction and engagement to support students and to meet their learning needs. In this study, it was found that most students demonstrated different kinds of struggle in switching from their prior secondary schooling in China to VCE ESL, and only a few students showed a successful switch in literacy practice. The key findings on pedagogical issues from the study may help teachers to reflect on more engaging pedagogical approaches, and the importance of meeting international students' needs more closely.

9.1.4 Learning in a new classroom culture

Kaplan's (1966) ground-breaking work on "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education" identifies cultural influences on rhetorical decision-making and identifies thought patterns associated with different cultures and languages. By examining the

students' written texts from different cultures, Kaplan indicates that learning to write in a different language requires not only switching linguistic codes but also acculturation. Thus, it is likely that teachers who give writing assignments to students could benefit from understanding the ways in which students from different cultures make personal sense of the writing process. In this section, I discuss both teacher and student perspectives on how cultural factors influence students' literacy practices in VCE ESL classes.

During the observation of Meg's lessons of argumentative writing, short answers were often provided by only a few students and most students remained passive. Four possible reasons were discussed in Section 8.1.1 to explore this. First, it was inferred that students who take an active role in the classroom break the solidarity of the group, and that the language barrier may cause students' low participation. Another point was simply that a teacher-oriented approach gave students little chance to speak. She did not nominate students to answer for example. In the individual interviews with students, everyone said that they understood the questions that their ESL teachers asked, but felt reluctant to answer. Natalie offered one explanation for being silent in the classroom. She thought that the questions being asked by the teacher were too simple, and that answering such questions would mean pretending to be smart or showing off. This perspective is grounded in the concept of a collectivist society like mainland China (see Section 4.1), where the idea of group membership and solidarity is embedded. But Natalie also draws attention to the need for more demanding questions and discussions in second language classrooms.

All the teacher participants in the interviews indicated that more interaction between teachers and students was needed. In a Western learning context like VCE ESL classes, teachers expect interaction with students in classroom activities. But this

has to be facilitated. The cultural concept of face also influences students' behaviour in classroom. Scollon (1997) raises the issue that one's face reflects the face of the whole group which is dominant in a collectivistic society. In this kind of society, people have the face of the other foremost in their mind before they do things or ask questions. Although this cultural concept may not apply to everyone from a particular society, this helps to view students' performance beyond the surface level. It is important to better understand both the values in Western institutions and the values students bring from their own culture to enrich teachers' pedagogical approaches to cultural practices in the language classroom (Ryan, 2007).

Face is also related to the Chinese moral value of listening to what people say without judgement, which was pointed out by Natalie. Some researchers also suggest that in CHC communities, people cling to the concept of getting answers right, whether they know the answers or not (Brennan & Durovic, 2005; Hofstede, 1998, 2001). Any CHC explanation relying on stereotypes leaves out great deal that is important, such as pedagogical issues, students' linguistic competence levels and opportunities. However, 'getting it right' was important to Monica, who tried to follow a fixed structure of argumentative writing to avoid making mistakes. She was committed to a specific pattern of text organisation by using firstly, secondly, thirdly and to conclude in every of her argumentative written texts. She saw herself as a beginner or apprentice of the secondary discourse community. Through the Chinese education system, students are trained to develop the skills of providing correct answers in the examination. When they transfer to the VCE, they may find discussing questions, providing their own arguments and creating their own style of writing unnerving, as Monica and others did.

In conclusion, the students' writing process in the new institution involved the process of creating a new identity which fitted the expectations of the new discourse community. Some students may take active roles in the classroom and learn to make choices in genre and language resources, engaging themselves in these literacy practices, while some may take longer time in learning to adapt socially and academically a new classroom culture. However each student in this study made personal sense of the writing process, and developed at his/her own pace.

9.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study investigated Chinese students' understanding of language use in argument and their written presentation of a point of view on an issue in VCE ESL. The methods of investigation for this study were not without problems and it is important to stress how these problems have limited the interpretation.

First, there was limited time allowed for the data collection.

The period for data collection was during the second semester of Year 12, a period of only six months. A longitudinal study for the whole of Years 11 and 12 would provide a clearer picture of students' writing development after they transferred from their schooling in China. It would allow time for a more complete investigation of instructional activities, school programs and curriculum. However, due to the time frames of this study, this was not feasible.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the research problem in one very specific VCE English college context, a school designed to maximise success in the VCE for international students. I did not include a range of public and private schools for my study due to the limited numbers of Chinese international students in different schools. Tower College was selected due to its large

numbers of international students with diverse backgrounds and its claim to be catering to their language and learning needs, in addition to the VCE curriculum.

This study yielded limited information on teachers' feedback on students' writing, although it was discussed in the literature review chapter (see Chapter Four). Teachers' feedback on students' writing and redrafting may assist students in comprehending the context and building a sense of audience. Due to the short period of data collection, I could not gather teachers' feedback since students wrote very few argumentative texts in the semester. For practice texts at home, the teachers usually provided scores only or with a short sentence of comments. Therefore, I did not focus on the effects of teachers' feedback on students' writing performance.

In the study, two argumentative texts from each student participant were collected, including texts from the School Assessed Coursework (SAC, school internal assessment) and practice texts. Student texts were used as supplementary materials to elicit perspectives of their own writing difficulties. Further research is needed to analyse more student texts, which would better facilitate comparisons between both teachers' and students' responses, along with data from classroom observation.

9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the research findings, there are several recommendations for further research. First, the extension of the student population and school types involved in the study would offer a richer exploration of the research questions. Do international students struggle similarly with argumentative writing in other schools? Second, international students' writing experiences are to a certain degree constructed by both the academic writing traditions into which they have been socialised during their

previous school and the academic context of their new Western institution. But the discussion of international students' writing in VCE could also be located in the broader context of all VCE students, as it is likely that many local students also struggle to interpret and to respond to media texts.

The third recommendation is that further research should be carried out to obtain more accurate data on student knowledge of and interest in relation to English media and writing performance. In the interviews, many students indicated that they did not engage with current affairs or mainstream media issues. Many of them do not read newspapers or watch local TV channels to engage themselves in the English learning environment. Further research could also be directed to a critical exploration of the media role in China, or the role of media in youth culture more generally. Finally, a detailed analysis of students' argumentative texts could be placed in the centre of a new study to reflect cultural and personal writing values in relation to ESL contexts and the complexities of producing a cogent written argument.

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Victorian Certificate of Education 2004

ENGLISH (ESL) Written examination

Friday 29 October 2004

Reading time: 9.00 am to 9.15 am (15 minutes)

Writing time: 9.15 am to 12.15 pm (3 hours)

TASK BOOK

Section	Number of questions	Number of questions to be answered	Percentage of marks
1 Text response	30	1	50
2 Writing task	3	3	50

- Students are permitted to bring into the examination room: pens, pencils, highlighters, erasers, rulers and an English and/or bilingual printed dictionary.
- Students are NOT permitted to bring into the examination room: blank sheets of paper and/or white out liquid/tape.
- No calculator is allowed in this examination.

Materials supplied

- Task book of 14 pages, including **Assessment criteria** on page 14.
- Two script books: a grey book and a blue book. All script books contain unruled (rough work only) pages for making notes, plans and drafts if you wish.

Instructions

- Write your **student number** on the front cover of each script book.
- This examination consists of Section 1 – Text response and Section 2 – Writing task. You must complete both sections.
- All answers must be written in English.

Section 1 – Text response

- Write your answer in the **grey** script book.
- Write the name of the text in the box provided on the **cover** of the script book. Indicate the question part you have chosen by ticking the appropriate box on the first ruled page of the script book.

Section 2 – Writing task

- Write all three answers in the **blue** script book.

At the end of the task

- Place the grey script book inside the front cover of the blue script book.
- You may keep this task book.

Students are NOT permitted to bring mobile phones and/or any other electronic communication devices into the examination room.

SECTION 2 – Writing task**Instructions for Section 2**

Section 2 consists of **three** parts.

Section 2 is worth 50% of the total assessment for the examination.

Parts 1, 2 and 3 are equally weighted.

Carefully read the following material on the banning of mobile phones in schools and then complete **all three** parts.

TASK

Complete **all three** parts.

Part 1

Write a note-form summary of the principal's message about banning mobile phones (page 11).

Your response must be in **note form**. Do not use complete sentences.

Part 2

The **letter** from May Brown, a parent at Metro High School, attempts to persuade the principal to reconsider the ban on mobile phones.

Find **five** examples of different persuasive language use in the letter.

Write out each example. Explain how each example works to persuade the reader.

Part 3

Should mobile phones be banned at your school?

The student newspaper is planning to publish a series of articles about this issue.

Write an **article** for this newspaper giving your views about the ban on mobile phones.

TASK MATERIAL**NO MORE MOBILES**

The principal of Metro High School has announced a complete ban on students bringing mobile phones to school.

Use only the material on this page for Part 1, the **note-form** summary.

Principal's message in the parent newsletter



Parent News Wednesday 12 May 2004

Metro High School

Message from the Principal



Last October the *Parent News* described the problems caused by students bringing mobile phones to school. School Council discussed the issue again last night. It has been decided that **no student will be allowed to bring a mobile phone onto school property**. Any mobile phone brought to school will be taken from the student. It will be returned after school but the student will receive an automatic detention.

There are many reasons for this decision. Classes are being severely disrupted because students hide mobile phones and bring them into class. When in class, continual text messaging distracts students from their work. There are even concerns about security in tests and examinations. A number of distressing examples have occurred recently. Students have attempted to cheat using mobile phones. They claimed the phones were needed for 'emergencies'.

Mobile phones are expensive to buy and have become a security risk. The school can't be responsible for lost or stolen phones. So far this year at least 37 students have claimed that phones have been stolen from lockers or bags. Others have been 'lost'.

The introduction of phones with cameras has led to some serious problems with privacy. At least three times this year phones have been left on 'accidentally' in changing rooms. While the school is able to prevent computer access to inappropriate sites, teachers cannot be expected to prevent mobile phones being misused in changing rooms.

This decision will not be popular with some people. Some people will say that their rights are being taken away. Every sensible person, however, will agree that the interests of the community must come before the selfish desires of individuals. The values of this educational institution must be upheld. The focus of this school on education and responsibility must be maintained.

John Black
Principal
Metro High School

Use only the material on this page for Part 2, the **persuasive language use** question.

Letter from a parent in response to the principal's message

14 Stone Street

Metro

21 May 2004

Dear Mr Black

I was very upset when I first read of your total ban on students bringing mobile phones to school. I am still really upset. To outlaw the mobile phone is to stop students and their parents from using technology that has made their lives simpler and safer.

When we, like many parents, decided to buy a mobile phone for our daughter two years ago, it made life so much easier for us. Both my husband and I work long hours and we can never be sure when we will arrive home. Our daughter travels by public transport which, as you know, is extremely unreliable. She comes home at different times and we worry about what time she will be home each day. Furthermore, as you know, she has a medical condition which makes it important for her to be able to contact us during the day.

How do rules like this help educate our children? From your many years of experience you must know it is not good educational practice. Some students are misusing their phones so all students are to be penalised! When we adults break laws we must suffer the consequences. As responsible, mature citizens we have learned, perhaps through making mistakes, to act considerately. Will banning mobile phones help students to develop these admirable qualities?

Furthermore, wouldn't it have been a good idea for students to play a role in setting the rules that they would then be more likely to keep? Schools should build true individual responsibility in students. Our community as a whole may benefit from this in the long run.

I can appreciate your irritation when students break rules, but please reconsider your decision.

Yours sincerely



May Brown

Parent

The local newspaper asked shoppers at the Metro Shopping Centre to give their views about young people's use of mobile phones and the school's ban on mobile phones.

Mobile manners

'Young people are always calling each other. It's annoying having to listen to other people's conversations. In trains, restaurants, classrooms, theatres – you can't get away from it. They need to learn some mobile manners.'

(Bev, mother of two)

Text Messages

'SMS is great. You can always connect with friends. As soon as something happens, you know. You can be flexible about planning to go out, to change your arrangements. You feel closer to your friends because you always know what's going on.'

(Chris, Year 8 student)

The School Ban

'It's not fair. I don't know why school banned our mobiles. We should be able to keep them but turn them off in class.'

(Meg, Year 10 student)

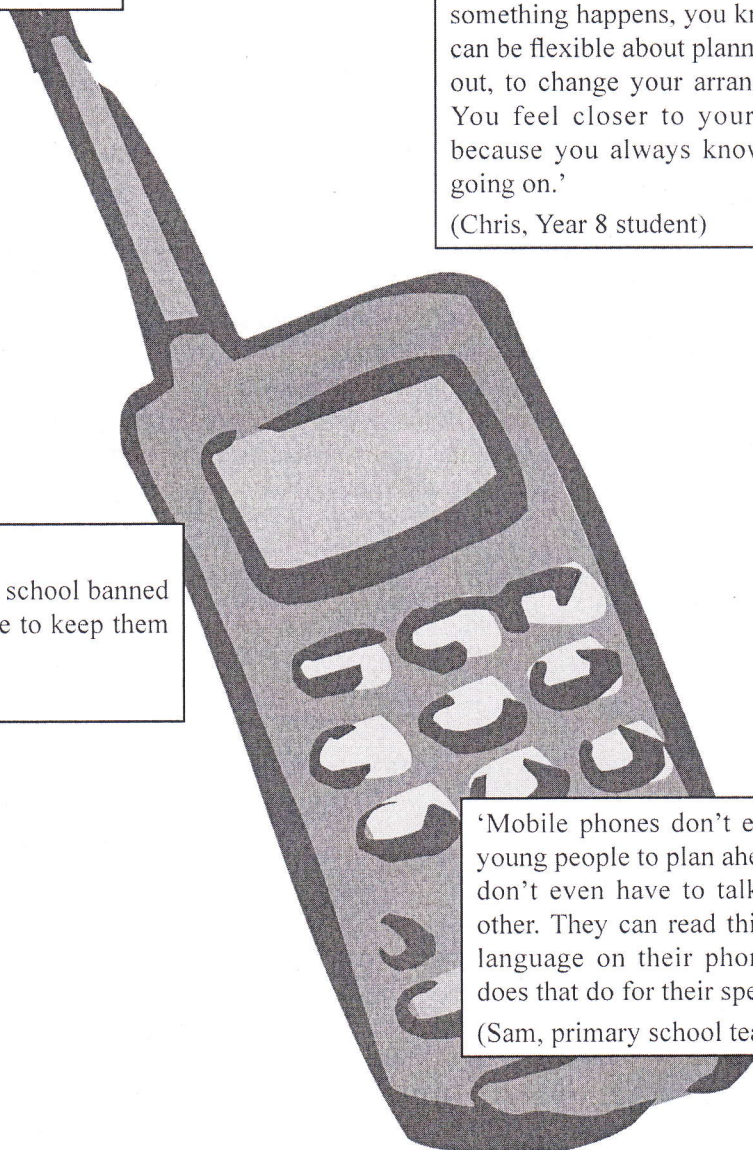
'Mobile phones don't encourage young people to plan ahead. They don't even have to talk to each other. They can read this strange language on their phone. What does that do for their spelling?'

(Sam, primary school teacher)

Image

'Mobiles are "must haves" for young people. They really need them. The fancier the phone, the happier they are. They're "emotional beings" who need "quality time" on their mobiles even at school.'

(Kim, pharmacist)





Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)
Research Office

Dr Jennifer Miller
Faculty of Education
Clayton Campus

19 July 2006

2006/453 - Chinese international students' writing in VCE ESL classes

Dear Researchers,

Thank you for the information provided in relation to the above project. The items requiring attention have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH). Accordingly, this research project is approved to proceed.

Terms of approval

1. This project is approved for five years from the date of this letter and this approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
2. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all information that is pending (such as permission letters from organisations) is forwarded to SCERH, if not done already. Research cannot begin at any organisation until SCERH receives a letter of permission from that organisation. You will then receive a letter from SCERH confirming that we have received a letter from each organisation.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by SCERH.
4. You should notify SCERH immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project:** Changes to any aspect of the project require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to SCERH and must not begin without written approval from SCERH. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. Please provide the Committee with an Annual Report determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. SCERH should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by SCERH at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

All forms can be accessed at our website www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html

We wish you well with your research.


Mrs Lyn Johannessen
Acting Human Ethics Officer (on behalf of SCERH)

Cc: Dr Marie-Therese Jensen, Ms Chia Chuan (Gwen) Wu

Appendix C

Letter of permission from Principal

Project title: Chinese international students' writing in VCE ESL classes

Name of Principal: Tony Cranshaw

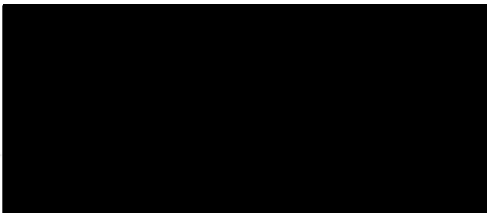
I agree to give permission for the staff and students at my school to participate in the project named above. I have read the accompanying statement about the aim and nature of this research and kept a written copy of the information.

I acknowledge that:

- a. I allow the investigators to observe and audiotape 9 lessons in the ESL writing classroom; take notes about the ways ESL teachers support their students in writing.
- b. I authorize the investigator to audio-record interviews with student participants and ESL teacher participants. The total time commitment for student and teacher participants will be 1.5 hours and one hour respectively.
- c. Teachers' and students' participation is voluntary and any of them can withdraw from the project without prejudice and also withdraw their unprocessed data at any time.
- d. All the participants and the school will remain anonymous and will not be identified in any publication arising from this research.
- e. The audiotapes will only be listened to by the researchers in this project. Confidentiality of data will be safeguarded.

I understand that if I have any concerns about the way that this research project is being conducted and I can contact the executive officer in Human Research Ethics at the Monash University. The contact number is +61 3 9905 2052.

Signature



Date

19/05/06



Explanatory Statement for Students

Project title: Chinese international students' writing in VCE ESL classes

Hello! My name is Chia Chuan (Gwen) Wu and I am a PhD student at Monash University in Education Faculty. My supervisors' names are Dr. Jenny Miller and Dr. Marie-Therese Jensen and they both are senior lectures in Education Faculty. As a Chinese international student, I am keen to discover Chinese students' personal experiences and attitudes about their learning experience in written English, and in particular, the challenges in the Issues studies which involve argumentative writing. It is a significant difference that English teaching in China is based on lexical and grammatical competence which is also the primary concern in the university entrance examination. I want to investigate what happens when students transfer from the Chinese secondary education system to the Victorian secondary education system. Therefore, I am keen to invite you to join this PhD research project about Chinese international students' argumentative writing.

The findings of this study may inform the teaching of genres that may help international students like you to develop a better sense of what an argument is, e.g. how it is structured, how the language of argument works and how students write an effective piece of argumentative writing to meet particular academic requirements in VCE. It will also investigate the gap between teachers and students' perceptions of learning to write.

If you want to be part of the project, I would ask you to allow me to do the following few things:

- (1) allow me to audiorecord and take field notes during three of your regular ESL classes
- (2) conduct two 45 minute audiotaped interviews with you, one individual and one small group, where I will ask you about your experience in learning to write in VCE ESL classes and discuss one of your written texts and few media texts used in your class
- (3) Provide me with one copy of your own written text practiced in the class and one SAC text

If you do not wish to be observed or audio taped during classroom observation, your voices will be disregarded and not be used in this study. If you don't wish to continue to participate in this research, you can let me know at any time. I and my supervisors will be the only people listening to the interview tapes and reading your written texts. Please note the information about you and your work will only for my study and has nothing to do with your marks in the ESL class or for VCE. When I write up my project, I will not use your real name or personal information in my study. Your identity will be fully protected by pseudonyms. I will lock up all the information you give me, including the tapes, transcripts and your written texts in a locker and then destroy them after 5 years after I finish my study. Please sign the student consent form if you'd like to take part. If you are under the age of 18, you will need to ask your parent or legal guardian to sign parent consent form and bring both forms to school. A box will be placed in the staff room for you. You and your parents will have the opportunity to read and confirm your own transcripts and to request feedback on the findings of the project.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research (project number: 453) is being conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Moansh Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at the following address:

Human Ethics Officer

Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)

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给学生的信

企画标题： 中国国际学生在 VCE ESL 的写作

你好！我叫吴佳娟 [Chia Chuan (Gwen) Wu], 是一个莫纳什大学教育学院博士班的研究生。 作为一个中国国际学生， 我热心于探索中国学生在写作方面的个人学习经验和态度, 特别是在用英文论文说写作的方式来陈述自己的论点而所可能面临的挑战。特别值得注意的是, 在中国高考及学校英语教学普遍注重于词汇及文法的正确性。我希望调查中国学生从中国的教育体系突然试着衔接到维多利亚州的高中教育体系有可能发生的任何情况。因此, 我诚心邀请你参加这份关于中国国际学生写作的研究。

如果你愿意参加，我将会要求你让我做以下几件事：

- (1) 允许我观察你的三堂 ESL 课, 并做笔记及录音记录
- (2) 允许我和你有 2 次 45 分钟的面谈(1 次个人和 1 次 5 人的小型团体面谈), 并做录音记录, 我将与你讨论你在 VCE ESL 的写作经验及深入讨论你的一份个人写作和你课堂所讨论过的媒体文章
- (3) 提供我一份你上课所写的文章或回家功课的拷贝及一份你的 SAC 文章拷贝

如果你中途不想继续参与, 你可以随时让我知道。我和我的指导教授将会是唯一听取你的面谈记录及阅读你的文章。请注意, 所有你的个人资料录音, 记录和笔记将仅提供作为我博士论文研究之用, 不会有丝毫影响到你的在学成果或 VCE 的总成绩。当我开始分析资料, 我将不会使用你的真名或个人资料在我的论文里。我也会将所有你提供的资料妥善保管, 包括录音带, 文字记录及你的个人文章, 并在我完成论文的 5 年后彻底销毁。请让我知道你是否有兴趣参与。

关于这份研究的方法, 如果您有任何抱怨或抗议, 请勇于联络 **Moansh Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (project number: 453)**, 联系方法如下:

Human Ethics Officer

Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)

Building 3d

Research Office

电话: +61 3 9905 2052 传真: +61 3 9905 1420

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Appendix E Explanatory statement for teachers

MONASH University



Explanatory Statement for ESL teachers

Project title: Chinese international students' writing in VCE ESL classes

In English speaking countries, an increasing number of Chinese international students undertake VCE as a preparation for tertiary education. For those students, writing performance is central to the assessment of their ability to study in English. Chinese students who transfer from a Chinese secondary education system may lack analytical and critical skills, which are required in the second part of Outcome One 'Presentation of an Issue' [Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2003]. Therefore, I would like to invite you in taking part of this PhD project. It is conducted by me, Chia Chuan (Gwen) Wu and my supervisors, Dr. Jenny Miller and Dr. Marie-Therese Jensen in Education Faculty at Monash University.

The research involves an exploration of the learning experience of international students, the ways in which they engage with Australian media texts and their difficulties and needs encountered when writing about media issues. This study also focuses on teachers' perceptions and experience of teaching argumentative writing to international students.

In your college, I wish to work with 3 classes of Chinese international students in Year 12, and their ESL teachers. Students in these classes will be asked to take part. The data collection will occur in semester 2. If the students agree to participate, the outside of school time needed will be 1.5 hours (45 minute individual interview, 45 minute small group interview). For ESL teachers, the total time commitment, outside of normal teaching duties will be one hour (individual interview). There are five stages to the data collection:

- Note-taking and audiotaping of three one hour ESL classes at VCE level. Teachers will nominate which lessons can be recorded.
- Audiotaped a one hour interview with each ESL teacher participants about their perceptions and experience of teaching argumentative writing to international students
- Audiotaped 45 minute interview with each student discussing one written text of a student and a selected number of media texts used in their ESL classes
- Audiotaped of two group interviews of about 45 minutes with the student participants about their personal experience and attitudes in argumentative writing (2 groups of 5 students)
- Collecting students' written texts on the issue task (one SAC text, one written text practiced

in the class)

Participation of teachers and students in this project is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Both ESL teachers and student participants who are involved in this project will have the opportunity to read and confirm their own transcripts and to request feedback on the findings of the project.

To ensure the anonymity of all participants, pseudonyms will be used, chosen by you, and actual names will be known only to the investigators. The raw data will only be accessible to the investigators of this research project including the audiotapes. The data will be destroyed after a period of five years by the investigators.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Moansh Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at the following address:

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Appendix F Semi-structured interview protocol with students

Part I. Discussion about background data sheet

1. Why do you choose this school?
2. Why do you undertake VCE and plans for future?
3. Distribution of time in each subject
4. Feelings of 4 skills and practice done in China
5. How have these differences between Chinese secondary school and VCE affected your learning practice of written English?
6. What practices have you done for ESL class?

Part II Discussion about note form summary and persuasive language use (using examples from the media texts used in the class)

1. What types of texts do you feel are easier to help you understand language features?
2. What types of texts are difficult? Why?
3. Can you compare media texts between China and Australia?
4. What do you pay attention to when you received media texts in the exam or class?
5. Pick up media texts that you intend to discuss in detail.
 - (a) What types of issue is it?
 - (b) Can you list the main points of his/her argument for this issue?
 - (c) What is the context of the speech, essay and editorial?
 - (d) Who is the audience? Is there more than one?
 - (e) What is the purpose of the text?
6. Can you identify some persuasive techniques used in this text? Do you try to use them in your own text well? If not, why?
7. Can you tell your learning experience about note form summary and persuasive language analysis and how they relate to your own writing?
8. How do you use study guide, supplementary materials given by the teacher?
9. By looking at study guide, can you give me the examples of persuasive techniques you are familiar with and used in language analysis (section 2) and your written piece of work (section 3)?

Part III. Discussion of students' own written texts

1. What do you think about purpose, vocabulary, audience, outline plan and structure of your texts? Give examples in one particular text.
2. Can you identify persuasive techniques you used in this text?
3. How do you feel about using linking words to express your view points? Why?
4. Can you explain why you want to organize your text in this text?

5. What do you think about your strengths and weaknesses in writing?
6. What do you think about feedback from teachers and individual tutorials?

Appendix G Focus group interview protocol with students

A. English in VCE ESL

1. Can you describe your ESL class in three different adjectives? Tell me more about one of them.
2. Can you tell me about how you study English for ESL class? What are the most difficult and the easiest things for you in the class?
3. When you encounter difficulties in learning English in VCE, what do you do? What does your teacher do to help you in class? Do you have strategies you use to help yourself?
4. What have you found out the most beneficial strategies to apply to your own writing?
5. In the ESL final examination or a SAC, can you think of a question when you had ideas but had difficulty writing in expressing these? Explain?

B. Learning of reading a media text (Argument)

1. Argument as genre

Can you explain 'argument' in your own words? Give 3 adjectives and tell why. What do you think about argument in media texts and how it relates to your own writing?

2. Argument and language structure

- (a) Do you pay particular attention to particular language structures in the text?
- (b) Have you encountered any problems in language structure? Why?
- (c) Does your teacher emphasize or point out what structures you will need to understanding for argumentative essay, speech, or a letter to editor? Give examples.

3. Argument and vocabulary

- (a) How do you feel if there is some new English vocabulary in the media texts?
- (b) How often does your teacher discuss the new vocabulary for the issue or provide the vocabulary list that you need to understand before you write your own text?
- (c) Do you think it is helpful to your own writing?

C. Teaching writing tasks in VCE ESL classes

- (a) Can you give examples of practice in class? What is the most impressive to you?
- (b) Can you give examples of strategies that teacher teaches you about note-form summary, persuasive language and writing you own piece of work? What do you think the most useful and useless strategies applying to your own writing?
- (c) What do you think argumentative writing can be improved in the classroom practice and at home? (brainstorming)

- (d) What kind of support have you got from ESL teachers?
- (e) If you can make a wish, Can you tell me one particular support you want to get from your ESL teacher regard to argumentative writing?
- (e) If you have questions and problems in the class, how will you ask for help at the first place?

D. Culture and your language learning

- (a) Can you think one particular thing you bring from China that help you to hope with VCE study well? What about English learning? What about written English?
- (b) Can you think about Chinese international students' strengths and weaknesses in taking VCE ESL?
- (c) Can you think about your own strengths and weaknesses in coping with argumentative writing?

Appendix H Semi- structured interview protocol with teachers

(Prepare some media texts used in the class and some student participants' written texts as samples)

A. Background data sheet

1. Why do you choose private school instead of government school?
2. Compared to government school teaching, what do you think the differences between private and government school?
3. What kind of extra work do you do compared to government school teachers?

B. International students and their written English

1. What do you think about Chinese international students' written English generally? Can you comment on their strengths and weaknesses in reading media texts and writing their own argumentative texts? (Give specific examples)
2. What do you think the challenges faced by international students are?
3. Do you think cultural features play a part? If so, how does it reflect on their learning practice in your class, especially in reading and writing?
4. How do Chinese international students engage with the writing activities?
5. What do you think about Chinese international students' understandings of the argumentative genre?
6. Do you think they have problems with different forms of argumentative writing? What are they? Why?

C. Teaching of an issue

1. What do you focus on when teaching note-form summary, media texts and argumentative writing? Is there a reason for this?
2. Can you describe the writing and reading activities you use in both the teaching of an issue and the teaching of argumentative writing?
3. Can you describe Chinese international students' performance in defining arguments, language analysis about persuasive device used in the media text and how it relates to their own writing?
4. What role does vocabulary play in using these media texts?
5. Are particular language structures pointed out in various media texts or students' written texts?
6. What do you think about purpose, audience, structure, outline plan when you teach argumentative writing?

7. Do you use any specific strategies to support your students in writing tasks during class?
8. As an ESL teacher, what do you expect them to do? Specify which unit?
9. What do you expect them to do to prepare for your classes?
10. Can you tell me about your attitude of grading, feedback and personal tutorials?

Appendix I Field note data sheet

Class _____ **Date** _____ **Time** _____
Teacher’s name _____ **Student no.** _____
Topic _____

Resources _____

Teacher	Students	Comments

Teacher	Students	Comments

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Teacher	Students	Comments

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Appendix J

Year 12 E.S.L. SAC 1 - Issues

Contention: The Commonwealth Game was not worth the cost.

Outline Plan (may extend over page):

Recently, Melbourne has been hosted ^{the} Commonwealth Games. In that two weeks, 697 million tax has been spent, 47 people has been arrest and 19 athletes ^{are} still unaccounted for, further more, we can see police every and turn on the TV, they only talking about how does Australia Winning during the game. This make us, who pay the tax, strongly doubt that can't we find anything better to do than wasting 'our' money on Commonwealth Game. Although, some people ~~thought~~ say it's a Great opportunity to develop the good will and good understanding in British region ~~concerns~~, We still believe the Commonwealth Game was not worth the cost.

50 Million Dollars spent on the opening and closing ceremonies. (The Age, 30/3, 2006)

697 million Dollars ~~was~~ totally spent on the game. (Posted 11:42 am ET games Birds, 27/3/06)

These number ~~was~~ ^{is} not only a lot, that's a great amount of money which require us — (who pay the tax) to ^{work} ~~work~~ for age to earn it. But our government, spend all these money in two weeks. What

can stop ~~us~~ from ~~doubt~~ that what our government has done to ~~lose~~ our money? "not how much did it cost the government

but how much of our hard earnt money did they ~~lose~~?" said by Michael (H-sun website 'your views on the Commonwealth Game,

www.heraldsun.news.com.au, 24/3/06) Just like Michael said, It's not something we should ^{be proud of} ~~pride~~ with, but it's something we should shame with. And in fact, the purpose of the game — "good will

Year 12 ESL SAC 1 - Issues

Commence Essay here:

and good understand" do not mean ~~spend~~ ^{Waste} or lots of money. Maintenance ~~not~~ ^{do} relationship not equal to spend money. ~~For~~ For one sentence, It's a great shame that our government waste so many money, and we should be shame to.

Moving on, What did our money spend for? Build up a state for all athletes come from different country to compete? May be that's what they said, but why we never got that kind of feel? Turn on the TV, all we can hear is how does Australia win the gold medal. All ~~phenomena~~ appearance that we can see is just like we are building up a game for ourself to win. "I have had a horrible thought. Australia is to the Commonwealth Games as the US is to the Olympics." said by Gerard Gleeson (Letters, The Games, The age 27/3/06) That's the feeling remain in our mind. ~~Be successful~~ successful in a game which do not involved in China, Russia, US. Is that so great for us? "When I tell people I am going out to Australia, they don't say 'That must be for the Games', they say, 'What for?'" England's chairman of selectors for athletic, Chris Carter said. (by Jame Button, Peterker and Len Johnson, The Age, 9/3/06) That how do people in other country feel about the game, Why only we be so interesting in? Only because the attraction of reputation, only because we are ~~winning~~ winning. All these can end up with one world word "Vainglorious", Shame on you Australia.

What a great legacy we get!

H/2
3

Further more. during the game, only 2 weeks, ~~they~~ there are 47 people arrested, ~~and~~ ~~that~~ (The games by number The Age 28/3/06) Is that what we want to get by spending the money. In fact as we gain reputation, we get a lot of trouble as well. Our government enjoy so much with show off ourself. But on the other hand, they use hardly policy to treat immigration. So what can we expect for from that? 19 athletes missing (The games by number The age 28/3/06) ~~That~~ That's so easy to understand the feeling. When you come to ~~another~~ ^{Australia} country which use nearly 1/3 of your home country's GDP to host a game, and after show off themselves then send back you to your own country which just like hell when compete with Australia. If I am that athlete, definitely I'll chose stay, no matter use what method. And they should ~~let~~, Australia should let these people stay. That's what we called human rights. We show off ourself then we have the obligation to help them. But what our government do? After gain ~~golden~~ medal from these athletes and then kick them back to the hell. What a ~~too~~ "commonwealth"!

Some people said, the game can help us to understand our brother country's problem, and then we can help them. However, I not only I, we all citizen of Melbourne strongly doubt with that. ~~host a game~~ How can host a game give us the opportunity to help our brother's. In fact, for the Sierra Leone, this country's GDP is only 3 times of what we spend on Games ~~of~~ ~~the~~ (The Game, Letter, The Age 27/3/06). Just like that, if we really want to help, if we really want to archive

The purpose of good will and good understanding. It definitely will not be ~~the way~~ correct way for us to do. If we donot waste these money to build up this game to gain reputation for ourself or like othe said for commonwealth. Instead ~~that~~ waste, ~~to~~ how ~~about~~ use this 69 million dollar to build factor~~s~~ or develop industry for these third world contory. ~~We~~ We can sure ~~they~~ these athlete will be far more thankful to it than join a game which only a pain to them. That's the obligation we should follow, but now a day, what are our goverment doing? build up ourself, and ~~the~~ want use a great game (infact not) to help our commonwealth. The only word I can find to describe it is redicular. ~~There~~

~~As we can conclude,~~ Finally, as we can ~~conclude~~ ~~conclude~~. For the Commonwealth, Game. We waste hundreds million tax, and lose the chance to help our brother contory, the chance to ~~the~~ doing our duty. The only thing we get, the Legacy ^{is} ~~is~~ Vainglorious. ~~And under the far~~ ~~and~~ Nothing ^{we have is} realtable to obtain the real purpose of the game — good will, good ~~understanding~~ understanding. ~~In fact, what we do~~ ~~we~~ feel just like ~~clean~~ ~~the far for~~ a stand on these. Can we still say the game worth ~~the~~ the cost? ~~It~~ ~~open our eyes and stop~~ It's the time for us to open eyes, to wake up from the repetition of winning. Although the game has passed already. But we still can't forgot the shameful for what we ^{has} done. So we'll not stop wrong ^{again} ~~again~~, ~~if we can~~ ~~understand~~ that. ~~May be the game can still~~ ~~to~~ ~~core seth~~. But ~~no~~ now, we only can say, ~~to~~ ~~much~~ for commonwealth, we want our money back.

What a good job for waiting! "well done"
Commonwealth Game.

Appendix K

Year 12 E.S.L. Folio SAC

Commence Draft here:

*good understanding of the topic

(reference?)

"People are dying. However the government ^{is} stopping us from saving lives." said ~~by~~ the head of ^{the} genetic department of Melbourne university Down Gellan. This is the reality we ^{are} facing at. No matter how hard our scientists beg ~~the~~ government, these politicians ^{always} answer ~~always~~ ~~be~~ 'No'. Only because they don't want ^{to} lose their votes. ~~However~~, people don't ~~matter~~. People may ~~don't~~ not have ~~the~~ knowledge, but these politicians are the ones in charge.

In stead of doing what people ask them to do, they should try to correct peoples mistakes and take care of them. However in this case, the real meaning of No is, "No, ~~the~~ ~~rest~~ we can't saving you. ?? (Where is your contention?)

please see page 6 for introduction.

^{Research} "Stem cell" ^{is} one of the greatest discoveries in 20 century. The importance of it ^{is} just like the discovery of fire and electricity. It's ^{something} that can ^{evolve} make ~~us~~ our society ^{evolve}.

What's stem cell? Many people will ask that. In fact stem cell ^{research is} around us every day. Every individual ^{is} developing from a stem cell. As we all know, Organisms are built by cells.

There are so many ~~cells~~ ^{different} ~~cell~~ in our body. Most of them are highly ~~speci~~ specialised, and some of them ^{are} even more complex. Like ~~nerve~~ ^{nerve cells??} cell, heart muscle, some cell ~~the~~ can't

^{replicate} ~~reproduce~~ it self by mitosis. This becomes a limit for humans and also created a grave problem for medical science. Even today, people ^{are} still dying from heart attacks and cancer. ~~Nerve~~ ^{Injury} takes away the dream and life from a lots of people. Facing these problems our scientists can do nothing? why not? Because there is no way

23/06

SLOW DOWN!

Plan first.

Grammar mistakes is affecting fluency

to what?

about what?

have reve
* inclusive lang.

different type of cells

same lexical choice

one

ell from

*modality *agency** degenerative

3

For them to solve this kind of degenerative disease. We can kill ~~the~~ virus, we can stop infection. But there is no way for us to stop the dying of our own cell and impossible to rebuild our own body. Although we trust our technology and our doctor, we ~~still~~ must facing the reality. In front of nature, human are so weak.

strong argument

However, stem cell research open up a new area for scientist. ~~What~~ With this technology, we can do all sort of amazing thing that we even can't thinking about. For example, If you lost a leg in an accident, With stem cell research, our doctor will say "don't worry, we can make a new one for you." Further more, If you catch cancer, the only thing you should do is inject some T cell which is ~~now~~ developing from stem cell. This sounds ~~realt~~ like science fiction. But it's not. Stem cell has the potential to do all these thing for us. Just like embryo can grow into a whole body, stem cell has the ability to specialise itself into any kind of cell. That's the power our nature use to creat life. And today it is possible for us to hand it, And saving lives. A world without disease and death, is it a dream of a lots of people?

However, some people think scientist doing this research only for fun and they don't believe stem cell. What a shame. Just like Newton attacked by public, ~~and~~ We are progressing has been

but our society can't understand it. The only thing they believe is we are killing these embryo. "If we can, we don't want such these embryo too." said by researcher ~~of~~ of stem cell from CSIRO. Human are highly evolved. So we are not like plant. ~~—~~ — Cutting a piece than we can grow ~~a~~ a whole new individual. In our body, we only want our heart cell to become heart cell. No one want a lung replace their heart. So because we are complex, we lost the ability to rebuild ourself. In fact the stem cell remain in a adult nearly equal to 0. So the only place we can get it, is from embryo. But it doesn't mean we'll find a women and ask for an embryo. The embryo we want use is the byproduct of IVF. ~~ttt~~

Some couples want a child but they can't do it by themselves. So they chose IVF. During this process the embryo we get usually more than 20. However no much people want have 20 ~~per~~ child once or even during their whole life. So what happen to these excess embryo? Frozen in the ~~ref~~ fridge, and forget by people forever. Instead of waste, why don't we use these cell to do stem cell research? However at this stage some people coming through and say "You can't kill these innocent life, They have the right ~~to~~ ~~live~~ to become a human just like you." May be they are right, but if we stop research will these cell grow into people? Of course not. In fact is we already ~~take~~

away the right from ~~them~~ them. so which will be better,⁵
make these embryo useful and saving other's ~~if~~ lives or stay
there forever and doing nothing? The answer is ~~obvious~~.
obvious. Further move at this point. There ~~are~~ is
nothing ~~to do~~ against people's religion. As we all
believe human are special because we have soul. We
are intellegen and can memorize things. However
can embryo doing that? Reality is these embryos
~~can't~~ ~~feel~~ have no feeling, no memory and no soul.
We even call a baby "it" instead of he or she. So
How about these embryos which is even got no chance
to become a human? Our religion doesn't say we can't
touch these embryo, and what we are doing in stem
cell reasearch is try to saving people's life. That's what
our religion tells us to do.

As I conclude, every time we are facing some great
discoveries. Outside, there are always some body against.
With the excuse of humanity or religion. However, from
the experience of industry ~~revolution~~ resolution, ~~and~~ We
can see there ~~the~~ barrel will never stop our step of
progressing. For stem cell reasearch, I believe one day people
will understand it and accept it. And it's better for
that day to coming as soon as possible, so we won't lost
that many innocent lives.

introduction

Stem cell research.— This is a hot issue right now. Recently, at Canberra, the government are debate on this topic.

Although some people agnise this research, It's won't change the fact that stem cell research is one of greatest discovery in those days and will saving a lot of lives.

The only reason people agnise it is the scare to unknown ^{make}

At here as a science student I am going to ~~explain~~ teach these people who agnise this research a lesson. Help them to ~~ret~~ realise how amazing and important this research is. I am not trying to agnise, I am establishing the fact that is stem cell research will make the whole species of Homo sapiens ~~evolute~~ evolving a lot, ~~and~~ ~~become the real~~ ~~to of~~ and change our life forever.

Appendix L Table of English in VCE ESL

	Describe your ESL class	Teacher's teaching style	The easiest (E) and the most difficult (D) things in ESL	Ask questions or request tutorials	Support for individual needs
Nancy	1) inactive – the teacher keeps talking, the students listen; not much interaction; do tasks perfunctorily	1) Teach hard already, but the pace is too slow 2) only few types of media texts have been analysed in the class, hope the teacher can summarise different forms of argumentative writing, such as speech, editorial, a letter etc. 3) hope to read good articles about how to write different forms of argumentative writing 4) In Year 11, English teaching doesn't help me to comprehend English better, like a subject for exams. My teacher in Year 12 helps me to understand English as language to express ideas, not a subject.	(E) 1) Oral presentation – like talk in daily life, can add other components, such as preparing transparencies, organizing information to show your thoughts 2) Folio, personal writing, text response are easy coz it's a form of expressing your emotions (D) Argumentative writing – every Chinese student writes similar piece of work, not powerful, like copying a model	1) always ask questions in class when I feel unclear 2) If I receive bad score in argumentative essays, for example, 7 out of 10, I will request for a tutorial and discuss with the teacher in detail.	1) Speed up the class – add pressure to students, make tasks compulsory 2) Go deep – not only teach or ask superficial questions and knowledge, try to broaden our views. Chinese students feel shame to answer easy questions, afraid to be laughed to answer or they feel you want to show off.
Vince	1) inactive, dead – A	1) I feel fine coz I talk and	(E) Speaking – expressing your	(1) For short	1) one to one

	small part of us is reactive at front, most students are quite at the back, only few people respond	participate	views orally (D) Expressing persuasive techniques (sec. 2 in writing task) – Finding persuasive language is easy, ‘how to explain’ is a problem.	questions, I ask immediately in class or after class. For long ones, I will request for a tutorials. (2) But I always cross lines with the teacher.	teaching – solve particular problems, discussing some issues and difficulties in detail
Magic	1) sleepy	1) first reason is because the class is in the early morning 2) her style is more knowledge-based and cause the class less interesting 3) too much knowledge and less flexible, learning needs to combine with interests 4) more exam-focused, like how to answer questions and what we should pay attention in the exam	(E) presentation – not rigid in grammar (D) 1) Writing an essay, but text response is even harder – For argumentative essays, still can use some references so my ideas will be clear. List ideas and the structure will be clear. 2) For text response, need to find my own ideas, arrange my thoughts and supporting materials, consider whether the ideas are appropriate, that’s so troublesome.	1) We don’t cross lines. If I have a problem, I will make an appointment with her, I am also free in Line 6.	1) help us practice for exams and try to increase our marks
Jimmy	1) awful	1) no freedom, can’t bring my skills or talent into full play 2) the teacher only follow her own	(E) Oral presentation – has no limit and can express my own ideas, mistakes are acceptable	1) don’t need tutorials, but individual talk in	1) Give me good marks.

		<p>answers or the answers from the book and disallow my answers, more rigid and inflexible</p> <p>3) can't make it on time so provide individual talk from the back, I never receive one</p> <p>4) feel the teacher doesn't balance the time she spends on students, some more, some don't</p> <p>5) This class is more about listening</p>	<p>(D) text response – the teacher lists down all the points, emphasize these as main reasons and ask us to use these as quotes, but we have our own ideas. She uses my ideas as wrong examples. If I need to decide my own topic, I prefer to discuss my true feeling, not just follow what the teacher said is correct. I want to follow my own comprehension, don't know why to apply the quotes.</p>	<p>the class sometimes is necessary</p> <p>2) always want to ask questions, but the teacher said 'be quite, give other people chances', so I give up.</p> <p>3) We also have crossed lines, I solve problems by myself.</p>	
Tide	1) boring	<p>1) can't develop our own ideas, the previous teacher's teaching style was more open, no matter the ways of encouragement, teaching styles and teaching methods</p> <p>2) Sometimes I know the answer, I will try hard to keep it and not response.</p> <p>3) feel never receive the teacher's attention</p>	<p>(E) Oral presentation – develop my own ideas, no limitation on topics</p> <p>(D) text response- few limits, difficult to write if you don't understand the topic well, vocabulary limit, get ideas, but can't express in English well</p>	<p>1) Before I always talked with the previous teacher, now I cross lines with this teacher.</p>	<p>1) Follow the previous teacher's teaching style, follow the students, not just the curriculum, more vivid, not rigid.</p>
Amanda	1) no feeling,	<p>1) I feel her teaching is ok, I sit at the back and often receive the teacher's attention</p>	<p>Don't have any ideas about easy and difficult tasks, go and ask the teacher often.</p>	<p>1) I won't ask questions in the class, normally, the</p>	<p>1) Be very strict to me, I need pressure to study</p>

				teacher brings up questions and answers and I listen. I don't really have any questions. always ask questions when the teacher comes to her	hard.
Leon	1) dull, but sometimes active (when the teacher tells jokes)	1) He doesn't greet any students, very cold	(E) Oral presentation- everyone gets 'A' (D) 1) Reading media texts, especially during class or exams, not interested, like disaster. 2) rebelled mind, when everyone is reading the article, I don't want to do it 3) After thinking thoroughly, I find it hard to explore this idea deeply, the idea is too superficial		1) provide samples about how to write topic sentences in the class 2) one to one teaching, check all the mistakes in my articles and let me know how to write different forms of argumentative writing

Molly	1) boring and silent	<p>1) Although he is cold, but he doesn't affect my learning</p> <p>2) Many students are silent because English is poor</p>	<p>(E) Speaking is the easiest.</p> <p>(D) Writing is the most difficult, but I feel persuading people are not too difficult, maybe my thought is more radical</p> <p>3) If talking about advantages or disadvantages, I can't write well.</p> <p>4) With emotion, I can write well, otherwise my article will look very simple, doesn't explore the issue deeply</p> <p>5) After thinking thoroughly, I find it hard to explore this idea deeply, the idea is too superficial</p>	1) I feel it's a problem of language, if I can't speak English well, I don't want to express my ideas or ask questions in the class	<p>1) check my articles carefully and point out every single mistakes and weaknesses</p> <p>2) put good sentences in my article, as a local, what grammar will he use to demonstrate his ideas about this topic</p>
Marina	1) Boring	1) I prefer other subjects, like further math	<p>(E) reading novels</p> <p>(D) argumentative writing</p>		<p>1) point out all my mistakes in writing and tell me how to do it</p> <p>2) make a model for me so I can just follow this particular model to write</p>

Appendix M Narratives, mind map and implications for Kelly's lessons

Kelly's Lesson 1: A heart and a brain!

At beginning of the class, Kelly started role play by asking students if you were 3 years old and want a toy from a shop, what do you do? If you turn to an adult and go to CBD with friends, one friend changes his mind and doesn't want to go, how can you persuade him? Some students tried to provide some strategies. Later, she took out a transparency with a short passage and asked students how the text made them feel. The passage is about some rules for young people to comply on the bus. Kelly asked students to stand on young people's and old ladies' shoes and thought how the passage made you feel. Most students were quite and few of them answered, one asked about the word 'pimply'. She emphasized the 'feeling' in the language and explained vocabulary, then asked a student to read.

She asked students to bring their study guides from the lockers and started explaining the requirement of section 2 of a writing task, persuasive language analysis, for example, students need to find 'five different types' of persuasive language techniques, not simply find five examples. Most students were quite while listening and two were chatting in mother tongue. She started talking about feeling and effect in the language.

Heart = feelings/emotions

Brain = effects on listeners/readers/readers' opinions/thoughts

Half of students in the classroom were taking notes while others were not. Three students asked questions about how to apply persuasive language techniques while she was explaining, for example, is it important to remember all the types of techniques, what is the most common technique, etc. Later, she asked students to go back to the study guide again and asked students to read some important points and many students shared the study guide together. Students were required to read through a text from the study guide and highlighted the feelings and effects in the language or just simply drew a heart or a brain about them. Few students were picked on to get their answers about feelings and effects and their answers were relatively short, maybe only one words, like 'scared' or 'confident'. She referred back to the techniques on the study guide and asked students to memorize them.

Finally, she used an old exam paper for practice by asking students to read the text and the instructions. One student fell asleep in the class while some were taking turns to read. Later, she gave one example on the board.

They will go bankrupt, that's what!

By highlighting the word 'bankrupt' and the emphatic exclamation, then listed three components as below,

Language techniques = scare tactic

Heart = scared (one student answered)
 Brain = consequences of charging, business (one student answered)

At the end, students were required to find at least 12 types of persuasive language use for this specific text.

Kelly's Lesson 2: What do the examiners want?

Kelly began to ask students to take out their homework and explained the example they talked yesterday in details and asked students to copy down the diagram below.

1. They will go <u>bankrupt</u> , that's what!		
		Alarmist language emphatic exclamation
Heart (feelings)	Scared, worried, frightened, alarmed, concerned	<u>Explanation</u> Smythe is using language that makes the audience feel alarmed, the audience is persuaded as they are worried and frightened about what will happen to their community if the proposed beach fees are implemented. This influences the audience to believe that if they support the council's proposal, it will spell disaster for local business and community.
Brain (effects)	Negative, local business	

Then, Kelly moved to talk what examiners want, for example, write down the sentence exactly as how it looks like. Jimmy asked a question, whether he can use the same sentence but for different examples of persuasive language techniques while other students were copying the diagram and chatting in mother tongue. Students were asked to work in pairs to practice feelings and effects about the same text and write on transparencies. Students received two pages of supplementary materials from her about persuasive techniques and referred them to use extra vocabulary on the study guide, p. 44. A lot of Indonesian and Chinese were chatting in mother tongue loudly and one student complained the easiest one was already on the study guide. On P.49, students can find out all the answers. While Kelly was passing the colour pens and she explained to individual students in more details. Then she checked the understandings of students from each group and started from the back. Some students were still chatting about their daily lives while some showed their transparency to Kelly and confirmed their answers or some students checked the study guide and played around with other students. She collected all the transparencies and promised to return them tomorrow.

Kelly's Lesson 3: I wanna get good marks!

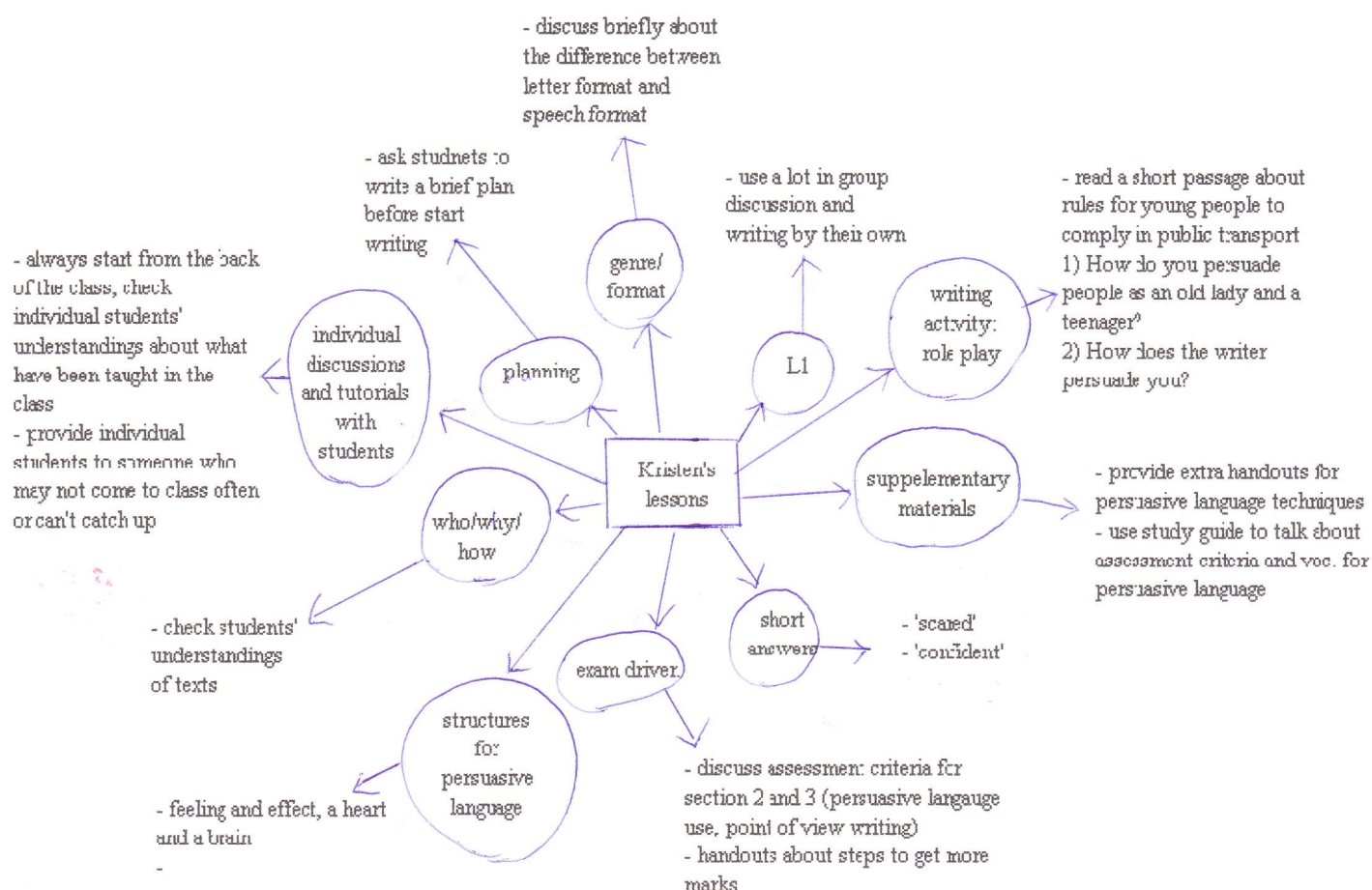
Kelly began to explain what examiners look for part 3, point-of-view writing and asked students to read the criteria for part 3 in the exam paper. Students were asked to highlight some important phrases in the criteria and write some points on them, for example, the phrase 'material presented' and students needed to write 'the information given in the article – persuasive language and argument you present'. She referred the trial exam they did and she was pleased with their structures, but in order to get more marks, they need to improve 'the language'. She also emphasized 'audience, purpose and form' in the criteria and asked students to tell 'who, what, why' about one exam paper. Few students answered.

Later she gave another issue on the board and the form, students were required to tell who, why, how and discussed something in common, for example, teachers won't give a speech to a class about whether the internet is a bad influence or not. Few students answered.

Some students were picked on to read the steps in handouts about what the examiners look for. She explained step 5-7 in details in relation to get good marks, such as thinking about effects, writing a contention that will be included in the introduction, thinking about whether you'd like to introduce a rebuttal or not. She'd like to help students to check their rebuttal language. More examples were like writing a brief plan of three or four ideas, using notes to write a passionate and persuasive response to an issue.

One student asked whether it's necessary to have 3 body paragraphs. Kelly started to explain the differences between various forms of argumentative writing, like letter format and speech format. Many students provided answers while she was asking questions about the forms. Before 25 minutes to go, she asked students to practice by writing down five examples of persuasive language devices and gave their reasons. Five students started chatting while 7 were writing their own examples and reasons. One or two were daydreaming while three were chatting aloud. One student came before the class finishes, Kelly asked him to see her after class and some students showed their written work to her.

Mind map for Kelly's lessons and implications



Implications

1. It is important to find out whether it is because of time constraint that Kristen only briefly talked about genre/format, planning and who/how/why.
2. A lot of first languages are used in the class and short answers are provided. Compare with teacher and students' answers whether it is because less motivation, confidence, difficulties in understandings the lessons or weak classroom management.
3. Role-play is a good activity to help students to think about persuasion, however, many important issues haven't been addressed and taught carefully, such as genre/format, planning and who/how/why in the writing.
4. Less effective activities to help students to think critically and logically about persuasive writing and techniques used in media texts.
5. It is encouraged to provide extra handouts to assist students' learning, however, students' understandings of the handouts should be checked, not just reading through the steps
6. It is useful to refer back to voc. in the study guide for students to use in analysing persuasive language in media texts.
7. Individual discussions with students in the class may be a good way to check individual students' understandings of each section, however, some students may not receive any help from the teacher due to time constraint.

SECTION TWO – Writing task

Specific instructions for Section Two

Carefully read the following material and then complete **all three** set tasks on page 17.

Each task has the same weighting in the assessment. After you have read the material carefully, you should spend approximately the same amount of time on each task.

You will be assessed according to the criteria for the award of grades on page 18.

Task material

Bosman is a large regional city with a population of 80 000. Bosman is approximately 120 kilometres from Melbourne.

There has been an increase in the number of violent crimes involving young people in the inner city area of Bosman. Politicians, the police force, community groups, and social welfare workers have been discussing the problem.

The City Council has suggested a curfew for young people. If a curfew is introduced, it will be illegal for young people under the age of 18 years to be out in the inner city area between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am. Young people will only be allowed in the inner city area at this time if they are with an adult who would be legally responsible for their behaviour.

The city newspaper, *The Bosman Bulletin*, reported the most violent crime. A young man was injured in a knife attack. This is part of the report in the newspaper.

The police and community groups say that the number of crimes involving young people has had a bad effect on the reputation of the Bosman community. The council has tried to reduce violence in recent years. A Youth Outreach worker, Ms Barbara Thomas, has been employed by the council to help young people in the inner city area. Ms Thomas said that she was trying to help young people who often had nowhere to live, no family support and no hope of getting a job.

‘Keeping young people off the streets by force is not the answer,’ she said. ‘Force never works. The government tried to stop the sale of alcohol in the USA in the 1930s. That didn’t work and the curfew will not work either. The only way to change behaviour is to change the way people think. We must start by teaching young people how to behave. Families and schools are both responsible for this.’

‘The people of Bosman should be ashamed of the way young people are treated in this city. The kids have nowhere to go and nothing to do. If they come into the city to meet their mates, they get bullied by the police.’

Barbara Thomas believes that local government must put more money into programs for young people.

However, the City Council is determined to introduce a curfew on young people. A spokesperson for the council, Ms Elaine Foster, said yesterday that curfews had been successful in reducing certain kinds of crimes in other countries.

‘We know that this proposal may seem harsh, but we’ve tried other things and they have not worked. This is not an attack on young people’s freedom. We are trying to protect them so that they are free to grow up in a safe society.’

‘I would like people who are against the curfew to remember that many groups in our community are in favour of the curfew. In fact we received a letter from the student representative council at Bosman South Secondary College. The students there want a curfew to be introduced.’

The City Council will decide at its next meeting whether or not to have a curfew.

Increase, in percentages, in Offences Committed in Bosman from June 1994 to July 1995.

Type of Offence	% Adults 18+years	% Adolescents 12-18 Years	% Males 12-17 years	% Females 12-17 years
arson	+ 7	+ 10	+ 10	0
assault and assault with weapons	+ 40	+ 58	+ 75	+ 25
car theft	+ 39	+ 46	+ 80	+ 5
domestic violence	+ 22	+ 5	+ 18	+ 4
drunk and disorderly	+ 45	+ 80	+ 65	+ 20
shopstealing	+ 19	+ 55	+ 35	+ 50
vandalism	+ 20	+ 65	+ 80	+ 10

Bosman Police Statistics Branch 1995

This notice was published in the daily newspaper and displayed in public places.



CITY OF BOSMAN

Public Meeting 8.00 pm November 16 1995 Bosman Civic Centre

Topic: Proposed Youth Curfew

The council proposes to have a curfew on people under the age of 18 in the city centre between the hours of 10.00 pm and 6.00 am, unless they are with an adult.

Speakers

1. Mayor of the City of Bosman
2. Head of Crimes Branch, Bosman City Police
3. Coordinator, Youth Outreach Projects
4. President of the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties

Any interested people will then be invited to speak to the meeting.

Any people wishing to speak, should contact Chris Brown, the Council Secretary, on 045 555 4444, by 5.00 pm at least two days before the meeting.

People may also write to the council. Letters must be received by November 18 1995. The council will vote on the curfew at the council meeting on November 27 1995.

**SECTION TWO – continued
TURN OVER**

There have been a large number of letters to the editor of *The Bosman Bulletin*. Here are two of the letters.

from Colonel Samuel Howard (retired)

All fair minded and decent citizens should support the curfew.

Why should we all suffer because of the behaviour of a minority of badly behaved young people? People are afraid to go out at night for fear of being robbed or attacked. Families are prisoners in their own homes while these brutal animals roam the streets. Our police force is already overworked. They have no time to cope with extra problems.

Young people who commit crimes must be punished. It's no use being soft. The so called 'experts' tell us sad stories of broken homes and youth unemployment. This is rubbish! Why should young people be rewarded for bad behaviour with unemployment benefits and special programs? The problem is the lack of discipline in schools and at home. When we were at school we had to behave or we were punished. It didn't do us any harm.

When I left school I was fighting in a war. Discipline was essential for our survival and for the survival of Australia as a free country.

A return to the good old-fashioned values that we all respect is the answer. Decent young people don't want to be out on the streets at night. They want to be at home with their families and this is where young people belong.

A curfew is not a punishment for these decent hard working young people. It will not affect their lives. A curfew will give the police the power they need to clean up the streets and make Bosman a safe and happy town for all of us.

Samuel Howard
Bosman West

from Mr Ken May

President

Bosman Chamber of Commerce (an association for business owners)

As business owners and responsible citizens, our members are concerned about the increase in violence on our streets. However, we do not believe that imposing a curfew on young people is the answer.

The traders in the inner city want the area to be a safe place for the people of this city. We believe we can make the city safe and at the same time improve the economy of Bosman by providing leisure activities for young people.

Young people need to become mature and responsible by living their lives in a normal world. Young people have just as much right to go to restaurants, theatres, nightclubs, cinemas, and video arcades as older members of the community. They also have a right to earn money working part time in restaurants, fast-food outlets and supermarkets.

There are also sport and recreation activities, which are important for the health and happiness of young people. It is wrong to stop young people from enjoying these activities.

Staying at home, even in a loving family, will not give young people the opportunity to make friends and learn profitable ways of spending their leisure time. How will they learn the values of cooperation and responsibility if they cannot take part in the full life of the community in which they live? Staying at home watching violence on television may be as bad for young people as wandering the streets with nothing to do!

Introducing a curfew is too harsh. We don't want Bosman to be like countries with military dictatorships which control people's freedom.

Ken May
Bosman City

Tasks

Complete **all** three tasks. All tasks are equally weighted in the assessment.

1. Write a summary, **in note form** of the report in *The Bosman Bulletin*. (You should not answer in complete sentences. You should not write in paragraph form.)

2. In the letter to *The Bosman Bulletin*, retired Colonel Samuel Howard tries to convince readers that the curfew is a good thing. Identify five ways in which he uses language to persuade his readers. Explain how each example you have selected is persuasive.

3. The Bosman City Council is making the decision about the curfew at its next meeting. Write a letter to the council giving your opinion.