



**MONASH** University

**Critical Inquiry into an ELICOS Writing Programme:**

Exploring multimodal pedagogies through action research

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A thesis submitted in full for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* at

Monash University in October 2019

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# Abstract

Across the world, international education is a very lucrative business. In Australia, the international student market is extremely important, and a key dimension of that market is the teaching of English language and literacy to adults wishing to enter Australian universities. While global debates about language and literacy teaching have been transforming the ways in which literacy is taught and learned in schools, these debates appear to have had little impact on curriculum and practices in adult international English language courses. In schools, traditional literacy teaching practices that emphasise one mode of writing are being challenged because they do not adequately meet the needs of multicultural students whose home language is not English. Approaches to English literacy teaching that highlight the multiple nature of literacies are challenging traditional understandings of language, meaning making and language pedagogy, and have paved the way for new developments in literacy practices and language education (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

Much research undertaken in primary and secondary education setting suggests there is value in exploring and experimenting with multimodal pedagogies in school classrooms (e.g., Bisson, Van Heuven, Conklin, & Tunney, 2014; Mills, 2011; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010). Despite some scepticism about the implementation of multimodal pedagogies in higher education classrooms (DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Selwyn & Bulfin, 2015), research on multimodal writing in higher education has begun to explore ways in which multimodal pedagogies have something to offer ELICOS learners in post-secondary Australian settings.

Using practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in a form of action research, this study investigates the ways in which multimodal pedagogies can be productively deployed in the development of ELICOS students' meaning making and writer identities in one ELICOS institution in Melbourne, Australia. Underpinned by critical pedagogy, the research explores the nature and implications of multimodal pedagogy in the teaching of writing in English to adult L2 learners in Melbourne, Australia. It examines how students engage with and make meaning in a range of monomodal and multimodal academic writing activities, where the teaching acknowledges and values the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) that they bring to their writing.

The study finds that adult L2 students in one ELICOS setting benefitted from the introduction of multimodal pedagogies in the teaching of writing in a number of ways, including: improved confidence; enhanced enjoyment and engagement in the teaching and learning process; and a greater willingness to use creative and critical approaches in their writing.

This study contributes to a slowly emerging debate in the literature about the need to improve English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in the 21st century for adult students whose first language is not English. In part, it responds to calls in the literature (Janks, 2013; Nicholas & Starks, 2014) for change in current English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) writing practices that present a disjuncture between global digital forms of communication and traditional academic writing.

# Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

**Signature:**

**Print Name:** Huda Kahwaji

**Date:** 29 October 2019

# Acknowledgements

My journey in this PhD was parallel with my journey to establish a new life with my family as recent immigrants to Australia – along with my drive to establish a rewarding career for myself. Both journeys were extremely tough, and neither would have been achievable without the constant support of people who have assisted me throughout the entire process. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to each and every person who stood by me, supported me and encouraged me in ways both seen and unseen.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my dedicated supervisor, Associate Professor Graham Parr, for his ongoing guidance, support and encouragement. He defined the model example of a supervisor and a caring educator with his devoted supervision, pedagogical practices and mentorship. He willingly sacrificed hours of his personal time to support me and did an amazing job at accommodating my individuality and understanding my struggles. Thank you for making my turbulent PhD journey as easy as possible and for making it a learning journey for me as a teacher and researcher.

I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Fida Sanjakdar. Her understanding of the complicated circumstances and processes of securing my Permanent Residency Visa and her support at the initial stage of this thesis are most appreciated.

Special thanks and gratitude is extended to Dr. Scott Bulfin for the ongoing support, the contributions to the thesis in both feedback and constructive suggestions, as well as providing very valuable academic advice. Thank you for being someone I could always count on.

Thanks to all who have helped, in ways big and small, for making my research journey reach the light in this form. Special thanks to Fatma and Jess. Special thanks to the illustrators Nalisha from Australia and Haitham from Syria.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to every single one of my students. As newly arrived international students, I truly appreciate their time, and their willingness to share their personal experiences with me.

To my lecturers at the Masters, Associate Professor Howard Nicolas, thank you for your engaging pedagogy and introduction to multimodal writing at the master's level. You have inspired me to be the teacher that I am now and to expand my assignment into this PhD. Professor Margaret Robertson, you empowered me and ignited my passion for research. Dr. Mary Burston, thanks for being passionate, understanding and sensitive to the needs and struggles of international students.

To my fellow colleagues at La Trobe University, thank you for believing in me. The feedback, hallway chats and hugs you provided me with throughout these stressful times have truly filled my soul. Special thanks to Dr. Martha Kamara for taking me by the hand in heart, prayer and care. Dr. Margaret J Robertson, my dear friend and my colleague, your ongoing love and support have been so valuable, and I would not have been where I am today without you. Over the course of our master's studies, you have come to know my whole story from the very beginning, and you have been a significant and beautiful part of it.

Thanks to my colleagues at NLC for their participation in the study and, most valuably, for the amazing friendships that have been established. As a new immigrant, I genuinely consider them to be my family here. You have sustained me through these years, especially during some of the toughest challenges which I have faced both during my research and in my personal life – *“the journey can be extremely difficult, buuut it is worth it.”* These words of encouragement were a turning point in my PhD. Whilst I was on the verge of giving up, having almost written up an email and putting forth a form of withdrawal, I received them from a colleague who is a dear friend, like family to me. And here I am now. So, thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, I would like to give thanks to my beautiful family. I will start with my daughter, Nour and my son, Mohammad. Years have passed since I have last seen you, yet this separation has given us resilience. The strength to keep going in tough times. Thoughts of you both are enough to keep me going, the same way they keep you both going in your pursuits of higher education. Thank you, Ibraheem—it makes all the difference when a son grows and becomes a mature, respectful man, and you, Ibraheem, have become a man that I can truly rely on. Ahmad, thank you for the constant hugs and words of encouragement and for always being proud of me, the same way that I am proud of you. Omar and Firas, my little ones, thank you both for all the fun times and for celebrating the completion of each chapter with me. Thank you for always spoiling me with flowers on my desk and tokens of your love. You both put the biggest smile upon my face at times when I needed it most. Last - but most definitely not least - my loving and supportive husband, Amer. This entire PhD journey started with your encouragement back when I was at university and it has not ever ceased up to this moment. I will be indebted to you for all the things you have done and continue to do for me. My deep love for you all has always been my drive.

***Thank you all.***

**Huda**

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# Glossary of Terms

<b>AARE</b>	Australian Association for Research in Education
<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>CEFR</b>	Common European Framework
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>EAP</b>	English for Academic Purposes
<b>EFL</b>	English as a Foreign Language
<b>EFS</b>	English for Further Studies
<b>EL</b>	English Language
<b>ELF</b>	English as a Lingua Franca
<b>ELICOS</b>	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
<b>ELP</b>	Extended Learning Program
<b>ELSHE</b>	English Language Standards for Higher Education in Australia
<b>ELT</b>	English Language Teaching
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>GATS</b>	General Agreement on Trade in Services
<b>GE</b>	General English
<b>Go8</b>	Group of Eight
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>IELTS</b>	International English Language Testing System
<b>TESOL</b>	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
<b>TOEFL</b>	Test of English as a Foreign Language
<b>MUHREC</b>	Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee
<b>NEAS</b>	National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme
<b>NLC</b>	Nour Language Centre
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

# Part One: A Journey of Many Beginnings



*Seeds buried deep,  
the beginnings of what will grow and flourish  
into a beautiful form of life. The roots begin to rise,  
slowly at first – the foundations settling firmly  
within. Then, a miracle of life sprouts from these  
foundations: vines reach forth, each taking on a  
new life of its own.  
And so begins a journey of many beginnings.*

*Thanawia<sup>1</sup>, Jami'ah<sup>2</sup>, higher education and teaching experiences branch out  
and lead to this research. Ongoing growth.  
The sun and the clouds? Some days are bright  
and fruitful; others are tough and challenging.  
But vines overcome raging storms, continuing to grow.  
Never discouraged.*

*Buds, leaves and flowers, not a single one akin to  
another, not in colour, nor in shape, like the multi-  
dimensional aspects of my study and teaching  
experience. Always learning, always growing.*

*Seasons change, days come and go. And  
the vine? Much like my research  
journey, it continues to meander.*

---

<sup>1</sup>High school in Arabic

<sup>2</sup>University in Arabic

# Prologue

## Lucy

Lucy. Lucy is not my name. It is not the name of my pet, nor the name of a lost loved one. Lucy is a poem written by William Wordsworth. Lucy, I can quite comfortably say, was the reason I first fell in love with English. She is one of the important beginnings in this journey toward a PhD. She sparked in me a fascination of English poems, novels, and the English language overall. Lucy led and inspired me to study English language and literature at university in Syria.

Perhaps it wasn't exclusively the poem itself, nor the meaning behind Wordsworth's words. Perhaps this love for English is rooted in the past with my Year 10 English teacher in the town of Masyaf, Syria. This teacher's efforts to engage students, and help us create a sense of self, and encourage our creativity, and imagination, captured my attention instantly. He was the person who first introduced me to Lucy.

**Scene:** *Syria, 1987 - My Year 10 English Classroom*

The sun burned on my face, its bright rays casting a dark shadow on the gravel floor beneath. With each step I took, I could hear the magnified and crunching sounds of the little rocks under my feet. I looked up at the entrance to my school, eyes slightly squinting. It was one of only two secondary schools in my town. It was big. The building was big. The yard was big.

I walked inside, welcoming the darker and cooler atmosphere. Pushing open the door of my English classroom, I walked directly towards my favourite spot in the room. The chair and desk were right beside the window. From this desk I could gaze outside. The picturesque view of vast grassland dotted with beautiful local trees and wildflowers in all the colours of the rainbow created a feeling of deep happiness inside me.

I spoke to two classmates who were sitting beside me, all of us waiting for our English teacher to arrive and introduce the day's lesson. In the midst of listening to my friend complain about her little brother, the classroom door squeaked open and the familiar face of my English teacher, <sup>3</sup>Esthaz Abdul, appeared at the doorway with a smile on his face. Esthaz greeted us with his usual morning well-wishes. After a few moments preparing his notes at the front of the room, he turned around with a piece of chalk in his hand

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<sup>3</sup>Mr. Abdul ( Arabic- Syrian Dialect)

and wrote on the blackboard: 'Lucy, by William Wordsworth'. The confusion on all our faces was soon replaced with expressions of awe as he read a short extract of the poem to us. I remember it to this day.

*She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A Maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love:  
A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.*

Unlike my past teachers who taught English as a foreign language at my school, Esthaz Abdul did not proceed to deliver a monologue to us about what the poem meant. He did not read from his notes all that we 'needed to know' about the tone, context, and meaning of the poem. He did not write notes on the board that we had to copy into our notebooks. Instead, he asked us to set our minds free, use our imagination, and write! He asked us to describe Lucy the way we individually perceived her.

I remember sitting there, my chin in my palm, repeating the poem in my head and trying to put into words who I thought Lucy was and what she was like. The class fell silent as we all wrote. Soon it was time to share our perceptions. My descriptions, and I soon realised the descriptions of my classmates, were almost all related to our own selves and how we perceived the world around us. We had all imagined Lucy differently, including parts of our own identities and beliefs in our image of her. The entire class, a room full of thirty girls, expressed their own versions of Lucy and not one was the same as another. All were unique.

**Scene:** *Melbourne, 2019 - At My Desk*

I loved that school in my beautiful hometown of Masyaf. Although our classroom settings were very traditional, from the physical arrangement of rows of students to the transmissive teaching methods, our teachers were committed to helping us master our subjects and successfully

complete our assessments. The lessons and syllabus for our Year 10 subjects were rather predictable, and although we had to learn various subjects with differing content, the teaching of knowledge was similar in almost every class. English was different.

No one spoke English during daily communication in my town so I always welcomed the different direction taken in my English class. Although Arabic was still constantly used in English classes, it was the way of engagement with the subject that resonated with me. The pedagogical approach that my teacher took made the rather traditional syllabus of teaching reading, vocabulary, and grammar in English interesting and inspiring. Little did I know that this educator's teaching methods would only be one of the many beginnings of my journey, a little seed in the ground that would eventually grow and sprout and lead me to this PhD research.

My journey before and throughout this research can be represented by the metaphor of a vine symbolising experiences, ideas, and my professional and academic identities. These experiences, ideas, and identities can be described as weaving personal growth throughout my journey. The image presented at the beginning of Part One shows a vine with multiple root systems beneath the ground and multiple threads of vine above the surface, weaving their way in and out of buildings, which represent formal educational institutions and communities in my life. The vine can be seen to have many beginnings. I have located one of my beginnings in the story that I just shared in this Prologue.



# Chapter One

## Introduction

### The Personal Journey

Another beginning can be located 23 years ago, when I was studying language, literature, and writing in English at a Syrian university. After finishing high school, I undertook my undergraduate degree in Latakia, Syria. As a student, I remember being fascinated by the imagination and creativity of the English poets and novelists studied and their ability to formulate unique worlds that could be enjoyed and appreciated even by readers, like me, for whom English was not our first language. At university, I loved experimenting with English as I tried to express myself and create my own sense of the world.

### Early Career

After graduating from high school, I moved to Saudi Arabia to begin my career as a teacher of English in Saudi secondary schools. Although my fascination for learning English continued as an English teacher, I felt unable to create a space in my classrooms to immerse my students to write and express themselves in English. There seemed to be no time or interest in creating or implementing creativity in the Saudi curriculum, which was based on a particular paradigm of writing pedagogy that valued rote learning, modelling, and memorising. Creativity was not expected by my colleagues, and surprisingly, not welcomed by my students. As an early career teacher, it seemed impossible to change the expectations of an educational environment where the curriculum was highly conservative and everything in the textbooks was designed to reflect a very traditional 'Saudi way' of thinking about Saudi Arabia – and about the English language being taught.

## Post- graduate Studies and Teaching in Higher Education

Many years later, I enrolled in a Master's degree at an Australian university, and was fascinated to discover a world of discourses and practices associated with multimodal writing. Also, it was about this time that I obtained a job as an English Language Teacher in the University's Language Centre. The Language Centre offers intensive English Language Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) who do not have adequate levels of English to meet Australian University entry requirements. In my teaching at this Language Centre, I hoped to apply the multimodal theories and creative writing practices that I learned in my Master's studies. Yet, once again I was disappointed. I was faced with classrooms where the teaching of writing was driven by ways of thinking about writing that had no room for multimodality or creativity.

I always asked myself why the theories of language and teaching had not been truly applied in actual classrooms. I could not understand, as a student teacher, why students would learn these theories if we could not use them in the classroom. I recall a meeting with one of my lecturers to discuss one of the assignments. I asked whether the multimodal theories and other theories that I was learning about in my Master's degree could be applied at the University Language Centre. The answer was both honest and indifferent: "I have no idea what is going on there". While it was not unusual for me to experience such a narrow perspective concerning English writing in the education system in a country like Saudi Arabia, it was surprising and disappointing to find such a limited writing curriculum in a multicultural country like Australia. I have come to know, throughout this PhD research, that such a 'gap' or disjunction, in the teaching of writing between contemporary theory (as published in the literature and taught in initial teacher educational institutions) and contemporary classroom practice, is commonplace in schools and other educational spaces. I was keen to explore why it was so acutely evident in ELICOS spaces in Australia.

This disjunction between theory and practice, and the difficulties that my ELICOS students with low 'levels' of English had always faced in their writing, led me to think about why, as educators and teachers, we spend time and effort learning about research to improve the English teaching environment for learners if this valuable knowledge remains in books or is so often disregarded in the classroom. What are the factors that make it difficult to put theory about quality writing pedagogy into practice in ELICOS systems and institutions? Like many of my students, I came to Australia as an international student, and although my English ability is quite sufficient to express myself, I admit that in many oral or written situations, I have been

misunderstood by my professors or friends just because I used a word that does not exactly express my intended meaning. In my own professional practice, I am continually looking for ways to maximise the value of theory in my practice, just as I am always wary of certain dominant ideologies (such as seen in neo-liberal discourses of success in education). This was at the heart of my decision to build Practitioner Action Research into the methodology of this PhD study (Burns, 2010; Jacques & Daniel, 2013; McNiff, 2013). I not only wanted to improve my own practice, but also desired to share what I had learned with others in my teaching environment and other ELICOS-related institutions in Australia or the rest of the world.

I believe that many of the conflicts experienced by people in different parts of the world can be a direct influence of what people in power perceive as the one and only 'correct' or 'right' solution to educational challenges. This is where critical pedagogy has come to play such a significant role in this study. My research has been motivated, not only by my aim as a teacher to improve my practice and students' writing, but also by my belief in the potential of education to challenge dominant ideologies in our world. For me, this research is aligned with my sustained beliefs as a teacher and person seeking to improve people's and students' English learning conditions. From the outset, I suspected that my action research might challenge the dominant ideology of teaching writing at Nour Language Centre (NLC) (The name of this Language Centre is a pseudonym).

However, I hope that this study can help to develop more conceptual and methodological frameworks for ELICOS teachers in the area of multimodal writing and pedagogy, both at an institutional level and beyond.

## Research Experience

In questioning this disjunction, it led me to conduct a small pilot study to investigate how using different modes of communication in writing (including multimodal writing) might assist international students with low English proficiency to make meaning in their writing and thus improve their writing competence and confidence. The findings of that pilot study were consistent with research that advocates for the use of multimodal forms in writing pedagogy to encourage the use of multimodal forms in learning to communicate in English, as the sophistication of student communication tends to improve as their confidence increases (Archer, 2006; Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). In my pilot study, I found

most students managed to construct different layers of meanings from their writings that were not evident in their monomodal writing. These positive experiences constituted another of the 'beginnings' that motivated me to begin this PhD study in which I would explore the possibilities of integrating multimodal writing into a number of different English language classes at an ELICOS Language Centre where I taught. I now present the rationale and general aims for my study.

## Rationale

In Australia, as in many other Western countries, the international student market is extremely important with education being one of Australia's major exports (Agosti & Bernat, 2018; Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Wadhwa & Jha, 2014). However, with the rise in the importance of educational courses for international students, and increasing amounts of money being invested into the provision of English language programs, questions are being asked about how well English language and academic writing can be taught to these students to make meaning or just produce accurate pieces of academic writing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2014; Hyland, 2013; Janks, 2013). The marketing for ELICOS programs in Australia typically claims that ELICOS international learners, whose first language is not English (that is English as a Second Language (ESL) learners), will be enabled to develop their linguistic competence so that they are prepared to complete the kinds of writing tasks required to complete higher education courses (Bruce, 2011). This has implications for teaching writing in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Some researchers argue that the current approaches taken by English teachers, syllabus designers, and educators in these ELICOS courses are based on the 'product approach' that emerged in the 1960s (Khansir, 2012; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). This approach mainly focuses on developing students' linguistic knowledge (Bruce, 2011). However, this traditional approach to literacy has been contested by new studies in this area (Street, 2005) and sociocultural scholars (Doecke & Parr, 2005; Emmitt, Zbarack, Komesaroff, & Pollock, 2015; Lillis, 2003) as it seems it does not reflect today's diverse social and cultural contexts.

The concepts of writing are so varied throughout the history of language teaching that linguists, teachers, and experts have stressed the different features of writing, which has paved the way to the emergence of a number of approaches in writing (Khansir, 2012). For 5,000 years, humans have attempted to create and use symbols to communicate with each other. Over the

millennia, the various developments in writing can be seen as revolutionary moments. Some see the recognition of multimodality in writing as one of the more recent revolutionary moments (Grigorenko, 2012). The theories of meaning-making demonstrate a new trend toward the inclusion of multimodality into studies of meaning-making. Lillis (2012) stresses that research into diverse ways of teaching ESL are growing and indicates that multimodality is growing in importance. In relation to the above views concerning literacy, this study attempts to investigate the nature and implications of multimodal pedagogy in teaching writing to adult learners in Melbourne, Australia, whose first language is not English.

The problem in the current dominant writing practices in Higher Education, particularly in ELICOS lies in another disjuncture: this time between the global digital forms of communication, which are widely practised by most people every day in their lives, and in traditional, academic, and writing classrooms, which make little or no reference to these practices. In these classrooms, meaning is assumed to be made via a particular and unchanging set of semiotic symbols- spoken word, letters and words, gestures, images, colours, moving pictures and so on (Kress, 2010,2013; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).that come together to make pre-existing forms or structures. These symbols offer potential for meaning-making that is based on the “satellite view of language” (Kress, 2013, p. 15). Kress’ (1996) metaphor shows the limits of traditional and dominant views of language, and opens up questions about the richer possibilities when language is understood to include multimodal forms. Over time, research has focused more on attempts to understand how making-meaning has been impacted by a wider range of constantly emerging forms, structures, and semiotic symbols. . In multimodal pedagogies, writing activity involves a wide range of meaning making practices. The meaning making is enacted in and through different modes. Pedagogy that explores the communicative capacity of these forms, structures, and semiotic symbols is interested in the ways multimodal and digital texts work with all of these However, most of this research has focused on English as L1 contexts (that is, places where learners are learning their home or first language) and mostly with children. There appears to be little research in relation to adults in an L2 context (that is, where English is a second or foreign language for the learners). Use of multimodal pedagogy in writing classrooms has been demonstrated to show advantages in that it has been seen to help learners and children to make meaning (Archer, 2006). Despite this, multimodality is still not widely integrated into the theories of teaching of academic writing to adults (Zawilski, 2011). As Kress (2013) concludes, the monomodal ideology still dominates.

Much research conducted in the last 25 years into multimodal writing demonstrates that a wider range of these opportunities can assist children in making meaning in their writing (Mills, 2011; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010; Vincent, 2006), but little research has investigated whether and how this knowledge might be applied to adult learners whose first language is not English. This study explores the potential of using multimodal pedagogy in the teaching of academic writing to assist adult ELICOS learners to make meaning and develop communicative competence and confidence in their writing. It identifies the need for recognising and adapting pedagogical strategies to address 'multiliteracies' in the ways these adults are learning to write in English.

***The questions that frame this study are:***

1. What are the potential challenges for L2 adult learners in ELICOS writing classes?
2. What are ELICOS teachers' beliefs about meaning-making practices in writing and how they might develop L2 learners' meaning-making?
3. How can multimodal writing pedagogies in an ELICOS setting assist L2 learners' meaning-making?

## **Aim of the Study**

This study investigates whether, and to what extent, the use of different modes in the teaching of writing can assist low proficiency adult learners in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses to make meaning in their academic writing. It is intended that the findings of this study may add weight to existing calls (e.g., Janks, 2013; Nicholas & Starks, 2014) to modify the literacy curriculum (especially the teaching of writing) and pedagogy in ELICOS courses by suggesting more inclusive and dialogic approaches to teaching and learning that will provide ELICOS learners with more opportunities for making meaning in their writing, and to help build their confidence as writers. The design of the study is based on traditions of action research, where the researcher is both a participant and critical observer in the phenomena being observed (McNiff, 2013). In this case, as a teacher of literacy in an ELICOS short course for ESL adults, I document, analyse, and critically reflect on my own attempts to introduce multimodal pedagogy and resources in my teaching of writing to three classes.

This study also aims to demonstrate that by opening up opportunities for learners to fully engage and understand language, literacy, and meaning-making and using multimodal approaches and resources, there is potential for significant improvement in the learners' experiences while studying English

## Structure of the Thesis

### *Part One: A Journey of Many Beginnings*

#### *Prologue*

This introductory reflective narrative presents a flashback for me (the teacher/researcher) at the high school in my small town in Syria when I first attended an English class and the teacher asked, "Who is Lucy?" It was not just a mere question about a poem in the syllabus; it was an insight into this teacher's pedagogy and her efforts to help her students create a sense of self, creativity, and imagination in her classroom. The memory of this moment remains a significant part of my inspiration to conduct this PhD research 35 years later. At this particular moment, being invited by my English teacher to share my perspective with the class, had a profound impact upon my schooling and my lifelong teaching and learning journey. This is one of the reasons why I include throughout the thesis excerpts of poetry that I have deeply connected with throughout my own studies. Drawing on a pedagogy of multiliteracies (Kress, 2013; Kalantzis

& Cope, 2014; New London Group, 1996), I use a mix of prose, illustrations, poems and poetic verse to introduce key ideas that will feature in the pages that follow. As well as the critical dimension these introductions, I also use them to reveal a personal perspective on the ideas that I am exploring in the chapter.

#### *Chapter 1: Introduction*

The introductory chapter provides a brief outline of the context in which the research was conducted, which led to the formulation of the research questions framing this study. It opens with an explanation of my position as a researcher and the participants in the study. This is followed by a discussion of my motivation for the study and the design of action research. The introduction also outlines the research problem and rationale for the study. This research

identifies the need to recognise and adapt pedagogical strategies to address the language and cultural needs of ELICOS learners.

## *Part Two: Situating the Study*

### Chapter 2: Context

This chapter situates the study within existing research and policy regarding the teaching of English, with a particular focus on Australia that is the location of this study. It begins by describing the context of the study through an overview of teaching English in global and local contexts, with a focus on international education and students in higher education in Australia (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014). This chapter also critically examines emerging global educational policies regarding teaching/learning English in response to internationalisation and 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and challenges, while concentrating on Australian policy in higher education (especially as it relates to ELICOS programs and structures).

### Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter critically reviews relevant literature and presents a detailed discussion of the theoretical concepts pertinent to the three research questions framing the study. The study is presented as drawing upon literature of three interrelated disciplinary fields: the teaching of English; English literacy; and multiliteracies pedagogy. The review is divided into three sections: (1) theories of language, (2) meaning-making in writing, and (3) multimodality. The first section pertains to theories of language and grapples with the fundamental question of “What is language?” The second section looks at literacy and meaning-making in writing. This section covers traditional approaches to the construction of meaning in writing and ELICOS learners’ challenges in meaning-making and generating ideas. The third section examines a range of approaches to the teaching of writing and includes theories associated with multiliteracies and multimodal writing. The last section explains what multimodal pedagogies can offer ELICOS students, in the face of some scepticism regarding the value of multimodal writing in ELICOS settings. The review identifies ‘gaps’ in knowledge of multimodal writing in ELICOS programmes arising from a relative dearth of research on the influence of the implementation of multimodal writing on ESL learners’ meaning-making in ELICOS settings.



### *Part Three: Research Design and Methodology*

#### Chapter 4: Methodology

The fourth chapter outlines the critical theory methodologies underpinning this study. It identifies the methods employed to generate and analyse data and discusses the reasons why action research was deemed to be an appropriate design to answer the research questions in this practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Selection and utilisation of the approaches used to generate data, recruit participants, and analyse the data are outlined. The chapter begins with an explanation of what is meant by the term *knowledge*. The chapter then moves through a general description of the study design, including the study paradigm, theoretical perspective, and methodology. I demonstrate how the methodology in this research is motivated by a desire to gain a deeper understanding of international students' meaning-making in English academic writing. The action research component was undertaken with three classes, approximately totalling 40 international young adult students from different countries. These students were beginners and intermediate learners studying at Nour Language Centre (NLC), which is a pseudonym. The NLC is situated within a major Australian university to provide intensive General English (GE) and English for Further Studies (EFS) language courses for students wishing to enter universities through alternative pathways.

#### Chapter 5: Reflections

This chapter represents my reflections and aspects of my experience concerning the action research I conducted. From initial feelings of optimism and excitement, stumped by apprehension and doubt and culminating with deep satisfaction and contentment, I explore the stages of my research journey. A reflexive lens allows me to identify the challenges that I encountered, and my determination to overcome them. My experiences in the integration of multimodal literacies in writing pedagogy at NLC have exposed me to a range of pedagogical considerations that will have a lasting impact upon my approach to teaching, as well as what this research can contribute to the knowledge of multimodal pedagogy.

## *Part Four: Findings and Discussion*

### Chapter 6: Academic Literacy and Pedagogy in ELICOS Writing

This chapter provides a narrative-based account of the beliefs of teachers who have taught EAP courses in writing at NLC. It identifies the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and how these shape the way students make meaning of their writing. This chapter presents the teachers' responses to interview and questionnaire questions about writing, and the teaching of this, to address the first two research questions:

(1) What are the potential challenges for L2 adult learners in ELICOS writing classes? And (2) What are ELICOS teachers' beliefs about meaning-making practices in writing and how they might develop L2 learners' meaning-making? Students' responses to interview questions and excerpts from students' monomodal writing texts are also analysed in this chapter. The analysis extends to include students' views of writing and challenges that they encounter when enrolled in NLC courses while writing academic English. In this chapter, I present evidence that reflects a traditional view of literacy practices in writing pedagogies employed in most ELICOS classes. This evidence suggests that the traditional writing pedagogy at NLC, with its emphasis on the accuracy of the final product, imposes pressures on low proficiency ESL learners.

### Chapter 7: Meaning Making: Integration of Multimodal Writing in ELICOS Writing Pedagogy

This chapter presents research findings generated from two action research cycles employed in this study to address the research question: Can multimodal writing pedagogy in an ELICOS setting assist ESL learners' meaning-making? The data set that I have used for this purpose consists of teachers' responses to interview questions and questionnaire items, students' responses in interviews, and samples of students' monomodal and multimodal writing completed during ELICOS classes. The analysis suggests that the ELICOS teachers participating in this study have strong beliefs about the connections between students' English proficiency level and their ability to make meaning in their writing. Aligned with such beliefs, teachers also identified some pedagogical choices and strategies they utilised to help students generate ideas and make meaning from their writing.

## Chapter 8: Multimodal Pedagogies: A Critical Exploration of the Possibilities

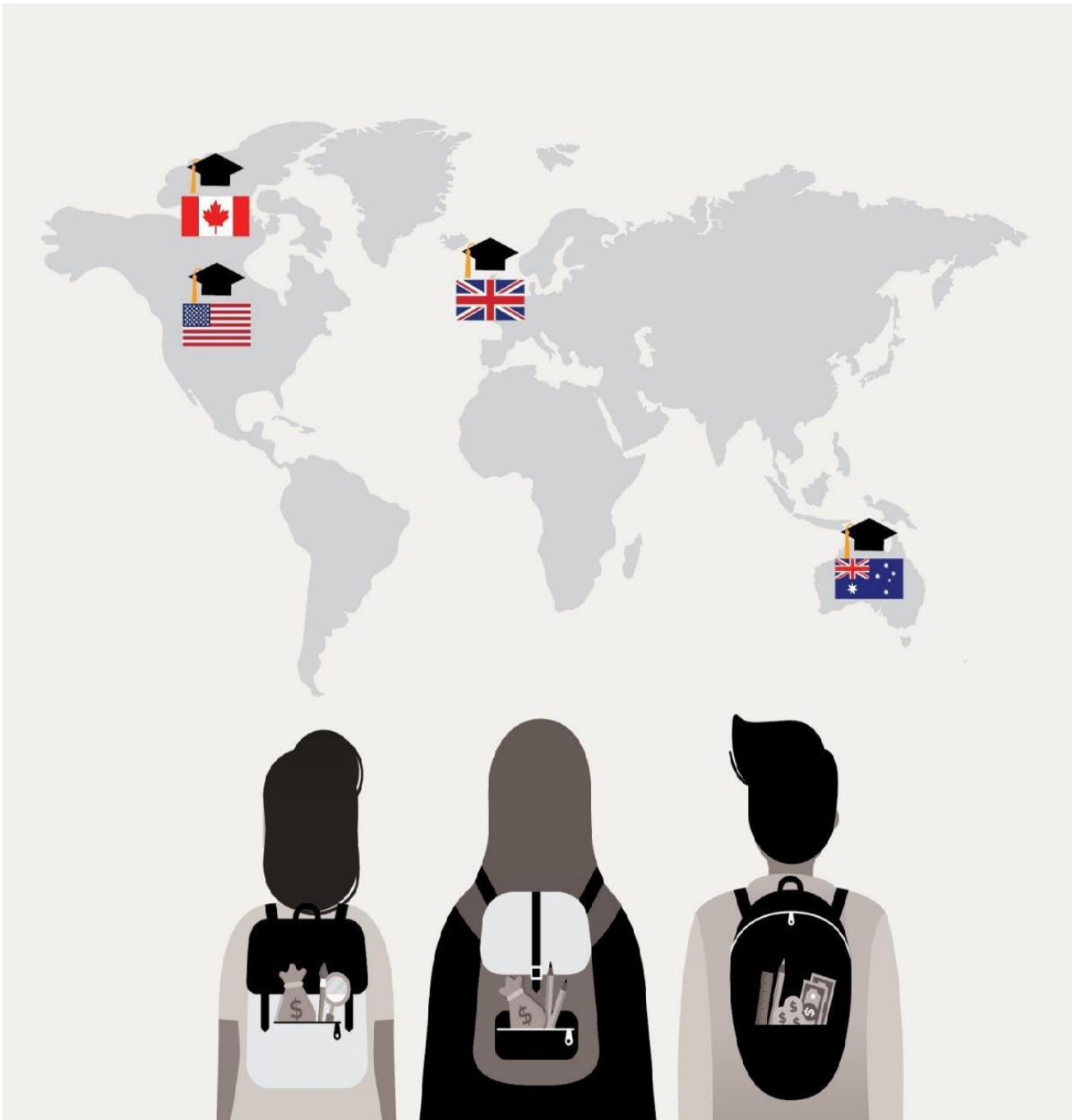
A synthesis of the findings and implications for theory and practice in the teaching of writing in ELICOS settings is provided in this chapter. I engage the lens of the critical pedagogical framework underpinning this study. I make three substantial claims based on evidence presented in the previous two chapters. The first part of the chapter presents the dominant traditional view of literacy practices reflected in pedagogies employed at NLC. I argue that this traditional view of literacy promotes monomodal, decentralised, and monolingual pedagogies, which impose further pressure on ESL students who already tend to lack confidence in their abilities as writers. In the second part of the chapter I challenge the main principles of the EAP needs analysis of students' linguistic skills and argue that meaning-making more effectively focuses on developing students' writer identities, which helps to shape their exploration of self. After referring to my analysis on the impact of my use of multimodal pedagogies, I argue that NLC traditional writing practices are not accommodating students' knowledge, language, and culture. Furthermore, I draw attention to the ways in which meaning-making and identity development *were* emphasised through the multimodal pedagogies employed in the action research teaching of three ELICOS classes.

### *Part Five: The End of One Story, the Beginning of Many More*

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, this chapter addresses the fundamental problem being addressed by this research, the disjuncture between the global digital forms of communication (including multimodal literacy practices), and traditional academic pedagogy in ELICOS settings. I use the findings of this research to argue that monomodal pedagogy imposes extra pressures on ELICOS students and devalue their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making it more difficult for them to express themselves and to develop their knowledge, confidence, and identities as writers. Also, I outline the challenges that I faced in implementing multimodal pedagogies as an alternative teaching approach (in ELICOS). I finish by acknowledging the limitations in multimodal theory and practice that contributed to those challenges and make specific recommendations for further research into the use of multimodal pedagogies in ELICOS settings.

## Part Two: Situating the Study



A university.  
A marketplace.  
A community  
of cultures and languages from all parts of the globe,  
coming together, bringing their individuality,  
their characters, skills, and qualities to share their goods.  
One shared purpose amongst this diversity:  
to pursue an education and find themselves.  
Each one of them has packed their bags with hope, happiness, and dreams,  
leaving the comfort of home on a quest to find a land  
where their dreams will be fulfilled.

A land of fortune  
where students spend fortunes to gain the fortune of  
an international education.  
A space where cultures, beliefs, and financial expectations merge  
to become one.  
Everyone adding parts of themselves into the mix  
whilst pursuing their dreams.  
It *sounds* like paradise ....

# Chapter Two

## Context

This chapter presents a critical review of literature that describes the ways in which the fields of English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have emerged in Australia, and internationally. Part of this review involves an examination of the ideological, economic, and policy influences that have shaped the teaching of English in Higher Education (HE). The chapter is divided into three main sections and commences with an examination of the concept of globalisation and the notion of ‘internationalisation of education’ as a key influence of globalisation. The next section reviews the context of international education in Australia and maps out the socio-economic ideology and policies that have shaped ELT in HE. The third section of the chapter discusses the influences of contemporary political and social phenomena, particularly globalisation on universities and the rise of English as a global language (with the accompanying demand for English-medium education). This section also demonstrates how EAP is located within education offerings of contemporary universities and how it has been shaped by influences outlined in the preceding sections. I review the range of policies and research that explains and inquiries into the notion of English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students, which have come to be known in Australia as ELICOS providers. This study focuses on one such ELICOS provider, which is located within a large, multi-campus university in Melbourne, Australia.

### Globalisation and Education

Globalisation is a complex phenomenon and a notoriously difficult concept to define (Shields, 2013). Most definitions refer to a world increasingly characterised by flows of people, policies, and practices within nations and across national borders. These flows have been facilitated by rapid developments in information, communication, and technologies across the world (Caron, 2012). The term ‘globalisation’ initially referred to economic factors and international trade (Burbules & Torres, 2013). Burbules and Torres argue that the most common

view of globalisation was based on the theory of capitalism which emerged during the sixteenth century, alongside notions such as the 'global economy'.

The narratives about globalisation in the vast and complex literature often focus on the positive dimensions and consequences of globalisation, such as mentioned above. However, it is important to remember that there are also critiques of globalisation that show how minority cultures and languages have been oppressed and sometimes silenced by the march of dominant cultures and languages in contemporary globalising times (Appadurai, 2013; Chirico, 2014; Eriksen, 2014; Pennycook, 2010). Chirico (2014) explains how changes associated with globalisation can impact on identity, cultural values, and beliefs and he explores the ways in which globalisation has had a "dramatic impact on how individuals think of themselves" (Chirico, 2014, p. 19).

Some scholars write about globalisation as if it is a more recent phenomenon and an advent of the modern era. Yet, Hébert and Abdi (2013) note that in ancient times there was also significant mobility of populations and cultural practices when people were seeking to maximise their opportunities through trade. Looking back even further, Hébert and Abdi point out that ancient history contains many examples of exploration and conquest of the New World by Europeans along the Silk Trade Route, which were all mostly for economic reasons. Chirico (2014) also mentions that globalisation can be traced back to international trade centuries ago, but he argues the current era of globalisation is distinctive, suggesting it has "surpassed all [previous] waves of economic globalization" (p.25).

In more recent conceptions of globalisation, what is new and distinctive is the internationalisation of education, involving mobility of peoples, cultural practices, and languages. Globalisation, according to (Leask, 2009), has produced "increased interconnections between nations and peoples of the world" (p. 205), and this has prompted educational institutions across the world to become more interested in internationalisation, which can include the internationalisation of curriculum offerings (Maringe & Foskett, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This review focuses primarily on the recruitment of international students in Australia, and the influence of this global mobility on the teaching and learning of English in Australian ELICOS offerings, which is arguably an important dimension of internationalisation in education.

## Internationalisation of Education: The Higher Education Market

Traditionally, as Ding and Bruce (2017) explain, universities are believed to fulfil certain types of roles in society, including “the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself” and the promotion of “the free expression and exchange of ideas” (p. 18). Increasingly, however, one of the significant roles of universities is seen as “contributing to economic and social development” (p. 18) in nation states. In the past two decades universities have given increased priority to developing the ‘business arm’ of their operations. Of importance to the activities of this business arm are large international projects that generate revenue for educational institutions. The influence of internationalist agendas has intensified in recent decades. This intensification has been enhanced by improvements in technology and the internet, and it is reflected in increasing mobility of international students and developments in technology and the Internet (Maringe & Foskett, 2012). Some scholars argue that internationalisation has become “a central lever in higher education policy” (Maringe & Foskett, 2012, p. 11). However, as globalisation provides opportunities, it also presents societies with constraints and challenges:

*Global expectations constrain societies [and institutions] to conform to emerging global standards in the structure of their states, the establishment of financial, judicial, educational, and other institutions, and their treatment of citizens, refugees, and other members of the international community. (Chirico, 2014, p. 52)*

Due to the increasing competition between nation states and universities across the world, the standards and performance of their education and training systems are among the key factors that countries depend on for development and growth (Kotarska, 2019). Globalisation forces have encouraged countries to “adopt quality-focused strategies for the development of educational sectors both state and private and at all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary” (Kotarska, 2019, p. 55). The increased trend to internationalising education has prompted vast changes worldwide in the last decade. These changes have had as profound an impact on partnerships between universities as they have also had within universities themselves (Maringe & Foskett, 2012).

Debates about the relationships between higher education and globalisation often focus on the extent to which universities are coming to be seen as some of the most significant drivers of capitalism in the ways they reflect, form, and influence global markets. Some scholars (Knight, 2006; Guruz, 2011; Wadhwa & Jha, 2014) have suggested that the introduction of The General



Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) in the 1990s contributed to the emergence of internationalisation of higher education by providing a strong base of finance for international organisations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This prompted accusations in the 1980s that universities were turning into business enterprises rather than places of academic learning and knowledge creation, as articulated in the policies of the World Bank and the OECD, and as implemented by national governments in the 1980s (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Marginson and Considine (2000) argue that the 1980s marked the emergence, in Australia, of what they call the “enterprise university”, which was characterised by corporate-style executive leadership. Around this time, researchers began to analyse the work of a university through the lens of human capital theory, such that globalisation in universities became a particular manifestation of “the imposition of the economic and political agendas of major world powers on the global society” (Hébert & Abdi, 2013, p. 6). Through this lens, the proliferation of programs catering for international students in higher education institutions can be considered as significant drivers in newly developed marketing approaches to higher education.

The increasing, and in many ways successful, commercialisation of higher education showed that internationalisation could be exploited to become an important source of export and import income in education (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014). Globally, international education has become a very lucrative business, and universities have now become key players in their national economies, significantly contributing to both the knowledge stock of the world and the financial economy of their countries (Maringe & Foskett, 2012). As governments have recognised the increasing opportunities to create greater financial benefits from higher education, they have sought to have more control over the structure and organisation of universities. According to Wadhwa and Jha (2014), there has been “a great urge for restructuring the education system to make it internationally comparable ensuring economic benefit” (p. 103). In this way, universities have come to be regarded as institutions intensely affected by *financialisation* (Ding & Bruce, 2017).

In many ways, universities might be seen as merely reflecting broader changes in the fabric of society. Financialisation has taken hold of diverse areas of national economies such as social housing, privatisation of medical services, the introduction of prisons operated by private security companies, and banks operated by entrepreneurs. In all of these instances, the focus is

on services – and indeed society is increasingly seeing universities as merely providing a service. However, universities are also concerned with the generation and sharing of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge has also become a marketable commodity that can be financialised and opened up to market forces (Ding & Bruce, 2017). This has significantly influenced two broad domains of university activity in the last two decades: the first is external, involving the relations that a university maintains (that is, as an organisation) with its clients (that is students, other users of its services and its partners); the second is internal, involving the administrative organisation of the university, in particular, a set of intra-institutional relationships that are profoundly shaped by financial concerns (Ding & Bruce, 2017). As a result, the higher education sector across the world is now characterised by increasing competition for students, resources, staff, and funding. Nothing better demonstrates the internationalisation of higher education than the growth in the number of international students enrolling in universities (Shields, 2013). In fact, the number of international students on university campuses is currently being used as one of the “best proxies for institutional competitiveness” (Liu & Rhoads, 2011, p. 5).

To attract more international students, universities’ recruitment and marketing strategies have been directed toward establishing the vision of Western countries as the educational “promised land” (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014) or what Hébert and Abdi (2013) refer to as the idea of “West is best” (p. 5). This ‘pull’ factor is not a mere business viewpoint of education in Western countries, as the desire for improved educational opportunities in non-Western countries can also serve as the ‘push’ factor. Students who seek to study abroad assume that the opportunities offered by Western educational institutions may never have been realised through the opportunities available in the educational institutions in their home country, language, or culture (Mulvey, 2012). Recent figures from the OECD show that there were 3.5 million international students enrolled in tertiary education programs across OECD countries in 2016 (OECD, 2018, p. 222). Australia is at the centre of this global growth in international student numbers and is now one of the few countries with a long history of providing education for international students. In OECD countries at Master’s level, there has been a significant increase in international enrolments. In the decade leading up to 2016, the proportion of incoming students enrolled in Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees doubled in two-thirds of the OECD countries (OECD, 2018, p. 220). Australia recorded the largest increase in enrolments in international students in Master’s courses: 46% compared to the United Kingdom (36%), Denmark (19%), and Norway (7%). In 2016, except for the United Kingdom, Australia was able to boast that it had a larger number of international students enrolled at Bachelor’s level than in the OECD countries mentioned above (OECD, 2018, p. 220).

International students' contributions to national economies are calculated in both the short term and the long term. Initially the financial input of students is felt in the form of higher tuition and registration fees. However, the longer students study in a host university, the more financial impact they have on institutions and the wider community through ongoing living expenses, and later when their influence extends to innovation and employment opportunities (OECD, 2018, p. 218). It is this realisation that has prompted governments to appreciate the value of international enrolments in universities as a primary objective in higher education policymaking.

To increase the competitiveness of higher education systems in recruiting international students, various strategies are being employed globally. These strategies include creating a more 'open door' policy for educational migrants and branding whole nations as places of opportunity for educational advancement (Liu & Rhoads, 2011). The consequences of these strategies are that individual universities have engaged in open competition where they attempt to market the education that they offer as higher quality and more amenable to the needs of international student consumers than their competitors (Ding & Bruce, 2017). As universities have had to develop more sophisticated marketing strategies for international students' recruitment, so the marketisation of higher education has developed into "a big business" (Wu & Naidoo, 2016, p. 3). The idea of marketisation, when applied to universities, also means that international students (that is, consumers of the services provided by universities) compete to be able to enrol in the best universities in their search for quality education and value for money. However, as Kotarska (2019) argues, these students' quest for a quality education, and their search for the best 'experience' of education in an international setting, provides universities with strong and ongoing "incentive and motivation" to improve that experience for international students (p. 71):

*The quest for quality is a never-ending journey and the challenges the institutions and the accrediting agencies face—the fit between the commercial and the tangible, the developmental and the educational—still remains subject to wide debate. (Kotarska, 2019, p. 71)*

Maringe, Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon (2011) show how the 'consumer' discourse, wherein students have purchased their education as a commodity, reinforces the notion of the educational experience as a product rather than a process or experience. There is little disagreement that Australia now has an extremely marketised higher education system in which "universities operate in a discursive space where they sell education to international students"

(Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014, p. 71). This also raises questions about whether the most popular education commodity, or the most successful marketing techniques, actually reflects the highest quality of education. Many studies suggest that where questions about the quality of education clash with questions of education marketability, it is often the marketing questions (and answers) that will win through (Neubauer, Yonezawa, & Meerman, 2012). This has become especially evident in ELICOS providers in Australia in the twenty first century, where there is now “considerable customer involvement in [the] production [of] their English language ‘product’” (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014, p. 71).

## International Education: The Australian Marketplace

Owing to the previously mentioned economic, political, and cultural changes of the globalizing era, many have begun to argue in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that the idea of a ‘university’ needs to be re-thought (Montague, 2013). In the Australian context, Australian Governments have responded to the emergence and increased influence of globalisation and begun to re-examine the fundamental role of the university. This has been reflected in the development of policies that make access to universities more affordable and that attempt to provide “vocational outcomes that are better planned and ... have sound repercussions within the broader society” (Montague, 2013, p. 684). In the 1980s, Australia began to develop the provision of courses offered to full-fee-paying international students in universities into a major national export industry (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). Recently, Australian universities have been increasingly explicit about their aspirations to profit from the recruitment of international students; international students are now typically valued as sources for raising revenue (Wadhwa & Jha, 2014). The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that international education contributed \$32.4 billion to the Australian economy in 2017–18, up from \$28.1 billion in 2016–17 (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2019). In the End of Year Summary of International Student Data (2018), it was reported that 876,399 enrolments were generated from 693,750 full-fee paying international students on student visas in Australia. This represents a 10.1% increase from 2017 and compares with an average annual enrolment growth rate of 10.8% per year over the preceding five years. The commencements (new enrolments) increased by 6.6% on the 2017 figures.

As in many other countries, a number of factors have prompted Australia to open its doors to international students. Among these factors are Australia’s ageing population and the

reduction in government funding of public universities, which has stretched the capacity of Australian universities to offer quality education experiences in order to remain internationally competitive in international university rankings (Marginson, 2018). Recent research for the Department of Education (DoE) shows that Australia also gains “social, cultural and skilled workforce benefits from international education” (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2019). This same study has estimated that international education now supports over 240,000 jobs nationally (Department of Education, 2019). According to a Group of Eight Report (2018)<sup>4</sup>, the Australian Government assists in visa acquisition for international students to support the growth of these figures and maintain a place in the international student market. Like the Canadian, United States, and United Kingdom Governments, the Australian Government continues to have a particular interest in recruiting international students to enrol in the English Language (EL) courses. It is promised that intensive English language courses in ELICOS institutions will prepare these students to meet the requirements of university or higher studies. (The details of this promise will be discussed later in this chapter.

## English Language Teaching in Higher Education

The market-driven processes of globalisation and treating education as a tradable commodity have been rising since the end of the Second World War by the increase of English as a global language or as a world *lingua franca* (Ding & Bruce, 2017). The concept of English as a global language has been the result of the influence of the United States as the world superpower, but it has also come about by the influence of other geographic centres that use English in everyday communication and business contexts, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Hong Kong and Singapore in Asia, and Dubai in the Middle East (Crystal, 2013). English is increasingly used for global communication in multi-lingual contexts (Galloway, 2013). Crystal (2013) points to the fact that “English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language—in over 100 countries such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, and Brazil ... often displacing another language in the process” (p. 5).

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<sup>4</sup> The **Group of Eight (Go8)** is a coalition of world leading research, intensive Australian universities. The Go8 universities are some of the largest and oldest universities in Australia and are consistently the highest ranked of all Australian universities. In 2016 all Go8 Universities were ranked in the top 150 worldwide, with six in the top 100. Go8 Universities feature in the top 100 places for every subject area in the QS world university subject rankings.

Thus, there has been an increasing demand for English teaching institutions worldwide to prepare individuals for global careers in communication, science, education, business, diplomacy, entertainment (Altasan, 2016), or combinations of these areas. Due to the increasing number of non-native English speakers across the world and the changing demographics of English speakers globally, native English speakers are now very much in the minority (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012).

Researchers who study the globalisation of the English language have repeatedly demonstrated how vested interests have been responsible for consolidating power and influence by requiring new players in the global markets to speak English. This conscious promotion of the global spread and dominance of English, which is guided by political and economic interests, is what Benesch (2001), Canagarajah (1999) and McDonald (2013) describe as linguistic imperialism. Many studies of linguistic imperialism focus on how and why certain languages dominate nationally and internationally, and what the consequences are for other languages (Phillipson, 2018).

The demand for English language education is nowhere more prominent than in the global academic world. The *lingua franca* status that English acquired at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has made learning academic English almost essential for anyone seeking a university education or an international professional career in science, research, or academia (Haase & Orlova, 2014). Paradoxically, while multilingualism has become a fast-growing worldwide phenomenon, English has become entrenched as the dominant international language. This means that language classrooms are now typically multi-lingual, and the English learners who speak English as a second, foreign, or additional language now outnumber those who speak it as their first language (Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015).

English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an Additional Language (EAL) (Cummins & Davison, 2007; Curriculum.) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Crystal, 2013), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Ding & Bruce, 2017; OECD, 2018), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Nunan, 2015) are some of the many different terms used to refer to the teaching and learning of English by students whose first or native language is not English. English teaching is now “inextricably embedded in time, place, power relationships and socio-cultural contexts” (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 214). Thus, these terms are seen as socio-political constructs (Cummins & Davison, 2007). Not surprisingly, countries where English is an official language (either legally or de facto), such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United

Kingdom, and the United States are top OECD destination countries for international students wishing to study English. In these 'other' countries, English language has increasingly been included in the mandatory school curriculum, even at early educational levels, and this has prompted many students to want to improve their English language skills through immersion into an English-speaking context. Additionally, the OECD reports that the number of tertiary education courses now being taught in English is increasing within institutions located in non-English speaking countries (OECD, 2018, p. 223).

In many countries, English is required for citizens who wish to enter the labour force and enhance career prospects in their own countries (Richards, 2005). In the context of the global knowledge economy, the prestige associated with a degree obtained from high-status universities in other parts of the world is often assumed to significantly improve job opportunities (Shields, 2013). Education in an English-medium university located in an English-speaking country presents an opportunity for international students to obtain a degree within a respected HE system. It also provides an opportunity for intercultural experiences that significantly influence an individual's personal development (Murray, 2015). Attending university in English-speaking countries is seen as a way to improve employability prospects (OECD, 2018, p. 206). Individuals with a good command of English are thought to be more in demand by sectors and services that are connected to the international economy, therefore they are "the ones most likely to benefit" (Altan, 2017, p. 765). This explains the strong incentives for international students to gain a tertiary degree as it increases "the pool of skilled people across countries, and those with high qualifications are more likely to be employed" (OECD, 2018, p. 70). However, with the globalisation of international education, critical issues relating to language learning have become more pressing than ever.

In light of this, and since the emergence of New Literacy Studies, questions have been raised by many researchers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Doecke, Parr, & Sawyer, 2011; Street, 2005) about how language teaching can best meet the needs of learners' diverse social cultural contexts in the 21st century. The increased likelihood of communication and contact among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, due to the increased mobility of people worldwide (Sowa, 2014), has led to serious attempts by governments and educational institutions to implement policies that will improve the standards of their language programs. The change in the student demographic of universities has raised a number of fundamental questions about the quality of education, teaching practice, and curriculum as well as its diversity. Questions regarding support services for international

students and the quality of the overall student experience have also been raised. Consequently, education policy makers worldwide are seeking to improve educational offerings by means of innovative policies and new methods (Della-Chiesa & Miyamoto, 2008). For instance, one of the goals of the UNESCO Education Strategy (2014-2021) for the 21st century is to respond to the contemporary global challenges through education. All these questions have “the issue of English language competence at their heart” (Murray, 2015, p. 78). The linguistic, cultural, and functional diversity associated with English today challenges some of the fundamental assumptions of ELT and requires revisiting pedagogical practices, particularly in classrooms where English is taught as an international language (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012).

In a world characterised by large-scale student and academic mobility and global exchanges, English language classrooms have become more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016). They are now often considered to represent the full cultural diversity of the population in most communities (He, Vetter, & Fairbanks, 2014). The theories and practices developed and practised in the mid-twentieth century are no longer adequate when considering issues relating to cultural and identity diversity. Research recognises the need for English language curriculum and practice to be rethought in light of globalisation (Nault, 2006), and this is often advocated through action research projects (like the present study) for some particular improvements in curriculum or pedagogy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the increase of non-native speakers using English as lingua franca has implications for the teaching of English. Haase and Orlova (2014) highlight the need to shift to a more flexible pedagogy when teaching English academic writing to incorporate and represent the many linguistic and cultural alternatives to the standard mid-twentieth century Anglo-American academic writing conventions. Whilst the need to support the diversity and related challenges of students is widely acknowledged, the expectations for such students to adapt and perform in mainstream educational institutions remain. This indicates the challenges within the dominant educational paradigms to interpret the curriculum of teaching and learning (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016). Referring to the previous concept of ‘linguistic imperialism’, this term has implications for “theorising the relationship between the two basic semiotic planes of expression and interpretation in different modalities, and how the affordances of the expression plane relate to the meanings of the interpretation plane in each case, as well as in understanding the particular role of language in *multimodal* texts” (McDonald, 2013, p. 218). This has particular implications for the teaching of writing, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.



## ELT in the Australian context: University Providers (ELICOS)

As mentioned in the previous section, there is a growing demand for learning English worldwide and for English language courses that can deliver the skills needed for today's global learners (Altasan, 2016). I have also discussed how the shift to internationalisation in Australian universities was driven largely by a desire to generate more profits, and how the presence of international students in Australian universities has had significant implications on the development of Australian educational policy (Wadhwa & Jha, 2014). Opening access to universities, and to English language bridging courses, are two of the ways in which Australian Governments have sought to facilitate the enrolment of international students in its universities.

Recent changes in Australian Government policies that broaden access to universities, particularly for international students, have led to the emergence of private university providers within or alongside many Higher Education (HE) institutions. ELICOS providers, which offer language courses in English, serve as a bridge or pathway to a university (Dooey, 2010). ELICOS, as a private sector institution that meets the needs of large numbers of international students, has become dominant in many Australian universities and language schools (Altasan, 2016). In fact, Australia is one of the leading destinations for English language learning and teaching and is regarded by many as having one of the best regulated TESOL industries in the world. Altasan (2016) places Australia in third place, ahead of Canada, as a preferred destination for global English language learners. According to Neghina (2016), the pathway program sector in Australian universities had a turnover of \$1.4 billion in 2016. The 'English Australia' survey (2018) shows that the numbers of ELICOS students on different types of visas during the last eight years has significantly increased during the last six years. As well as its business requirements, a university is still responsible for finding "an appropriate balance between financial health and ethical manner that guarantees the best educational expenses for all students" (Murray, 2015, p. 79). The ELICOS 'industry', as it is now known, currently forms a significant part of Australia's international education sector and seeks to educate a highly diverse population of students who come to Australia to study English for various purposes.

## What is ELICOS?

ELICOS programs, as already mentioned above, offer language courses in English to students on student visas who wish to study in Australia. The word 'Intensive' in the title refers to full-time students who are required to complete a minimum of 20 scheduled course contact hours per week of face-to-face classes in English Language (EL) instruction (O'Loughlin, 2015). These programs are conducted in language centres that either belong to or are associated (that is, university providers) with a particular Australian HE institution. ELICOS courses are aimed at students who need to improve their competence and confidence in improving their English language practices and skills before commencing their formal university studies in Australia (Altasan, 2016).

Lack of competence and confidence in English is the main barrier that prevents international students from enrolling in Australian universities, as they are required to provide proof of a certain level of English proficiency (Coley, 1999). Australian universities have established an agreed EL entry requirement for international students over the last twenty years (O'Loughlin, 2015). The International Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are the two most frequently used language entry tests. However, students who do not have the required IELTS or TOEFL scores or cannot meet the specified academic requirements of a university, can enrol in English or Foundation courses. A Foundation course is a pre-university year that is equivalent to Australia's Year 12, and for many international students in Australia, it is the first step to completing their tertiary studies (Dooey, 2010). Some students who are enrolled in ELICOS courses want to develop their English literacy skills for particular work in Australia. Others desire to be sufficiently fluent in English to undertake further studies. The overall aim of these ELICOS programs is to improve student knowledge, academic English usage, study skills, and understanding of Australian academic culture.

At policy level, the Australian Government has legislated a range of codes for university providers wishing to offer ELICOS courses. This legislation is intended to protect the rights of international students who come to study in the country and expect a safe learning environment (Tsukamoto, 2009). It is aimed at enhancing the quality of learning and overall experiences for international students in Australian universities. In doing so, internationalisation expands the

scope for both students and staff within and beyond the university environment to develop their skills and competencies in interacting in a rich intercultural setting.

According to a recent Australian Government annual report into higher education for international students, a key government objective is to “facilitate higher education providers to pursue their individual missions, and encourage diversity, excellence and innovation in the sector” (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2014-2015, p. 9). NEAS (the widely used acronym for the ‘National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme’) is an Australian based quality assurance regulatory organisation, which is intended to support and advance the service of English Language teaching throughout Australia, and internationally (neas.org.au). They have established seven “Quality Areas” in which organisations seeking accreditation must demonstrate competence and professionalism. Within each “Quality Area” are detailed “Quality Principles”, which align with international standards for English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS)” (Kotarska, 2019, p. 59). For example, a registered ELICOS provider must demonstrate that its educational courses and resources—among other things—comprise “varied learning activities and teaching methodologies ... developed for classroom and individual student use and address specific student needs and course outcomes.” These courses must include “access to a range of multimedia” and must “reflect new developments in TESOL theory and practice and changes in course offerings and student profiles” (Department of education and training, 2011-2018).

These courses are regulated according to NEAS, and individual universities as proxies for this monitoring and accreditation body, approve them if satisfied that all the stated requirements are met. And yet, as O’Loughlin has pointed out, these courses have “no national standards in relation to design, delivery and assessment for students” (O’Loughlin, 2015, p. 189). According to the accreditation guidelines, consideration of student diversity is paramount in Australian designed courses. Still, (Diallo, Abdallah, & Embarki, 2016, p. 204) is not convinced that ELICOS teachers are able to effectively employ this emphasis in their EL classrooms as Australian policies may position teachers as “non-participants, as observers of the diversity picture” (Diallo et al., 2016, p. 204) . Despite robust literature advocating and supporting inclusive education provisions for the benefits of students from diverse backgrounds, there are still embedded assumptions that students of diverse cultural, linguistic, and epistemological backgrounds have the ultimate responsibility to make the necessary adaptations to their learning. In effect, they are expected to fit in and replicate mainstream educational paradigms they encounter in ELICOS offerings (Diallo et al., 2016, p. 201). Whilst some scholars point to

inadequacies in ELICOS providers' capacity to recognise the varied backgrounds of students, Galloway (2013, p. 18) acknowledges current teacher pedagogies and classroom practice that address such diversity are a rarity in any educational sector.

In the Australian HE system, the promotional materials for ELICOS programs or courses on university websites state that students' mixed ethnicities and cross-cultural interactions are a key focus of teaching in an internationalised university system. However, no substantive evidence demonstrates that universities have actually systematised the 'international' within their English language curricula (Liddicoat, Eisenclas, & Trevaskes, 2003). University providers that offer ELICOS courses may well recognise the importance of international students in the global market. However, because of the predominant market-based approach to education, English in the ELICOS industry—the setting of this study—has been constructed as a standardised commodity and “pedagogically reduced to an efficient means of information transfer” (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014, p. 67). When a particular language is presented as a stable and unchanging product to be acquired in a classroom, the presence of multilingualism in a classroom is seen as a complication or even a barrier to learning. There is an insistence on an idealised model of language with “a notional set of qualities that conform to a universal and absolute standard of success, and learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds do not conform to this ideal” (Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015, p. 53). Many researchers in the world such as (Doecke, Parr, & Sawyer, 2014) in Australia; Brass (2015) in the United States; and Yandell and Brady (2016) in the United Kingdom – have noted the significant effect of standards-based reforms on narrowing diversity in relation to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in English language education. Hyland (2007) mentions that only a few countries, such as South Africa, have made practical attempts to frame a language policy based on multilingualism.

A critical pedagogical approach aims to challenge the narrowing effects of standards-based reforms, typified by top–down dissemination of teaching knowledge, and encourages teachers to “speak out as professionals and demand to be recognised as integral to the creation and implementation of any curriculum or policy” (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008, p. 210). This objective is what the current study aims to achieve, not only through critiquing traditional writing pedagogy and practices in ELICOS classrooms but also through trialling, experimenting, and inquiring into multi-modal writing pedagogy in those same classrooms. The classroom practices, pedagogy, and curricula of many ELICOS providers and university partners involved in EAP courses in English speaking countries worldwide and in Australia, including the setting of this thesis, are derived from literature that identifies itself as English for Academic Purposes

(EAP) (Agosti & Jordan, 1997). The next section explores how the EAP literature theorises and conceptualises language and how these theories and conceptions feed into the courses that the ELICOS sector in Australia offers.

## English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

The paradigm of EAP is one approach to English language learning, amongst a range of different areas of program delivery, for students wishing to transition into higher education in English speaking countries (Agosti & Bernat, 2018; Jordan, 1997). Driven by the global demand for the use of English and with the increasing numbers of international students undertaking tertiary studies in English, EAP has expanded to become a fast-growing branch of ELT (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2013; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

Although the field of EAP has increased enormously in importance and evolved rapidly over the last two decades (Anthony, 2018), these courses are the most common and perhaps influential branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Charles, 2012), which emerged 50 years ago. ESP emerged from the mid-1970s as courses for projects in the Middle East and were usually staffed by large numbers of British, North American, and Australian teachers (Ding & Bruce, 2017). This is believed to have occurred as the result of two oil crises in 1973–1974 and 1979, which led to dramatic increases in the price of oil and a huge influx of funds into the oil-rich North African and Middle Eastern economies, resulting in their rapid economic development (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). The same decade also saw the emergence of English as the dominant international language of technology and commerce (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004) in an era that became known for the development of communicative language teaching. This new approach began to be reflected in course books and syllabuses (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). ESP is an approach to teaching English for subject-specific purposes (Johns, 2013) – that is, a given course of ESP will concentrate on one occupation or professional discourse in the particular vocabulary or skills that are taught (Hewings, 2002). In EAP courses, the knowledge base has been built up around traditional, university academic needs (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Thus, the main focus is on English language in academic settings (Anthony, 2018; Benesch, 2001), with the aim of assisting learners' study skills and developing their capacity to continue to learn English while at university (Hyland, 2013).

The demand for EAP has continued to climb with an ever-increasing population of overseas students (Anthony, 2018). EAP courses have grown into multi-million-dollar enterprises around the world (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Yet, EAP courses are not only a “commercial endeavour” for colleges and universities; the other aim is to enable students to master enough English, and “the right English”, to succeed in learning their subjects through the medium of English (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2).

According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), the EAP discipline originated from two perspectives:

*The “narrow angle” and the “wide angle”. The narrow angle is based on the view that there is a common core of grammatical and lexical items that dominate any linguistic register. Thus, whatever type of text one analyses, [a] common set of linguistic structure and vocabulary items will run through it. When applied to language teaching, it follows, according to this position, [that] learners may master the basic set of linguistic items which make up the common core. (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 16)*

The wide-angle perspective of the EAP discipline is defined as much by the “activities performed within it as by its typical language forms and meanings” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 17). That is, the primary purpose of EAP courses is to prepare students to be able to manage the language requirements of academic courses in higher education (Bruce, 2011). Bitchener et al. (2017) mentions that because the aims of EAP teachers involved in teaching writing are to prepare candidates for their academic writing needs, which involves reaching a satisfactory level of linguistic competence as well as mastering academic writing conventions, the students will often see their problems as “primarily linguistic”. Consequently, teachers have typically provided “remedial assistance” for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Wette, 2014, p. 2), where they “fix up” students’ English language problems in line with a singular understanding of language or literacy (Hyland, 2016, p. 39). More sophisticated ways of thinking about English language teaching challenge this ‘single literacy’ view and seek to replace ‘remedial’ views of teaching with approaches that address students’ own writing practices (Hyland, 2016, p. 39). More progressive teachers of EAP appreciate the need to engage a diverse range of international students in the genres of their disciplines. This means engaging with “the spectrum of their students’ abilities, and ... tailor[ing] instruction to meet their students’ needs. This calls for specialised linguistic knowledge, as well as pedagogical knowledge, for apprenticing students into new discursive practices (Bazerman et al., 2017, p. 358)

Since the main characteristic of EAP courses is that they are “needs-driven” (Bruce, 2011b, p. 7), one important role of the EAP lecturer or course designer is to find out what the learners need and what they have to do in regards to transitioning into academic work or courses. Then, lecturers must consider how best to assist students to reach their aspirations within a specific timeframe (Benesch, 2001). In most EAP courses, it is expected that students will be taught how to use a wide variety of sentence structures to support the purposes of tasks in providing clarity, emphasis, and specific effects as well as extending, linking, and developing ideas (Myhill, Lines, & Watson, 2012, p. 30). In short, EAP courses aim to provide learners with the ‘capacity’ and ‘competence’ to meet learners’ future academic language needs. In pre-sessional EAP courses at lower levels, which is the context of this study, the overall goal tends to be to provide all students with the most possible benefits by focusing on their language (Bruce, 2011). At this point, it is useful to refer to the concepts of ‘competence’ and ‘capacity’ that are advocated within much EAP literature (Bruce, 2011). The two terms are defined by Widdowson (1983):

*Competence - the speaker’s knowledge of the language system...*

*Capacity – the ability to create meanings by exploiting the potential inherent in the language for continual modifications in response to change (p. 7-8)*

Widdowson (1983) proposed 36 years ago, are significant as they are able to underpin decisions about the knowledge and skills that should be prioritised in ESP. According to Widdowson (1983), ESP courses are placed at the narrow end of the competence-capacity continuum as they require a restricted repertoire of language, but he considers them at the broader end.

History tells us that the early years of EAP course design focused mainly on teaching the lexical items and types of texts students might encounter in their work or academic courses. This gave EAP teaching in academic writing some of the characteristics of the product-oriented approach to this (Khansir, 2012; Lotherington, 2007; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012) even though these courses also sought to promote a communicative approach to teaching, as previously mentioned. Such EAP approaches have been re-enforced and encouraged by writers like Silva and Matsuda (2012), who argue that exposing ESL students to the functions and forms of writing and assignments they will encounter in their future university courses is essential. However, this kind of education can be viewed as consistent with what Freire (2009) describes as ‘banking’ education, where teachers deposit information in the minds of students who then withdraw that information in examinations, with little attention to their experience as learners (Mui, 2013).

In recent years, social context has become a central issue for EAP (Benesch, 2001). Research in EAP has turned its attention toward investigating EAP in a wider social context as a set of social practices both within local institutions and globally (Charles, 2012). Researchers have sought to move away from what they see as “a bias” towards the written text in EAP teaching and learning (Charles, 2012, p. 166). This is believed to have helped expand the diversity of EAP pedagogy, yet it has also raised concerns about the socio-political implications of such an “accommodationist” view of language and the teaching of language (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 4). Hyland (2006), one critic of this approach, argues the importance of “personal and social expectations of learning” (p.73) alongside academic skill development. He urges that educational establishments need to embrace a range of student driven needs including the background, language proficiency, goals, and motivation of students enrolled in their courses (Hyland, 2006).

This chapter has shown how globalisation and the internationalisation of education have had a number of exciting, but sometimes disturbing implications, for the teaching of English language in higher education institutions in Australia and across the world. In the next chapter, I move to consider literature that is relevant to the current study of implementing multimodal writing pedagogy in ELICOS writing pedagogy.



# Chapter Three

## Literature Review

*"I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought..."*

*"Daffodils" by William Wordsworth*



*I have chosen this image to preface my review of the literature with an image of the brightness and many-faceted beauty of a field of daffodils.*

*My experience of reviewing the literature, delving into countless theories of language and studies, often felt like I was gazing at and wading through a field of daffodils. Each theory I came across and all the theorists that I encountered in my PhD journey provoked my critical thinking and my imagination in equal measure. These were times when the world seemed bright and full of possibilities. But there were other times I felt that I had entered into a dark tunnel and was unable to see the end. I could not understand why schools and schooling were learning from the bright possibilities of multimodal pedagogies practices and the research that was supporting these practices, while the ELICOS sector seemed to prefer to remain in the dark. I remained optimistic though, that those gaps in the literature, those darker spaces, such as in the area of multimodal academic writing for L2 learners transitioning into higher education, could be illuminated by my study. Or to invoke another metaphor, I hoped that my PhD thesis could be seen as a treasure chest mixed with garlands of brightness and beauty of existing knowledge about multimodal writing for L2 English language learners, woven also with some of my own new knowledge. This is the wealth of research – bringing theories, knowledge, and experiences together to store in a guarded place...like a treasure chest. A chest of daffodils.*

This chapter reviews a selection of literature about language, English language teaching (especially to L2 learners), and the teaching of writing. The review is divided into three sections: (1) theories of language; meaning making in writing; and (3) multimodality. The first section examines theories of language and deals with the question of “What is language?” The second section looks at literacy and approaches to the teaching of writing (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Milian & Camps, 2005) and covers construction of meaning in writing and ELICOS learners’ challenges in writing in English. In the final section, a range of theories associated with multiliteracies and multimodal writing is reviewed (Kress, 2010). The potential of multimodal pedagogies for ELICOS students is critically explored in this section. In this process, gaps in existing literature are identified with respect to the influence of multimodal writing on ESL learners’ meaning making in ELICOS settings.

## What is Language?

Any study involving the English language curriculum and pedagogy needs to grapple with the fundamental question of ‘what is language?’ For some, the question is answered using a particular metaphor. Some educators propose that language is a ‘tool’ used by individuals to engage in communication with other individuals. Others speak about it as a medium within which communication takes place or can it be described using other discourses and concepts. This range of metaphors raises a number of questions about research into language education that I have grappled with in designing the methodology for this study. Is it appropriate to speak about language as a continually evolving social phenomenon? Perhaps, it is more meaningful to speak about it as a set of practices in which groups engage. What is the relationship between language and social groups who use particular forms of language? What is the relationship between language and culture, or language and identity? The interest in answering these kinds of questions started in Ancient Greece and was reflected in the work of Socrates and Plato (Davis, 1976). However, this review is concerned with recent views of language, which can have implications for the teaching of language.

Linguistic theorists tend to view language as a set of rules and patterns that ‘control’ how language works. This view includes principles of combining words in multiple different patterns to form a finite set of sentences (which have their own internal patterns). The focus of this abstract view of language is on a ‘system’ of linguistic structures, and this tradition of linguistic

theory represents little or no interest in the diversity of people and social groups using those structures or systems (Lamb, 2004). However, this perspective has been challenged by other theories that view language in relation to who uses it and the culture within which it is used. Sociolinguists, for instance, view language as a form of social behaviour. As Labov (1973) says, “[c]hildren raised in isolation do not use language; it is used by human beings in a social context, communicating their needs, ideas and emotions to one another” (Labov, 1973, p. 183). The following quote from Nicholas and Starks (2014) is an example of critics who argue for a culturally situated or holistic understanding of language:

*[L]anguage is not a discrete system, and what “language” is cannot be separated from who is using it and why they are using it. When language is looked at holistically, traditionally understood “language” is, as many in Language Education observe on a daily basis, interconnected with other systems”. (Nicholas & Starks, 2014, p. 8)*

Other socio-cultural scholars emphasise the importance of being explicit about the particular cultural or linguistic perspectives from which they are speaking (Emmitt et al., 2015). According to Emmitt, in sociocultural approaches language is seen as deeply embedded within culture. Clyne (2005) argues that this linguistic perspective assists in some way to appreciating the multiplicity of backgrounds and differences of language users and the diverse contexts in which language is used. Language and culture are seen to represent “two sides of the same coin” (Nault, 2006, p. 315), and the way in which individuals express themselves in their own and other languages is influenced by their cultural backgrounds. The term *culture*, as I am using it here, refers to “all the ideas and assumptions about the nature of things and people that we learn [about] when we become members of social groups” (Yule, 2010, p. 267). In other words, language can be seen as a component and the result of cultural communication, which provides us with a ready-made medium that categorises the world around us, and our experience of it. In this way of thinking about language, knowledge about it is understood as transmitted in social contexts, through relationships in the value systems and ideology of the culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1991, cited in (Emmitt , Pollock, & Komesaroff, 2006). In this respect, the user of a language is affected by the culture within which they use it, and *vice versa*. In an attempt to bridge the gap between a more abstract notion of linguistics and a socially and culturally responsive view of language education, Nicholas and Starks (2014) argue that a “narrow” perspective of linguistics is one that defines language as a discrete, culturally homogeneous entity. However, Nicholas and Starks also argue that understanding language is a complex

system, which often leads to blurring of categories and complications in communication. In this view, communication is seen as systematic but not fixed.

It is commonly believed that communication is the main function of human language. As Lee (2004) mentions, language can be seen as “the dominant medium through which the communication occurs, and it provides humans with symbolic resources through which to manipulate ideas” (p. 129). Yet, Yule (2010) argues that it is not a distinguishing feature of all languages because all creatures communicate in some way. For Yule, like many other socio-cultural language scholars (Doecke & Parr, 2005; Schlesinger, 2007), creativity is a crucial dimension of human language. Humans not only communicate but also create new expressions and novel utterances by using their linguistic resources (Yule, 2010). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) see language within a wider communicative view. These scholars, similarly, to the New London Group (2000), suggest that rigid linguistic conceptualisations of language are too restrictive in today’s diverse cultural and plurilinguistic contexts, where language and language codes regularly interact and overlap.

The concept of multiliteracies or multimodality, and using multimodal literacy practices in language classrooms, can be seen as another way of language educators responding to the restrictions of what they see as more rigid linguistic conceptualisations of language. Jewitt (2009) also sees the field of multimodality as moving out and away from singular notions of language. Furthermore, Jewitt prefers to see multimodal language as “extend[ing] the social representation of language and its meanings to the whole range of representational and communicational modes or semiotic resources for making meaning that are employed in a culture – such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture” (p.1). According to Zhuanglin (2008), we experience the world through our senses and through multiple modes of communication to which each of our senses are attuned. Nicholas and Starks (2014) reframe language as “the communicative repertoire available to each individual within a multiplicity of needs, practices and contexts”. According to Nicholas and Starks, they believe this merits “a shift in thinking about modes of language from oral, written and signed to one that engages with the multiple ways in which traditional linguistic and non-linguistic features interact” (Nicholas & Starks, 2014, p. 29). Therefore, in order to understand language as communication, Nicholas and Starks suggest that the first step is to focus on how individuals communicate in ways that allow for creativity by embracing the full range of the use of potential semiotic resources.

This study adopts the view that any research into teaching and learning of English must take into account the significant developments that have taken place in the area of multimodality and multimodal literacy practices. The following sections review some of the literature that investigates writing pedagogy with attention to the possibilities that multimodality brings.

## Literacy and Writing Pedagogy in Higher Education - ELICOS

### *Traditional Approaches to Writing Pedagogy: The 'Product Approach'*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, ELICOS programs in Australia typically follow the protocols of teaching known as English for EAP. Although EAP courses encompass different domains and practices (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), they are mainly based on a communicative approach to language teaching and learning (Ellis, 1982). The academic literacy approach in ELICOS is generally focused on written text (Richards & Pilcher, 2018). ELICOS programs share the same characteristics in being product-oriented when dealing with teaching writing. This is due, as Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) suggest, to the fact that the knowledge base has been built up around traditional, university-based academic needs. In this tradition, teaching writing focuses on a final product rather than the process that might have contributed to it (Lotherington, 2007).

The 'Product' approach to writing pedagogy, as it has been called, was formally established in the 1950s and 1960s (Khansir, 2012b). Pincas (1982b) provides a simple description of the product approach. In this approach, Pincas perceives writing as being mainly about linguistic knowledge, where the attention is very much on the mechanics of writing such as syntax, connectives, and vocabulary (see also Coffin, 2003; Khansir, 2012; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). Attention is paid to the structure of sentences and paragraphs. Student learning in this approach involves repetition of drilling exercises that are meant to build the learners' competence with grammar and sentence structure. This approach to teaching writing is seen by some scholars as prescriptive in nature and narrowly focused on imitating existing models to produce an accurate final product (Khansir, 2012).

In the product approach, the writer's main interest tends not to be on how clear the ideas are in a piece of writing, but on the correct use of formal, linguistic structures (Khansir, 2012). Critics of this approach suggest that students come to understand that "the major function of writing is to produce a text for a teacher to evaluate, not to communicate meaningfully with another person" (Nunan, 1991, p. 88). The dominant EAP approach to writing literacy assumes

that students have a competent knowledge of grammar, syntax, and spelling of a foreign language. If students do not have this kind of knowledge, it then becomes the responsibility of teachers to make sure that they commence teaching by ensuring their students become familiar with these (basic) language structures. In practical terms, this means that a teacher starts teaching at the sentence level before moving on to paragraphs or larger structures (Zafiri and Panourgia (2012). The assumption underpinning this approach is that meaning is embedded by writers in a combination of words and skilled readers *extract* meaning from these words. There should no concern about any ambiguities in interpretation if both the writer and the reader strictly follow similar linguistic rules (Hyland, 2002). For this reason, in accordance with writing as a product approach, traditional written texts do not need to pay attention to the context, purpose, or audience because it is assumed that the texts that students write are made up of words, sentences, and paragraphs, which are communicated directly from the writer to the reader. In this way of conceptualising writing, the written product is basically deploying grammar exercises in a controlled context, and the ideas in the text are believed to be transmitted directly through language (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012).

### *ESL Learners' Challenges in Traditional Writing Pedagogy*

According to Hasbollah (2010), focusing on form and final written products when teaching writing, imposes additional pressure on ESL learners who already consider writing in English as one of the most difficult skills to acquire. For many ESL learners, it is the main obstacle encountered in their academic studies, whether in schools or universities (Milian & Camps, 2005).

#### ***I have categorised these challenges in the following ways:***

- (i)** Negative feelings towards traditional writing pedagogy
- (ii)** Challenges in meaning making
- (iii)** Vocabulary and generation of ideas
- (iv)** Negotiating identity

#### **(i) Negative Feelings Towards Traditional Writing Pedagogy**

As stated earlier, writing is widely understood as one of the most difficult skills for students to develop in primary, secondary, and tertiary educational settings. When teachers'

pedagogy focus predominantly on the form and final product generated by students in their English writing, this tends to cause particular difficulties for ESL students (Hyland, 2003). According to Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), university ESL or EFL students in particular are prone to significant levels of anxiety when it comes to writing their assignments in English. While many factors contribute to this anxiety, high expectations for writing in all subject areas have been identified as likely to contribute to writing anxiety. Cheng (2004) asserts that many Taiwanese students have somatic anxiety or psychological reactions to anxiety, such as unpleasant feelings, nervousness, and tension, while other students experience anxiety as a result of external factors such as teachers' negative expectations, preoccupation with deficits in their writing abilities, and concern about others' perceptions of their writing. Cheng's (2004) study finds that some students demonstrate behavioural anxiety through avoidance, withdrawal, and procrastination in completing their writing assignments.

A study by (Mullins, 1995) shows that ESL students studying in Australian universities report having three or four times more difficulty than local students in writing assignments. This perceived difficulty in writing for academic purposes is reported in other more recent studies that apply not only to beginner learners but also to those with high ability levels. A study by Al Fadda (2012) shows that postgraduate EFL students at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia encountered difficulties with grammar in their writing, in particular, when using pronouns and applying the pronoun-antecedent agreement. These EFL students made mistakes with the subject-verb agreement and their sentences were fragmented throughout their writing. As non-native speakers of English, these EFL students also experienced difficulty with connectives relating to combining sentences in their writing. In their study, Phakiti and Li (2011) investigate attitudes to the writing of students who had completed a Master's degree in TESOL at an Australian university. In this study, Phakiti and Lik found strong associations between general academic difficulties and academic English proficiency. In these two previous studies, as well as others (e.g., Wong & Hyland, 2017) students were studying at postgraduate level where they might be seen to have high proficiency level in English. Despite this, these students still experienced heightened anxiety when writing in English.

Langan (2008) and Gunning (1998) agree that one of the reasons writing in English is perceived to be difficult by ESL or EFL learners is because it is more complex and abstract than speaking. Moreover, Parker (1993, cited in Hasbollah (2010), supports this view when he states



that writing can be a “torment” (p. 9) for ESL students and poses a number of problems to these students. It is believed that English writing demands a great deal of skills and knowledge relating to conventions such as grammatical rules for students to follow if they are to become proficient and effective writers. Besides that, teachers too face great challenges in teaching these skills and conventions. This is because students may at times find the so-called ‘rules’, which are constantly being broken, and are confusing and difficult to understand, make it harder for them to write effectively in English. Writing, therefore, is not just putting pen to paper or writing down ideas but it relates to how ideas are presented or expressed in a *process* that extends over time – that is, this is the thinking behind the so-called ‘process approach’ to English writing pedagogy. However, even learning to write in English using a process writing pedagogy, requires competence in a number of skills and requires knowledge of conventions like organization in the development of ideas and information. Understanding writing as a process still requires a high degree of competence in choosing the right words to communicate ideas (Nik, Hamzah, & Hashollah, 2010).

(ii) ESL Learners’ Challenges in Meaning Making

Over forty years ago, Halsted (1975) commented that “the obsession with the final product ... is what ultimately leads to serious writing block” (p. 82), and I have experienced this as a teacher of English in ELICOS settings. Perl (1980) found that experienced ESL writers, in the process of creating meaning, changed whole chunks of discourse, and each of these changes represented a reordering of the whole text. While the unskilled writers in Perl’s study (1980) seemed to understand that writing is a process that involves constant revision, they too were almost constantly concerned with form, usage, and grammar. Noguchi (1991) argued that although sentences offer a form or a means to convey content, the content of the sentence structure could offer no help if writers have few ideas or are confused about the content they wish to convey. Twenty years later, Sommers (2011) was also concerned about similar problems when students were writing without understanding the ideas. Sommers found that less skilled ESL writers who revise their writing in limited ways, tended to be preoccupied with vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, and rarely modified their ideas. Perl and Sommers (2011) both suggest that inexperienced ESL writers pay so much attention to form that the on-going process of meaning making is constantly inhibited or interrupted.

(iii) Vocabulary and Generation of Ideas

According to Milian and Camps (2005), writing is the main difficulty that ESL/EFL students encounter as an obstacle in their academic studies no matter what their level of proficiency. ESL/EFL students find writing in English an extremely difficult task. The difficulties are usually linked to confidence in getting started, generating the right ideas and then expanding them, and using the appropriate vocabulary (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). Mahani, Asmaak, Anis, Surina, and Nazira (2011) state that the difficulties in English writing are much greater for ESL beginner learners in Malaysia as they find writing a greater challenge than more advanced learners. They suggest this is because they need to “incorporate their understanding of grammar and to use the correct sentence structures to express their ideas in words” (p. 155). Firkins, Forey, and Sengupta (2007) confirm this in their study of Hong Kong learners of EFL:

*[T]he student writer has to create a text that is both rhetorically and linguistically appropriate. Often, the teaching of English to low proficiency students tends to be taught in a way that focuses on the sentence level and these learners often have minimal, if any, awareness at the level of complete texts. (p. 341)*

In a study of students enrolled in Yarmouk University in Jordan, confidence and competence in English affected the writing processes of most students (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). The respondents in that study, like most Jordanian university students, usually failed to express complex ideas in their writing. Al-Sawalha et al. (2012) conclude that this is because the students lack the appropriate vocabulary, both general and technical. The lack of appropriate vocabulary on the part of the respondents in turn affects their confidence in the writing process. Coxhead (2012) also mentioned that the selection of words for writing involves effort and draws on a range of formatting and knowledge for writers. My action research study sought to address this particular source of anxiety by examining how ELICOS students in Australia utilised images to communicate when they did not know an English word, when they needed to communicate their ideas in a sustained piece of writing. Also, in my action research study, I sought to investigate how this affected their confidence as writers in English.

(iv) Negotiating Identity

Over recent years, second language (L2) scholars of writing have turned their attention to identity issues surrounding multilingual writers in academic institutions. Their research has

focused on areas such as problems and limits associated with linguistic identity labels like ESL and non-native speakers, the ways in which monolingual ideologies present in academic systems that devalue students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and even erase their identities, and how linguistic identities are constantly shifting as students cross discourse communities and academic contexts. Fujieda (2010) mentions reflectively writing about her writing experiences as a student in higher education and how students' academic writing in L2 caused considerable difficulties. Also, Fujieda reflects on how throughout a range of professional and academic settings, writing in English for her was complex and challenging. As a student, Fujieda received critical feedback that mentioned words like "redundancy", "awkward" or "unclear sentence". When Fujieda attempted to revise or re-write papers with this kind of feedback, she still did not know how she could clarify her writing or improve her sentences. Most feedback she received from teachers was summarized in one word: "Explain". Wang and Hyland's (2017) case studies of Chinese postgraduate students studying in Australia reveal the complex 'identity work' associated with writing in academic English. Some participants spoke of needing to erase their Chinese/Eastern identity and assume an English/Western one. Fujieda's and Wang and Hyland's cases illustrate the struggle encountered by ESL/EFL learners in acquiring skills of academic writing in English, as well as in reconstructing identity to better fit into their new academic culture. As an ELICOS teacher teaching intensive English bridging courses, I often encounter students similar to Fujieda who are supposed to create new Western identities in less than five weeks as they attempt to write English in an academic manner. Students with the lowest levels of English not only have difficulty in English proficiency but also struggle with a sense that they are being asked to reinvent themselves and their identities.

Canagarajah (2011) also refers to the concept of identity when discussing the challenges faced by ESL learners writing in English for academic purposes. It is suggested by Canagarajah that bilingual students, for instance, can become more sensitive to the ways in which writing shapes their thinking and knowledge as they learn to write in different languages. In the most positive situations, Canagarajah argues that multilingual writers can face both challenges and possibilities in writing as they already have writing and rhetorical conventions, which have been influenced by their first language as they learn very different conventions of English as a second language. Rather than it being a mastery of a new form of writing, these divergences have to be considered as having implications for the representation of their knowledge (see also Wang and Hyland, 2017). A case study by Fernsten (2008) shows how language and culture are intricately tied to other aspects of writing identity. Who we are, how we see the world, and how the world sees us cannot be separated like ingredients in a recipe, and this has implications for ESL/EFL

writing pedagogy. Lee (2008) argues that L2 students' difficulties in their academic writing processes should not only be viewed as due to their limited proficiency of language. The struggles, which L2 students experience with writing, are almost always influenced by the process of negotiating their identities in multiple social worlds and communities.

One of the defining features of Western Societies in the 21st Century is cultural diversity, which is enhanced by policies that emphasise the internationalisation of higher education institutions (Diallo et al., 2016; Wadhwa & Jha, 2014). The use and mastery of new technologies of information and communication have been encouraged in higher education in the last decade (Gonzalez & Gomez, 2010.). Yet, when international students come to study in Western societies, they are often called upon to give up their ethnic identity and follow the culture of the English-speaking institution in which they are studying. According to Carroll and Ryan (2005), many international students face significant difficulties in their quest to be academically successful in their new learning environment. They find transition from one culture to another taxing until they become accustomed to academic language and conventions. Even students with a good command of English can struggle with local language peculiarities, lack of discipline-specific vocabulary, and cultural nuances experience in their new culture. In exploring the reasons for such problems research has moved from focusing on the skill deficits of ESL learners to focusing on identity and identity work. It is increasingly understood that ESL learners often encounter difficulties in negotiating their linguistic identities when writing in English (Fujieda, 2010). This process is seen to exist due to “the ways that monolingual ideologies present in academic systems works to devalue students’ diverse linguistic backgrounds and even erase their identities” (Todd, 2011, p. 174). The types of studies I have discussed above add a new dimension to the study of writing by ELICOS students in higher education in that they imply that the teaching of academic writing is much more complex than merely focussing on grammar and an ability to comply with grammatical rules.

### *New Literacy Studies: Challenges to Traditional Views of Literacy*

Multiliteracies and multimodality are now seen as other ways language educators can respond to the restrictions of rigid linguistic conceptualisations of language identified by Kress and other sociolinguists. These developments impact on literacy practices in language classrooms and on the development of meaning making among students. Since the emergence of New Literacy Studies in the 1980s, there is growing multidisciplinary consensus that literacy pedagogy needs to more fully accountable for multicultural and digital literacy practices, and that this requires pedagogy to move beyond narrowly linguistic understandings of language

(Haggerty, 2011). This begins with framing writing as more than just compliance with a set of fixed rules or grammar. Doecke and Parr (2005), for instance, conceptualise writing as entailing three dimensions: (1) an *artefact*, generated by writers in seeking to communicate ideas, to inform or to reflect; (2) a *process*, which supports a variety of writing practices; and (3) a *medium*, “in which and through which meaning making is undertaken to accomplish a variety of communication or reflection goals and this medium is greatly influenced by a range of sociocultural and historical factors” (p. 13).

In regard to new literacies, researchers such as Kalantzis and Cope (2012), Street (2005) and the New London Group (2000), consider the new communications environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents challenges to what they call the traditional views of literacy where writing was seen as merely a product rather than a collection of practices. These scholars argue that the ‘old’ concept of literacy teaching and learning now needs to be reconsidered, since it has produced learners who tend to accept a notion of knowledge and literacy that cannot easily be applied in new and different contexts (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Traditional literacy pedagogies are facing a challenge on many fronts because they are not adequate to meet the needs of the today’s globalising and digital society. My study aligns with the view that writing pedagogy is understood not simply as identifying the important writing products in the world and guiding students to emulate these and use them in correct ways. Writing pedagogy becomes part of an exploration of self and the world, so that all writing is understood as meaning making practices “in a broader, richer and all-encompassing sense” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 4). What follows is a critical review of writing in ESL in higher education, which is the context of this study.

As mentioned above, a large part of the challenge of learning EAP writing is when students are asked to write autonomous texts. Yet, Hyland (2003) argues that written tasks cannot be completely autonomous because every text should be understood as being written in a particular situation with a particular purpose and a particular audience in mind. Martlew (1983) suggests “we get some indication of the autonomy of the written texts if we notice that we frequently talk as if the texts had written themselves” (p. 42). This focus on *form* at the expense of *meaning* raises arguments in regard to academic writing in higher education not only as a product, but also as a process to generate or discover meaning (Matsuda, 2003). Kalantzis and Cope (2014) describe this approach to literacy teaching as being explicit about the way language works to make meaning. It means seeing students as active meaning makers, while working with the teacher who is acknowledged as an expert but also a meaning maker of language. This approach to writing has been researched and challenged, especially by those who see it as an

act of personal expression and discovery where process is as important as is product (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). This view of writing as an ever-evolving process and therefore contradicts the notion of writing as the demonstration of correct grammar and usage in a single writing product. In this way, writing can be seen as a non-linear process in which writers reformulate ideas as they attempt to make meaning (Khansir, 2012; Zamel, 1982). In this case, teachers are no longer examiners or editors but facilitators and advisers who assist students in creating more meaningful and creative texts (Khansir, 2012; Raimes, 1983). Such consideration has significant implications for the theories of teaching writing for EAP as it emphasizes a need to move away from the “authoritarian role of teaching, and [its preoccupation with] linguistic knowledge” (Bruce, 2011, p. 126) to a ‘writer-centred’ classroom, where writers develop their *voice* in order to be able to communicate their own ideas in individual and new ways (Bruce, 2011).

In traditional notions of writing pedagogy, there has been a separation between content and form. However, apart from the work outlined in the previous paragraph, the perspective of language as a ‘system of meanings’ challenges this notion further. Berthoff (2011) considers language not just as a “medium of communication but a means of making meaning”. From this perspective, Berthoff (2011) stresses that linguistic structures can be studied by “interpreting their interdependencies on meaning, and by interpreting our interpretations” (p. 331). It is here that research can be seen to shift away from viewing writing from a merely product-based perspective. Based on recent research Langacker (2008), and Graham, Gillespie, and McKeown (2013), it is possible for teachers to teach in ways that encourage students to move from seeing grammar as a tool for creating meaning to it becoming a study of how meanings are built up through the choice of words and structures. This results in a corresponding shift in much of the research on meaning making. Focusing on formal linguistic grammar is now often seen as limited in that it does not always help, at least not directly, in the area of students developing their ideas or content (Noguchi, 1991). This is because content involves meaning making related to the basic idea that the writer wants to convey (Noguchi, 1991).

The issue of making of meaning in writing, as Milian and Camps (2005) state, relates to the writer’s making of meaning while involved in the process of writing. According to these researchers, texts use forms and create their own forms in the process of making meaning. They do not necessarily rely on pre-existing forms. Each new piece of writing can be seen as the meaning making of an individual speaker who, as a social agent, is forming his/herself as he/she writes. Learning how to write becomes a process of “learning how to mean” in particular cultural

contexts (Doecke & Parr, 2005, p. 264). Thus, meaning is important, not the semiotic sign (Connery, 2010). As Flower and Hayes (2011) contend, this challenges the perception of meaning as a one-directional, one-dimensional.

## Multiliteracies, Multimodality and Meaning Making

According to some researchers, a multiliteracies approach to teaching of writing, where understandings of literacy allow for multiple semiotic forms such as words, static images, sounds, and moving images, better supports meaning making in writing than the product approaches reviewed above. What might be referred to as a multiliteracies pedagogical approach places the emphasis on meaning making as a dynamic and multidimensional process, whereas in the traditional view of literacy in writing, the emphasis is on:

*fixed meanings and their direct transmission. The process of representation is a matter of 'getting' meanings as if they were static and intrinsic. It is as if meanings were in a kind of code waiting to be decoded by listeners, readers and viewers, if language were an objective code, and all we would have to do would be to decode its meanings and let them speak for themselves. (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 180)*

In contrast, the multiliteracies approach represents a radical shift, focussing on:

*the inevitable fluidity of meanings, their different interpretations and the necessity to negotiate meanings socially. In other words, we continuously and actively re-shape meanings. We are always making sense of the world in new ways, our own ways. (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 180)*

Multiliteracies approaches to language have changed the views about narrative and text production and paved the way for 'new' perspectives on literacy practices that move away from drawing on one mode of writing towards an ability to write multimodally (Doloughan, 2011).

### *Multimodal Approaches to Writing*

In multimodal approaches to teaching writing, meaning is constructed in and through different Semiotic modes such as speech, writing, gesture, colour, three-dimensional objects, and moving pictures. A multimodal pedagogy goes beyond written and spoken language to

value a range of modes (Archer, 2014). These modes have the potential to relate to each other differently in different contexts. Kress (2010) explains:

*[L]inguistics provides a description of forms, of their occurrence and of the relations between them. Pragmatics – and many forms of sociolinguistics – tells us about social circumstances, about participants and the environments of use and likely effects. Social semiotics and the multimodal dimension of the theory, tell us about interest and agency; about meaning(-making); about processes of sign-making in social environments; about the resources for making meaning and their respective potentials as signifiers in the making of signs-as-metaphors; about the meaning potentials of cultural/semiotic forms. The theory can describe and analyse all signs in all modes as well as their interrelation in any one text. (p. 59)*

The many studies on multimodal writing pioneered by researchers such as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) provide a conceptual foundation that helps to explain the positive effects of multimodal pedagogies on students' abilities to express meaning (e.g., Archer, 2014; Kress, 2013; Mills, 2015). According to Zhuanglin (2008), we experience the world through our senses and through multiple modes of communication in which each of our senses are attuned. Advocates for seeing literacy as multiple (multiliteracies), rather than singular (literacy), suggest that this encourages writers and communicators, especially those operating in digitally mediated spaces, to connect with readers and other writers and communicators using multiple modes to construct meaning when communicating information and establishing relationships. In this sense, communication is no longer assumed to be monomodal. Zhuanglin (2008) urges that any teaching and learning of language and communication must include multimodality.

This includes exploring how multimodality may also assist L2 students in their writing, communicating, and meaning making. Jewitt (2005) when discussing writing in today's world, notes:

*Writing [in words] is not always the central meaning making resource... In some texts writing is dominant, while in others there may be little or no writing [in words]. The particular design of image and word relations in a text impacts on its potential shape of meaning .... Image can be used to reinforce the meaning of what is said, what is written, and so on. (p. 316)*

Here Jewitt (2008) is referring to writing in the traditional sense, which is composed of words, sentences and perhaps paragraphs, and he suggests this limits the meaning making



potential of the person seeking to communicate, and that this needs to be seen as a concern in thinking about developing writers. Hodge and Kress (1988), developed a theory 30 years ago known as 'social semiotics' to address this kind of concern. In this theory, all modes of communication are considered equally important. In a latter publication, Kress (2000) suggested that multimodality expressed the complexity and interrelationship of more than one mode of meaning by combining linguistic and non-linguistic modes. This means that making meaning can include visual, aural, gestural, spatial, temporal, and linguistic elements (Leong, Ho, Leong, & Anderson, 2011). As Jewitt further notes," multimodality attends to meaning as it is made through the situated configurations across, image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, speech, and so on" (p. 246).

Archer (2014) adds that these multiple modes of communication have been increasingly pushing to the centre of public communication practices in recent years. As a response to this changing semiotic world, the concept of multimodality has gained greater prominence in the research literature. It has led to the dislodgement of words and written language from the unchallengeable central position it previously held in research into public communication (Kress, 2000). It is important to note that while all modes contribute to meaning, Jewitt emphasizes:

*Models of multimodality assert that all modes are partial. That is, all modes, including the linguistic modes of writing and speech, contribute to the construction of meaning in different ways. Therefore no one mode stands alone in the process of making meaning; each plays a discrete role in the whole. (p. 247)*

These new theories of meaning making are illustrative of a new trend towards inclusion of multimodality into studies of meaning making, literacy, and English language teaching and there has been a proliferation of literature that explores the potential of multimodal writing in school literacy teaching (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Hamilton, 2016), This is especially so in L1 English language teaching. Lillis (2012) stresses, however, that research into diverse ways of teaching ESL in schools is growing and she indicates that multimodality is growing in importance. The change is now moving into other areas of education, including tertiary institutions. According to Luke (2003), the rapid change in the concept of meaning making 'revolutionized' pedagogical practices in school education. While in some policy settings, discourses associated with literacy standards continue to drive the way students learn and teachers teach (Sachs, 2003). Scholars in the area of multimodal research argue that there should not be just one set of standards or

skills that constitute the objectives of literacy learning (Ajayi, 2008). Consequently, multimodality continues to become a more significant feature of mediated discourse analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For some researchers (e.g., Stein, 2008), this increasing interest in the study of multimodal communication has implications for writing pedagogies (Stein, 2008). Multimodal writing is starting to become a significant issue, which is being addressed in school classroom literacy teaching. Whilst there is a focus on classroom teaching in schools, some attention is being directed to multimodality in making meaning in academic or higher education writing (Archer, 2006). Archer (2006) draws attention to this increased interest in multiliteracies and multimodal writing in higher education and states:

*there has tended to be an overemphasis on the teaching and analysis of the mode of writing in 'academic literacies' studies, even though changes in communication landscape have engendered an increasing recognition of the different semiotic dimensions of representation. (p. 449)*

Despite more and more findings in relation to the potential of using theories of multimodality, there is still a prevailing emphasis on monomodal forms of writing in higher education especially in formal assessment. Archer (2006) refers to this as “logocentrism to the neglect of other modes and their interconnectedness” (p. 451). However, there remain complexities and a lack of clarity about exactly how notions of multiliteracies and multimodality are understood in the realm of academic literacy.

### *Multimodality: Sceptical Views*

As mentioned before, multimodality is a frequent theme in literature, and a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored in schools and higher education. For years now, some teachers in schools have started to include multimodal writing in their teaching of literacy and meaning making. At the formal level of curriculum, the definition of ‘text’ in the current Australian Curriculum now includes multimodal texts (Doecke, Parr & Sawyer, 2011). However, while there has been a proliferation of literature that explores the potential of multimodal writing in school literacy teaching (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Mills, 2009), there continues to be some concern and anxiety about how to teach using and producing multimodal texts.

In the past three decades, the shift of writing knowledge from printed to multimodal texts has been central to discussions in rhetoric and composition studies in some parts of the world (DePalma & Alexander, 2015). It cannot be said that most scholars in higher education are

comfortable with expanding conceptions of traditional writing and composition, nor are all teachers in schools open to the integration of multimodal writing in their writing pedagogy. Many schools have not moved past the use of multimodal writing (Benson, 2014). One side of the tension seems to be that schools continue to be organized around “rules and regulations intended to sustain standardized processes and goals” (Selwyn & Bulfin, 2015, p. 274). When talking about creativity in language education, DePalma and Alexander (2015) believe multimodal writing is more like a creative project, whereas creativity in academic writing is “creativity in a controlled space” (p. 186). This leads to other arguments about where the boundary is between monomodal and multimodal writing.

Pedagogically, multimodal writing is seen by some to pose considerable challenges to teachers and students. Nevertheless, in a discussion about the value of multimodal writing in contemporary times, Yancey (2004) argues that there is a need for a new language as “we seem comfortable with intertextual composing, even with the composed products. But we seem decidedly discomforted when it comes time to assess such processes and products” (p. 90). Janks (2013) uses Kress’s points about social and semiotic blurring of frames and boundaries to argue that multimodal writing productively destabilises the notion of a text. Janks suggests that “[c]onventions, grammar, genres, [and] semiotic forms are all in a state of flux and the boundaries between information and knowledge, fact and fiction are fluid” (Janks, 2013, p. 152). In their communicative repertoire, Nicholas and Starks (2014) do not see the use of different modes as ‘resources’, but they agree with the argument about the need for better understanding the relationship between different modes. Hopefully, one outcome of my own study, will be to contribute to a better understanding of this. For instance, it is hoped that when ELICOS students write using multimodal texts in digital spaces, they will see that it is still related to monomodal writing, rather than thinking that it is a completely different form of meaning making (DePalma & Alexander, 2015). Despite the concerns about the implementation of multimodal writing in classroom practices, research on multimodal writing reveals that multimodal writing has a lot to offer to learners.

## What Implementing Multimodal Pedagogy Can Offer to ESL Students?

As stated earlier in this chapter, meaning in academic writing tends to be constructed only through grammatical structure and knowledge of the language. There are a number of detailed studies on specific modes, such as images, that have helped to understand “the affordances of

those specific modes in regard to meaning making” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246). Most contemporary academic texts rely on the co-presence of writing and visual or graphic semiotic symbols. Using images, and the knowledge that they can help to convey, has become increasingly important in the reading and writing around different academic disciplines such as “art, art history, architecture, film studies, cultural studies, media studies, communication science, historical studies, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology and education” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p 11). Although there is an increasing integration of images into student writing in higher education, and there are some underlying trends in the description of the relationship between images and writing, there has not been much exploration into what academic discourse look like when different modes are employed (Archer, 2010). Although there appears to be little research in relation to adults in an L2 higher education context, there is research in L1 contexts showing that using multimodality in writing classrooms has been demonstrated to show some value.

### *Linguistic Competence and Improving Vocabulary*

Research into multimodality in schools has for some decades shown positive effects on the literacy development of school aged learners. However, research into implementing multimodality in adult or higher education academic literacies has been gaining momentum for a little over 10 years. Exploring a ‘big picture’ approach, Hamilton (2016), has conducted a historic-sociological study of the ways in which adult literacy has been framed and enacted to reinforce or more recently challenge dominant policy of the past. At a more practical level, Archer (2006) has undertaken a study into how multimodal pedagogy “actually enables engineering students to acquire the discursive, generic and linguistic competencies required by the discipline of engineering while at the same time remaining in dialogue with the discourses and modes of representation they bring with them” (p. 449). The findings of that study are emphatic:

*It is clear that language, power and modalities are inextricably intertwined. A multimodal approach to teaching academic literacy practices could enable a curriculum design, which draws on the full range of students’ semiotic resources and may also help to create less structured curriculum spaces. The visual genre seemed to enable students to utilise discourse seldom used in engineering. (p. 459)*

Acquiring any new language vocabulary is a challenge for learners. Research on multimodality and vocabulary acquisition seems to provide ESL learners with an additional way in which they can learn new words and improve their fluency in a foreign language. The overall results of a study by Bisson et al. (2014) reveal the impact of exposure to multimodal stimuli on learners' learning and vocabulary acquisition. Bisson et al. claim that the acquisition of new foreign language vocabulary is facilitated by exposing learners to multifarious texts using a wider range of semiotic resources. In such situations, even complete beginners can derive the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from the visual texts. Although the findings of the study by Bisson et al. do not confirm whether exposure to multimodal modes is the reason for learners' acquisition of new vocabulary, or the repeated exposure to it is the reason, the results of their study suggest that exposure to both auditory and written word forms help students to acquire new vocabulary. The work also suggests that, in simple terms, learners gain confidence as they improve their capacity to learn new vocabulary if the new words are presented to them in association with other modes of language such as visual, audio, and gestural.

### *Multimodal Pedagogy and Identity*

Apart from Archer's (e.g., 2006) and Hamilton's (e.g., 2016) research, much of the research on multimodality has focused on primary and secondary education. Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) show how learning new composing practices led some fifth-grade students to author new literate identities, or what they call 'authorial stances' in their classroom community. It was noted that students appeared keen to engage in multimodal storytelling. Students enacted and experimented with their identities through selecting a range of digital modes such as digital photography, video, audio recording, and video editing software to compose stories in the classroom. An unexpected outcome of the research, as far as these researchers were concerned, was the finding that using multimodal expression increased the students' engagement in learning. Vasudevan et al. (2010) also argues that multimodalities are useful for students who are recent immigrants and are relatively new to learning English. In their study, students composed documents that included elements that could not be reflected in their previous written texts where they relied only on words to express meaning.

A study by Hornberger (2007) on three suburban youths in the United States show that by using multimodal modes including words, visual images, sound, streamed video, and symbols, all them were able to negotiate complex multiple identities. These three youths used multiple modes in creating their personal blogs. Additionally, online spaces, enabled the youths to have

a voice, engage in important identity work, and create texts around local, national, and global issues that were important to them (Hornberger, 2007, p. 328). Ajayi (2008) recommends having a meaning making theoretical framework that links English language learners with the sociocultural context of their learning. Ajayi found that when new immigrants are encouraged to write using multimodal resources, they are more likely to explore their identity and subjectivity.

### *Encouraging Creativity and Exploration of Ideas*

Kress (2000) and Ajayi (2008) point out that multimodality has sometimes encouraged learners to be creative in the social and cultural context of their lives. In a study by Vasudevan et al., one of the findings was that by using video, images, and other modes of expression with writing, the students in their work began to construct novel or more creative ideas and more richly layered texts. The researchers speculated that this was because the multimodal dimension of the work helped to bridge home and classroom worlds. A study by Vincent (2006) suggests that by using multimodal expression, children can effectively communicate complex ideas. The main focus of Vincent's study is assessment and he criticizes the current practices privileging monomodal verbal facility in their assessment tasks in schools and suggests they are expecting a huge jump between the rich worlds of meanings in the early years of children's lives outside of school to the much more uni-dimensional world of written language they face in schools. Vincent's research shows that children today are viewing information multimodally through television, multimodal books, computers, and electronic games. In the early years of school, teachers usually accept and encourage children to use multiple forms such as drama, gestures, written words, and drawing. Yet studies continue to record a decline in multimodality in following years of schooling as children get into the "serious business of literacy" (p. 51). As a result, Vincent identifies a need for a pedagogy in schools in her own country (Australia) that allows the use of multiple modes even when the students are engaged in more serious study. In this study, Vincent also suggests that it is unfair to some children to restrict assessment to monomodal written language and the conventional literacy of school given what they have previously experienced, arguing that the lack of a multimodal assessment scheme cannot be allowed to prevent multimodal literacies from being part of the literacy curriculum.

Also, as an Australian researcher, Mills (2011) presents detailed insights into how multimodality in writing operates in school-based literacy practices. Mills extends research in

this area by including the study of students' engagement in the process of making meaning through the translation of content from one sign system into another. Mills describes this process as one of "transmediation" (p. 56). One key aim of Mills's study is to expand the research into children's engagement in transmediation in the context of digital media creation. This is done through dialogue with children around their writing. In her research, Mills finds that transmediation is fundamental to digital text production, requiring the recasting of meaning through the "context and expression plane of multiple semiotic structures" (p. 64). Even when retelling scenes from a novel through drawing or translating a print-based comic to a digital format, a degree of transformation is evident. This, according to Mills, is because each sign system has unique organisational principles, involving elements and conventions that do not have precisely equivalent meanings. According to Mills, the multimodality of meaning making by both young children, and in society at large, necessitates that students learn to transmediate flexibly between modes. This suggests that the argument to include multimodality in higher education teaching and learning has been around for ten years at least, but still there remains little evidence of higher education incorporating multimodal pedagogy into their literacy programs, or their writing pedagogy in particular.

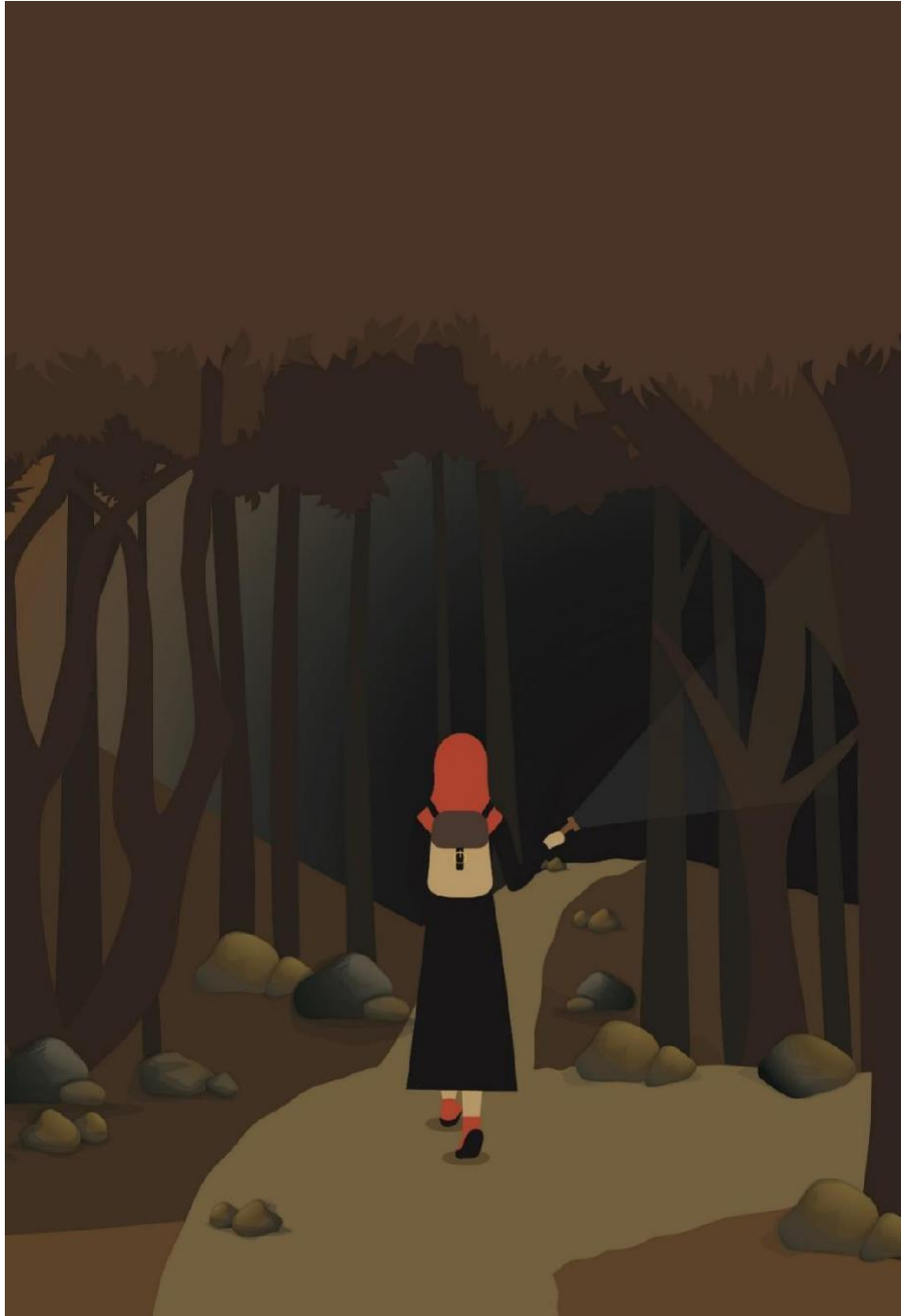
While the higher education sector appears to be expanding and deepening its interest in multimodality and multiliteracies in the literacy practices of their students, ELICOS centres in Australia appear not to have noticed these shifts in thinking about literacy and meaning making. If there has been some recognition of these shifts, there is very little research literature reflecting this. However, given the change in communication practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there are strong voices that seek to connect multimodality to understandings of literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Palmeri, cited in Benson (2014), makes the case that "multimodality is a key part of the common disciplinary heritage that we all share [as compositionists]" (p. 14). Palmeri argues that multimodal history should be acknowledged in the field of composition in higher education and that there should be a commitment to developing a "capacious vision of multimodal pedagogy" (p.160).

Despite the possibilities of meaning making that multimodal writing can offer adult ESL students, much still needs to be learned about the potential that different and/or multiple modes can offer them through implementing multimodal writing pedagogies. If the research that is conducted in multimodal writing assists children in making meaning to their writing in schools, it is worth investigating whether and how this might be applied to adult learners in an

ELICOS context who also have limited linguistic knowledge but no lack of experiences to write about. This study aims to explore what multimodal pedagogy can offer to ESL student in ELICOS settings.



## Part Three: Research Approaches



*There is light. But it is dim.*

*It is the light of researchers who have gone before  
me - . And those others who are seeking a way  
forward even as they plan for that journey, As I  
am.*

*But I am conscious that few have trod this exact path.*

*To sustain me, I have in my backpack:  
my culture, my history, my teaching experience, my passion.  
They sustain me on my research journey and  
They influence the directions I take.*

*I tread slowly, deeper and deeper into the darkness,  
Shifting my gaze from side to side,  
Learning as I go,  
The torch of theory clutched tightly in my hand,  
Illuminating parts of the knowledge and policy landscape  
That are also influencing the decisions I make.*

# Chapter 4

## Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology underpinning this practitioner inquiry study and identifies the methods employed to generate and analyse data. I document and critically reflect on my actions and rationale as a teacher researcher, in the first instance, investigating the current writing pedagogy employed in the teaching of adult ELICOS learners at the Nour Language Centre (NLC) in Melbourne, Australia. As explained in Chapter One, the name of this language centre is a pseudonym. Also, I explain how and why I use action research protocols to guide my inquiry into the development of writing pedagogy in NLC classrooms. The action research component of the study inquiries into and challenges the existing traditional approaches in teaching writing to TESOL students at NLC, especially with regard to what is often referred to as the ‘product approach’ to writing pedagogy (Khansir, 2012; Pincas, 1982). Finally, I present a critical reflexive account of how I employed multimodal pedagogies to promote the students’ meaning making in their writing.

This study is set within critical traditions of literacy research (e.g. Canagarajah, 2011; Pennycook, 1999; Freire, 1972). In that respect, it explicitly addresses an issue of inequity, where already disadvantaged learners (second language speakers of English in ELICOS programs) are further deprived by a system that seems reluctant to utilise widely accepted, and potentially valuable knowledge about writing pedagogy for these learners. Practitioner inquiry typically encourages researchers to use multiple research methods (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). This study is largely qualitative, yet the effectiveness of it is enhanced by the judicious use of some quantitative measures and analysis. As indicated in the Literature Review, most of the research into multiliteracy pedagogy has been conducted in L1 environments, with little reference to L2 academic writing in higher education. My research explores this area of meaning making through guiding students to use a wider range of language modes and semiotic resources (cf. Jewitt, 2008, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996), and critically investigates the potential of “multiple literacy practices” (Doecke & Parr, 2005, p. 105) in the teaching of writing in one particular ELICOS setting.

The chapter is divided into three main sections: (i) research design and methodological approach; (ii) data generation processes; and (iii) data presentation and analysis. As this study

seeks to make an impact on the field of knowledge and professional practices in ELICOS writing programmes, and because the concepts of knowledge and methodology are closely interconnected (Ibekwe-SanJuan & Dousa, 2014), a carefully theorised response to the question of ‘What is knowledge?’ is essential to research methodology. I begin by responding to this question.

## What is Knowledge? A Response Grounded in the Critical Paradigm

In an attempt to situate this teacher practitioner inquiry study, with respect to particular theories of knowledge, the definition of *knowledge* is viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy. Understanding knowledge and its use in education is central to critical pedagogy traditions (Kincheloe, 2008b), which challenge prevailing assumptions about knowledge and encourage scholars to contest traditional epistemological boundaries of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008b). In my study, I consider the epistemological boundaries as product, focused writing pedagogies that inform existing NLC writing practices.

A critical pedagogy approach to knowledge seeks to disrupt, where possible, traditional notions of knowledge constructed through the “bureaucratic and managerial press of school (the hidden curriculum)”, which forces students “to comply with the dominant ideologies and practices” (McLaren, 2003, p. 86). By implementing a multimodal writing pedagogy, this study embraces a critical approach to knowledge with the aim of critically disrupting the forms of knowledge construction in ELICOS writing classes previously dominated by traditional writing practices. The curriculum in these sites tends to be heavily standardised; the teacher’s role is to implement that curriculum, irrespective of context. The teacher is assumed to have no relationship to, or influence on, the content of that curriculum. My account in the previous chapter of the product focused writing pedagogy that is dominant in ELICOS institutions, is consistent with what critical theorists call ‘traditional schooling’, which disenfranchises students. In traditional sites of schooling, as Kincheloe suggests, there can “only be one correct way to teach ... [since] [e]veryone is assumed to be the same regardless of race, class, or gender” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 17).

Over the past three decades, there has been a shift in language teaching debates about what counts as knowledge and how it is produced (McNiff, 2013), which some have attributed to the work of critical pedagogy researchers and practitioners in challenging this knowledge. In contrast to the traditional approach to knowledge, which involves teachers merely

implementing someone else's curriculum and complying with policy directives, a critical approach to knowledge sees teachers and students as active knowledge makers. They are collaborative active agents who inquire into and transform knowledge depending on their context and the needs of the children they teach. Their teaching involves much more than simply implementing curriculum or transmitting decontextualised knowledge to students in the same way in all settings (Giroux, 2011). In her blog post to the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), Mockler (2017) invokes the notion of teachers as 'curriculum workers' and she explains that teachers understand curriculum work as a deeply creative and productive process. It is notion that relies on teachers' confidence and command of content; they need to have pedagogical expertise, and also need to understand the needs of the learners whom they are teaching. Teachers who understand their teaching as 'curriculum work' understand teaching as scholarly, intellectual, and knowledge work (Giroux, 1988). These teachers are prepared to question or challenge any standardised notion of knowledge, which "produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization" (Giroux, 2011, p. 9). Teachers who implement critical pedagogy, recognise:

*[t]hey are in a position of authority and [need to] demonstrate that authority in their actions in support of students. ... [A]s teachers relinquish the authority of truth providers; they assume the mature authority of facilitators of student inquiry and problem-solving. In relation to such teacher authority, students gain their freedom—they gain the ability to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge. (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 17)*

Also, these teachers develop a habit of questioning their own practices. In this study, this is part of what motivated me to change my pedagogy for teaching writing in ELICOS courses and integrate multimodal writing into writing activities to engage my students. In the process, I saw myself as potentially constructing alternative knowledge and challenging the dominant knowledge valued by an existing "dominant culture" (Sarroub & Quadros, 2015, p. 253). I attempted, through practitioner action research, to view my own practices from a critical perspective, and thus use my authority as a teacher researcher to create space for my ELICOS students to exercise freedom and generate meaning in writing beyond purely linguistic forms. My decisions in the classroom as a teacher of writing and a researcher were underpinned by a set of critical pedagogy principles. I wanted to enable my L2 students to feel more of a sense of agency in learning to write in English, so as to make meaning in a variety of ways using their own knowledge and experiences as resources.

Critical educators typically believe that in the teaching of writing, it is helpful to impress upon student writers that texts they are producing are open to many alternative interpretations (Kincheloe, 2008b), and that the knowledge they bring to the classroom is a valuable resource for their writing. This is aligned with attempts in critical pedagogy to actively engage students in the construction of knowledge in the social context of their classroom, rather than have them following a singular model of writing or meaning making. This study is inspired by critical educators who have challenged the assumed superiority of one form of making meaning, that is linguistic form in language education, and especially in writing pedagogy, (e.g., Mills, 2009; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012), or who have enabled teachers to implement multimodality in classrooms previously dominated by monomodal forms of writing pedagogy.

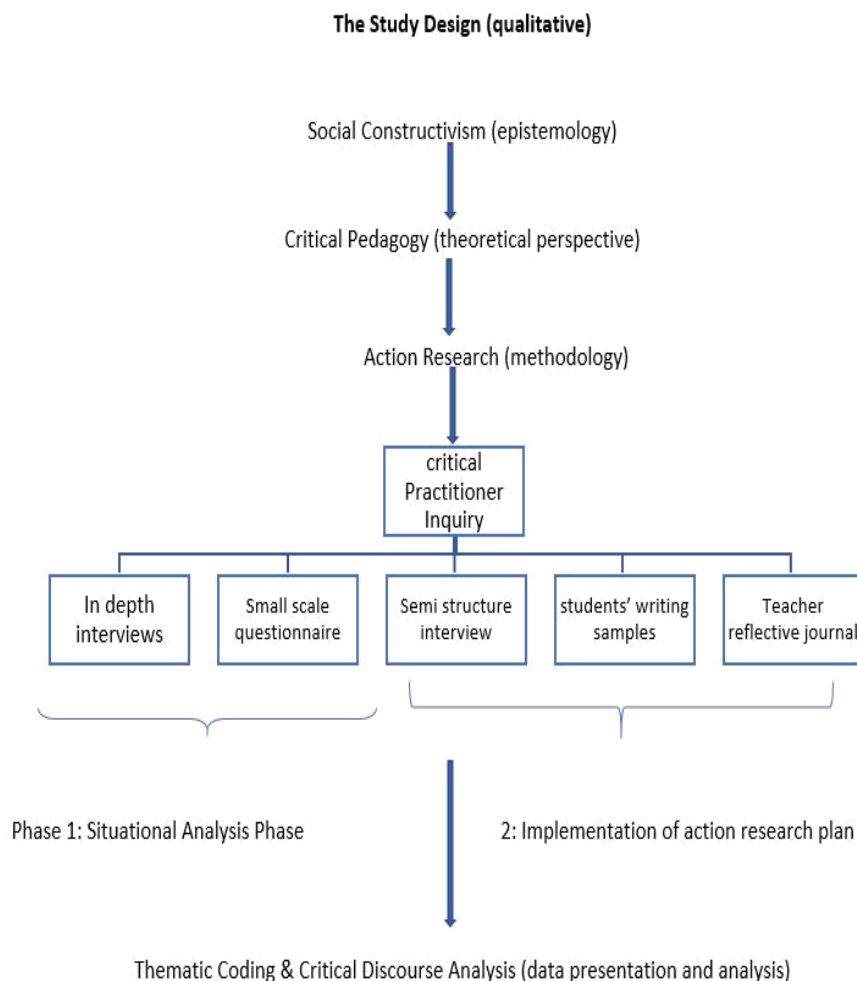
Critical pedagogy also challenges the traditional view of knowledge as a “decontextualized epistemology of practice” (Kincheloe, 2008b, p. 9) and, instead, aims to understand how context mediates practice. This is aligned with the social constructivist epistemology of this study, situating it within the social conception of knowledge (Bodner, 1986; Scott, 2014). Critical pedagogy theorists might have different educational philosophies, but most agree on a broad definition of knowledge and its role in school and society (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). It is appreciated through this definition that the world of learning is not simply “a series of rules to be obeyed, facts to be learned and knowledge authorities to be followed” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 149). This understanding of critical pedagogy approaches knowledge from a social perspective, rather than a view of knowledge that is independent of any social setting. From this perspective, knowledge is deemed to be valuable if it is beneficial for students as a social community, and not just for individual students (Giroux, 2011).

## Study Design

Guided by a critical approach to knowledge creation, my role as a practitioner researcher in this study enables me to direct my focus to the generation of carefully designed smaller data sets likely to yield nuanced and deeper information about the participants and the context under scrutiny (Kincheloe, 2008b). According to Cox (2012), “[p]ractitioner–researchers are well-positioned to apply qualitative methods to the study of significant problems of educational practice” (p.129). Qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study because I wanted to investigate the experiences and practices of ESL students learning to write, and thereby make

meaning in a particular ELICOS setting, in response to my implementation of a multimodal pedagogy, as part of an action research project.

Figure 1 below graphically sets out the ways in which various dimensions of the study are related to each other. These dimensions are explained separately in the sections of this chapter. I commence with social constructivism as the epistemology of this study and proceed to explain how critical pedagogy works as the theoretical paradigm and foundation on which the practitioner research design was constructed and how the data generation methods were selected. In the last section of this chapter, I explain the data generation processes and the analysis of data.



**Figure 1: The Study Design**

### *Social Constructivism (Epistemology)*

As mentioned in the Literature Review, traditional writing practices continue to be dominant across many disciplines and academic writing in higher education, with priority given to students' writing as final texts or products as assessable artefacts (Coffin, 2003; Khansir, 2012; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). In ESL academic writing, this means producing writing that complies with standardised structural elements and demonstrating the correct use of linguistic patterns (Bruce, 2005; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). However, more recent literature such as (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Copland et al., 2014; Doecke et al., 2011; Street, 2005) demonstrates a shift towards a more socio-cultural constructivist view of language, which is not only just interested in *what* writers compose but *how* they make meaning (meaning making strategies). This study intends to encourage different ways of thinking about meaning making in ELICOS writing classrooms, which might help produce some reform in current writing pedagogy, as well as disturb the hegemony of one type of knowledge (i.e. monomodal writing) in this setting. The appropriate epistemological paradigm for such a study is one that embraces a socio-constructivist approach to language and literacy, such as that described in the work of Holstein and Gubrium (2008).

Social constructivism in epistemological terms gives an explanation and understanding of knowledge in relation to learning or meaning making (Ultanir, 2012). One of the main principles of social constructivism is based on the idea that individuals create their own meanings through deploying semiotic resources in different ways (Hines & Conner-Zachocki, 2015). Thus, individual students create meaning through their actions and interactions in dynamic social spaces where "learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience" (Lainema, 2009, p. 55). Through critically and reflexively documenting learners' processes of employing a multimodal writing pedagogy, this study is an attempt to assist learners to create their own meanings through viewing meaning in a multimodal method; it supports an alternative to the preoccupation with "fixing of meaning" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 47) in the current writing pedagogy at NLC. Socio-constructivist theory in literacy practices has opened up previously "closed hierarchical boundaries" that have existed in traditional models of writing pedagogy, and has contested the "fixed body of knowledge" or "unquestioned acceptance of prevailing knowledge" (Hirtle, 1996, p. 91) about appropriate ways to teach writing to ESL adults.



A constructivist paradigm approach views knowledge from a social perspective in which knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Apple, 2012). In this respect, particularly in obviously globalised contexts of literacy education, schoolteachers and researchers have begun to re-examine the role that culture can play in student writing (Hyland, 2016). This is particularly important, as the students participating in this study are international students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This constructivist view of knowledge also emphasises the subjective nature of experience and the implications of this for knowledge in this area (Bagnoli, 2013). In education practices, this is best explained as the awareness of learners' backgrounds knowledge and prior experiences. This means that individuals are encouraged to construct their own views of knowledge when they come into contact with the ideas and activities in the social space of a writing classroom (Ultanir, 2012).

One of the core elements of a social constructivist paradigm is empowering students from different cultural and social backgrounds (Au, 1998). As the participants came from so many different countries in Asia and the Middle East, this study aims to explore the consequences of giving these culturally diverse students an opportunity to express themselves in writing using different semiotic forms. Another constructivist principle underpinning this study is that the learning spaces can be seen to empower students from diverse backgrounds and give them more agency in their learning through an alternative writing pedagogy. For this reason, participatory action research is chosen in this study as the method of collecting data as it allows for the researcher to initiate changes to some of the classroom practice, for example, by implementing multimodal writing pedagogies. This socio-constructivist paradigm sees teachers, not as the transmitters of knowledge, but as 'facilitators' in co-constructing knowledge with their pupils (Rata, 2012).

The core of a social constructivist paradigm in a writing classroom is that students should be actively engaged in processes of meaning making (Au, 1998). Contemporary constructivists in the area of research into writing pedagogy, such as (Kress, 2010, 2013) and (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008), suggest a developmental lens of language as making meaning, which suggests that writing is about generating possibilities. For this study, it means generating opportunities for students' cultural and linguistic experiences and knowledge, where any text is seen as brimming with meaning making potential. According to (Kress, 2010), written language should no longer be seen as the primary mode of communication and meaning making. At best, it can offer

explanations of one dimension of the communication process. According to social constructivists, much of the traditional knowledge in school devalues students' social and cultural backgrounds (Au, 1998), and it seems that adopting culturally relevant pedagogy is still a pressing problem (Baffour, 2014). As Ruecker (2011) notes, "the ways that monolingual ideology is present in academic systems work to devalue students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and even erase their identities" (p. 174). By implementing multimodal pedagogy, this study attempts to pay more attention to students' backgrounds and identities, and to promote the development of their individual and social identities.

By adopting a social constructive approach to the teaching of writing and promoting the development of multimodal pedagogy at NLC through this action research project, it seeks to open pathways for students to express themselves (beyond the use of linguistic forms) by attending the range of ways in which they make meaning using a variety of semiotic resources in their writing. It is important to note that by adopting critical pedagogy as the underpinning methodology for this study, the aim was not to entirely replace the current writing curriculum at NLC. My responsibilities as a professional ELICOS teacher did not allow me to ignore the existing curriculum. However, these responsibilities did allow me to integrate multimodal pedagogy within the existing curriculum and expected teaching practices. This allowed me as a teacher to consider the learners' social and cultural backgrounds, even when they were writing in more monomodal activities. I approached the research with the belief that a professional teacher has an ethical responsibility to open up spaces for students to experiment with multimodal practices if she believes this could generate more potential for meaning making in students' writing and extra agency for them in their English language learning.

## Theoretical Perspective: Critical Pedagogy

One aim of critical pedagogy is to transform a "language of critique" into a "language of possibility" (Cho, 2010, p. 311), and at its core is the belief that new educational knowledge can help to transform teaching and learning (Cho, 2010; Freire, 2009). Sometimes this process happens through constructing "alternative or counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge, and therefore power" (Cho, 2010, p. 311). The dominant discourse in critical pedagogy is seen as "multiple forms of constraints" that determine such things as the books teachers use and the traditional classroom pedagogies they employ (Freire, 2009, p. 73). In Janks (2010) insistence on the importance of the alternative form of knowledge known as 'critical literacy', she argues that

there is a relationship between knowledge and power, which she refers to as “little p politics” and “big P politics” (p. 186). The former (little p politics) can be seen as standing for the everyday practices and choices and the latter (big P politics) for government related practices and choices. Janks believes that those two forms of power are evident in the world in which we live, and that both should be subject to critique. However, the study and the critique of the relationship between knowledge and power should not be an end in itself, but rather be part of a process of “transformative and ethical re-construction” (Janks, 2013, p. 153). Thus, critical pedagogy starts with questioning power and power relationships, including those that are handed down or inherited from previous generations. Through its critique, critical pedagogy promotes empowerment of teachers and the empowerment of students in all their diversity (Freire, 2009; McLaren, 2015).

Most histories of the English language suggest that research on, and theories relating to language teaching, have traditionally focused on issues of “effectiveness and efficiency” (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 3). However, as Cummins and Davison recommend, language teaching cannot be “reduced to a one-dimensional set of prescriptions” (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 3). Critical pedagogy in the context of teaching English tends to be centred not just on questions such as “How to teach?”, “What to teach?”, but more so on questions such as “Who teaches?”, “To whom?”, “For what purpose?”, “In what language?”, “In what context?” and, crucially, “Who decides?” (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 214). From my teaching experiences in different teaching contexts in Arabic-speaking countries and Australia, it seems there is a lack of focus in traditional classrooms concerning these questions, and instead the dominant approach tends to be a one-way, transmissive teaching of English. However, critical researchers are arguing that since language is used in complex and constantly evolving ways outside of classrooms, language classrooms should reflect these constantly evolving practices (Cummins & Davison, 2007). Classroom writing activities should be devised depending on who the students are in the classroom, for what purpose they are writing, and in what context. This study proposes and to some extent investigates the tenets of critical pedagogy, including the need for teachers as intellectuals to critically review existing practices and set their own reform agendas rather than concentrate on complying with a standardised reform mandated by a government or regulatory authority. Investigating these tenets is, in itself, one way to bring about some change in current writing practice at NLC.

This study is also concerned with understanding the institutional power and hegemony that operate in the ELICOS classrooms at NLC. By adopting a multimodal approach to writing instruction, this study explicitly questions and critiques the monomodal practices and ideology of a singular approach to writing at NLC. This is aligned with critical pedagogy which critiques Freire's notion of the *banking* form of knowledge (Freire, 2009; Giroux, 2011). Freire's notion of 'depositing' knowledge in which students are the 'depositories' and teachers are the 'depositors' is seen to inhibit students' creativity as they are only receptors of what the teachers allow them to receive (Freire, 2009). One common approach to critical pedagogy views pedagogy as creating space for identities, stories, and voices to develop (McLaren, 2015). An alternative pedagogy then becomes "the telling of the story of ... something more that can be dreamed only when domination and exploitation are named and challenged" (McLaren, 2015, p. 167). As such, critical pedagogy views an alternative writing pedagogy as an expanded set of possibilities, as a way to help students find their voices and expand their creative potentials (Rhem, 2013). This is a crucial dimension of my aim to contribute to the body of knowledge that informs decisions about writing pedagogies in ELICOS. In this study, by conducting a critical interrogation of the current writing syllabus and learning materials at NLC, and through the implementation of multimodal writing pedagogies, I aim to provide students with opportunities for meaning making afforded by multimodal resources and thereby empower them to express who they are. In this respect, critical pedagogy underpins my "hope that things can change" (Monchinski, 2008, p. 3) at NLC and perhaps, in time, in the ELICOS sector more widely.

By engaging in critical pedagogy, as the teacher-researcher of this study, I wish to critique and reconstruct my work and current practices at NLC. I can do this by investigating ways to modify and possibly change the existing practices with respect to writing pedagogy and particular writing tasks. By integrating multimodal writing into my pedagogy, I hope to create more space for my students' creativity and meaning making in their writing. Optimistically, I hope that I might set a precedent for teachers at NLC to actively participate in multimodal meaning making, as part of their teaching practices in the ELICOS classroom. To engage in such a critique of the current dominant writing pedagogy, I used practitioner inquiry as my foundational method of inquiry. Critical pedagogy is an approach that works at the knowledge level by considering educational problems. Practitioner inquiry works on the particular knowledge as a practice in a specific site (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). By undertaking a practitioner inquiry, I was actively blurring the boundaries between research and practice, and between researcher and practitioner. I consider this in more detail in the next section.

### *Method: Practitioner Inquiry*

Practitioner inquiry in education is research that identifies teachers as the “linchpin of educational reform” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 1). In fact, it positions teachers as intellectuals capable and willing to examine and alter many of their traditional ideas about pedagogy and the nature of knowledge. With its focus on the practices of teachers in the classroom, practitioner inquiry is closely linked to critical pedagogy in that it also encourages critique of existing knowledge. This can be a matter of teachers appreciating how differences in contexts and how students are taught can influence their approach to teaching (Babione, 2014). In this sense, practitioner inquiry perceives teachers as effective and resourceful professionals who actively generate educational knowledge, rather than just implement knowledge created elsewhere. Practitioner inquiry sees teachers as potential agents of change (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009).

Traditionally, English language and TESOL teachers have been characterised as ‘top-down’ practitioners: that is, they seem to be driven by policy or curriculum imperatives that pays little attention to the particularities of their classroom contexts (Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015). Sometimes, according to Seedhouse and Jenks (2015), “research ... conceptualise[s] teachers as intermediaries or ‘transmitters’ who should deliver the pedagogy devised by theorists” (Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015, p. 2). However, with globalisation and the spread of English as an international language, and ELT as a business and major growth industry (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014; Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015), there has been increased interest in classroom-based inquiry where English/TESOL teachers closely and critically examine their own and others’ classroom practices. This change in the attitudes towards classroom practice has led to a ‘bottom-up’ approach to ELT, as teaching English language theories and concepts can be generated from “interactional data, which ought to enable two-way traffic between theory and practice” (Seedhouse & Jenks, 2015, p. 2).

Critical pedagogy approaches to educational research typically put great emphasis on the particularity of a classroom context as do many approaches to practitioner inquiry. Using a combination of these approaches, this study can offer international students more opportunities to make meaning in their writing, giving them an opportunity to explore and express their backgrounds, voice, and identity. This research examines the introduction of

multimodal pedagogies into ELICOS classrooms to explore the potential that multimodal pedagogy in ELICOS programs can offer for students' meaning making in writing. This includes problematising the existing dominant knowledge about English teaching that has been passed on by others. It has the potential to generate a "pedagogical change based on new learning and understanding" (McCallum, 2014, p. 13). The importance of critical practitioner inquiry for this study is that it allows me to investigate ways of improving writing my own pedagogies, my students' meaning making in their writing, and to contribute to new knowledge about the teaching of writing in ELICOS classrooms beyond my own. My approach is to shift the focus of the writing classes from more product-based monomodal writing towards a multimodal writing approach, an approach which recognises students' knowledge and experiences as starting points for inquiry.

In education, the fundamental root of practitioner inquiry is the notion of teachers studying their own practice when working with students to address issues within their teaching contexts (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). Through practitioner inquiry, this study seeks to participate in a cycle of inquiry (See Figure 2) into my current writing pedagogy and to inquire into my students' experiences of meaning making in their writing. That is, I will critically reflect upon my own implementation of a multimodal pedagogy and consider the impact of this on my students' meaning making in writing. Other teachers' perspectives on writing pedagogy at NLC, and their actual practices, will be taken into consideration through a combination of interviews and a questionnaire which will ask them about their views and experiences of writing pedagogy at NLC. Multimodal pedagogy will be acknowledged as an approach that has not previously been used in the writing classes at NLC, since the first phase of the study showed (as I anticipated) that there were no other teachers at NLC doing similar work. Therefore, multimodal writing was only conducted by me, as the researcher and teacher in this study.

### *Data Generation*

This study employed mainly qualitative approaches to data generation. This allowed a greater level of triangulation, in that I was investigating a range of "different actors' viewpoints" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 195) to an alternative approach in teaching writing, or as Bergman (2008) puts it a "multi-perspective exploration" of this new approach. This also allowed for the development of in-depth narrative-based descriptions of meaning making in ELICOS classrooms. Because the investigation of current practices in ELICOS writing classes is complex, much like

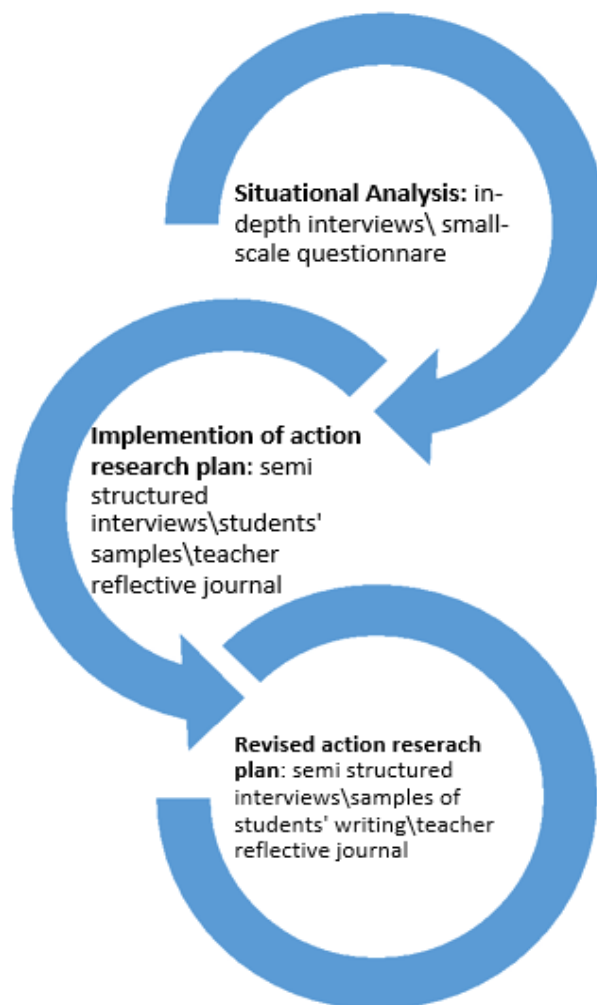
the barriers and subsequent ways to challenge traditional ideologies in writing, it was necessary to consider the use of qualitative and quantitative data to generate the diverse viewpoints of those involved at NLC, including students and teachers. This assisted in my critique of the extent to which a multimodal approach to writing pedagogy could be utilised in culturally diverse ELICOS classrooms.

### *Practitioner Action Research (AR)*

Action research comes in a multitude of shapes, forms, and scopes and the literature that describes action research is full of contesting arguments. However, there is some broad agreement that it is an approach to documenting and facilitating the efforts of practitioners to empower them and improve their own practices (Lynn Milton-Brkich, Shumbera, & Beran, 2010; Mills, 2000). Action research involves thinking carefully about the circumstances someone is in and why the situation is as it is. It also involves thinking carefully about whether certain perceptions of the situation are accurate, or if they need to be revised considering what is discovered about the current situation (McNiff, 2013). Recent shifts in the conceptualising of educational knowledge toward a more socially constructed epistemology, as explained earlier, has led to a recognition that knowledge is also socially developed, and it is situated within the groups of people who create it. This recognition of the value of such forms of knowledge has its acceptance in higher education in terms of new forms of courses for a range of professions and disciplines (McNiff, 2013). Indeed, action research has become a preferred methodology for undergraduate and graduate professional learning in many of these courses, and it is the preferred method for this study.

As this study is a practitioner inquiry study, action research is chosen as the method of generating data to integrate and implement multimodal writing. It is hoped this study can be utilised to influence change in the current dominant knowledge about writing pedagogies at NLC, and more widely in the ELICOS sector, on the basis of “authenticated evidence” of the implementation of multimodal writing (Lynn Milton-Brkich et al., 2010, p. 47). I also hoped that action research cycles could assist me in better understanding the diverse experiences of students in meaning making, and therefore improve my practice in this area (see research questions). In action research, the teacher becomes an ‘investigator and explorer’ of his or her teaching context (Burns, 2010b). In reading and preparing for this PhD study, I became mindful of aspects of action research in so many of my usual processes of planning and monitoring my

own teaching. I came to see the value of a continuous cycle of self-reflection about my own teaching. By the time I began this PhD, I had begun to use action research in more self-conscious, methodical, and rigorous ways. This helped me to explore and investigate in nuanced ways the meaning making in the multimodal writing of my students. In this study, data was generated at different stages of the action research cycle as shown in Figure 2 (see also Table 1).



**Figure 2:** Data collection phases and research methods used



### *Setting of the Study*

The site of this study was at NLC. This language centre is located in a large multi-campus university in Melbourne, Australia, that provides ELICOS courses (mostly for international TESOL students) as a pathway to university. According to NLC's English Language Standards Policy and Procedure (NLC unpublished, 2013), NLC ensures that its students are sufficiently "proficient in English to participate effectively in their studies upon entry" (p. 4). The policies and standards at NLC are in line with those outlined in the English Language Standards for Higher Education in Australia (ELSHE, 2010), but are modified for ELICOS programmes. NLC offers two level courses, general and English for Further Studies (EFS), with a new intake of students every five weeks. The general level is a five-week course, and the EFS level is a ten-week course. NLC was chosen for this study because it is the place where I was (and am still) teaching, so I was familiar with NLC's curriculum, the existing writing pedagogies, and the range of policies and assessment practices that mediate the teaching of writing there.

### *The Participants*

The action research was undertaken with 40 international young adult students, who were studying at NLC, each of them hoping to meet the language requirements for university entry. The students came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, with a majority coming from Asia and the Middle East. They were spread across three groups, with 28 students about to commence level 2B 'General' level and 12 students about to commence a level 3 EFS course.

The participating students were considered beginners and intermediate in the judgement of NLC. A learner's level of language proficiency is defined by a placement test that uses the Common European Framework (CEFR) levels system. In terms of this framework, the participants in the classes I was teaching could be described in the following terms.

#### ***They had the ability to:***

- Understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to immediately relevant areas
- Communicate in simple and routine tasks, requiring a simple exchange of information about familiar and routine matters

- Describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment, and matters of personal interest
- Use basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases
- Use simple structures correctly, despite making systematic basic errors
- Make themselves understood in short turns, despite long breaks or pauses
- Respond to questions but were rarely able to keep conversation going by themselves
- Link ideas together in a simple way. (Little, 2007, p. 647)

As the study focuses on an alternative pedagogy that enables students to use multiple modes to express meaning, beginner learners were deemed more appropriate for the action research. I believed that any student from general level (either 1 or 2) might have been an appropriate candidate for the study. However, students from level 2 were deemed a better choice because students from level 1 were usually not able to enter into any kind of fluent conversation in English about their learning, which was required in the interviews. In the end, the decisions about which students would participate in this research were in many ways the result of negotiation with the Director of Studies at NLC, who was also in charge of the timetable but generously was prepared to consider my needs as a teacher-researcher as well as her needs as Director of the ELICOS courses.

**Table 1:** Classes participating in the action research

Action Research Cycles	Participating Students
Cycle 1	2B General class
	3B EFS class
Cycle 2	3A EFS class

This study aims to explore ELICOS students' experiences of meaning making in monomodal and multimodal writing tasks through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of samples of the students' writing. However, in order to create an in-depth understanding of the context in which I was conducting my research, I needed to examine current practices in writing pedagogy at NLC. I believed that it was also necessary to investigate

the experiences of NLC teachers in relation to their beliefs and practices in ELICOS writing classes, so my methods also incorporated semi-structured interviews with a small selection of other NLC teachers. The following section details those various methods.

### *Methods for Generating Data*

**Table 2:** Phases and methods of generating data for action research

<b>Phase 1</b> Teachers (x28)	Situational Analysis	<i>In-depth interviews</i> (23 interviews of 30 minutes)
		<i>Small-scale questionnaire</i> (28 responses returned)
<b>Phase 2</b> Students (x40)	Implementation of action research (Cycle 1&2). (Teacher's reflective journal)	<i>Sample of students' writing</i>
		<i>Semi- structured interviews</i> (75 interviews of 5-10 minutes - before and after the writing tasks)

### Data Generation Phase 1: Situational Analysis

Situational analysis refers to what is happening now, why it is problematic and what can be done about it (Skilbeck, 1990). There are three main purposes for the situational analysis phase in this study:

1. To develop an understanding of the current writing curriculum and pedagogy at NLC.
2. To identify the barriers of implementing multimodal writing.
3. To access teachers' and students' opinions about meaning making in writing.

In this study, the major sources of data during the situational analysis were in-depth semi-structured interviews and small-scale questionnaires. Each will be discussed in turn below.

#### *In-depth Interviews – for NLC Teachers*

In-depth interviews are focused conversations with individuals to explore their experiences and understanding of a particular idea (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Newby, 2010). They

are intended to reveal lived human experiences within a particular time and context. The paucity of evidence about post-secondary ESL students using different semiotic modes in writing pedagogy in ELICOS settings meant that my interviews needed to be in-depth and inductive – that is building on the students’ particular experiences, rather than moving too quickly to establish generalizable categories of experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thus, I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews to provide a deep and rich description of each participant’s experiences to provide answers to the specific research questions of this study.

In the end, 23 in-depth interviews of approximately 30 minutes’ duration were conducted with teachers at NLC, all of whom were teaching or had taught general level and or level three EFS. All interviews were recorded, and I transcribed the contents of the interviews for analysis. The main purpose of conducting in-depth interviews with the teachers in Phase one of the action research was to develop better understandings about their existing beliefs and approaches to meaning making in writing, multimodal writing, and their expectations of students’ writing. The interview questions were about how the teachers defined writing. I was interested to learn more about pedagogical decisions made by the teachers in regard to teaching writing and their rationale for these decisions (See appendix A).

#### *Small-scale Questionnaire – for NLC Teachers*

As this study includes a critical inquiry into writing pedagogy, the teachers at NLC (28) were also asked in an online small-scale questionnaire about their practices in writing classes and understanding of the concept of writing and multimodal writing. Questionnaires are a “widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, and often numerical data, in being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 377). The decision to employ a questionnaire was driven by my awareness that there are two shifts for teachers at NLC so I would be unlikely to conduct face-to-face interviews with some of them who work different shifts on different days. Teachers were able to complete the questionnaire in their own time. As a questionnaire provides numerical data, teachers’ perspectives on their writing practices and meaning making provided a broad-brush picture of NLC teachers’ views and expectations in writing at NLC. The questions were multiple-choice, scaled questions, ‘yes’ of ‘no’ items and short answer ones so that a quick overview of their perspective could be obtained. The questionnaire included three areas: students’ difficulties in writing; teachers’ practices and challenges in writing classes; and students’ needs and the current writing curriculum (See Appendix B).

## Data Generation Phase 2: Implementation of Action Research

### *Samples of Students' Writing*

I generated data from samples of students' writing completed by the ELICOS students in the normal way of teaching and learning in their course to help inform my questioning in the subsequent semi-structured interviews and in my teacher reflective journal. These samples of writing were intended to form "rich sources of information" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) that would enable me to understand the perspectives and experiences of participating students who were exploring multimodal approaches to writing. It is important to note that the writing tasks were not ones that are scheduled in the syllabus for those particular levels, that is, I described them for the students as writing activities that were not for assessment. Also, despite the fact that the writing tasks designed for this research were not for assessment, they played no direct role in preparing students for their final assessments. I needed to avoid any perception that my analysis of their writing in multimodal forms would influence my final assessment of their work with regard to the official ELICOS curriculum. Therefore, as agreed in the ethics application approved by Monash University for this study, I did not begin to *analyse* these writing samples until after the end of the 5-week course when students had officially completed 2B level and Level 3 EFS (see Appendix C, Explanatory Statement for ethics approval).

At pedagogically appropriate times in my teaching, student participants were asked to compose two brief and separate texts on a similar topic. The first text was monomodal and the second was multimodal, which allowed me to examine how students used contrasting modal approaches to communicating similar content in writing. In Cycle 1 of the action research, students from 2B general level were asked to write about a "memorable event". This topic was chosen for this research to be consistent with the NLC writing syllabus for this level, which is narrative. Level three (EFS) students were asked to describe "my country" because the syllabus for students at this level requires them to write a 'descriptive paragraph' in the first writing assessment task of this level. In the monomodal writing task, students were asked to write as they normally would for a writing task in class, which meant that they could only use linguistic forms of language; they were not allowed to use a dictionary or any digital device; and as usual, they used a pen or a pencil to write on paper. In the subsequent multimodal writing task, I allowed (and in fact encouraged) my students to use different semiotic forms in their writing, and they were allowed to use a range of digital resources or the internet. The writing task was

done in one of the computer rooms at NLC where each student could use a computer to perform the task and access the Internet. In a 5- week term, students at NLC typically have one class per week timetabled in a computer room.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews – with NLC Students*

The interviews with the NLC students were intended to provide insights into their experiences and views about the writing they had been doing as part of their English language learning before this study, and the writing being done in the course of this action research study associated with my teaching. Mindful of the fact that participating students had low levels of competence and confidence in English, a semi-structured interview was deemed the most appropriate interview instrument because it “enable[d] multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 349) . That is, additional questions could be asked, and responses could be clarified using any of these channels.

The structure of the interviews was flexible enough to allow for follow-up questions based on the different ways the participants framed their answers (Cohen et al., 2007, 2013; Mullins et al., 1995). Because it could not be predicted what type of writing text the participants would produce in the tasks described above, not all the questions for the interview were prescribed in advance. However, I did go into the interviews expecting to ask questions about the following three topics:

- Difficulties the students face when writing in English
- The most important aspects they focus on while writing in English
- Their experiences of making meaning from two contrasting types of writing (monomodal and multimodal texts)

To ensure the conversation continually flowed, I audio-recorded the whole interview which was particularly helpful in the case of interviews with participants whose English was not always clear or fluent. It ensured all responses were fully captured with all nuances of responses available for close analysis (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). In some cases, as the interviewer, I repeated the participants’ answers back to them so as to ensure the responses they gave had

been accurately understood and to guarantee that the words they had uttered were consistent with what they had intended to say.

Using a semi-structured interview allowed me to probe for more detailed responses so that the respondents could be asked to clarify what they had said (Merriam, 1998). This fitted in with the recommendations of Phakiti and Li (2011) who state that the meanings that people ascribe to certain phenomena are important to identify. In addition semi-structured interviews are open-ended “to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included and further probing to be undertaken” (Cohen, 2018, p. 313). A semi-structured interview is the most appropriate instrument for the investigator because it is flexible enough to follow up questions based on the different ways that participants frame their answers (Mullins et al., 1995). The semi-structured interviews were conducted in two stages: before and after the writing tasks were completed. Students’ writing samples were used as a point of reference for the interview questions. Often, the questions or responses referred to the students’ difference experiences in making meaning between the monomodal writing task and the multimodal writing task (see interview questions Appendix D). Because it cannot be predicted what type of writing texts that the participants produce, these are unlikely to generate fixed questions for the interview.

### *Teacher Reflective Journals*

Regular writing in a reflective journal is widely acknowledged as an important dimension of teachers’ professional learning (Farrell, 2013). Reflective writing is a strategy which “requires teachers to express in written form their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes, typically in relation to particular topics or experiences” (Borg, 2015, p. 293). Reflective journals are also believed to shape teachers’ actions in the classroom and can lead to more effective practice in teaching. According to some researchers, writing in reflective journals is crucial for developing new awareness, knowledge, and value shifts (Burnard, 2006). When teachers reflect on their practices, they observe critically in order to learn from previous work – their own and others’ work. As such, reflection can be seen as “an agent of change”; it is one of several practices that can “trigger change and which helps change come about” (Burnard, 2006, p. 3). For this study, reflective journal writing required me, as a teacher and researcher, to reflect upon the implementation of multimodal pedagogy as an innovative pedagogical practice at NLC and ELICOS in general. Through the course of this action research, I wrote in a reflective journal,

documenting and exploring my pedagogy as I sought to help my students improve their meaning making through multimodal writing practice. I drew freely and liberally on the reflections written in my research journal to support the writing of this thesis. Sometimes the reflections appear as fragments of an autobiographical narrative with illustrations. Each chapter begins with an image (co-constructed with an illustrator) and some form of poetic or narrative-based reflection on how the particular image relates to the content that follows. Some parts of this thesis include extended autobiographical narratives for reasons that I explain at the moment they are introduced. Collectively, these images and reflections are designed to reflect my advocacy for multimodality as an authorised medium for meaning making in all manner of academic and research texts. Connection between pictorial meaning and text meaning may be described in terms of the relative contribution of each mode to the overall meaning and purpose of the text (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Tin, 2011).

## Presenting and Analysing Data

### *Presentation of data*

#### ***For this study, the data set is as follows:***

- NLC teachers' responses to interview questions
- NLC teachers' responses to questionnaire questions,
- NLC students' responses in interviews
- Samples of students' writing completed during ELICOS classes
- Researcher's journal.

In presenting the data throughout this PhD thesis, I have utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative strategies including diagrams, tables, statistics, stories, or vignettes drawn from teaching or interview episodes, excerpts of interview transcripts, and shorter quotes from transcripts or questionnaire responses. In the following section I draw out some of the analytical approaches I took, and some of the traditions of qualitative analysis that I drew upon in presenting my analysis in Chapters Five and Six.



## *Analysing of Data*

### (i) Thematic Coding

Thematic analysis was used to analyse teachers and students interviews and questionnaire responses. Thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). As a large set of qualitative data was generated for this study, thematic analysis was an attractive option because of its flexibility in managing contrasting forms of data, but also because of its adaptability to a study that emphasises meaning making in a constructivist paradigm. I used thematic analysis and identified themes within and across data that I had generated with the cooperation of students and teachers. In particular, these patterns relate to: students’ and teachers’ lived experiences; their views and perspectives on writing and related issues; their writing (students); their pedagogical practices (teachers); and the relationship of these with their spoken views. All of this was intended to build understanding of what the participants thought, felt, believed, and did in their everyday practices as English language writers or teachers of writing (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

### (ii) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Multimodal Discourse

Because this study not only critically investigates current traditional writing practices, but also attempts to integrate multimodal pedagogy into the current writing pedagogy at NLC, it was necessary to analyse students’ multimodal writing products and processes. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) assists in understanding meaning as socially and contextually constructed (Phillips, 2000), and in that respect it allowed me as a researcher to home in on details and nuances of language as individual and social practice. This was particularly important when I analysed the students’ multimodal texts because Critical Discourse Analysis views language as a social practice; it enables study of the relationship between language and ideology as “conceptualised within the framework of research on discoursal and sociocultural change” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 27). Critical Discourse Analysis also views power as implicit in the conventions and practices of academic discourse; it is interested in the struggles on the part of learners (or teachers) to contest and transform such practices in their course of their learning or teaching (Fairclough, 2013).

Following the widely accepted principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study approaches language and discourse as potentially multimodal discourse, which “encompass[es] all modes used in any text or text-like entity” (Gee & Handford, 2012, p. 38). Even when analysing students’ monomodal texts, I was able to look at the ways in which different words, phrases, and forms of expression mediated the students’ meaning making. In multimodal texts, it facilitated my close attention to the ways in which words, phrases, and modes - e.g. images (static and moving), symbols, sounds and so on – were utilised by students to write about themselves, their countries and the world in which they currently live. Verbal language, for instance, is seen as but one mode among others. In line with the views of Kress (2010) and other critical linguists (e.g., Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), non-linguistic means of making meaning were given full recognition and attention in the analysis of the data from this study. In this respect, written discourse was seen as involving multiple modes which often work together as “any system of signs that are used in a consistent and systematic way to make meaning [that] can be considered a mode” (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012, p. 29). This means that this study is not analysing these other modes *instead* of speech and writing, but seeking to understand how different modes work together in the pedagogies used by the ELICOS teachers. This approach includes analysing images. Descriptions of the ways images are part of actions to construct meaning are used in multimodal text analysis. It is an approach developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), who provide a new perspective of how images are analysed and how they are used to produce meaning. In the non-traditional writing tasks completed by students (i.e. multimodal writing tasks), images are analysed by the types of details they include or exclude and through the ways in which they are arranged within or other semiotic symbols.

## Ethical Considerations for the Research

Using semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary means for generating data raises some ethical issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Cohen et al., 2018). In designing these interviews, I was mindful that conversational interactions are never neutral (Fairclough, 2013), especially when the interviewer is also the teacher of the student being interviewed. There were potential power issues I needed to address, for example, related to how these potential participants would be approached and subsequently invited to participate in the interview and how I interacted with them during the process. I took great care to fully inform potential participants about the nature of their involvement in the study, and in gaining their consent I

made it clear that they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time. In conducting the interviews, I took care to explain the processes and protocols of the interviews, how I would handle and disseminate the knowledge gained from the interviews, and I informed participants that they were not obliged to answer any particular question if they were not comfortable. I felt, above all else, a need to ensure that no harm was caused to any other person in the generation of data or in any phases of the writing or dissemination of the research findings (Cohen et al., 2018).

Although I was conscious that bias in any research is inevitable, in the design and approach to my particular study I remained alert to situations where this bias could be minimised both from designing the study to generating the data and analysing it. For instance, I designed the study so that student participants would have the opportunity to respond to interviews as well as the questionnaire, and that they were not obliged to submit samples of their writing for analysis if they did not desire. This study was approved on 29 September 2016 by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) as a low risk study (See Appendix E).

As the teacher and researcher, I conducted the interviews. After a brief description about the study was presented to the participants, they agreed to participate, and also have their data used for research purposes. All participants then signed consent forms. I asked the participants for their permission to audio-record their conversations, and in the case of student participants, I also asked their permission to use their writing texts for later analysis. Participants chose the time and location of conversations so that they felt more comfortable talking to me, as the researcher, in their chosen places and at preferred times. The participants were also informed at the beginning of the interviews that they would be able to ask for the withdrawal of their data at any time within the four weeks from when their conversations took place.

As previously mentioned, student participants were asked to write two types of texts in class as part of the teaching I had planned for those classes. Participants first wrote the monomodal scripts in Week 1, then the multimodal ones in Week 2. Students were interviewed before commencing the writing tasks. After they had completed the multimodal writing, they were interviewed again about how they made meaning in the two contrasting modes of texts. In this way, my questions, as the researcher, and the learners' responses were all drawn and based on concrete materials. As beginner speakers of English, the students were not asked to discuss the abstract concept of 'meaning making'; questions were practical and focused as much

as possible and were often based on students' survey responses of some details of their own pieces of writing. Teachers and students were given pseudonyms for confidentiality. Although the writing was central to the authentic teaching and learning in the courses I was teaching, I made it very clear to students that the multimodal writing tasks and the interviews were not part of the formal assessment of their work in this course. I also emphasised that there would be no consequences for their progress or success in the course should they choose to withdraw from the research.

## Limitation of the Methodology and Research Scope

Despite my care in designing data generation activities that were ethically sound and targeted to respond to my own research questions, there were some methodological limitations. The first limitation is related to the time constraints (5 weeks of teaching with each cohort – and just one day per week). This limited my ability to conduct interviews with students and elaborate on their responses during short interviews. It also constrained students from elaborating on their ideas. In addition, there was some tensions associated with securing and using the computer lab for this research as this was usually the time scheduled in the timetable when students used the computer facilities to prepare for other assignments and exams.

The other methodological limitation of the present study was the participants' limited English competence (and confidence) in the interviews, which occasionally constrained my opportunities as an interviewer to ask participants to elaborate on his/her responses to my questions. The interview was conducted in English even though some students could speak my native language, which is Arabic. The reasons for this choice was that, as described above, the learners were able to communicate and respond at some level to the questions in English, and I did not wish to disadvantage students who did not speak Arabic when I could not speak their home language. Another dimension of the study, which is worth reflecting on, is that the interviews with the students were based on their own pieces of writing. I saw these both as a strength but potentially also a limitation of the study, since some students felt more proud or confident about their written work than others, and those who were not so confident felt less confident and open in reflecting on their writing experiences.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, the design of this study was focused on listening to and valuing the lived experiences of ELICOS students in order to draw from these stories, lessons that may be learned. In this chapter I have sought to explain and justify the methods and methodology I employed in this study. I have taken care and time to describe how the traditions of critical pedagogy, various theories that are central to the epistemology of the study, and the methodological design that I hoped would consistently and truthfully represent and honour the stories and experience of the participants. I am mindful of the responsibility in conducting this research sensitively and ethically, particularly recognising myself as a participant in this research, as both researcher and teacher, engaged in teaching writing at NLC. The stories told by teachers were richly diverse and often revealed tension between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and current institutional practices, which are experienced by many of the teachers in their daily teaching.



## Chapter 5

### Reflections

#### An ELICOS Teacher's Journey in Action Research: A Reflexive Narrative

##### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I offered a more traditional scholarly account of the methodological decisions I made in planning, designing, and implementing this practitioner inquiry, action research and presented a theorised rationale for these decisions. This chapter takes a different approach to the scholarly work of a PhD thesis, and in particular to a methodology chapter. Here, I present a more nuanced, reflexive account from my experience of conducting two cycles of action research at NLC, Sunrise University. I do this by telling stories about the day to day events and conversations I experienced and observed in each cycle. Woven amongst the stories are reflections on my teaching, students' learning and their reflections, and my research.

Before I began this study, I did not think of myself as a storyteller. Yet the more I read and critically inquired into multimodality and storytelling, and the more I wrote as a researcher, the more I came to realise that there is so much communication in everyday life that involves storytelling. I have come to understand that all scholarly communication, like everyday communication, involves telling stories in different modes for different purposes. Since I am conducting narrative-based research into an alternative (multimodal) pedagogy, I thought it would be useful in this study to work with multimodality and narrative to communicate an alternative perspective on my methodology. When considering how to begin other chapters in this thesis, I was often excited by quotations from literary fiction, which I used as epigraphs. In some chapters, I turned to ideas or quotations from researchers or theorists, or from conversations with my supervisors, or incidents that occurred in my ELICOS classrooms. For this chapter, it seemed more appropriate to focus on the nuances of my work as a teacher and researcher so as to tell a series of professional stories about my action research experience, and to reflect on both the experience and writing about this using a range of reflexive research practices (Attia & Edge, 2017; Parr, Doecke, & Bulfin, 2015). But how to start this reflexive narrative? To answer this question, I spoke to my two young sons, Firas and Omar, my sources of inspiration who happen to be fans of multimodal narratives, especially graphic novels and comics. I explained to them that in this part of

my thesis, I wanted to write more of an explicit story, a narrative. My sons were concerned that this made it sound as though I was writing a fictional story. One son suggested that I use the word *journey*; the other argued that *experience* would be more fitting. As usual, they began arguing, or perhaps it was more like an intensive dialogue. Anyway, I hear too much of this in my daily life to pay too much attention to it in my family as well. So, with a smile on my face, an idea in my mind, and a title to play with, I took my fingers to the keyboard and began to play around with the idea of action research as a narrative journey. I present here a reflexive narrative, detailing my experience and reflections on action research that I have conducted with my ELICOS students.



These were young adult international students who were undertaking English language intensive courses (ELICOS). Like me, they were hopeful of completing a journey: in their cases, it was the journey of qualifying in order to attend an Australian university.

Using the medium of this reflexive narrative, I take you now, as my reader, on a lively journey. This is a journey of inspiring highs and periods of deep discouragement. I invite you to share my experiences as a teacher and researcher, while I discuss my research and reflections on my use of multimodal pedagogy in my teaching of writing at NLC.

### *Another New Beginning*

Towards the end of 2016, one of the busiest times in the ELICOS academic year, I was very keen to start the next phase of my PhD study: I was about to start the process of generating data for my action research project. However, I could not proceed until I had received ethics approval.

The timing was tight and there were so many factors that were out of my control. Firstly, I was still waiting to receive final approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC). I could not start my action research until I had received this final approval. Secondly, I had been invited to be a sessional teacher in the ELICOS program at Sunrise University, but I did not know whether I would be given enough classes to enact my plan of action research. My plan had been to teach and generate data from three classes. Usually, the number of students enrolled in ELICOS courses declines at the start of a new year, and as the time for commencement of teaching approached, I imagined a scenario where there were not enough students for me to teach. Thirdly, my plan was to teach particular levels in the ELICOS program, so that the students could speak fluently in focus group interviews about their experience of being taught English using a multimodal pedagogy. I had liaised with the Director of Studies and jointly formulated a plan, but there were no guarantees. Within a 24-hour period, everything came together. Literally, a few hours before the timetable for the ELICOS teaching term was sent out, I also received approval from MUHREC, allowing me to undertake my research. Then the Director of Studies informed me that student numbers had not significantly declined, and I would be able to take two of the classes that I had hoped to teach. My anxiety dissolved in an instant. I could not contain my excitement. And the good news did not stop there. I had taught at NLC for some time before I approached the leaders of the ELICOS program to ask if I could conduct some action research as part of my teaching. When I approached them, I took care in assuring the leaders that my action research would not interfere with my teaching and the students' learning. Also, I explained that I hoped it would enrich both teaching and learning. I suppose I was better able to persuade the leaders because they knew me from my previous teaching experience and trusted me.





Meet Kez. Kez is a young educator with a golden heart, golden locks, a beautiful smile that brightens the day, and blue eyes that make one feel completely comfortable in her company. Oh, and she just happens to be an excellent teacher, a researcher, and a trusted colleague. The other good news I heard in the same 24-hour period was that Kez was the lead teacher for the group of students I would be teaching. I knew that she was supportive of my research and teaching. There would be many other wonderful times, punctuated by some very difficult periods, during the five years of my PhD journey. But I still remember this as a time of great celebration.

### *Meeting my Students*

The first day of the new ELICOS term soon arrived. I experienced nervous excitement rushing through my body as I made my way to the classroom. Kez and I agreed that I would attend the class and introduce myself as well as my research to the students. I could only hope that the students would agree to participate so that I could begin my research with them on Friday that week, which was the only day that I had with them.

As I stood just outside the door of the classroom, I smiled inwardly as Kez twirled her hair around her finger. She only ever did this when she was very involved and interested in something. Clearly, this was one of those times! Kez turned her head towards the door and gestured for me to join her at the front of the classroom. “This is Huda! She will be your teacher on Fridays and will be doing some research on writing.” The whole class erupted in applause and I smiled, stepping forward to introduce myself.

“Hi!” I grinned, sending a small wave in their direction.

“Hello, Huda”! The students all shouted in excitement, waving back at me. I felt encouraged to begin the spiel I had prepared.

“As Kez said, I will be teaching you on Fridays and will be undertaking some research on writing”. I explained this briefly. At this stage, I had anticipated some resistance or at least anxiety at the prospect of research. Their response took me by surprise.

“Yayyyy”! They all beamed at me, apparently very eager to participate in some research.

“I’ll see you on Friday for our first class”! I said, waving goodbye to them as I turned to leave. As they continued cheering and clapping when I walked out of the classroom and down the corridor, my imagination was brimming with possibilities. With the image of their beaming faces still prominent in my mind, I rehearsed multiple ideas for activities and lessons that I could implement with the class as part of my multimodal pedagogy. I could not wait to finally begin my research.

### *Cycle One of the Action Research*

As I walked into my classroom, early on that first Friday morning, I greeted my students with a wide smile. The morning session was tense. My first responsibility was to lead students through several hours of traditional revision, in which I revisited all the grammar and vocabulary content they had ‘covered’ on Monday to Thursday of that week. In the afternoon session, it was different. I was both nervous and excited to introduce my research plan to them. As soon as the word ‘research’ left my lips, the students’ eyes brightened, and they seemed to sit up in their seats. Once again, I felt empowered to move ahead with my plan to teach writing using multimodal pedagogy.

The first activity in my plan was for students to simply write, in the way they were accustomed to write (using words, sentences, and paragraphs), about a ‘memorable event’ in their lives. After a brief discussion about what that might involve, they picked up their pens and pencils and started to write. I watched them work, seeing their focussed eyes set on the task at hand. Occasionally, heads would look to the ceiling or out the windows, trying to recall a detail of the particular event they were writing about, or the English word that they needed to describe for a particular detail. Each student completed the task ‘successfully’ in the time I had allocated and there was no confusion about it. This was a writing experience that the students knew about and expected as part of the syllabus for this level of their ELICOS course.

In Week Two, when students were expected to undertake Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in one of the computer labs, I introduced them to the concept of multimodal writing. Rather than talking to students about this in abstract terms, I was keen for them to get started and explore what was possible when using more than just words, sentences, and paragraphs in communicating their ideas. I decided that encouraging students to write in PowerPoint slides would suit them better as it is a software program, which is very common,

and they had usually used it previously for oral presentations. I introduced the topic of 'I love my country' to my students and explained that they would be able to use free writing for this by including sounds, audio, images, and text in whatever combinations they wished. Then, I needed to step back for a while and see what the students could do. I walked around the classroom, observing the students as they experimented with different ways of communicating by using a wider range of semiotic resources and not just words. I could not disguise my delight at the positive ways they were already responding to this activity, which was my first foray into multimodal pedagogy. After about 15 minutes, I invited one of the students to share his work-in-progress on the data show projector, which he did with considerable pride.

This seemed to encourage more students to be more adventurous, just as I had hoped. Watching students edit their work on the screens with various colours, fonts, images, and themes was amazing! I even witnessed some students recording their own voices to add to their presentations. Most of the students seemed determined to incorporate their own twists to make their writing or presentations more distinctive. However, I need to say that there were one or two students who were not so keen to experiment. Perhaps they were less confident in their abilities to deploy different semiotic resources to convey their ideas about the topic, 'I love my country'. I gently tried to scaffold their efforts, but I also did not want to pressure them so early to write in multimodal ways in their learning journeys. Overall, though, the atmosphere of this Friday afternoon class was one of heightened excitement.

The experience was as beautiful as wandering through endless meadows, of watching an idyllic sun rising from the horizon or a galloping stallion. Still, all too soon, it was time to go home and this heightened excitement needed to be put on hold until the next time I was working with



As soon as the Week Three classes commenced, the news was that Kez would be taking maternity leave earlier than had been expected. I was asked to take over some of Kez's classes, which would have been a great opportunity to spend more time with students. However, other teachers were also called as emergency teachers to replace Kez, which was quite stressful for students. So, it was in the next CALL laboratory session with students that I asked them to rewrite the piece about the 'memorable event', which they had originally written using just monomodal forms of language. This time students would be writing using the range of modes that they had used on the first Friday afternoon. I thought this session would be a success based on the amount of engagement students had shown in a previous scaffold session, but it was not. Some students were confused about what to do, and some could not see the point when they were not going to be examined on this kind of writing. I struggled to engage students in the 'fun' of writing multimodally, and it was indeed a struggle with some of them.

I walked away from the classroom feeling slightly deflated. In my office, I sat at my desk with my shoulders slumped. My vision of enjoying vast meadows of possibilities, of an idyllic sun rising up from the horizon and a galloping horse began to fade. There were in fact many obstacles and hurdles that I needed to negotiate, as all teachers find when using multimodal pedagogy. As a teacher and researcher, I needed to draw on my pedagogical skills, and in some respects, modify my plans.



I was dedicated, motivated, and most importantly, determined to find out if and how a multimodal approach could help these students in their learning to write in English. However, a little voice in my head began to gnaw away at my confidence, telling me what a number of colleagues in the ELICOS workplace had already told me – that this type of multimodal writing does not suit the current writing framework, or even if it does, it will only work with students at very low levels in English.

Framework!! This word alone stopped me! I needed to think again.

I could clearly identify the current writing framework. It is what is described in my Literature Review as a monomodal writing framework. But, what was the framework for the multimodal pedagogy I was using and investigating in my action research? I realised that my enthusiasm for incorporating and exploring multimodality in the writing classroom was partly driven by my desire to take a more democratic and inclusive approach to the teaching of writing. I realised once again as I had when conducting my Literature Review that a multimodal pedagogy looks for ways in which students can draw on their existing knowledge and experience of words, images, and sounds. A multimodal pedagogy seeks to help them to value that experience and is about building writers' confidence and enjoyment of the writing process. Also, it sometimes involves experimenting and playing with language, images, and sounds, rather than constantly reminding students of their deficiencies as writers.

My reading and past classroom experiences as a teacher in different parts of the world had identified the gap in literature about multimodal literacy and practices in higher education, and I had the opportunity to address this gap by showing the potential of multimodal pedagogy in ELICOS settings. I reminded myself that at the moment not enough was known about multimodal pedagogy to redefine writing in ELICOS programs in terms of such a framework. No other teacher in the centre had conducted such research and there were no similar experiences. This project was important to me. I was not going to let one disappointing experience dampen my enthusiasm for this multimodal pedagogy project.

As it happened though, the next stages of the action research did not immediately turn around that moment of disappointment. Far from it. According to my research design, I proceeded to conduct interviews with my colleagues who were other teachers of writing in this ELICOS setting. If I had hoped that these interviews would revive my belief in the value of multimodal pedagogy in the teaching of writing, I would again be disappointed. As I sat down and interviewed several colleagues about their current practices as teachers of writing, I realised that I was utterly alone in my advocacy for multimodal pedagogy. I began to question the possibility of success in this ELICOS setting. More than this, I began to doubt the value of multimodal pedagogy and question the beliefs that I had brought to my whole PhD research project.

In these interviews, fellow teachers revealed that they were not familiar with the concept of practices of multimodal writing. Despite not knowing much about it, most teachers stated they wouldn't *allow* their students, let alone ask them, to use pictures or other modes of expression to convey their ideas or understandings in writing tasks.

Many teachers believed that multimodality, in as much as they understood it, could only be acceptable in oral presentations where students were expected to use a range of communication modes.



**E A P**  
**Writing Class**

In particular, as I listened to these views, I wondered why multimodality was only permissible in some assessment tasks but not others. I recalled the lively work my students had produced in the previous week's CALL session and came to a realisation. Perhaps, as these teachers had suggested, my students had not completed a 'writing' task after all. Perhaps they had simply made a verbal presentation, merely *decorated* with images and audio.

Yet, I was soon to discover that my research interviews, prompting colleagues to think about the possibility of multimodal pedagogy in their classroom practice, had actually sparked the curiosity of quite a few educators. Over subsequent days, whilst making coffee, walking between classes or standing around the photocopier, I encountered many teachers who wanted to discuss my research further with me. One teacher, who had been teaching in the academic institution for much longer than me, looked at me and curled his lip while summing up my research project in a single word as 'childish': "So ... students use pictures, symbols, and gestures ...to impart meaning? Isn't this a bit childish...? Is this what you are doing for your PhD"? Other teachers were more genuinely interested in my emerging results. Some teachers had even pursued some of their own reading of research articles about multimodal writing.

Despite many positive encounters with colleagues, this remark about being childish stayed with me, and as my feeling of isolation increased. I began to construct a new hurdle for myself, which was one called 'fear' and it seemed difficult to overcome. I began to fear that challenging the traditional concept of writing alone could result in negative outcomes, thus potentially strengthening the case against not using multimodal pedagogy in higher education and ELICOS institutions.

This fear, which was intense pressure, increased tenfold as I conducted my research with classroom students who were at a much higher academic level than the original group. It was decided, after negotiations with my level coordinator and the student engagement teacher, that I would undertake my action research with a higher-level grade as this might help them to "improve their vocabulary." I had never envisaged multimodal pedagogy being particularly useful in improving students' vocabulary. So, this suggestion prompted me to revisit my initial rationale for my action research. I was reminded again, that my goal was to allow this research to offer a comfortable space for students to be engaged in meaning making and to feel more confident in expressing themselves through a range of writing modes. But now I doubted this

was possible, for one reason alone. I had not imagined, in all my pre-research planning, the amount of confusion that the introduction of a multimodal pedagogy in the teaching of writing would cause my students, for whom the notion of writing in these forms was alien to what they had encountered in their other writing classes.

This was just one more disappointment in the action research journey. Some other more discouraging moments related to responses from students.

Another student did not complete the multimodal task, because he did not wish to discuss his views about writing in another interview. Many students did not care about the research, and perhaps this was the most deflating aspect of all.

One of my students withdrew from the research almost soon as it had started, she did not even give me a chance to explain the task, using a very strong hand gesture.



When my first cohort of students had beamed with delight at the prospect of participating in research, it was so discouraging to see that some other students did not care for it, or its results. Within my idealised democratic and inclusive approach, I had assumed that students would be positive about their role in potentially affecting change for those in the future. There was a further challenge though, one that stood above the rest, which was the struggle to change student assumptions about what writing entailed. These students were so certain that writing must only involve monomodal writing. In the midst of my lowest period of questioning the value of my research, I had an idea! Perhaps I could use their scepticism to my advantage in my pedagogy. I decided to define multimodal writing by using the questions my students had about writing.





As I delved into the students' minds and saw their perceptions of writing through the artefacts they created, I realised their definitions of writing were synonymous with their presentations. I watched as my students one by one began presenting their so-called multimodal writing using PowerPoint slides. I recall witnessing one student whose submitted artefact contained only photographs as illustrations and a set of bullet points. Another student had not written anything and had just submitted images. When I questioned this student about this, he answered with a shrug of his shoulders, saying, "I had nothing to add to [to the writing I had submitted in] week one". It shocked me seeing many students misunderstand the multimodal task, or simply not completing it. I had expected that giving my students the opportunity to use different semiotic modes of expression would open pathways for them to communicate their ideas. Instead, some students felt constrained by the addition of multimodal practices. Around this time (Week Four), I also came to an awareness that I was guilty of making a traditional separation between PowerPoint presentations and writing, a view that I had critiqued in the interviews I conducted with other teachers earlier (that is, writing as a separate entity from oral presentations).

Before I knew it, Weeks Three and Four had passed, and gradually in Week Five I began to witness more diversity and multimodal richness in the 'writing' completed by my students. Even one week earlier, I had been struggling with what I felt to be a lack of effort from my students. I had been disheartened as I took their behaviour as dissatisfaction with, or even rejection of, a multimodal writing pedagogy.

Despite feeling down about the entire process, I went ahead with my planned interviews with the students and was so glad that I did. It was through these interviews, as I sat and spoke with the students, listening to their views and discussing the tasks at hand, that my disappointment turned to elation. When I asked students to describe their experience of writing

in multimodal ways, I thought I would have to listen to the students use words like 'unmotivated', 'indifferent', or 'boring' as these were the types of feelings that I assumed the students had towards this research. Instead, I began to hear them use words like 'relaxed', 'free', and 'easy'. I listened with rapt attention as students articulated their insights into multimodal writing. Students explained how they enjoyed using images in their writing and would prefer to do this in all cases because they felt as though using these allowed them to convey what was in their minds more fluently than using words alone. One student said; 'This type of writing allows me to write, but not to think!'

As I reflect now on those first few weeks, I can pinpoint many factors, which played a part in the positives and negatives in the first cycle of my action research. The most important factor was the time constraint for these classes. Being allowed only one session, one day per week meant that I had just two hours to help students in making a huge paradigm shift in their thinking about writing. A second factor was the scheduling of that once-a-week session on a Friday afternoon. Educators know that students in Friday afternoon classes are generally tired from their intensive classes all week. In fact, many students were absent for Friday afternoon sessions when I explained the notion of multimodality. A third factor was that up to the end of Week Four, when final examinations commenced, students were often preoccupied with preparing for examinations in order to pass. A fifth factor was that in ELICOS school's homework and non-standard tasks are not counted in their final assessments. Students are aware of this so naturally, do not put in as much effort into the homework tasks as they do into those that affect their grades. The multimodal task was one of these non-standard tasks and so effort was often minimal. As a self-aware person, I also admit that over the four weeks, due to time constraints, and my other duties that involved delivering syllabus materials and assisting students with what they needed to pass their assessments, I could not fully engage myself with them or devote myself to exploring multimodality in its entirety as my main focus was on completing the task at hand.

#### *Cycle Two of the Action Research*

As I concluded the post-writing interviews with the students, I realised just how positive they were about the research. It was during these interviews that most of the questions I had hoped to explore and receive answers for this study were answered. Pleased with the results, I discovered a new interest in continuing along this multimodal writing path. However, in the second cycle of the action research, my teaching benefitted from all that I had learned in the

first cycle with a new group of students. If I had been asked how to describe Cycle Two, my response would have been that I was more successful in motivating the students successfully. I was better able to create a collaborative socially bonding class environment, which is important for all my teaching, and felt I was better able to meet the students' academic needs.

Cycle Two, like Cycle One, lasted for five weeks. There was one significant difference and that was that Cycle Two was conducted with one 3A EFS class. I thought that it may be more useful, for research purposes to involve students from 2B general once again. Yet in the end, selecting the 3A academic class turned out to be advantageous in many ways.

After much contemplation in my office, I decided that I would continue to use the topic, 'My Country', for the task that students would complete first in monomodal writing, and then produce later in multimodal form. The sessions that I ran with students in Cycle One encouraged me to be creative in the way I had introduced and scaffolded the topic in Cycle Two. I had seen many students speak about their home countries with language like 'I love ...', so I decided that this encouraged deep engagement by students in their writing. However, I introduced a number of improvements in my pedagogy. One significant improvement was inviting one of the students, who had completed the multimodal writing in Cycle One, to explain the task and describe his attitude to it. As the rest of the class sat back and listened to this student, I projected her Cycle One presentation onto the wall. This student was able to explain to this new class what she had done as well as her reasoning behind her choice of pictures and sounds. I observed the rapt attention of the class as they listened to her, and then I followed this up by showing and explaining presentations in more detail from Cycle One students. This time, in this new class, I could see no trace of confusion on their faces.

Another improvement was that during the CALL session during the same week, I placed students in groups in accordance with their nationalities (while some students decided to work individually after realising there were not any other students from the same country in the class). Also, I gave students the option of using Microsoft Word if they preferred but most of them decided to stick with PowerPoint. When giving my instructions to the class about the task, I told students that each one within a national group would take on a specific aspect of their country to write about. Walking around the classroom, I overheard a particular group discussing and planning the outline of their piece before delegating tasks. I was also pleased when I heard that they had decided to use Prezi, which is a program similar to PowerPoint. This program has

a zoom animation option, which shows the location of their country on a map. The students used this animation as yet another mode of expression. I was overjoyed to hear students think this through as it had not been mentioned earlier by me or the student who conducted the last class. This was proof that these students were becoming more deeply engaged with the concept of multimodal writing.

This was a vast contrast to the students in Cycle One who had seemed constrained and unwilling to take these risks.

During Weeks Two and Three, students began their multimodal writing in earnest. Each student worked hard to complete their delegated tasks whilst continuing their peer-to-peer discussions on how they could improve their final written pieces. All students were engaged in the process of multimodal writing, which was something I had not seen in Cycle One. As Cycle One, students had not quite grasped the concept of multimodal writing. These students believed that by adding a few pictures to their writing, which was otherwise traditional and monomodal, was fulfilling the multimodal brief. I was glad to see that Cycle Two students did not seem constrained with traditional writing practices and that they were trying to add their individuality to their writing.



Weeks Four and Five consisted of students combining their work into a complete piece of collaborative work. Students around the classroom could be heard discussing their thoughts about the possible structure of their presentations, and they willingly experimented with other modes of expression, in the hope that these might be added to enhance their final submissions. I recall approaching one of the groups at their table in Week Five and asking about their progress. Their faces lit up as they proceeded to thoroughly explain each of their slides to me, excitedly detailing the different dimensions of their work, and showing how they believed this fulfilled the multimodal aspect of the task. It was also during this week that students asked if they could present their multimodal writing during their normal class session instead of during their CALL session, because they thought they could convey much more information at this time. As the students presented their writing in collaborative groups as a manifestation of multimodal writing, I sat back and marvelled. At the end of each presentation, students in the audience asked multiple questions about each other's countries. All students appeared to be deeply engaged. I listened as students commented on photos and videos, clarifying their awareness of points. The whole class smiled and laughed as one student asked his fellow classmates to demonstrate a traditional folk dance from his country. Throughout my teaching career, I do not remember witnessing such harmony and an intense feeling of community within a classroom.

The enhanced motivation felt by the students stemmed from a few key factors: (1) I was allocated two days per week to teach this class; (2) spending more time with students meant that I was better able to get to know their backgrounds and needs; (3) I made some significant changes to my classroom pedagogy (having learned from Cycle One); and (4) the presence and input of students from my Cycle One group made it easier to persuade the Cycle Two students of the value of writing in multimodal forms.

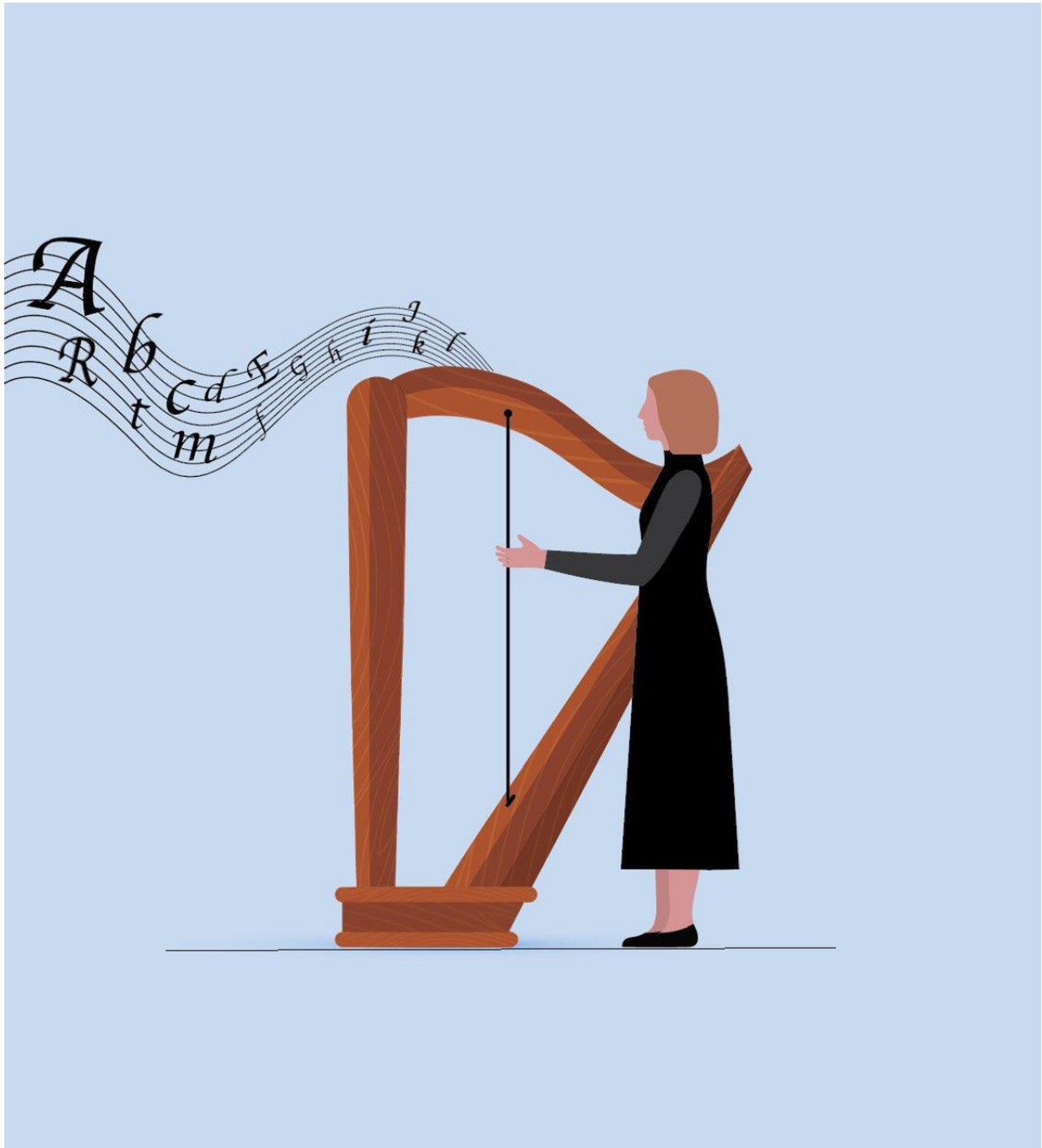
As mentioned earlier, in Cycle One, I undertook the research with 3 EFS, which was a higher-class level than I had taught in Cycle Two, in an attempt to improve students' vocabulary being their main difficulty at this level. Vocabulary was not mentioned by students in Cycle One (either in the interviews or writing sessions) as a significant challenge in classes. However, in Cycle Two, there were times during presentations when I witnessed students jotting down notes. This sparked my curiosity and as I moved around the class to check what they had been noting. I was pleasantly surprised to see that students were writing and making notes about new vocabulary that they were picking up on during the presentations. Several students asked the meanings of these newly learnt words and actively sought to add them to their vocabulary knowledge. When I asked in class if students had found any benefits in the use of pictures throughout their presentations, many replied in the affirmative, stating that the pictures had helped them remember the vocabulary they had recently learnt. They also mentioned that they had acquired new vocabulary whilst working with each other in groups.

Cycle Two of the action research showed me that the views of several teachers', regarding multimodal writing only being of benefit to less competent speakers of English, was seriously challenged. This was evident in statements made by the students themselves during interviews. One particular response stood out from the rest: "Not only were we motivated to write, but multimodal writing helped us write something special". In fact, I was quite surprised to hear the word 'childish' used for the second time during my research but this time it was to debunk the notion that multimodal writing was a childish idea. Without any prompting from me, a student stated that his writing in English only seemed childish when he was restricted to writing in monomodal forms. In monomodal writing, he found he could only communicate the simplest ideas and could not really incorporate complex ones. Yet, another student told me that as an avid reader he felt he had knowledge of the world and an inspiring amount of life experiences. However, he struggled to convey this knowledge and thoughts in monomodal writing. All of these experiences sharply contradicted what some teachers had stated during my earliest interviews in that ELICOS students writing in English is always superficial. According to these teachers, this is because the ELICOS students are yet to learn more about the world and lack critical thinking skills.

## Conclusions

This multimodal reflective story provides authentic insight into the motivations, processes and challenges involved in my action research. It is a mode which has allowed me to share a nuanced narrative of the path that I explored. The range of life experiences I have encountered, and notably my own perspective of learning language and teaching writing using a multimodal approach, has ignited my passion to pursue research in this area. Enabling action research was the only method to employ to acquire the genuine, rich, and meaningful data I was seeking to obtain. Conducting this research and generating the data I had decided was necessary was at times a turbulent experience, yet the personal interaction and engagement into meaning making with students spurred me on during my involvement in the students' journeys. I could see real value in my research and also through shared learning experiences for the participants and myself.

## Part Four: Findings and Discussion





*She stands still,  
Shoulders poised and back straight,  
She gently leans against the wooden frame of the beautiful instrument –  
Ready to play, communicate, and learn.*

*She raises her arms along each side of the instrument, and pauses to reflect.  
There is only one string.  
The instrument and this string have a rich history,  
Shaped by decades of practices, players, and values. But  
still there is - Only one string.  
Only one way of conveying who she is, and what she wants to express.  
She feels she has no alternative than to play the instrument as it is.  
As do her peers on the same journey as her,  
They too are asked to play on one string.  
Their uniqueness as players is constrained by  
this one string in this limited mode of  
expression.*

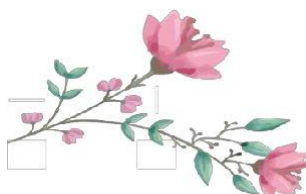
*Her communication is influenced by, and aligned with her teacher's  
instructions, And the expectation of the institution within which she  
is about to play.*

*She prepares her fingers (and her mind) exactly as instructed by her teacher – and her  
institution.*

*Plucking the string with her fingers, she elicits a single pitch of sound.*

*And yet she is frustrated. This lone sound does not compliment her  
individual strengths, It does not speak of her insights into her journey thus  
far.*

*It is a beautiful instrument, but there is so much more she wants to say.*



# Chapter 6

## Academic Literacy and Pedagogy in EAP Writing

This chapter provides a narrative-based account of the process of teaching writing in EAP courses as enacted by teachers at NLC within this practitioner inquiry study. The action research design of the study has enabled me to generate data for this account, and also to explore the potential of implementing multimodal writing in the current NLC writing pedagogy (Jewitt, 2008, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996). The data presented in this chapter were generated at different stages of the action research cycle and address the first research question: (1) what are the potential challenges for L2 learners in ELICOS writing classes? In presenting this account of teaching writing at NLC, my aim has been to critically investigate the dominant 'assumed' knowledge about this process at NLC. The findings I present here are broadly reflective of traditional monomodal understandings of literacy (Hyland, 2016). Further, these findings demonstrate that teaching writing at NLC is driven by dominant pedagogical beliefs and practices, which are seen to impose pressures on ESL learners beyond the linguistic difficulties that they typically face in learning to write.

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of several facets of NLC teachers who teach writing and draw on data generated from multiple sources: (i) the teachers' responses to interview questions and questionnaire items, which concerned their writing beliefs and pedagogical decisions regarding teaching of writing in EAP courses; (ii) NLC students' responses to interview questions about their understanding of writing; (iii) excerpts from students' monomodal writing texts; and (iv) students' responses to interview questions about their experiences concerning teaching of writing in the EAP course. The analysis extends to include the intersection of students' and teachers' views of the challenges, which they encounter in writing when enrolled in NLC courses. Through thematic analysis, I identify certain emergent themes by "categorising, or through comparing and contrasting units and categories of field texts, to produce conceptual understandings of experiences and/or phenomena that are ultimately constructed into larger themes" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 47). Three key themes emerged:

1. Teachers' understandings of writing and their related pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices.
2. Students' views of themselves as writers in English and the challenges they face in writing
3. Meaning making in monomodal notions of literacy: a challenge and a need.

In order to develop a better appreciation of the ways NLC teachers understand writing, and to develop a deeper understanding of their pedagogical approaches to this topic, I begin by investigating their personal perspectives and then move on to investigate the nature of literacy practices and writing pedagogy throughout NLC. All of the participating teachers have a bachelor degree in different majors, not necessarily in education. As ELICOS teachers, they are all required to hold a post graduate certificate in TESOL, which is inclusive of at least 6 months study (e.g. CELTA). The majority of the participating teachers at NLC (15 teachers) have a 6 month post graduate certificate in TESOL, five teachers have Masters in TESOL qualification, and three teachers have a PhD. The teaching experiences in ELICOS range from three years' to more than 25 years'. All names used are pseudonyms.

## Teachers' Understandings of Writing and Their Related Pedagogical Beliefs and Classroom Practices

In their responses to questionnaire and interview questions about the concept of writing, teachers expressed different beliefs. It seemed that Peter, who taught at the general level, was taken by surprise: "I haven't ever thought [about] this" However, this was the exception. All other teachers had views about writing. The dominant view was that writing is *written text*. That is, writing is the artefact that is produced, rather than the process of producing that artefact. For example, when interviewed, Andy, a relative newcomer to teaching in ELICOS programs, perceived writing as "recorded language on paper, usually with a pen or a word processing [program] to produce a written script that usually reflects what a student is trying to say". Similarly, Donna, with more than ten years' experience, understood writing as "putting a pen on a piece of paper or typing on the keyboard to form *words*". Ramsi defined writing as "organis[ing] ideas into a written form, whether it be paper or into a Word document sort of thing". These understandings of the concept of writing were shared by many other teachers who saw learning to write for students as acquiring an understanding that the major function in this process is to produce a text (Nunan, 1991).

The emphasis from these responses is on textual approaches, focusing on the rhetorical purpose of a particular text, and the relationship between the author and audience (Coffin, 2003). These approaches typically include seeing writing as associated with technical skills of handwriting, punctuation, and spelling (Berninger et al., 2002). Writing is also seen as the writer attempting to create and process ideas ready for presentation in a mode of choice (Flower, 1994; Flower & Hayes, 2011). This mode has traditionally involved pen and paper but of course

now extends to digital presentations, as the teachers also expressed. Although there were some exceptions, most NLC teachers mainly focused on the linguistic aspects of language or the 'mechanics' of writing. In contrast to the above text-based perspective, writing can also be understood as a means of communication and expression.

This view of writing was conveyed by very few of the teachers. However, Clara, who described herself as a teacher and a writer, pointed out that writing is "an expression, ... a communication method, and that's what I like to tell the students, that they need to write because it is one of the most important methods of communication". For low proficiency learners, Clara believes that "the most important thing is to get the message across". Similarly, Karol, who has been an ELICOS teacher for 30 years, believes that writing is "an expression of your feelings, your thoughts, your opinions, your views about any issue, or it can be an experience". Writing in this sense understands language as a system of communication, and therefore teachers of writing need to be more focused on the communicative purpose of language. One definition given by CLara, who mostly teaches low-level proficiency students studying at the general level, shed some interesting light on what is meant by communication. CLara understands writing as "a way of communicating using language". When I asked what CLara meant by "language", she explained that this as "using grammatical structures and vocabulary". This was also confirmed by Sunny, who has a Master of TESOL. Sunny placed greater emphasis on the accuracy of the text produced, suggesting that writing is "expressing your thoughts and ideas in sentences, grammatically correct sentences, using the right task style and vocabulary as well". Although the above understandings of writing differ in the *purpose* of writing, they all stem from a conceptual understanding of language which is predominantly characterised by a system of linguistic structures in which the 'word' form of expression is the assumed medium of communication (Flowerdew & Peacock 2001). Teachers, who conveyed these understandings of writing to their teaching of this topic, concentrated on providing assistance that they hoped would help students from non-English-speaking backgrounds to communicate (Wette, 2014). Typically, this meant concentrating on correcting students' attempts to communicate in English. Despite teachers' acknowledged concerns about facilitating communication, they tended to be driven by deficit views of the students' English language 'problems'. Typically, this concern was focused on monomodal understandings of language as words and sentences (Hyland, 2016, p. 39).

Literature, relating to writing, demonstrates that it is possible to define language from a communicative perspective, such that this process is seen as more than just producing accurate

and complete sentences and phrases. James, who is undertaking a PhD in creative performance, referred to writing as *communication* in a way that values its innovative and creative potential. James understands writing as “a creative act of expression in a form, which can be ... in a form that is able to be passed on and also can be preserved, and like speaking, we are always moving into the unknown, and that is like a creative act”. This suggests that teaching writing needs to be more than relying on one form (the linguistic form) of language. This is consistent with James’s view in also referring to writing as a creative practice.

While there is strong evidence in the literature that teachers’ beliefs in any teaching context are directly connected to their practices (e.g., Gaitas & Alves Martins, 2015), this was not always the case with the NLC teachers. Despite teachers’ varied understandings of writing as a concept, they tended to have similar beliefs about pedagogy and writing practices.

When I asked teachers during interviews about their particular approaches used for teaching writing in ELICOS classrooms, all of the 23 teachers focused on the text-based components of their teaching practices. That is, the NLC teachers who spoke about writing as the production of (correct) text products also referred to pedagogy as concentrating on ensuring that students produced correct writing products. The teachers’ conceptual beliefs were aligned with their pedagogical opinions. During interviews, the NLC teachers who began speaking about writing in abstract terms as a form of communication, proceeded to describe their writing pedagogy as ensuring that students produced correct communicative writing products. Teachers’ conceptual beliefs about writing were often in conflict with their stated views about their teaching practices. For example, some spoke about using multiple modes to communicate particular ideas and to express feelings and experiences, but from the teachers’ explanation of their practices in the interviews, it was not clear how this happened. One explanation of this is that teaching writing in ELICOS settings does not easily accommodate individual teachers’ communicative-based conceptions. For instance, most assessment tasks in ELICOS courses concentrate on a student’s ability to be fluent and accurate in their writing artefacts (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013). At NLC, details of syntactic structures, academic vocabulary, and text construction, were all largely previously defined and determined for the teacher at the course level being taught. Before moving on, I should make it clear that the data generated from the teachers’ interviews was consistent with their questionnaire responses in relation to the importance of focusing on accurate spelling and grammar in writing classes. 15 of the 26

teachers who responded believed that accurate grammar and spelling is important, while seven were undecided and only four disagreed (see Appendix B).

In the years leading up to 2000, the research literature about writing pedagogy and curriculum in post-school settings tended to move away from concentrating on the dominant linguistic theories of writing toward more inclusive and expansive communicative theories of writing. This has been consistent with the emergence of a generation of post-school institution teachers who have at the very least *talked* of writing as communication. However, discussions about writing as communication have tended to be more at a theoretical level, while there has been little that connects them at a practical level (Russell, 2002). Thus, the interest in writing as a form of communication did not “shake the disciplinary structure or permanently alter the usual arrangement for writing instruction” (Russell, 2002, p. 256). The teachers’ responses to my questions in their interviews suggested they also spoke either theoretically or practically about writing, but few of them at NLC ( e.g. James who defined writing in terms of creativity and moving ‘from the known to the unknown’ about writing in ways that combined theoretical and practical discourses.

When I interviewed teachers about their practices, they maintained that their strongest beliefs were for the importance of producing accuracy of the word and phrase and sentence levels. Jenny, who referred to herself as a researcher and a teacher at NLC, and has been teaching for more than 10 years, emphasised the significance of grammatical accuracy:

*I guess at lower levels, probably my focus is more on grammatical accuracy and quite small and simple units of meaning. So for example, if I was teaching a level 1 class I'd be focusing on you know, maybe they're only going to write two sentences or three sentences, they're probably not going to write a lot, but I'd be modelling you know the types of sentences I expect to see from them, and getting them to focus on the who or the what. So, for me teaching writing ... a lot of my teaching has started to focus on sentence structure, like even at lower levels, getting them to think about who they are talking about or what are they talking about, and what kind of action is happening. So, I guess how I teach that is different at each level, but getting them to think about that there is a structure to what they're writing*

Sunny also stressed the importance of grammar and sentence structure. As Sunny explained, she expected students who were studying in an advanced level course to demonstrate the ability to use “a grammatically correct sentence using relative clauses or whatever complex (needs another word here to for the sentence to read clearly) and tenses and a variety of academic

vocabulary of course". For low-proficiency students, Sunny said, "Again vocabulary and grammar are really important". Marlow, emphasised that for low proficiency students, writing needs to be "grammatically correct at that level yeah, I expect". Andy also stressed the importance of pre-writing grammar exercises at Level 3 EFS:

*... so talking in level 3 – there are exercises aimed at you know getting, you know, your relative pronouns to be correct or, you know, understanding the difference between a, you know, a main clause and a subordinative clause, and so those sort of grammar exercises are often best done secondarily to having done some writing. So, for example at an early stage, we pitch the students into writing a descriptive paragraph, and this is going to be absolutely crammed full of grammatical errors. That's the logical end result of asking a student at that level to do that kind of a task. So, what you can do in a group is actually work on with some of those errors or use, as we use, a set of errors made by students in another group and ask this group, 'Well what's wrong with the sentence?' And give them some tactics in basically scaffolding their search for grammar errors in their own language which really starts with: Is it a main clause? Is it a subordinate clause? Is it... Where's the subject? Where's a verb? Do they match? What's a noun phrase? How do you identify it? And when you've got those basics sorted out then you can sort of use them as a sort of foundation to find the other errors in the sentence.*

Andy, in his approaches here, similar to those described by Pincas (1982), understands writing as almost exclusively about linguistic knowledge. Although Andy suggests some potentially interesting "scaffolding" activities with students taking some ownership over their "search for grammar errors", the attention is consistently on the mechanics of writing a correct sentence, such as syntax, connectives, and vocabulary. This is further evidenced in the following extract from my interview with Sunny:

**Sunny:** *... the basic structure, ideas, content, how well they can develop it, grammar accuracy, fluency, cohesion ...*

**Me:** *That's for the lower levels or across all levels?*

**Sunny:** *All levels, as I said*

The above focus was frequently evident throughout all the interviews, as evidenced by Peter: "I do all the work helping those low-level students with spelling ... and then we sort of try and move on to sentence structure and things like that, I suppose". This focus was also evident in an explanation by James, who espoused his belief in writing for creativity and the expression

of the self, but yet stated, “My focus in writing classes is based on helping students develop the correct language in their writing expression.” The difference in James’s interview was that he was conscious of the fact that what he usually does in his ELICOS writing class is not his preferred way: “I tend to follow pretty much the (NLC course) program in the book. I feel a little bit constrained here in ... by doing that, I feel I am approaching writing in a way that I personally don’t particularly like”. When I asked James to explain this further, he responded that “there is a kind of ... there’s almost an unwritten expectation that it [writing] be in the direction of more formality, and that it is ... that this type of writing is required to meet certain expectations of the organisation”. According to James, teachers have no choice but to follow the prescribed syllabus and use only the materials available to them. Hyland (2003) expresses what James and apparently other EAP teachers experience as a difficult dilemma:

*The EAP teacher is not only precariously positioned in relation to the institution but is also positioned to enact the work of the institution and to act as gatekeeper for the EAP students. Thus, it’s possible to see that even the EAP teacher is uncomfortable with the practice of the institution, s\he is still not in a clear position to be an agent for the empowerment. (p. 94)*

Whereas the dominant approach to teaching writing in traditional EAP contexts appears to be driven by a desire to improve students’ academic skills, institutions typically prescribe the approaches to achieving that improvement. This approach is usually underpinned by a ‘common sense’ (rather than a carefully theorised) way of thinking about writing in official syllabus documents. It is what Lillis (2003) characterises as “one particular, albeit a powerful, way of conceptualising language, literacy and student writing in higher education” (Lillis, 2003, p. 195). The common-sense view of writing as composed of only linguistic resources is central to most teachers’ stated understandings of writing at NLC. In this regard, it is possible to see the power of the institution in shaping ways that teachers understand writing and text production. Learning academic writing is framed as a highly demanding process requiring a wide range of skills (Nik et al., 2010), but in the end these wide range of skills tend to refer to a limited number of considerations, such as accuracy in choosing vocabulary, spelling, grammatical structures, and avoiding ambiguity of meaning. ELICOS students at NLC quickly learn what is valued and important in traditional EAP courses across the world: strong knowledge and skills in grammatical rules (Yah, Awg, Hamzah, & Hasbollah, 2010). Still, the more contemporary literature consistently states that such an approach reinforces, particularly for those students with low proficiency level in English, their deficits as writers. This exacerbates students’ lack of



confidence when it comes to expressing themselves and their ideas in written English (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012).

In more contemporary contexts for teaching EAP, teachers encourage learner-writers to draw on diverse sources of information and means of communication, which suggests that learning and production should occur in socially interactive communities of learners (Luke, 2003, p. 38). This social constructivist view of information underpins a particular view of knowledge and learning (that is, the epistemology of this study), which argues that learning authentic communication outside of classrooms should occur in situated sociocultural contexts. Traditional EAP courses in ELICOS-like courses across the world purport to provide learners with the 'capacity' and 'competence' to meet students' future academic language needs (at the university they hope to enter), yet this emphasis on the linguistic form and the accuracy of written text has implications for how students' view themselves as writers in English and also how they view the challenges encountered in writing. Kress (2000) argues that focusing on verbal modes alone "has meant a neglect, an overlooking, even a suppression of the potentials of all the representational and communicational modes ... and a neglect equally, as a consequence, of the development of theoretical understandings of such modes" (p.157). The good news is that there is growing multidisciplinary consensus that in order to more fully account for socially based literacy practices, it is necessary to move beyond narrowly linguistic understandings of writing (Haggerty, 2011).

It is suggested in literature that many EAP courses across the world are premised on a deficit view of international university students, which assumes not just that they cannot spell, choose appropriate vocabulary, or write correctly but they are also not able to form or present an argument. Hyland (2016) suggests this can have deleterious effects on the perceptions of the role of EAP practitioners who are positioned as the people needed to fix or 'sort out' the problems of the students. James, when interviewed, was quite insightful when observing that his expectations of students are "the expectations of the organisation". These institutional expectations that James referred to are described by (Turvey, 2007) as "helping students develop the correct language in their writing", which means generating "clear expression in a very appropriate and effective linguistic form" (p.149). Such consideration has significant implications for the theories of teaching writing for EAP courses as it so often appears that what is being recommended is an "authoritarian role of teaching, and the sole focus on linguistic knowledge" (Bruce, 2011, p. 126).

In addition to teachers describing being focused on the accuracy of the written text, John and Marlow expressed their beliefs about paying attention to structure of the text their student writers were trying to produce. John mentioned his focus in his writing classes:

*Some of the key words that students need to identify to understand what composition they're meant to be writing, what is the focus of the writing or the task. Sometimes it's the task words if it's 'compare and contrast'... is it 'Discuss'? Try to focus on understanding the structure that's required in the piece of writing the students are about to perform as well as once ... Then we move onto the actual ... you know the structure of the paragraphs and the organisation of ideas, and where do we get those ideas from, whether it be research or things like that.*

It is interesting to observe in the above quote that it is only after John focused on more technical aspects of the analytical essay, for example, structure and vocabulary – that he only “move[s] onto ... the organisation of ideas, and where we get those ideas from”.

For most teachers, when asked to provide some details of their writing pedagogy, they immediately discussed forms of essay writing. For example, Marlow chose to focus on essay and sentence structure organisation regarding the development and structuring of ideas especially with Levels 5 and 6 (that is, advanced) students. Marlow mentioned that he “talk(s) about the structure of a paragraph, structure of an essay, so I talk about the topic sentence. What is a topic sentence? Supporting ideas. What are supporting ideas and concluding sentence”? This same topic of paragraph structure in analytical writing is what Sunny chooses to focus on: “If there’s a topic given, then of course the content, how well they can develop their paragraphs, how can they explain and prove their topic sentence is correct”. David mentions that “I don’t expect students to write with fantastic grammar, but they have to be reasonable. I expect them to be able to learn the different structures of different essays”. There appears to be an assumption that this focus on structure of paragraphs will help to build the learners’ competence with grammar and sentence structure, although it was never made clear how this happens. At the sentence and paragraph levels, the emphasis is on accurate imitation of a pre-existing, pre-determined sense of what a sentence or paragraph should look like (Khansir, 2012). Another characteristic of this approach is that it is seen as a very rigid approach because it is highly controlled and guided by the teacher or more often the institution through its syllabus. This is consistent with Flowerdew and Peacock’s (2001) characterisation of traditional notions of writing ‘rules’, which assume:

*There is a common core of grammatical and lexical items that dominate any linguistic register. Thus, whatever type of text one analyses, [a] common set of linguistic structure and vocabulary items will run through it. When applied to language teaching, it follows, according to this position, [that] learners may master the basic set of linguistic items, which make up the common core. (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 16)*

NLC teachers' responses to interviews and survey questions alike reveal that they believe teaching writing involves learning the rules of academic grammar with great attention also paid to the structure of sentences and paragraphs. This is depicted in Andy's use of the word "*just*" when he mentioned that in writing classes "we're basically trying to *just* reinforce correct grammar use, you know sentence structure, focusing on that, and as you progress you sort of go beyond the sentence and start thinking about how a paragraph is put together". Kalantzis and Cope (2014) describe this approach to literacy teaching as characteristic of a genre school of pedagogy, which involves being explicit about the way language works to make meaning. It positions the students as apprentices to the teacher, who (on behalf of the institution) in turn adopt the role of experts on language system and function. This requires a traditional EAP teacher to emphasize content and structure, and this is characteristic of much traditional EAP language learning in a formal educational setting.

The pedagogical beliefs and practices of almost all of the teachers I interviewed were consistent with pedagogical decisions of traditional EAP pedagogy, the main characteristic of EAP courses being seen as "need-driven" (Bruce, 2011, p. 7). The positive interpretation of a need-driven course is that the teacher has a responsibility to understand the students' language needs, and how to develop their skills so that they can cope with the large volume of writing required in the majority of university study and assessment (Bruce, 2011).

Most teachers I spoke to believed that one of their first goals is not so much to learn who the students are, what they are interested in, what they are capable of, and what experiences they have had in writing in the past. Teachers considered that an important goal is to enable students to distinguish between different academic writing styles such as formal and informal. That is, the teacher (and the institution) *determine* the individual needs of students, irrespective of who they are, where their interests lie, and the extent of their capabilities. Such an approach to difference in the student cohort is to attempt to work around students in spite of their differences. In such a traditional approach to writing pedagogy, there seems to be an assumption that students do not have the required knowledge of grammar, syntax, and spelling and that it is the responsibility of teachers to make sure that they start their teaching with these

basic language structures. This explains the importance stressed by the NLC teachers in focusing first on accuracy at the sentence level before moving on to paragraphs (Zafiri & Panourgia (2012). Such an approach has been reinforced and encouraged by writers like Silva and Matsuda (2012), who argue that it exposes ESL students to the functions and forms of writing requirements and assignments that they are almost certain to encounter in their future courses. Yet, such focus on linguistic competencies in writing pedagogy at NLC (and in responding to students' needs), imposes extra pressures on students as demonstrated in their interviews

## Current Challenges Faced by NLC Students in Learning to Write in English

In this section, I will analyse students' interviews and excerpts of their writing about the challenges they face in the current dominant approach to teaching writing at NLC, as well as teachers' interview and questionnaire responses. In analysing these responses, I have been mindful of the literature reviewed, which argues that ESL learners commonly consider writing as one of the most difficult skills to acquire (Hasbollah, 2010). I have also been conscious of my wish to critically inquire into the current dominant approach to writing pedagogy at NLC and to explore whether or how the students' needs were indeed being met. To do this, I needed to begin by developing an understanding of: (i) whether and how NLC students see themselves as writers in English; and then (ii) what challenges students faced in the writing they did in and for English classes at NLC. The samples of work included in the following pages are taken from the writing that students produced for what I have previously described as monomodal pieces, where students describe and reflect on life memories. The writing was completed in the second cycle of the action research. Students wrote using pencil or pen on paper and were aware that their writing would be assessed using traditional criteria that included control of spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar.

### (i) *"I'm Not a Good Writer"*

The above phrase, "I'm not a good writer", and similar phrases such as "of course I'm not a good writer", "my writing is no good", "my writing is so low", and "very bad" were common responses by NLC students when I asked them in interviews to describe themselves as writers in English. The majority of the students in the three different classes I observed at NLC, 40 students in total in the general English and academic levels, described themselves as "bad" writers. Only four students mentioned that their writing was "good". Common reasons that students gave for feeling less confident or capable in their writing were the accuracy of their grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. It is noteworthy that these were the same areas that the NLC

teachers emphasised as key focal points of their current teaching practices. Chie, a Vietnamese student studying in Level 2B general, said that her writing is “not bad because my grammar is not bad”. On the other hand, Leo, a Chinese student studying in Level 3 EFS, stated, “my writing is not good because I have not enough vocabulary and sometimes, I always make grammar mistake, yeah, because I’m not careful when I’m writing, yeah. I think writing this part I’m not good I think so”. Similarly, Yamin, an Omani student studying in Level 3 EFS, mentioned that he did not consider himself a good writer in English, although “in free time I write a lot of ... but in Arabic, not in English. English wrote for writing and English grammar and English vocabulary mostly different than Arabic ... I get some problem when I write ... when I want to write”. (Bitchener, Storch, & Wette, 2017) argue that because EAP writing teachers’ aims are to prepare classes for what they believe are their students’ academic writing needs, their focus needs to be on linguistic competence, which is constituent with the views of almost all NLC teachers. It should not be surprising that NLC students often saw their writing problems as “primarily linguistic”. The students had seemingly absorbed the concepts and values about writing espoused by their teachers with regard to the centrality of the *linguistic* dimensions of learning to write in English.

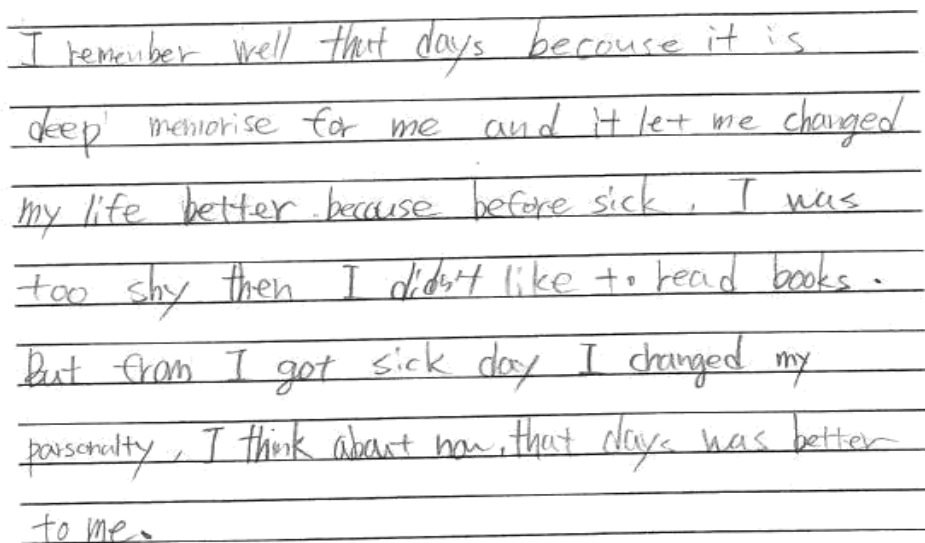
## (ii) *Challenges ELICOS students face in their writing*

### (a) Writing Difficulty and Anxiety

In pre-writing interviews, the NLC students readily acknowledged that they had a low level of oral and written English, and they often expressed anxiety about their writing due to what they saw as their limited knowledge of English spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. The students, in fact, were quite articulate in reiterating their views about academic writing expressed by their teachers: that learning to write requires mainly linguistic knowledge, where the attention is very much on the mechanics of writing such as syntax, vocabulary, and grammar. During their interviews, many of the participants expressed frustration and difficulty in trying to write something meaningful because they were convinced this required a wide range of linguistic skills. As one student said in his interview: “Writing is so hard, difficult because if I am writing subject I don’t know, some vocabulary and grammar is so difficult. I don’t know which grammar is correct, not correct, just write”. Another student expressed his anxiety in terms of his inability to successfully “focus on grammar ... If I don’t focus on grammar something is not perfect ... The writing is not perfect”. Mohannad, an Omani student studying in Level 3 EFS, said, “I have many

difficulties such as grammar and spelling of course, that is my difficult of writing". According to Nik et al. (2010), writing is a highly demanding process. It requires a wide range of skills, such as accuracy in choosing the right words, and ability to understand grammatical structures as well as being able to organise all this in the development of ideas so that there is no ambiguity of meaning. This specifically supports Milian and Camps' (2005) findings that writing is the main obstacle that ESL students encounter in their academic studies throughout the world.

Throughout the interviews, some NLC students expressed their anxiety in terms of a real fear of writing. This fear of writing was poignantly described by Wael, an Omani student studying in Level 3EFS (see English proficiency level description in chapter 3), "sometimes I *scared* because that sometime formal letter or in exam asked write something... I know vocabulary but maybe I miss some letters to spelling". As mentioned in the Literature Review, the criteria for NLC students writing in their final assessment suggest that they should be aiming to produce a grammatical, free-of- errors piece of writing. Students spoke about repeated reminders by their teachers that they needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the English grammar rules. Khansir (2012) notes the serious concerns that EAP students harbour are that they have produced the correct form of writing, since so much of their progress and final evaluation is in terms of their writing emulating these pre-existing forms (Khansir, 2012). Aki, a Japanese student in level 2B, described the following piece of writing as "*of course* not good". She had been asked to remember a time in her life that was of great importance to her.



I remember well that days because it is  
deep memorise for me and it let me changed  
my life better because before sick, I was  
too shy then I didn't like to read books.  
But from I got sick day I changed my  
personality, I think about now, that days was better  
to me.

Here Aki is describing a memory of a time when she became quite sick, and although this appears to have been a serious illness, she has emerged from it to become a different person and considers now that her days are “better to me”. It is clear that Aki has chosen, or had no choice, to use simple words and sentence structures, and she has taken care with her spelling. As a reader, it is possible to make sense of her writing. Aki has indeed been able to describe and reflect upon an important memory from her life. In this written piece, there are so many aspects in it that one might want to praise and encourage Aki concerning her writing. Yet, Aki’s self-evaluation is that the writing is “of course not good”. If one focuses only on the linguistic dimensions of the writing, then it is noted that it is not free from grammar or spelling mistakes and there are occasional incorrect choices of vocabulary. Aki misspells words such as “memorise” (instead of “memory”) and “personalty” (instead of “personality”), and there are numerous grammatical mistakes throughout. If one only focuses on these dimensions and does not see or acknowledge the relevance and poignancy of the memory writing, then it might be seen as ‘not good’.

Such analysis can be applied to the writing of many students at NLC who brought their writing pieces for discussion as part of their interviews for this study. Muller is a Japanese student studying in 2B general, whose level of English proficiency in writing exceeded the capacity of many others in his class. In the monomodal writing activity, Muller wrote about his experience when he “booked” a flight to “Tasimania [sic]” to see the “monster devils” he had heard about but wanted to see in “reality”. In the following excerpt, it is possible to sense Muller’s hesitancy in choosing his words and in spelling them. He crosses some words out because, as he told me in an interview, he was “searching about what word I know in my mind but forget the spelling”. He mentioned to me that he often struggled to “find the correct word”. Regardless, he decided to use his different efforts to spell the words in his writing (see words circled in red). Although the writing is halting and littered with linguistic errors causing disfluencies, it is also possible to see Muller’s potential as a writer in English.





in regard to grammatical structure (also identified by 16 teachers as a significant problem), or vocabulary (identified by 11 teachers), or “content” (identified in 10 responses).

(b) Identity

When I asked students in the interview about the challenges they faced in their English writing, they often mentioned their frustrations in writing ideas that seemed so clear in their first language (L1) but did not transfer easily or fluently into English. Students sometimes described how the ‘self’ they wrote about in their personal writing in English was difficult to connect to the ‘self’ they felt when writing in their home or L1 language. Considerable recent literature refers to the difficulties that ESL learners encounter in negotiating their identities when writing in a foreign language (Fujieda, 2010; Ivanič, 1998). This idea was confirmed by Lawrence, a Chinese student studying in Level 3 EFS, when he expressed his concern about his writing. For Lawrence, vocabulary is the major problem: “I use them but in Chinese I think, but right now I can’t write it down in ... I don’t know any language .... I don’t know and sometimes I want to English”. Wael also mentioned that “I is not a good writer...I come from Arabic country,” and he added, “I skip miss something because we don’t have vowels letters [in Arabic].”

Fujieda (2010) suggests that ESL writers are negotiating their linguistic identity when writing in English. Referring to the phenomenon of student writers writing in English, Todd (2011) details the many ways in which “monolingual ideologies present in academic systems work to devalue [ESL or EFL] students’ diverse linguistic backgrounds and even erase their identities” (Todd, 2011, p. 174). Such studies add a new dimension to the study of writing for ESL students in that it is implied that the teaching of academic writing is much more complex than merely following pre-existing grammar rules and emulating pre-existing models of what correct writing looks like. In interviews, students at NLC frequently showed awareness of their linguistic backgrounds and identities and how this influenced the shaping of their writing in English. For instance, Lawrence and Wael both had the view that their first language was an “obstacle” in their attempts to write in English. Lawrence and Wael were aware of the complications that arose from differences in grammar and vowel sounds in their English and L1 writings and related these to learning to write in English.

However, it was interesting to see that some students, such as Piza and Mona, saw their L1 language as a positive factor. They were able to use the skills and vocabulary of their first language in positive attempts to communicate their intended meanings in English. This linguistic aspect of students' identity work in relation to their ESL writing will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I find it useful to show writing excerpts of the students who used their first language in their ELICOS writing. In the excerpt below, Mona, an Omani student who is enrolled in Level 3 EFS, left a space in her text because as she explained in her interview, "I don't know how to spell [the word she wanted to write]". Instead, she inserted an Arabic word because she knew that the reader of her writing (that is, myself, as her teacher) would appreciate what she wanted to communicate, as I understand Arabic. Mona used a formal, academic Arabic word, which means "landscape" in place of the English word that has the same meaning. One aspect shown in Mona's writing is that she is academically proficient in her native language. Although Mona speaks Omani (an Arabic dialect) in her daily life, she is aware of the norms and formalities of academic writing, as evident in her text. She did not use a colloquial Arabic word but instead chose a more sophisticated academic Arabic one as part of her English writing. This suggests that Mona was anxious about not spelling an English word incorrectly, but also suggests she was willing to explore beyond the monomodal constraints that the institution and the criteria were imposing on her. This sample illustrates the issue, raised by Singh et al. (2015), about the extent to which L1 experience and knowledge can be helpful to those learning to write in FL/L2 writing. Perhaps, it is possible to compose a meaningful L1/L2 text occasionally using L1 vocabulary and grammatical knowledge if this helps the student to develop fluency or confidence in their writing.

### (c) Meaning Making

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in EAP academic writing classes, little attention is paid to meaning making. However, several students clearly demonstrated in their interviews that meaning is as important to them as the accuracy of their English language. Expression of thoughts and meanings, which is one key focus of this study, is a significant challenge for students.

A Saudi student, Maher, studying at Level 3 EFS, worked as a teacher in his home country and was also studying for a Master's degree before coming to Australia. Maher was keen to point out that meaning making was important to him in his English writing: "Actually, I focus on meaning ... on how I can reach my meaning the correct way". When I asked Maher if this meant that grammar was important for him to "reach [his] meaning," his response was quick and unambiguous: "No. I think idea [is more important] because what I talk about anything, when ... and for this idea or ideas okay, another one understand what I mean, but the grammar, there is some mistakes ... in my speaking but he or she knows what I mean". Much of the literature supports Maher's view here. Focusing on form and the final product in writing adds another difficulty because competent writing in a second language is said to be based on a wide range of skills and knowledge, including an ability to make correct choices in reference to vocabulary and cohesive devices and having a sound knowledge of syntax and forms (Hyland, 2003). These difficulties according to Mahani, Asmaak, Anis, Surina, and Nazira (2011), are much greater for ESL beginner learners who find writing a greater challenge than more advanced learners because they need to express their ideas in words. And this means they have to integrate their developing understanding of English grammar and be able to use correct sentence structures. This is emphasised by Firkins et al. (2007):

*The student writer has to create a text that is both rhetorically and linguistically appropriate. Often, the teaching of English to low proficiency students tends to be taught in a way that focuses on the sentence level and these learners often have minimal, if any, awareness at the level of complete texts. (p. 341)*

This focus on *form* and ignoring *meaning* raises arguments in regard to writing not only as a product, but also as a process to discover meaning (Matsuda, 2003). Yet, in traditional EAP academic writing, the focus remains firmly on the correct use of language and the accuracy of the final product. In this sense, meaning can be constructed only through pre-existing grammatical structures and knowledge of the language. The limitations of this view are reflected in the samples of the NLC students' monomodal writing from the second cycle of this action research study, which feature misspellings, simple vocabulary, grammatical mistakes, and awkward syntax. Consequently, it also demonstrates a difficulty in constructing meaning through a focus on the linguistic dimensions of writing alone. As Sandy tried to explain: "I can write something ... I ... my idea is ... [but] it's not open". The students' writing illustrates that they change vocabulary or change a sentence in order to avoid mistakes in a way that then compromises the meaning that they originally intend to communicate. Leo mentioned,

“Sometimes I always try to make my idea to writing in a simple way because I do not have enough vocabulary and recalling vocabulary is very ... I can’t think when I am writing, so sometimes I was in a simple way I just ... I try to make my writing, but sometimes my writing looks so childhood...” It seems that by depending solely on linguistic perspectives, participants were restricted to the superficial layer of meaning making due to not feeling supported in constructing their intended meanings.

## Conclusions

From the findings presented in this chapter, it is evident that the teaching of academic writing in English at NLC is dominated by the more conservative traditions of EAP teaching, which sees the teaching of language as centrally constructed through linguistic dimensions, discourses, and structures. Such traditional approaches to teaching writing in English seem to impose great difficulty for low-proficiency ELICOS students, particularly in making meaning. The implication of the current practices at NLC writing classes on students meaning making is the focus of the next chapter, as I investigate the possibilities offered by the multimodal pedagogy that I implemented in my classrooms as part of the action research cycles of this study.

## Chapter 7

### Meaning Making: Integration of Multimodal Writing in EAP Writing Pedagogy





*A change in approach brings a change in outcome.*

*Once again, she stands beside the harp, ready to play. Her posture is as straight as before, her arms ready. She is ready to produce sound, communicate with her audience, and learn. This time, her stance also conveys confidence, belief, and contentment.*

*The instrument has changed. It remains as beautiful as it was before, drenched in history, traditions, and conventions - yet with modifications. Multiple strings have been added. Knowing that each string has different role to play and contribute to communicating with her audience...*

*Once more, she brings her arms around either side of it.*

*As she places her fingers on the strings, she delicately begins to pluck them, acknowledging her tutor's instructions. This time, with the full range of strings as resources for her to deploy, the voice of the tutor is a guide rather than a dictator. Beyond that, her intuition directs her actions.*

*The traditional, historical instrument still shines as she plays it beautifully. Various and countless tones flow, complimenting one another.*

*Her tutor now recognises her individuality - knowledge and identity ... and allows her to play the instrument to its full potential.*

In the previous chapter, I presented and analysed data generated from students' and teachers' responses to interview questions about writing and the teaching of writing at NLC. I showed how the traditional writing pedagogy at NLC, with its emphasis on the accuracy of the final product, imposed pressures on low proficiency ESL learners. I also began to show that meaning making in EAP writing pedagogy seems to be marginalized in favour of other linguistic and technical skills.

As indicated in Chapter Four, the focus of the study is using action research to explore how low English proficiency ESL learners make meaning in their academic writing in an ELICOS setting. My aim as an ELICOS teacher has been to provide my students with opportunities to experience meaning making through constructing texts using different modes of writing. In this chapter, I present data generated from two action research cycles employed in this study to address two research questions: (1) What are ELICOS teachers' beliefs about meaning-making practices in writing and how they might develop learners' meaning-making?; and (2) How can multimodal writing pedagogies in an ELICOS setting assist L2 learners' meaning-making? The data set that I used for this purpose consisted of teachers' responses to interviews and questionnaires, students' responses in interviews, and samples of their writing completed during ELICOS classes. The data reported here suggests that ELICOS teachers participating in this study had strong beliefs about the connections between students' English proficiency levels and their ability to make sense of their writing. Aligned with such beliefs, teachers also identified some pedagogical choices and strategies they utilised to help students generate ideas and make meaning in their writing.

I feature and discuss participating students' composition of two brief texts: one that I categorise as 'monomodal', the other as 'multimodal'. As mentioned in my reflective narratives in Chapter Five, I asked the students to write about two relatively similar topics. In Cycle One's action research, the participants from 2B general level composed a traditional text about a "memorable event". These participants were only expected to use the linguistic mode as a way to express their ideas. In Cycle Two, the participants from Level 3 EFS were asked to write a descriptive paragraph about their country, an alien, in line with the writing syllabus for this academic level. In both cycles, I asked the students to write about the same topic as they had earlier written about, but this time using a range of modes, such as colours, fonts, photos, pictures, sounds, and symbols to express their ideas. In Cycle Two, all of the students elected, without any prompting from me as their teacher, to work in collaborative groups according to their country of origin. When the writing was completed the students were asked to present their writing to peers in the classroom. After completing the multimodal writing tasks, I

conducted one-to-one interviews with the students. In these interviews, I asked them why they made certain semiotic decisions and choices in constructing their multimodal stories, and how this differed from the way in which they made meaning using traditional ways of writing (that is, when they were only using verbal language). Students' responses to interview questions, and the analysis of excerpts from their monomodal and multimodal writing texts revealed that offering them an opportunity to use multiple modes of expression, not only in linguistic form), meant that they perceived they had greater opportunities for making meaning. By employing different modes, most students were able to create multi-levelled texts, which revealed deeper knowledge about themselves, their cultures, and their identities.

As in the previous chapter, I use thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns of meaning from interviews and samples of students' writing. I also use forms of discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis (CDA) approaches (Gonzalez & Gomez, 2010; Jones, 2012). This often explicitly includes multimodal discourse analysis as presented in the work of (Kress & VanLeeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2004). In using CDA, this chapter seeks to generate a deeper understanding of how students construct meaning in their own writing. This helps me to explore how multiple modalities can work together in the form of an intervention into multimodal writing on the current teaching of writing and learning at NLC. CDA also assists in understanding meaning as socially and contextually constructed (Phillips, 2000), which is consistent with the constructivist paradigm of this study.

Following the practices of Kress and also studies by other critical linguist researchers (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Kress & Leeuwen, 2001), my analysis sees written discourse as potentially involving multiple modes, which often work together, where "any system of signs that are used in a consistent and systematic way to make meaning can be considered a mode" (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012, p. 29). In the analysis of the data that follows, I give full recognition and attention to non-linguistic as well as linguistic means of making meaning. Therefore, my analysis will work on the belief that all modes and semiotic symbols contribute to the meaning of the text, and that verbal language is merely one mode among others.

In light of the findings from interviews and students' writing, my analysis in this chapter draws on frameworks in existing literature pertaining to EAP and the writing practices and experiences of the students who participated in this study. My presentation of findings in this chapter is organised around the following main themes:



1. Monomodality: How meaning is viewed in traditional EAP writing pedagogy.
2. Multimodal meaning making: Identity, culture, and language
3. The impact of the inclusion of the pedagogy of multimodal writing on students' meaning making.

## Writing Pedagogy at NLC: Monomodal Approach to Meaning

As explained in the previous chapter, the product approach to writing was the dominant pedagogical approach to teaching this topic at NLC. This approach places importance on grammatical accuracy and technical correctness, and it seems to encourage the production of texts in which meaning is constructed almost exclusively through the linguistic form, which consist of words and word-based grammatical structures. This was clearly expressed by Ramsi, an experienced teacher who taught students at all levels of proficiency: "It [meaning] would be vocabulary, accuracy, actually knowing how to express their ideas, you know in terms of forming a sentence". This traditional approach to meaning making is typically described in terms of what words mean (Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet, 1990). As such, words have long been assumed to be the source of all expressed conceptual content. In this study, I categorise the products of students' writing within this type of paradigm as 'monomodal writing'. Monomodal texts created in this product approach are made up of words, sentences, and paragraphs. This implies that meaning can only be constructed through learners' use of verbal language (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012), and it was this view of writing that was most often expressed when students were asked to describe the most common pedagogical approach to writing in their classes at NLC. All students stated that they had never been instructed by their teachers to use any mode of expression other than words, although they told me that in their everyday writing outside NLC, they frequently used different modes such as emojis, pictures, stickers, and voice recorded messages.

The emphasis on monomodal views of writing was also evident through interviews with teachers. In teachers' responses to interview questions about students' use of multimodal forms in writing, it was clear in their explicit statements that they expected students to present written texts only including linguistic forms. Ramsi, who is known for his fascination for using YouTube videos, such as TED Talks in his TESOL listening classes and class discussions, was perhaps the exception. Ramsi explained that he took a slightly different approach when teaching writing by using pictures to scaffold writing tasks. In order to explain concepts or stimulate students to generate ideas, Ramsi considered "[students] needed to have prompts to be able to understand

a topic, so you can't just have an abstract topic like holidays. You might need to have a series of pictures to help them elicit some holiday activities because you want them to talk about holidays ...". However, when Ramsi was asked if he allowed students to use pictures in their writing, he replied that he never does this. Ramsi is aware that, as an ELICOS teacher, he is only expected to teach writing within the traditional framework of academic writing conventions and the essay structure. Yet, Ramsi seemed to adopt more of a "process approach" to writing than merely focusing on students' final products: "The writing is the end, but first we must think about what we know, the information we can gather, how we could organise ... what words we know, what words we do not know, what words we want to include, and what structures".

Similarly, in my interview with David, a teacher with 15 years' teaching experience, he alluded to some pedagogical value in using multiple modes:

**David:** *I use Google images to give definitions of words and things, and maybe sometimes to help [the students] more I guess for listening or something like that before we start the listening, then maybe they don't have any background knowledge, like we did a thing on the Norman Invasions the other day ... I knew they wouldn't know Normandy, so I showed them on the map*

**Me:** *Okay, so as a teacher you use some pictures or images to show students, but students are not to use images if they need to express or make their ideas clear to you?*

**David:** *No.*

The definite response of "no" that David gave with no further explanation suggests a definite belief about the way meaning is made in writing, and this informs his approach to teaching this topic. Ramsi's and David's responses reveal slight contradictions in their thinking, which can partly be explained by the heavy emphasis in the NLC syllabus with assessment tasks based on traditional EAP approaches to the teaching of writing. That is, institutional expectations, in terms of assessment regimes and views of teaching colleagues, are likely to have influenced Ramsi's and David's beliefs and practices. This was a point previously raised by James when he was explaining his approach to teaching writing using the prescribed syllabus for textbooks. However, this was not the way James preferred. Another teacher, Patrick, referred to the efforts of teachers at NLC in assisting students with meaning making:

*Your teachers are gate keeping. University lecturers are gatekeepers, examiners are gatekeepers, scholarly journals, the editors are gatekeepers. There's a lot of gatekeepers with similar expectations, so everyone has to address those expectations with academic writing and formal structures. So that's predominantly where most of the effort is put into. The actual development of ideas takes time.*

Benesch (1993) explains how writing pedagogy, in such a context, can be understood simply as helping students to form correct products to appropriately use these, and contends that EAP attempts to adapt second-language students to the status quo. In naming this a “politics of pragmatism” (p. 713), Benesch argues that pragmatic approaches reinforce “current power relations in academia and society” (p. 711). Even when researching writing 26 years ago, Benesch was critical of EAP approaches during a time when university level literacy practices were accepted as “positive artifacts of a normative academic culture into which ESL students should be assimilated” (p. 710).

Like Ramsi, many other NLC teachers who completed the questionnaire indicated that they, in fact, used “multi-media technology” such as videos from YouTube, songs, and google images in their teaching. Yet in their responses to a question about whether NLC teachers ‘often’ encourage students to use multimodal composition such as images and pictures in their writing, 16 out of 26 teachers disagreed and five strongly disagreed. Only one teacher in the questionnaire agreed that students were encouraged to use multimodal approaches in writing composition tasks, and two were neutral. In response to the question about whether the teacher ‘would’ encourage their students to use non-linguistic forms such as images, audio, and video modes to convey meaning if students could not express themselves in words, 9 out of 25 teachers said “no”, 13 “maybe”, and three “yes”. Such responses might suggest that teachers tend to focus on *form*, which is linguistic form at the expense of *meaning making*, which is an idea that I explore further in following interviews. This can be related to the question discussed in Chapter Three in this thesis as to, what is considered as language. For many of these teachers, language is indeed viewed as a set of rules and patterns in a bounded system that controls how communication works. This view includes principles of combining words in multiple different patterns to form a finite set of sentences, which have their own internal patterns.

In contrast, the definition of language that this thesis has adopted and applied in exploring current writing pedagogical practices and beliefs, and in analysing the findings in

teachers' surveys, views language within a wider sociocultural, communicative view. Kress (2013) captures this position in his notion of a "satellite view of language":

*Stepping outside the long tradition of seeing 'language' as a full means of making meaning, seeing it instead as one means among others, one can gain a 'satellite view' of language. That metaphor recalls 'our' first views of the Earth through photographs from a satellite – that is, from outside the Earth, beyond its atmosphere. That view gave 'us' on Earth a startlingly different perspective; for instance, showing with frightening clarity the boundedness, the limits of our planet ... The satellite view showed us what we had known and had been able to ignore, in a way: that our planet, our Earth, was one small part of a much bigger whole (Kress, 2013 p.15; see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001)*

Kress's metaphor of the satellite shows the limits of verbal language and opens up questions about the predominant view expressed by the teachers in my survey that words on their own offer adequate means to make meaning, especially for students who are struggling to learn and express themselves in a foreign language. The semiotic theory of language pioneered by Kress argues, "language isn't a big enough receptacle for all the semiotic stuff we felt sure we could pour into it" (Kress, 2013, p.15)

When I asked teachers in interviews about their pedagogy in relation to generating ideas and meaning making in writing, their responses indicated that they favoured linguistic forms and a product approach to this process (as discussed in Chapter Six). Most teachers expressed different preferences to pedagogical approaches they thought worked best for assisting students in generating ideas for writing. Yet, all the approaches mentioned by the teachers, related to helping students with vocabulary and grammatical structure, which they believed were needed for traditional writing forms in English. For example, Vera, a teacher who usually teaches general levels, explained that "most of the students ... they have *the idea*, it's just that they can't convert it into words in the English language. They already have the ideas":

*I usually tell ... okay what are you trying to say? Give me an example of this. And then I'll give them some vocabulary okay, give them some vocabulary... help them with the vocabulary. Now, put those words together and try to construct a sentence you know... Yeah, so basically sort of building the blocks for their vocabulary. The next [step] is how do you join the sentences? What are you trying ... are you going to compare? How do you compare? Now this is the*

*structure of comparing. Now is the structure for contrasting. So, how do you put these ideas together?*

Vera clarified this further by giving an example:

*So usually if you're going to write something say describing a person for example, you have to arm them with certain vocabulary that you might want to use, descriptions of adjectives, and you have to have a ??... I would really prefer to give them like mini sentences, jumble them up and get them to write a sentence, a proper sentence ... get them to practise that first, and then slowly maybe give them writing where they fill in the blanks. Okay, leave out certain words and fill in the blanks. And I give them enough time ... I would extend that further and get them to write a full description of that particular topic. So actually, it's very guided in the beginning.*

As a teacher of international students in ELICOS, which provides intensive English courses, Vera is aware that her students need to build their linguistic abilities in a very short time in order to progress to the next level so as to be accepted at university. Vera mentioned to me in the interview that she “do[es] pity them [students] because they can’t express themselves ... there’s really no time to actually develop their skills in such a short time”.

Like many other teachers who expressed the same view in the previous chapter, Vera felt that she understood the students’ struggles and difficulties in writing because, as a bilingual speaker, she had been in the same position for many years:

*I took I don't know how many years to actually get to a level where I can actually write something you know, and I will say that I spoke English, I'm more like a native speaker because we speak English at home, even then I had a problem with writing. Now these are first language... they are second language students coming here, firstly to master the language, grammar, structure and everything whatnots, and then they have to also...*

The literature on bilingualism suggests that teachers who had learned a second language formally were well aware of “the concentration, perseverance, and, at times, frustration involved” (Ellis, 2013, p. 458). This explains Vera’s use of the fighting metaphor, “arm them with vocabulary”, and also suggests that in her current approach to writing, she feels her job is to build the learners’ competence with grammar and sentence structure (cf. Khansir, 2012).

Similar to Vera, Marlow who has teaching experience in general levels, emphasised vocabulary in his response to my question about assisting students to transform their ideas into writing: “I’d probably focus on the relevant vocabulary”. When I asked, “do you give your students the vocabulary or...?”, he responded before I finished the question with great assurance, as if there was no alternative to such an approach:

*Yes, if it’s, say, for example a descriptive paragraph, then yeah in the class there’s lots of relevant vocabulary related to you know describing people or places that vocabulary is supposed to be used in their writing. So basically, to give them the framework. You give them the vocabulary. They’re given the subject and the tense is usually present simple or present continuous, I guess.*

In the previous chapter, I explained how Marlow focused on structure in his pedagogy. Marlow’s above response fits within his approach of providing students with what he mentioned previously as “relevant” vocabulary and grammar. Similar to Vera’s approach, Marlow’s repeated use of “give them” suggests that he believes that knowledge is transferred rather than constructed in the action of writing, and that such classroom practices appear to favour certain understandings of knowledge and learners (McLaren, 2003). This notion of ‘giving’ students’ knowledge is consistent with the Freirean notion of ‘education as banking’ that I raised in Chapter Two. It frames teachers as depositing information in the minds of students, which they then withdraw and pass on during their examinations, with little engagement on their part as learners (Mui, 2013). As indicated in the Methodology Chapter, these perceptions of knowledge have implications for the production of texts and meaning making, which is the focus of this study. They stand in stark contrast to critical pedagogy and constructivist perspectives of writing composition, where the process of meaning making involves critical engagement with diverse texts and experiences. Utilising a critical pedagogy lens, the findings presented in this chapter go some way to challenging the notion of fixed meanings and universal writing practices, which are widely associated with EAP practices in ESL classrooms.

In this context, recent research conducted by Myhill, Lines, and Watson (2012) suggests that it is possible to see the potential of grammar as a meaning making tool. In writing, for example, it is expected that students will be taught how to “use a wide variety of sentence structures to support the purpose of the task, giving clarity and emphasis and creating specific effects, and to extend, link and develop ideas” (Myhill et al., 2012). Yet, Jenny, a very

experienced and highly qualified teacher and scholar, as well as David and two other teachers, highlighted the importance of providing sentence “models” to students. Jane also agreed with Vera and Marlow that inadequate vocabulary is the main reason students are struggling to express themselves. Jenny mentioned:

*I was also conscious that when I was a language learner that it caused me a lot of anxiety not having a model. Like if I had to freely express my thoughts when I was learning Italian [laugh]... my thoughts were more limited because I could only match them to the kind of vocabulary, I had to describe them.*

During an interview, Jeff, who teaches in general levels, agreed the central focus should be on vocabulary.

**Jeff:** *No, I don't think so. I guess if they are struggling it's just because they don't have enough vocabulary.*

**Me:** *What do you usually do to help them?*

**Jeff:** *Yeah... well this is where they have to use their dictionary.*

**Me:** *They use dictionaries for that?*

**Jeff:** *They use dictionaries. They might have a friend to help them ... to help them in the first language often I'll encourage them ... like tell your friend in your first language what you want to say and then see if they can help you out. So, I find that's a quick way of learning, a shortcut for them.*

David also noted the benefits of using models to “get them [students] analysing model essays, I think that's a good way to learn. Also, we learn little parts of the grammar that might be useful in a lot of different essays and they do practice”. In a study conducted by Wette (2014), teachers explained that they give models for students to know the level of mastery that is expected and an explicit focus on language forms and prefabricated patterns. In this study, using exemplary or achievable models and using frames or outlines, Wette (2014) reported that teachers tended to initially focus on the macro-structure and main moves of the text, followed by analysis of its micro-structure, for example, how coherence and clarity in sentences and paragraphs are achieved (Wette, 2014). From my experience as an ELICOS teacher, I have found that providing a model or exemplar essays sometimes restricts a student's ability to create an original text. Following expectations outlined in the writing syllabus at NLC, I am obliged to give

my students “a model” as a way of familiarising them with conventional text structures. However, I always suspect that such model essays provide little if any help to students with their meaning making. Interestingly, when I asked Cherry, a 21-year-old Vietnamese student in Level 2B how she felt about writing, she mentioned that she struggled with ideas. Cherry said she usually followed the prescribed essay structure given by her teachers: “I try to follow my outline, so my head is nothing, I’m just following my outline. When I’m writing, I’m not thinking”. When I asked what she meant by ‘not thinking’, she rephrased her response: “my ideas when I’m writing first ‘fix’ my plan and I start writing following my outline .... It’s already decided so ... no more, just following my plan”.

The above strategies used by teachers are consistent with the dominant practices in teaching writing through monomodal texts constructed solely with verbal language, which I have characterised as ‘linguistic modes of expression’. The overall goal of such strategies tends to be to provide all students with the necessary tools required for vocabulary by focusing on verbal language (Bruce, 2011). These kinds of exercises are meant to build up the learners’ competence with grammar and sentence structure. In all, it is seen as a model based on imitation and accuracy of the final product (Khansir, 2012). In this way of conceptualising writing, with the emphasis on the final product, the pedagogy concentrates on requiring students to complete grammar drills and exercises in a controlled context. This is what Val previously mentioned as “very guided” learning, and it is driven by the view that ideas in any text are believed to be transmitted directly through language in a closed system (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). Syntactic structures are correspondingly seen only as providing instruction for the assembly of the concepts expressed by words in that closed system (Cuyckens, Dirven, & Taylor, 2003).

While teachers such as Marlow and Vera believed that inadequate vocabulary was the reason their students fail to effectively express themselves and generate ideas, others such as Jenny and David had different views. Jenny and David did not believe students’ linguistic abilities were necessarily the issue, but rather that some students struggle with ideas because of lack of knowledge or experience about the world, or because their past education had not encouraged them to develop their personal voices. According to Jane:

*My personal opinion for many students is that they’re very young, and for some of them they haven’t been in an educational situation where*



*they have had to think much as far as expressing their own personal opinions or having to find relevant information.*

David, who had been teaching for more than 15 years in ELICOS, had a similar opinion to Jenny. According to David who did not think that students struggled to express themselves merely because of their linguistic abilities, he said, “no, not so much I don’t think. I think maybe it’s cultural, but I suspect a lot of it’s just their age, but maybe culturally they’re not used to coming up with ideas like we expect at university in Australia”. David continued by saying, “I guess it’s that they struggle because they haven’t had enough experience of the world”. Patrick, a highly qualified and experienced teacher, also referred to students’ knowledge in deficit ways:

*Normally because the topic might be unfamiliar and they might not even know or they’ve been familiar with the topic before that day, therefore the essays ask them to evaluate and solve ... look at solutions and evaluate solutions. So, you have to brainstorm the topic just to get their understanding and look at the key vocabulary.*

Where the above explanations may have been true for some students, on closer analysis they appear to be perhaps motivated by what some researchers have described as a cultural stereotype. This stereotype fits within traditional interpretations of native speaker teachers’ ideologies about the assumed “best way” that minorities should relate to the culture of the dominant majority and native speakers’ teachers as best models (Holliday, 2006, 2015). Making these assumptions about L2 language learners’ struggles to generate ideas, due to their limited life and education experiences compared to western students who presumably have been more exposure to these experiences, can be related to “misinformation about the native cultures of ESL” (Youngs & Youngs Jr, 2001, p. 100). Lee (2008) cautions against assumptions that L2 students’ difficulties in their learning of academic writing are explained by their limited experience, proficiency with language, or motivation to learn. Rather, Lee argues that L2 students’ writing challenges are mediated by the complex process of negotiating their identities in unfamiliar, multiple, social, and cultural worlds.

Authors mostly focus on meaning making based on grammatical and linguistic structures. Khansir’s description of language teaching in India is similar to what I have observed in at least one ELICOS language centre in Australia and he suggests that “[s]tudents are given the sentences of a paragraph and have to find sentences that do not belong, or they are given sentences in random order and have to put them in the best order in a paragraph or essay” (Khansir, 2012,

p. 289). From my experience at NLC, I have seen these methods and strategies employed. Some of these strategies I have also used with my students. However, it appears to me, that it is important to concede that these approaches provide students with practice in anticipating syntactic elements as well as spelling correctly. Still, as implied Graham et al. (2013), although grammar has shifted from a tool for creating meaning to grammar becoming a study of how meanings are built up through the choice of words and structures, the emphasis is also on form. As Khansir (2012) suggests, “[a]s far as the classroom activity of writing is concerned, the emphasis is on form” (p. 289). This approach can be inflexible and prescriptive, leaving students little opportunity for independent meaning making and self-expression. This was suggested decades ago by Noguchi (1991), who argued that although sentences offer a form or means to convey content, the content of a sentence structure can offer no help if writers have little or inappropriate content to convey. Furthermore, written language is the predominant mode that is used in academic writing as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the monomodal sense, writing is seen as being mainly about linguistic knowledge, where the attention is very much on the mechanics of writing such as syntax, vocabulary, and linguistic knowledge (Pincas, 1982). The priority appears to be avoiding errors in form (Khansir, 2012; Reid, 1993; Zamel, 1982), and this too constrains students’ independence in meaning making.

According to Hyland (2003), judgements about competent writing in a second language should be based on a wide range of skills and knowledge including an ability to make correct choices in reference to vocabulary, cohesive devices, and a good knowledge of syntax and forms. In short, learners must have sufficient knowledge of the syntactic rules. As previously discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis, data from my interviews with NLC students demonstrated that, in spite of the unremitting focus on vocabulary, grammatical rules, and structures, they still experience great difficulty in writing and expressing ideas. This is one of the key ‘problems’ that this chapter aims to address. The problem was simply expressed by James who defined writing in terms of creativity in the previous chapter:

*At the idea level ... most of the ideas that I see appear to be like ... repetition of received ideas, which are quite.... [There is] a sort of conformism that’s occurring in the ideas. You see the same kinds of ideas coming up over and over again. With Asian ... writers from an Asian language background, some of them of course also have the problem of the orthography and so it’s similar to the Arabic writers in*

*that sense, but there does seem to be more room for individual expression.*

There was widespread agreement amongst the teachers I interviewed that academic writing in a language that is not one's home language is highly demanding and requires a wide range of skills (Nik et al., 2010). The skills include: accuracy in choosing the right words (lexical choice skills); an ability to understand grammatical structures (grammatical skills); as well as being able to organise all of this in the development of the ideas so that there is no ambiguity of meaning (syntactic skills). In this context, writers transform or develop their knowledge through the tension between the intended content of a text and the language used to create it. The literature suggests that a number of difficulties emerge for ESL writers when teachers rely only on the linguistic written form (Mansor, Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, & Osman, 2011). These difficulties are much greater for ESL beginner learners, who are participants in this study, than for advanced learners. This is because beginner learners are only permitted to express their ideas in words, so this means they have to integrate their understanding of grammar and be able to use correct sentence structures (Mansor, Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, & Osman, 2011). For ELICOS writers to make their writing make 'sense' to the teacher or reader, they need to have strong skills in grammatical rules in order to be proficient and effective writers (Yah Awg et al., 2010). ESL students, particularly those in low proficiency levels in English, typically encounter difficulties in expressing ideas because they lack the aforementioned skills (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). Kress shows how language is partial in its capacity for expression and that there are always many modes involved in communication. As such, by the intervention of multimodal writing in the current writing pedagogy, I attempted to provide students with more options for expressing their ideas by using different modes of expression. I did not want to leave them relying only on their linguistic knowledge, as I discuss in the following.

### **A Multiliteracy Approach to Writing Pedagogy: When Meaning is Constructed Multimodally**

The following discussion draws upon NLC students' writing and quotes from students' one-to-one interviews, which I analyse with respect to the 'intervention' of multimodal writing in the two cycles of this action research at NLC. I begin by presenting and comparing samples of monomodal and multimodal writing completed by the students in my 2B General and 3AEFS classes. My analysis focuses on the similarities and contrasts in the students' writing, in

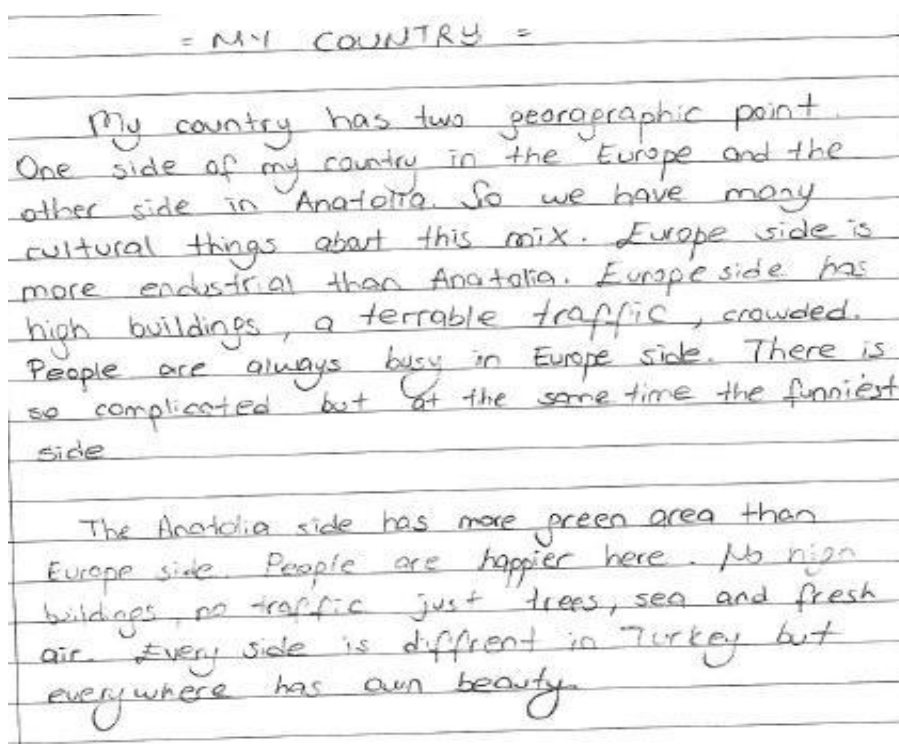
monomodal or multimodal forms, and the extent to which the students are engaged in meaning making. I explore the meaning making evident in the students' writing from their responses to interview questions relating to this, and in the students' narrative accounts of how they experienced writing multimodal texts.

### *Meaning Making: The Interrelationships between Identity, Culture and Language*

In this section, I explore the ways in which identity, language, and culture mediate the experience of writing multimodal texts. My approach is to compare students' monomodal and multimodal writing texts, which they wrote in response to a similar pedagogical prompt. Samples of writing from individuals and groups of students who collaborated in the multimodal writing activity is provided and interpreted. The discussion that follows further reveals how, by integrating multimodal writing in traditional writing pedagogy, the NLC students in my classes seemed to be able to show dimensions of their academic identities.

#### *A Turkish Student's Writing*

I begin my analysis by examining the monomodal writing of Piza, a Turkish student studying in 2B General and 3A EFS, who participated in both cycles of the action research. Piza is considered to be performing at a higher level than her peers regarding her English language usage. The first writing I present, which Piza completed in monomodal form using pencil on paper, is simply called 'My country'.



**Figure 3:** Piza's Monomodal Text

In this monomodal writing (Figure 3), Piza focuses on factual details concerning the contrasting geographic “point[s]” of her home country, Turkey. Piza provides some clear descriptions of the contrasts, which are buildings, traffic, and differences between the “endustrial [sic] ... Europe side”, and the greener environment of Anatolia. There is evidence here of Piza using simple vocabulary and sentence structures to communicate with her reader in clear and predominantly quite accurate language. This includes mostly correct spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, paragraphing, and reasonably controlled grammar. However, there is little or no evidence of Piza using her monomodal writing to show or explore complex ideas, such as her emotional relationship to her home country beyond fleetingly referring to “beauty” and that “people are happier here”. There is only minor evidence of values and beliefs that Piza has about her current identity or in respect to her country.

In contrast, Piza’s multimodal writing on the same topic (Figure 4) moves beyond correct structures and informative details to communicate more complex ideas, and more of her identity with respect to “my country”. In her interview with me, Piza said that she felt she did not need to provide many words in her multimodal writing text to write about the geography of the country as she was able to “show this my country, my location” through images and “geographic maps”. Piza was able to use an image and a caption to communicate some of the key information she had focused on in her monomodal writing, leaving her more time and space to explore additional dimensions of the topic, such as her values, attitudes and even her political identity with respect to “my country”.



**Figure 4:** Piza’s Multimodal Text

While speaking about the experience of producing this writing, Piza said she felt “more freedom” and more “confidence” when using multiple modes. I have said that Piza’s writing revealed a political dimension when she described her country, and that this aspect of her identity and knowledge was not evident in her monomodal writing. It is interesting to note that Piza’s political reference was only in relation to the *previous* political era. When I asked her in an interview why she did not comment on the current government of Turkey, she responded: “I do not want to talk about it”. This was a point in the interview, as well as in the presentation, where I began to realise a power shift. Piza began to take some control in the interview, disrupting - to a certain extent - the usual power relations in the traditional interview as she began to assert herself. Indeed, when Piza was given the opportunity to write about her country in multimodal text, and then speak about it in an interview, she began to reveal a more assertive and confident aspect of her character, which had not been evident either in her monomodal writing or in the classroom activities that revolved around it. Fernsten (2008) has written about observing young writers struggle to find their voice and to seek some positive acknowledgment of their efforts in an academic setting. Heekyeong (2008) supports Fernsten (2008) by arguing that L2 students’ limited proficiency of language should not be viewed as the only reason for the difficulties they face with their academic writing. Rather, L2 students’ struggles in writing can be influenced by the process of attempts to negotiate their identities. Canagarajah (2011), too, writes about the importance of understanding and empathising with students who are learning to write in their L2 for academic settings. He specifically notes the challenges when such students feel like their original ‘home’ identities are being effaced. In giving Piza the opportunity to use multiple modes of communication in her written piece, she felt encouraged to have a stronger voice and express a truer sense of her identity through her writing and in her interactions with a teacher.

Another interesting contrast between the monomodal and multimodal writing is that Piza’s voice shifted from having a simple and singular relationship to “My country” in her monomodal writing to a voice that appreciated her Turkish peers in the classroom, who referred to “our country”. Therefore, there was more of a sense of “social meaning making” in her multimodal writing. A close analysis of the students’ writing, like Piza’s, reveals that they often used the opportunity to write using multimodal resources as an opportunity to convey their identities in social meaning making engagements. This is consistent with Ajayi (2008) recommendation that teachers of L2 writing create a meaning making theoretical framework

and use classroom practices that link English language learners with the sociocontextual framework of their learning.

This political dimension of Piza's identity came to the fore when she felt encouraged, or even liberated, to draw upon her existing knowledge and prior education in her multimodal writing. The excerpt below from Piza's interview directly challenges assertions by some teachers at NLC that students' writing in English is due to students' lack of knowledge and world experiences.

**Piza:** *Well I want to show them who is [Ataturk]. I can write, I can write so much about him, but I want to show them who is looking like what [Piza's emphasis]*

**Me:** *Is that important that they know the face?*

**Piza:** *Yeah. I put my flag Turkish flag and this is so important for me. I can explain my flag is red, it has star blah, blah, but I should show them.*

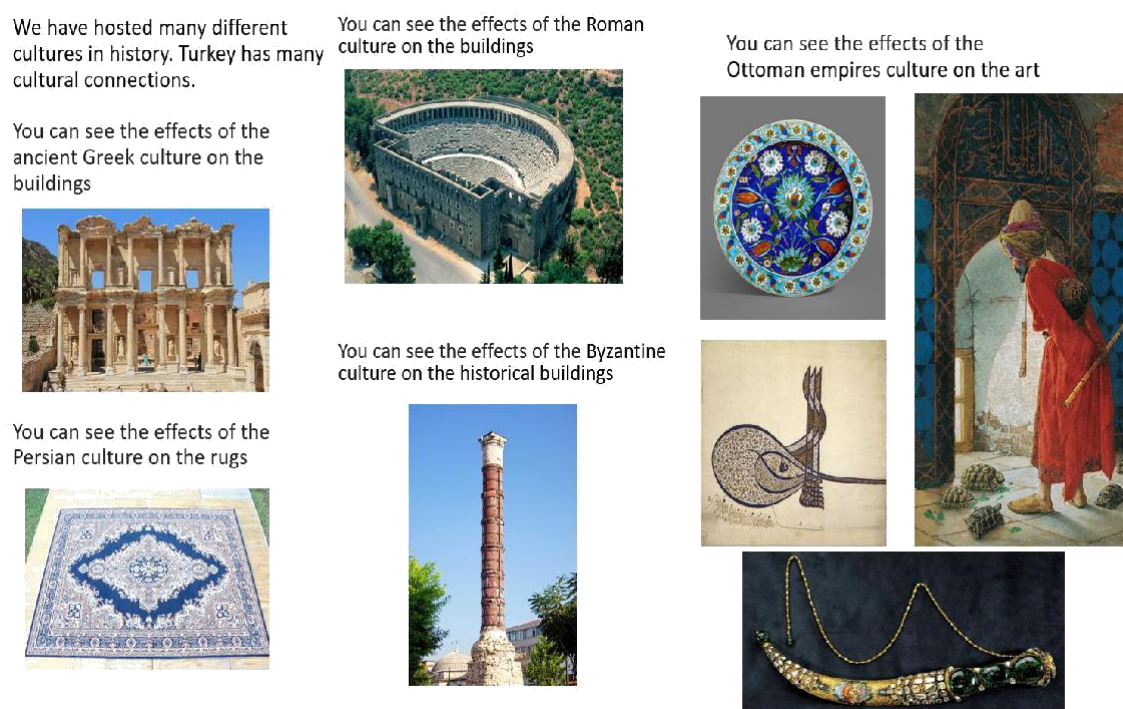
**Me:** *Is politics important to you to show it?*

**Piza:** *Yeah because I studied international relationship and political science [in my home country], yeah.*

As a person who has a Bachelor of International Relations and Political Science, Piza's views show that she is aware of current local and political issues relating to her country. Allowing Piza opportunities to use other modes of expression, as well as presenting her writing and views, seems to have encouraged her to identify some important issues related to her identity, such as her alliance to a political party that does not support the current Turkish Government. From a critical pedagogical point of view, the encouragement to write in multimodal forms allowed the NLC students more opportunities "to define the social world and to challenge theory from their own perspectives" (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 4) and gave them the power to speak more confidently in their own voices (Skinner, 2010).

As I discussed before, writing pedagogy at NLC has previously been heavily influenced by traditional approaches to knowledge and its construction. Relying on what I have described as a monomodal pedagogy, most NLC teachers appear to have been encouraged to accept the "dominant culture's limited conceptions and valuations of composition as low, limited, preparatory, [and] illegitimate" (Horner, 2015, p. 451). Such efforts produce and maintain a "discourse of need" about composition itself, which at NLC means producing a linguistically accurate text. When Piza was aware that she had to present a free-from-error piece of writing,

she narrowed the scope of her ideas to those that did not need higher linguistic skills to explain. However, despite Piza's best attempts, her monomodal text was still not free from grammatical mistakes. In her writing, Piza said that "we have many cultural things" (Figure 5), but it is only when she had the opportunity to write multimodally that she felt empowered to identify and reflect upon those "cultural things" (Figure 7).



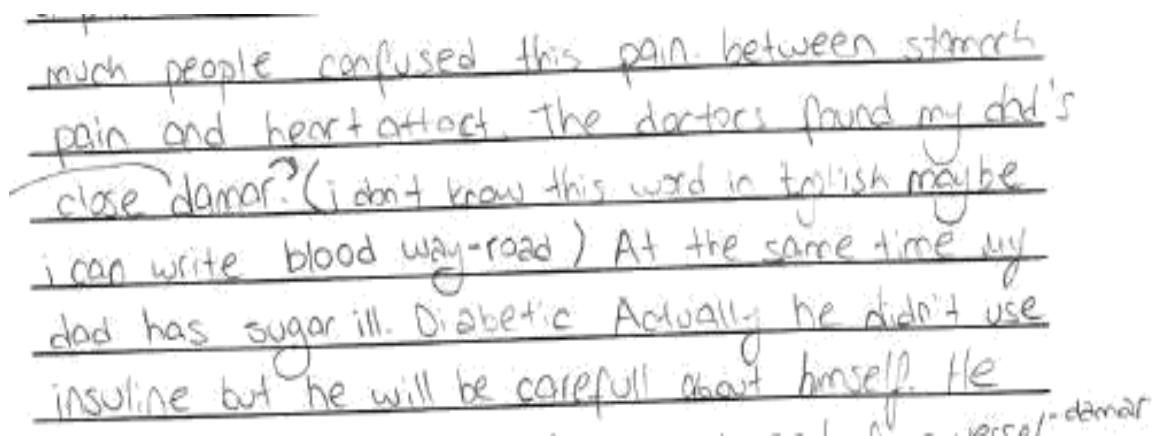
**Figure 5:** Another Screen from Piza's Multimodal Text

In Piza's multimodal text above, she used images of a diverse and heterogeneous set of elements that represent the "cultural things" that she mentioned in her monomodal text. In addition, Piza demonstrated a deep understanding and knowledge of Turkish history and culture influenced by other cultures, such as Greek, Roman, Ottoman, and Persian.

From my experience, and as has emerged from the NLC teachers' definitions of writing in the previous chapter, the only medium of writing that is valued in ELICOS courses is English verbal language. Using L1 is not expected and not welcome in traditional English classes. However, I demonstrated in Chapter Six how some students in my class felt free to use their first language when expressing their thoughts even when writing a monomodal text. Piza's first



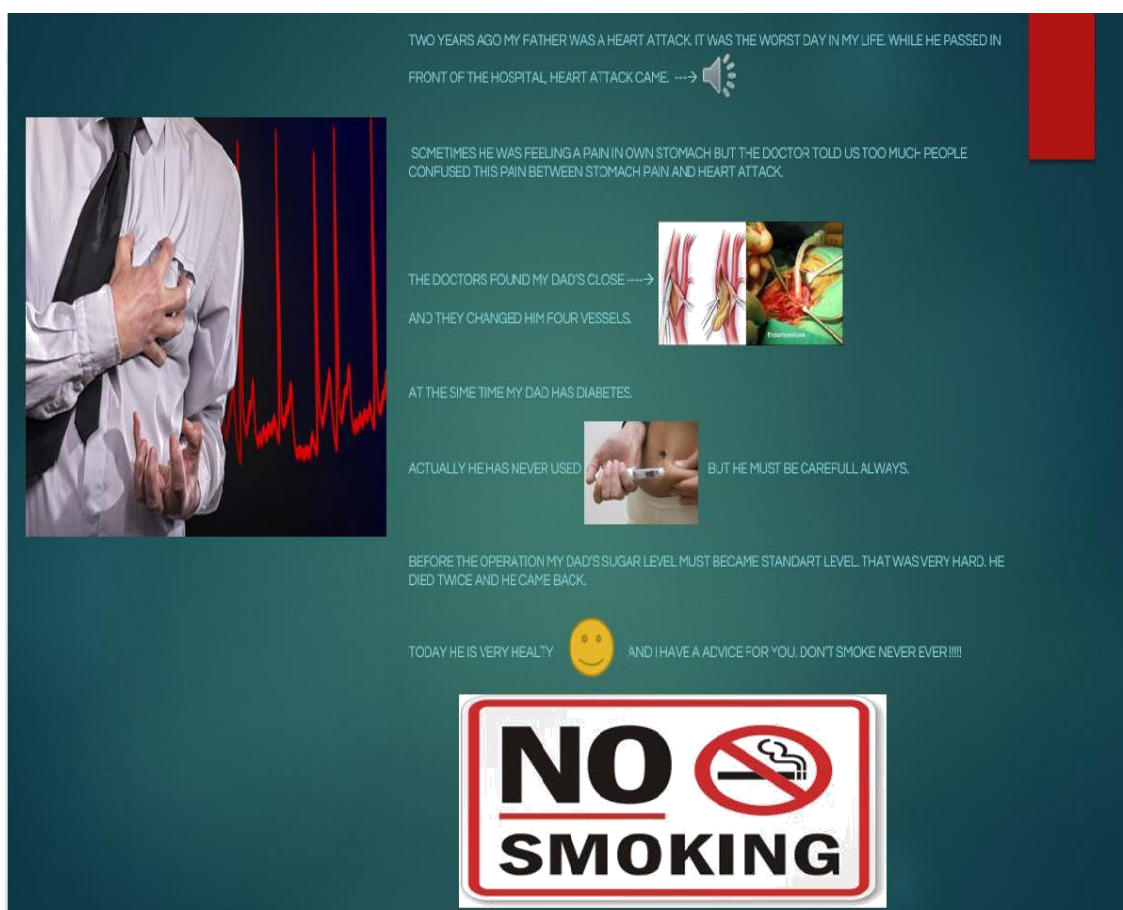
language is one aspect of her identity that she demonstrated in her monomodal text in Cycle One of action research, describing a memorable event.



**Figure 6:** Excerpt from Piza's Monomodal Writing

Once again, it was more important for Piza to convey the meaning of what she wanted to say rather than to reject the idea altogether and opt for a simple correct phrase or sentence. Piza mentioned she did not want to change her intended meaning. However, if Piza she could not allocate the appropriate word in written form, she would draw it. In writing about a memorable event in monomodal writing, Piza chose to describe the time when her father had a heart attack. Vessels and veins were two words that were important in Piza's narrative to describe her father's heart attack, although she was not sure how she could change her sentence to English. Consequently, Piza wrote her sentences in Turkish and then provided an explanation in English, as she was aware that I might not have understood. Piza used the Turkish word "damar" in an English sentence, which means 'vessels' as she was unable to think of an English equivalent. Also, Piza explained later that she used the Turkish word because she was confident that it was the precise word for the *meaning* and related to a specific life event that she was attempting to communicate.

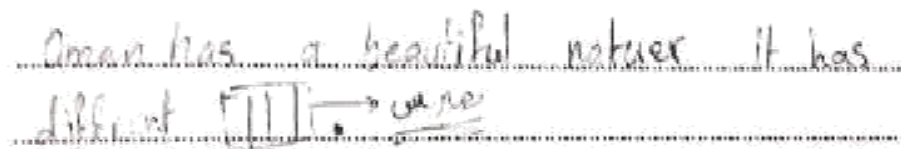
Piza describes herself as a "good writer" but "just if I have dictionary". Her multimodal writing, when she was allowed access to her dictionary, revealed more complex ideas than those in her monomodal ones. She said that using pictures was like "having a dictionary".



**Figure 7:** Piza Multimodal Text in Cycl 1 ‘Memorable Event’

Piza used images and sound to convey her intended meaning, and to send a strong “message” not to smoke, as she believed that it was the main cause of her father’s heart attack. With such valuable information to share, Piza did not want her communication to be diminished or ineffective. The opportunity to utilise multiple modes of communication increased Piza’s confidence in delivering her message, with the belief that her intentions would be understood.

The more I realised this was a significant finding for my research, the more I found instances to support this emerging theory, not just in multimodal writing but also in monomodal form. In Chapter Six, I introduced Mona, an 18-year-old Omani student, who used an Arabic word in her English monomodal writing. In doing so, Mona revealed to me, as her teacher and an Arabic speaker, that she had a high level of proficiency in her native language.

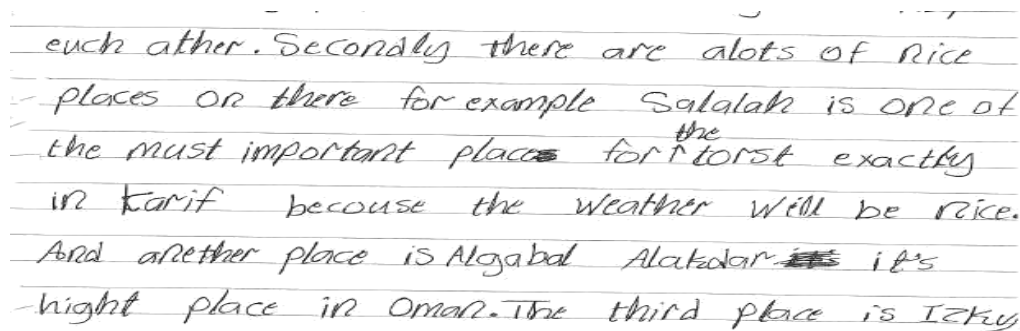


**Figure 8:** Mona's Monomodal Writing

Mona anticipated that as a native speaker of Arabic, I would understand her meaning. This was particularly important as Mona knew that this word, which is pronounced “Tadarees” in Arabic, was the only word that she knew how to convey her intended meaning. As Mona later confirmed in an interview with me, “I do not know it [the word] in English”. Therefore, it was more important for Mona to create meaning than to produce correct and simple words and structures in English. Canagarajah (2011) refers to the concept of identity showing that bilingual students can become sensitive to the ways in which writing and language shape their thinking and knowledge representation as they learn to write in a different language. Bilingual writers face both challenges and possibilities with this interplay between their knowledge and writing skills. Students’ skills are based on traditions of writing and rhetorical conventions influenced by their first language (L1). Rather than writing in L2 being a simple process of mastering a new form of writing, these divergences have to be considered as having implications for students’ representation of their knowledge as a whole. The examples from Piza, Mona, and Mohannad are testament to this. Each student has accumulated knowledge and expertise through their higher-level studies and experiences in L1. The limitations of these students in L2 often restricted their communication, which is interpreted by those fluent in English as simplistic or basic in language and knowledge.

In their monomodal writing, ELICOS students are usually not allowed access to a computer or any other technological device and are not even allowed to use a dictionary. Students like Piza and Mona in L1 showed that it was more important for them to make meaning that was close to what they intended rather than to only write accurate English sentences. This was a significant finding in this study that I had not anticipated. A case study by Fernsten (2008) shows how language and culture are intricately tied to other aspects of our identity. Who we are, how we see the world, and how the world sees us, cannot be separated like ingredients in a recipe. Rather, we are like the product of the recipe, mixed together in ways that make single aspects inextricable from others. Perl (1980) found that even unskilled writers employ strategies that are consistent and stable, which are composed to represent their attempts to discover meaning.

An excerpt from Mohannad's monomodal writing supports this notion. Mohannad describes his home country of Oman, below (Figure 9).



each other. Secondly there are a lots of rice  
places on there for example Salalah is one of  
the most important places for <sup>the</sup> worst exactly  
in Karif because the weather will be rice.  
And another place is Aljabal Alakdar ~~its~~ its  
high place in Oman. The third place is Izku.

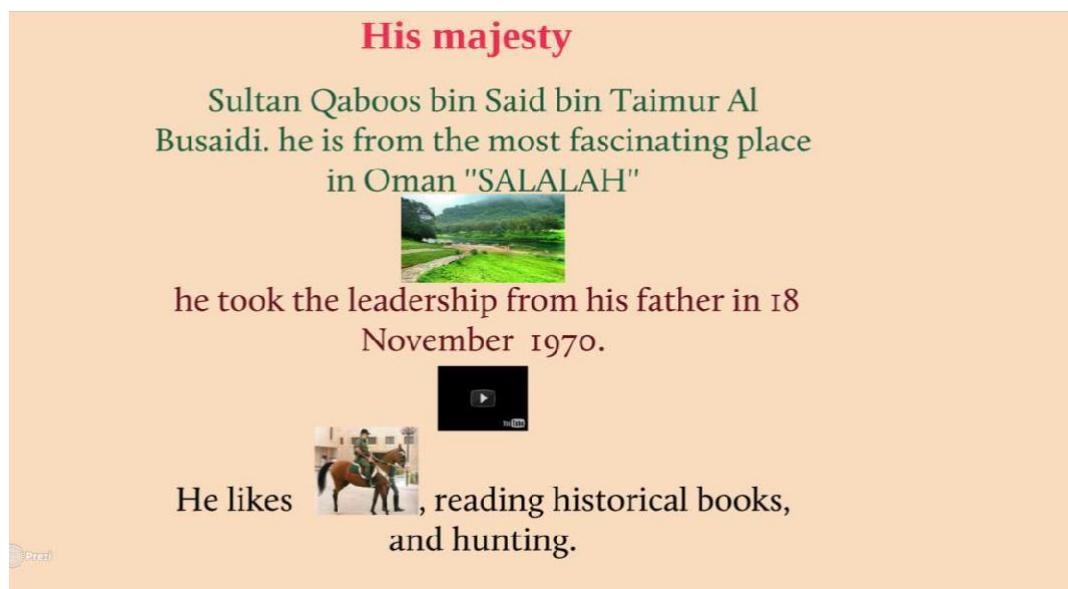
**Figure 9:** Mohannad's Monomodal Writing

In the above piece of writing, Mohannad, a 21 year old Omani student, who had recently arrived in Australia to study English, used “karif” which is the Arabic word meaning “autumn” as he did not feel he could write it in Arabic. Instead, Mohannad used English phonetic script for an approximate Arabic pronunciation. When I asked Mohannad about this in an interview, he replied that he did not know what Autumn or Fall means in English, so he chose to write these terms in Arabic as he was aware that I would understand his intended meaning.

The preceding pages of this chapter have shown a variety of ways in which L1 forms an important part of a learner's identity when learning to write in ELICOS settings (cf. Norton & Toohey, 2011). Still, it is well known that prescriptive approaches to the teaching of writing in EAP require students to formulate their ideas only in English. When the students were given more freedom to write in multimodal texts, they spoke of feeling a little relieved from the pressure of demonstrating high levels of linguistic accuracy, as is the dominant product approach to writing adopted by teachers in their pedagogy at NLC. Responses such as “I feel free” and “more freedom” were common amongst student responses to the questions about their feelings in regard to multimodal writing texts. By just providing the students with the opportunity to use different modes, they applied this to their monomodal writing. Instead of seeing their L1 as some sort of transgression or obstacle to effective learning, students were allowed to see their knowledge of L1 as another resource, and a positive way to express themselves. This clearly challenges the traditional views of L1 as an obstacle, which were expressed in the previous chapter by some teachers.

### *Omani Students' Writing*

The collaborative group of students from Oman also emphasised their political and national identity, through a slide in multimodal text that was titled "His Majesty" (Figure 10).

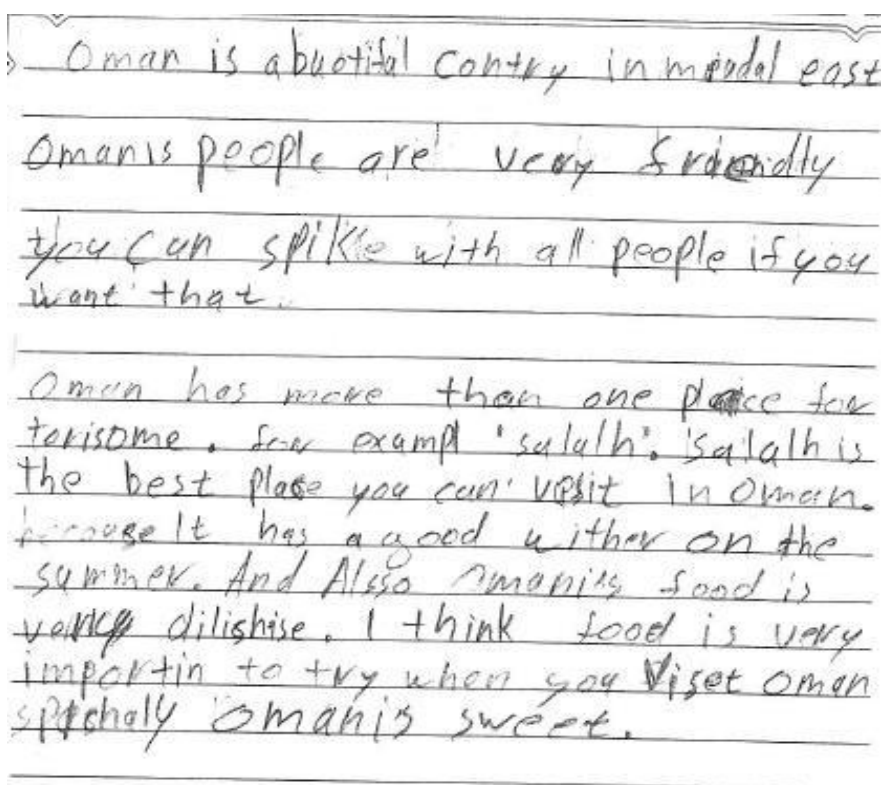


**Figure 10:** Omani Students' Multimodal Text

This sample above of the students' multimodal text gives only a limited insight into the rich example that they actually produced, which included video, pictures, and the sound of a traditional song in the background. One member of the group, Yamin, a 20-year-old student, who by her own evaluation struggled with writing in English, especially spelling and vocabulary. In an interview, I asked Yamin about the experience of writing multimodally and her response was that she felt so empowered she could have written a whole book: "Because in me myself I don't have so much [English] vocabulary, but when I can use picture, I can use that picture for something I can't explain, and sometime I ... a few things about Kaboos [Sultan of Oman] but when I get something when I can use picture, I can use voice, I can use video, I can write book about Oman". Mahani, Asmaak, Anis, Surina, and Nazira (2011) speak eloquently about the challenges faced by beginner learners of English, who speak foreign languages. These authors argues that ESL beginner learners often find writing a challenge because they need to express their ideas in words, which means they have to integrate their understanding of grammar and be able to use correct sentence structures all at the one time, and that this combination can become overwhelming and paralysing when writing

Clearly, this was likely to happen with Yamin, and yet her experience of writing in a collaborative group using a range of semiotic resources was empowering rather than overwhelming.

In multimodal text, Yasmin's group's choice of colours proudly demonstrated the national meaning as it incorporated the flag of Oman, a musical background, and ultimately the way in which the students dressed when they presented their writing to the class. In addition, a political meaning was constructed. The students revealed their loyalty to their ruler through the choice of the word "Sultan", and "His Majesty" written in bold, large font. This meaning is emphasised by attaching a picture of the ruler. In their multimodal writing text, the students included a video about the election of Qaboos forty years ago as the Sultan of Oman. The loyalty of those students to their Sultan is underpinned by the political constitution upon which Oman is based. For example, it is not a republic. Therefore, they are loyal even though the Sultan was elected more than twenty years before those students were born.



Oman is a beautiful country in middle east  
Oman's people are very friendly  
you can speak with all people if you  
want that.

Oman has more than one place for  
tourism. For example 'salalah'. Salalah is  
the best place you can visit in Oman.  
because it has a good weather on the  
summer. And Also Oman's food is  
very delicious. I think food is very  
important to try when you visit Oman  
especially Oman's sweet.

**Figure 11:** Yamen's Monomodal Text

In the monomodal text above (Figure 11), it is clear that Yamen is struggling to convey a fluent series of ideas or thoughts, and his use of grammar and vocabulary is obviously at a low

level. When Yamen attempted to write about his country, he relied on basic vocabulary in order to write 'correctly'. The type of meaning made in this kind of monomodal text depends on which semiotic symbols are 'available' (Jones, 2012, p. 161). Even when Yamen mentions "Salalla", he mentions it as a beautiful place to visit, whereas in his multimodal writing this beauty is related to another aspect of the country, the ruler and the ruler's hometown. This does more than merely demonstrate Yamen's knowledge about politics in his home country.

Rather, as shown in Yamen's group, there was an associated sense of pride. This was evident in the combination of language, images, and video that all students showed in their respect for their "Sultan" and their country. The students described 'Salalah' as a "fascinating" place and juxtaposed this with a visually stunning image of the town and exotic looking horses. The students seemed empowered when given the option to go beyond the traditional way of expressing meaning to incorporate aspects of their personalities and collective identities that meant so much to them as a group of students and individuals.

### *Chinese Students' Writing*

The multimodal writing produced by a Chinese group of students in my Level 3 class demonstrated their feeling of empowerment when their methods of communicating were broadened. The students chose to focus on the cultural and religious identity in response to the task to write about "My Country". These students opted to use illustrations to make meaning rather than just producing correct language that emulated given models. As Leo mentioned in the interview, the multimodal writing task for his group required a response regarding "culture and tradition", and in that sense their writing provided a strong and obvious example of the complexity of the students' meaning making. In the sample of multimodal writing below, the group of Chinese students identified strong connections to their culture. Similar to Piza, Sandy, who chose to write about Chinese traditional food in her monomodal piece, used the phrase "delicious food". Sandy expanded on this in her interview to explain that using images in multimodal writing assisted her to identify the most important dishes and show other members of her class the difference "not only by name, they don't know the difference" (see Figure 12 and Figure 13). A comparison of Sandy's monomodal description about "delicious food" and her elaboration through multimodal writing and the interview clearly demonstrated that Sandy had the knowledge and desire to communicate much more about traditional food than simply referring to taste only.

Then, I want to describe delicious food in my country. The food have many type such as Lu, Yue, Chuan... Every type have different tastes, but I think everyone are very good. If I have a chance, I want to learn every food type. In my hometown, Lu is very popular, some people like it and cook it.

**Figure 12:** Sandy Monomodal Text

## CHINESE FOOD-- SANDY

I want to describe delicious food in my country. There are eight major Chinese cuisines like Shandong,



Guangdong



Sichuan



Fujian



Zhejiang



Hunan



Jiangsu



Anhui



Each species has a different taste, but I think is very delicious.

**Figure 13:** Sandy's Multimodal Text

In contrast to monomodal text, by using different modes that were mostly images, Sandy and her Chinese peers were able to show their rich culture, history, and religion as important aspects of their personalities and identities that were missing in their monomodal writing. Below is an excerpt from Leo's monomodal writing.



Leo  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 China is a nice country. It's great. China has  
 a long history. And China is the heaven of the stomach.  
 And then, I will talk about two parts, like food and public  
 transport in China.  
 Chinese food is famous all over the world. Many countries  
 have Chinatown. In China, the food is very important. Different  
 cities in China have different diets. So you can try many  
 kinds of food.  
 And then, I will tell about the <sup>public</sup> transport in China. In  
 China, the transport is very convenience. But it's always many  
<sup>public</sup> people. But the public transport is much cheaper than the  
 in China  
 public transport in Australia.

**Figure 14:** Leo's Monomodal Writing

It is clear that Leo was not able to expand on "a long history" as this requires using more complex words. However, Leo's multimodal writing (Figure 14), he used images and a song instead to extend his communication regarding aspects of Chinese history, traditions, and symbols.

# Traditional culture ---Leo

- Chinese traditional culture is one of the oldest culture in the world like Peking opera



lion dance



and dragon dance



Buddhism



is the main

religion of China and you can see many in temples



in China. Chinese language has

different groups like YUE, Hakka and Mandarin. China Calligraphy



is

famous in the world. China Calligraphy generally uses traditional Chinese characters like dragon



opera dance

Traditional Simplified

Chinese New Year is a significant day. It mains a start of a year for Chinese. We would wear the red clothes and give children pocket money . We also at that day and for driving the beast call the Nian.



[song](#)

Figure 15: Chinese Students' Multimodal Writing

Leo was also able to use strong visual appeal to present the significance of the colour red, which is associated with good luck and hence very symbolic in Chinese New Year celebrations).

### *Saudi Students' Writing*

Bayan is a Saudi student who had a lower level of English and seemed to struggle with her writing. In an interview I conducted with Bayan, she mentioned that before she began multimodal writing, expressing herself was “difficult because [she had] no vocabulary”. Bayan said that she was also concerned about ideas, and in her writing, she was trying to give her teachers a lot of information. Yet again, it is clear from Bayan’s multimodal text below (Figure 17) that even with the spelling check on her computer, she was very restricted in communicating ideas that she genuinely wanted to convey. Nevertheless, despite Bayan’s limited vocabulary and spelling mistakes, her multimodal text showed a promising attempt to identify an aspect of her religious identity.

T0day I will talk about ‘Eid al Fitr. It is coming after  
Ramadan. Muslims are very people.

I am week UP in 6 cloak and I wiring new clothes. I

meet with my family. Gave my children

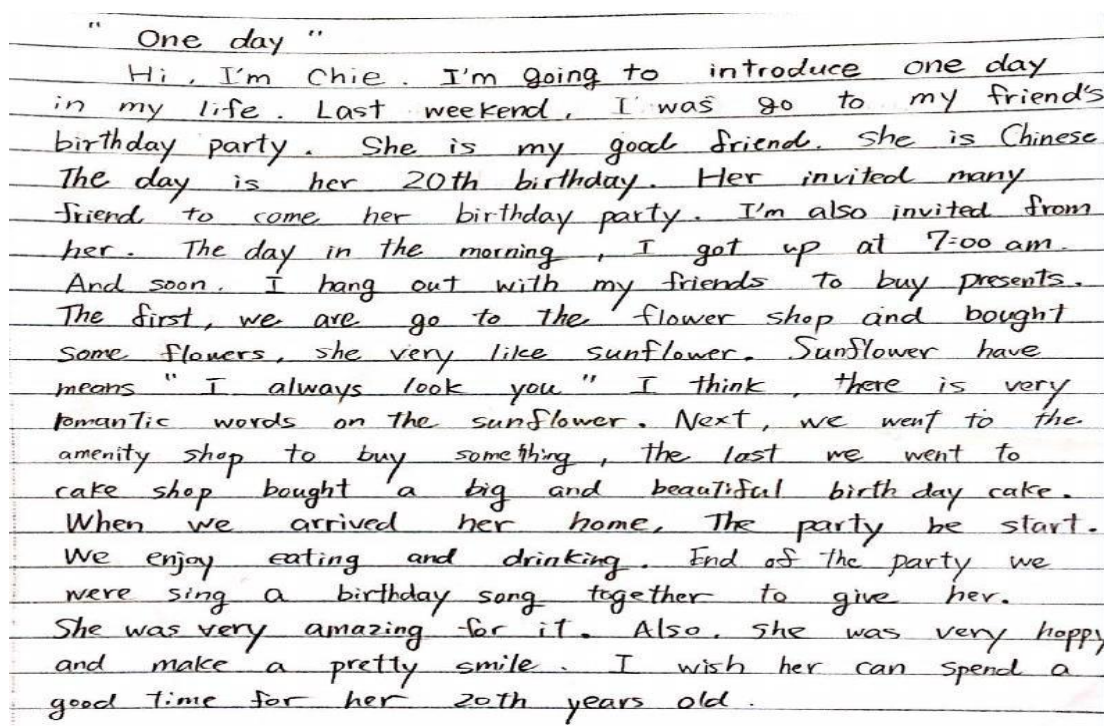


**Figure 16:** Bayan’s Multimodal Text

Bayan mentioned to me in an interview that she could only occasionally express her intended views in writing on a topic that she was given depending on whether she knew relevant vocabulary: “sometimes more vocab, sometimes no, not more vocab... topics easy because more vocab but little vocab difficult”. In Bayan’s multimodal writing, though, she was free to use images when she did not know the correct vocabulary she wanted. Reflecting on Bayan’s writing in Figure 16, she was still self-critical about lacking vocabulary: “Yeah but maybe some people do not understand that vocabulary [EID al Fitr]”, and yet they could understand from the picture that it is a kind of celebration for Muslims. Bayan said that “the picture helps me because I’m forget the vocab, but I use the picture ... it’s no problem, but I forget any vocabulary, it’s problem because different idea”. In the example above, the type of image is an independent feature of the whole; the picture becomes an important resource in the meaning making of the text. Kress and Leeuwien (2001) refer to this phenomenon of when an image can be regarded as ‘lexical’,

especially if there is a gap in the producer's linguistic knowledge (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 113). This suggests that using a wider range of semiotic resources, particularly images, can provide tools for beginning adult writers to communicate not just basic ideas, but more complex social, political, and religious meanings. Also, identity is an issue for adult students' as they learn what is required in academic writing. Hyland (2002a) challenges the view that is often presented to EAP students that academic writing is faceless, impersonal discourse. According to Hyland, students are told "to leave their personalities at the door" (p. 352).

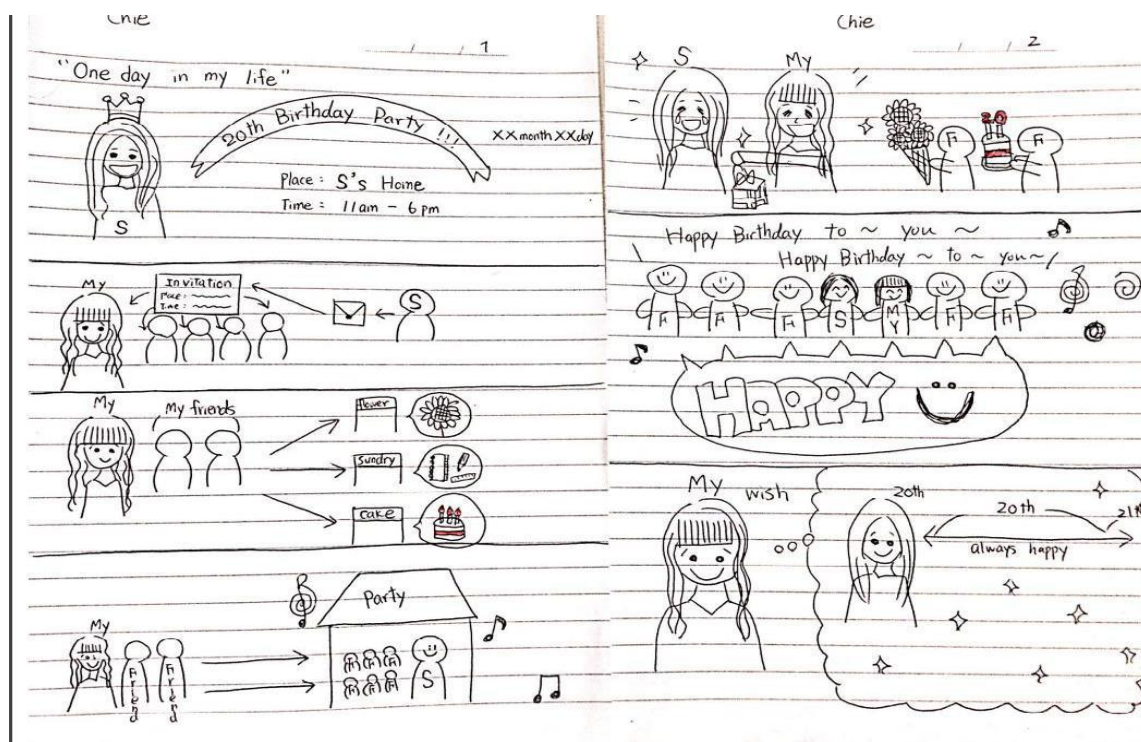
Chie, a Chinese student mentioned that if she "couldn't write, I can draw or use a picture. I'll be free for communication ... free to communicate my ideas". As seen in Chie's multimodal writing (Figure 17), she decided to draw. As a talented illustrator, Chie was able to use her skills to produce a comic style sequence, which also portrayed her understanding of concepts including order and progression.



**Figure 17:** Chie's Monomodal Writing

In the interview, Chie described how she used emojis in her daily communication, as it was important to her that "my friends think I angry or am not happy ... show people I'm so happy to send you talk with you". In her multimodal writing, Chie chose to draw because "I good at draw something picture draw something, so I can ... I can show you I want to say". Chie also

used drawings to show her *feelings* that she thought she could not reveal in her monomodal writing: “I think draw something more ... more”. The similarity in using illustrations and emojis as forms of expression must be noted here. In both instances, it is clear Chie feels secure and certain that those who view the content will more accurately interpret her perspective. For her, the combination of writing and drawing, as shown in Figure 18, is different from academic writing as “draw something can more communicate my think and feeling”. Although Chie was able to communicate the joy of the birthday party using adjectives such as “happy” and “pretty smile”, as well as using emotive language such as “amazing”, using a universally known visual mode of expression transcends verbal language barriers. Chie explains the ease at which she can communicate through a shared understanding of emojis. In the group as a whole, Chie is able to express her feelings of joy and this is depicted through her illustrations of friends in a line together and linking arms, while smiling and singing. In both writing instances, Chie was able to communicate her awareness of time and sequence. In Chie’s monomodal writing, she used terms such as “last weekend”, “the day”, “first”, and “the next”, whereas solid lines were drawn to indicate passing of time in her multimodal script. For Chie, these drawings communicate a narrative with many layers. The combination of illustrations and text (that is, “20<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party”, “friends”, “Time: 11am – 6pm”) provides Chie with greater scope to convey her knowledge of content, narrative structure, and conventions such as time.



**Figure 18:** Chie’s Multimodal Writing

For students who struggle in writing, they may choose to avoid words and expressions that are difficult to spell. As a result, students' writing is often thought to be simplistic, stilted, and immature (Wengelin, 2007). Such a phenomenon is applicable to all participants. Despite the attempts of students to write simple, correctly spelt words, and use correct sentence structures, their writing is often full of grammatical and spelling mistakes and displays incorrect choices of vocabulary. This was demonstrated in participants' written texts of when using computers – they showed a decrease in the number of mistakes in vocabulary and spelling. The use of computers also reflected a good use of language for learners with low level English. It seems that learners had fewer difficulties in spelling and vocabulary when they had access to the automated spell check and grammar that was provided. More importantly, these learners seemed more confident in their use of vocabulary, and assisted by the use of images, they were able to compile multimodal integrated texts to convey the meaning they wanted to convey.

## Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted the many benefits for ELICOS students in enabling them more freedom to think and write in multimodal ways. I have characterised this as multimodal pedagogy and have demonstrated that it is possible to bring a multimodal pedagogical approach to writing in this form. The provision of modifications, such as allowing students to use different scripts and refer to words from their home language, enables students to communicate the sophistication of their ideas and convey accurate meanings when their attempts in English are thwarted by a lack of vocabulary. Finally, I have emphasised the valuable learning opportunity presented through implementing a multimodal pedagogy. By allowing and encouraging students to experiment with meaning making strategies with words and other semiotic resources, I have been able to offer more space for students' voices, thus expressing their identities and expanding on their intended ideas in L2 writing.

Where Chapter 7 has focused on ELICOS teachers providing opportunities for learning from and modifying the existing pedagogy, Chapter 8 will draw upon previous data analysis and policy developments to explore opportunities for employing an alternative multimodal pedagogy in ELICOS classrooms at NLC. The benefits of a multimodal pedagogy, made clear

throughout chapter 7, are immediate and far reaching. Whilst the students were presented with an opportunity to learn and express themselves more freely, at the same time I (as their teacher) was learning too through exposure to a broader aspect of student experiences, knowledge and their individual selections of methods to make meaning. Chapter 8 takes a closer look at the challenges involved in seeking to explore the potential of multimodal literacies in established institutions. The discussion considers: the existing traditional literacy practices at NLC and the teachers' seeming resistance to change on the part of many teachers; the diverse linguistic and learning needs of the students at NLC; and the array of benefits of a multimodal pedagogy for these students in an ELICOS setting.



## Chapter 8

### Multimodal Pedagogies: A Critical Exploration of the Possibilities





*The previous image could be me in my ELICOS classroom. I stand with arms open wide just like the Syrian way of welcoming guests into our home. Through gestures and words, we say “Ahleen”. Welcome. But it means so much more than just welcome. Ahleen means welcome, not only to my home, but to my family.*

*It does not end there, as there are acts to follow.*

*We embrace those who enter our homes, just one step through the door. We embrace who they are, the way they are, all aspects of themselves and all they bring with them.*

*And still, Ahleen conveys more than to just embrace. We offer- whatever we can and all we can. We engage*

*– in dialogue with guests, and they engage in return. We pay attention to what they say, but mostly to what they need.*

*This is not a closed circle of interaction and discourse - it is almost like a cloud of possibilities.*

*I like to think of my classroom as a home for multimodal writing pedagogy. It is with arms open wide that I embrace, engage, and attend to my students’ needs through inviting them into a world of multiple modes of communication. I invite them to engage in meaning making with me – to explore the possibilities of a cloud of written, linguistic, visual, digital possibilities.*

*Students raise their hands and their voices are heard – their funds of knowledge, their cultures, strengths, and identities are acknowledged and encouraged by their teacher. In this classroom, students do not leave their identities at the door.*

*This is my vision of an 'Ahleen' classroom - accommodating cultures, languages, and practices. And it is Ahleen pedagogy - valuing diversity, multimodality, individuality, and possibilities.*

In this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged from my analysis of the data presented in Chapters Six and Seven, and I link these back to the dominant debates and policy developments identified in my review of the literature in Chapters Two and Three. I present three arguments in relation to the current practices in ELICOS writing classes and discuss the findings of my critical intervention and exploration of multimodal pedagogy with the three classes at NLC.

Firstly, drawing on the findings I presented in Chapter Six, I argue that the dominant writing pedagogy at NLC is somewhat resistant to multiliteracy practices. NLC teachers appear to be shaped by institutional cultures that support a traditional view of literacy practices in writing classes, which imposes pressures on teachers and students. The second argument that I make, informed by my findings from students' interviews and writing, is that the current writing pedagogy at NLC does not sufficiently address students' linguistic and learning needs. I show that linguistic needs are just one component of students' needs. Hiding beneath the surface are needs which are of greater concern to students, in the form of their socio-cultural needs and desires to express their identities and acquired knowledge.

Embedded within the critical pedagogical framework underpinning this study (e.g. Canagarajah, 2011; Pennycook, 1999; Freire, 1972), my third argument is that multimodal pedagogies seem to offer a range of valuable opportunities for multicultural ELICOS students at NLC. Using the work done on hospitable pedagogy (Kostogriz, 2009, 2011), I argue that NLC's traditional writing pedagogies are not hospitable to these students. The monomodal writing pedagogy that currently dominates NLC teaching has a constraining effect on students' writing identities. This constrains students' capacity to explore and express themselves through their writing. In contrast, this study reveals that multimodal pedagogies provide more than just an opportunity for students to employ a wider range of semiotic symbols. These pedagogies acknowledge and respond to students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When meaning making was emphasised in the same NLC classrooms through multimodal pedagogies, students expressed and demonstrated more positive connections with their existing knowledge, language, and culture.

In this chapter's mapping and critical evaluation of the writing pedagogies used in ELICOS classrooms, I discuss the following three areas:

1. EAP Writing Pedagogy: Institutional values, issues, and students' challenges in writing.

2. Monomodal Pedagogy: The constraining influences on students' meaning-making in EAP writing.
3. Multimodal Pedagogies: Exploring identities and accommodating students' knowledge and backgrounds.

### **EAP Writing Pedagogy: Institutional Values, Issues, and Students' Challenges in Writing.**

The mapping of NLC teachers' writing pedagogy in Chapters Six and Seven showed that traditional approaches to the teaching of writing were dominant in most classes. The instructional strategies and pedagogical practices employed by participating teachers at NLC are in line with the traditional pedagogy of EAP courses (Bruce, 2008; Grigorenko, 2012). In interviews where NLC teachers reflected upon their understandings of language and literacy, teachers stressed the importance of building ELICOS students' competence with grammar and sentence structure. Teachers' explanations can be characterised as presenting a linguistic perspective, where attention is principally on structure, vocabulary, and the mechanics of writing, such as grammar and spelling (Coffin, 2003; Khansir, 2012; Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). The dominant writing pedagogy at NLC has some of the characteristics of a 'product approach' to the teaching of writing, primarily focused on the form and final products of students' writing (Khansir, 2012; Lotherington, 2007), which I have referred to as an emphasis on linguistic knowledge.

This emphasis on linguistic knowledge is what Andy, who does not have much experience in EAP teaching, described as the teacher's job to "just focus" on correct grammar use as well as sentences, paragraphs, and essay structure. The findings from NLC teachers' responses to a questionnaire about their practices and beliefs (see Appendix B) also reveal that they were in strong agreement with each other about the importance of grammatical accuracy in students' writing. This is in line with Zafiri and Panourgia (2012), who argues that EAP language teachers' first priority is to enable their students to master different academic writing styles. However, this presumes that the students will have a sound knowledge of grammar, syntax, and spelling in their foreign languages. If students do not have this kind of knowledge, then it is the teacher's duty to make sure they start by teaching these 'basic' language structures before anything else. According to Zafiri and Panourgia (2012), when these 'basics' are 'in place', then the teacher should move on to helping students to generate coherent paragraphs. It is this kind of thinking that informs the pedagogical decisions prevalent at NLC, such as teaching according to paragraph models and brainstorming ideas with vocabulary and grammar exercises, which

teachers mentioned they use in class to assist students in writing. Such approaches were almost all focused on linguistic competency and accuracy.

I would be oversimplifying the mapping if I suggested operating within this traditional boundary of literacy practices that is entirely due to teachers' beliefs and consequent decision making. While there is strong evidence in the EAP literature that teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching of writing are directly associated with their practices (Gaitas & Alves Martins, 2015), not all teachers at NLC espoused beliefs about language and literacy that were aligned with traditional understandings of writing or its pedagogy. The responses from teachers' interviews and questionnaires revealed a range of conceptual views about writing. While some teachers focused on the text-based products of writing, others viewed language in terms of a tool for expressing ideas and the self, as well as a means for exploring creativity. Their views ranged from a narrowly linguistic perspective on correctness in language products to a broader one of communicative practices. However, when teachers talked about writing as a process of producing accurate texts, this strongly influenced their pedagogical beliefs. In contrast, teachers who talked about writing in terms of a communicative tool tended to reveal acute tensions between their imagined and actual teaching practices that they enacted. This suggests that opportunities available to teachers to discuss and reflect upon their beliefs and knowledge of teaching writing are limited due to specific requirements of their professional roles, which are related to their work within the classroom.

Based on the findings revealed in previous chapters, reasons for the traditional approach to teaching writing at NLC might be partly explained by teachers' individual pedagogical beliefs and decisions to mainly focus on developing students' linguistic skills. However, closer analysis showed that regardless of teachers' qualifications, years of experience, or beliefs, their pedagogical approaches to writing were also significantly shaped by what I refer to as 'institutional factors', which I will explain in the following section.

## NLC Traditional Practices: The Constraining Influence of Institutional Values on Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Practice.

Institutions such as NLC promote themselves in the ELICOS marketplace as offering English intensive courses for students with 'deficits' in linguistic and academic knowledge and skills. The courses offer a bridge or pathway for non-native speakers of English with these deficits to qualify for university study (Dooey, 2010). This pathway promises to give students the knowledge, skills, and strategies that are necessary to successfully manage academic writing tasks in a higher education setting so as to meet the entry prerequisite for university courses (O'Loughlin, 2015). However, there is a growing awareness that students wishing to transition into university should engage with knowledge in a variety of ways; and that this engagement should involve writing and reading familiar and unfamiliar genres (Hyland, 2013). As students feel the pressure to master the range of academic literacy skills, which is expected of them at university, teachers at institutions like NLC feel pressure to help students achieve, in a very short time frame, the required level of English.

Other institutional pressures imposed on teachers stem from national policies for higher education in Australia. For example, a registered ELICOS provider must demonstrate that it is addressing specific student needs (Department of Education and Training, 2011-2018). As stated in most promotional literature or online marketing, these specific needs for students are interpreted through the main goals of an EAP writing course. The aim of these goals is to help students develop an adequate level of academic writing competence, typically in terms of English language proficiency to enter university (Reid, 2001). In Australia, this effectively means that ELICOS providers must demonstrate that they are teaching students to read and write. The effectiveness of this teaching is judged according to whether students obtain a score of six or above in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (Gonzalez & Gomez, 2010.). Thus, ELICOS syllabi and course materials are designed to maximise the possibility of students obtaining a score of six or above. This puts teachers in the position of needing to adhere strictly to all requirements of the system and the institution. Teachers' agency (or lack of it), such as their capacity to make independent decisions regarding their work (Kincheloe, 2008b; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012) is a critical factor in understanding how teachers' professional identities and their practices are shaped by institutional factors. While there was some evidence that teachers at NLC could adjust their goals in response to the needs of

particular students in their classes, the pull of institutional or national ELICOS policies mostly determines their classroom practices (Lasky, 2005; Priestley et al., 2012).

Theoretically, teachers at NLC had some freedom to choose the particular teaching methods and strategies they thought would best meet the needs of their students. However, as teachers repeatedly mentioned in interviews, they considered there were strong expectations to comply with often unstated institutional requirements. For teachers such as James and Vera, their lived experiences were that there was little freedom to act autonomously. James and Vera felt constrained because of factors such as the lack of time due to intensive courses, the prescribed syllabus with its textbooks and lesson plans, and writing tasks as set out in all course materials prescribed by NLC. As discussed earlier, teachers at NLC due to their backgrounds, have various personal and professional points of view. Yet, in interviews, teachers were remarkably similar in their decision-making regarding teaching of writing, identifying the above-mentioned challenges faced in their practices, and their roles and responsibilities within NLC. This is best illustrated by Patrick in Chapter Six when this teacher mentioned that teachers are gatekeepers of the institution's expectations so that "*everyone*" felt compelled to address those expectations with academic writing and formal structures and "that's predominantly where most of the effort is put into". This gatekeeping concept is also described by Lillis (2002) who states that teachers tend to enact the vision of the institution and act as gatekeeper for EAP students.

There is widespread agreement in the literature about the fundamental importance of developing EAP students' linguistic knowledge and skills. Many scholars, such as Silva and Matsuda, (2012) stress the importance of exposing ESL students to the functions and forms of particular writing tasks and assignments they are most likely to encounter in their academic lives. Still, some studies also point to the limitations of an over-emphasis on linguistic knowledge and skills (Bruce, 2011; Khansir, 2012; Matsuda, 2003). This study reveals that these limited conceptions of language and writing pedagogy have implications for the types of text products written by NLC students, which relate to teaching that places the highest emphasis on emulating traditional linguistic structures and accuracy of mechanics of writing. This leaves little or no room for students to engage individually with the ideas they are writing about. This approach to writing pedagogy, which I call 'monomodal pedagogy', raises a number of issues and difficulties that were mentioned by students in interviews. Also, to some extent, this was confirmed by teachers in their interviews and questionnaires.

### *Monomodal writing pedagogy: Issues and difficulties faced by students*

Three issues emerged from the findings of this study in relation to the dominant monomodal pedagogy at NLC. The issues I discuss below all contribute to a picture of writing challenges that students experienced as a result of these, and how meaning is constructed in the monomodal writing pedagogy at NLC. The three issues are:

- (i) Monomodal representations of text
- (ii) Monolingualism
- (iii) Decontextualized writing instruction

#### (i) Monomodal Representations of Text

One of the significant findings emerging from the analysis in Chapters Six and Seven is that the traditional pedagogy at NLC reflects the institutionalisation of a particular model of literacy that operates through particular forms of text. Today, the Internet and modern technology play a role in so many everyday literacy practices that students engage in, and yet this aspect of literacy is barely addressed in traditional notions of academic writing at NLC. Although some researchers have suggested that it is possible for technology mediated literacy practices to be incorporated into ELICOS or similar programs (Ivanič, Carter, Lillis, & Parkin, 2009), these are generally not reflected in the traditional monomodal texts that ELICOS students typically write.

Indeed, Australia's National Standards for ELICOS maintains that their courses should "reflect new developments in TESOL theory and practice and changes in course offerings" and "enable varied learning activities and teaching methodologies" (Department of Education and Training, 2018), but there is limited space in a crowded curriculum for teachers to demonstrate or explore their knowledge of TESOL theory. It is important also to note that across the world, multimodality is increasingly found in a variety of domains of institutional learning such as schools, universities, adult learning centres, leisure and workplaces. Typically, this multimodality incorporates digital tools and culturally situated sign systems with intersecting complex significations (Morrison, 2010). However, despite all of the above and the pioneering work of researchers such as (Kress, 2013; Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), multimodal

communication practices and meaning making by L2 learners, particularly in their writing, is rarely if ever implemented. As revealed in teachers' responses to one of the questions in the questionnaire regarding their willingness to use multimodal pedagogies, there still appears to be scepticism about implementing multimodal pedagogies in academic studies, especially with students studying at advanced levels in ELICOS programs. While researchers claim that schools around the world continue to be organized around rules and regulations of standardized processes and goals (DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Selwyn & Bulfin, 2015), the interview data in this study suggest that there might be an even deeper preoccupation with constraining rules and regulations amongst teachers in ELICOS centres like NLC.

It appears to me that the reason for the traditional monomodal practices in writing classes does not seem to be solely associated with individual teachers' pedagogical decisions. A few teachers mentioned in interviews that they occasionally used multiple modes in writing classes to scaffold specific tasks, so as to help students generate ideas, find suitable vocabulary, or express some knowledge about the topic. These activities were more likely to be used by teachers as pre-writing tasks. However, teachers' responses to the questionnaire as well as responses from students' interviews confirmed that students have rarely been encouraged to use any approach other than the linguistic mode in assessable tasks. The emphasis on linguistic (verbal) dimensions of language prevailed and teachers rarely, if ever, allowed their students to experiment with meaning making using multiple modes of language. This suggests that despite teachers' awareness of the availability of other forms and the advantages of using other modes (such as Ramsi's use of YouTube and David's use of pictures), the majority of classroom practitioners in ELICOS programmes interviewed for this study (and I am including myself) found it difficult to step outside those established traditional boundaries in their classroom practices

Following Kress's (2000) theorising of multimodality and the wider socio-cultural communicative perspective of language that this study adopts, 'form' can include a word, picture, symbol, or any type of verbal or nonverbal language that already exists. Yet, 'form' as revealed in NLC teachers' pedagogy was predominantly linguistic. This emphasises the role of the institution and the power relationship between teachers and the institution in which they are employed. At NLC, teachers felt little alternative than to teach according to the prescribed writing syllabus and objectives. The literature suggests that favouring correct deployment of linguistic forms over meaning making processes is still the dominant model of writing pedagogy in EAP syllabi and delivering this in classrooms. Indeed, the widely enacted writing pedagogy at NLC explicitly promotes monomodal representations of text. Through my intervention, as a



teacher-researcher using multimodal pedagogies in the context of action research, this study activated an epistemological shift, which promoted the integration of students' different knowledge-making practices, beliefs, and experiences (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). This study then proceeded to investigate the impact on students' writing practices, writing products and attitudes to writing. All the participating teachers at NLC mentioned that allowing students to use different modes of expression was not embraced, and so monomodal understandings of language still dominated writing pedagogy at NLC outside the particular classes that enacted action research.

Many of the teachers at NLC stated that they had conducted action research and been involved in professional development. Nevertheless, all the action research and professional development were conducted within the constraints and affordances of the NLC syllabus. It is important to note that while implementing multimodal teaching of writing, I was still able to demonstrate that I was teaching in accordance with the design syllabus and course materials. However, there seemed to be very little space in the ELICOS syllabus for multimodality (as mentioned in my reflections in Chapter Five of this thesis). In other words, the classes in which I conducted action research were not completely transformed through adopting it. In many respects, these appeared to be 'normal' classes running as scheduled. There were some significant changes in pedagogy and writing tasks and this allowed me in the process of action research to portray some reasons for possible changes in the future. As a researcher and practitioner, I came away from this research with some optimism that change might be possible, driven by the positive responses to action research intervention in this study. It is worth mentioning that James, a teacher who expressed a belief in creativity, and also conveyed his dissatisfaction in the way he currently teaches writing at NLC, modified a writing task for his students to enable them to include images in their writing, after being interviewed for this research. In the task description, James asked students to "use the following pictures, drawings, and words to write ". In an interview later in the study, James mentioned to me that he allowed his students to draw if needed to complete their writing tasks.

## (ii) Monolingualism

The second issue that emerged from the finding of this study that relates to dominant traditional writing pedagogy at NLC is monolingualism. The dominant monomodal pedagogy at NLC gives the impression that teachers fail to appreciate, or under appreciate, the value of students' multilingual backgrounds and knowledge, and this promotes a monolingual ideology (Mazak &

Carroll, 2017). In the findings of this study, this concept has been combined with an emphasis on the linguistic form as the authorised mode that students can use in writing. It reflects a specific ideology which is related to the use of English, which understands students' first languages as an obstacle, not a resource, for learning an additional language. This is reflected in the narrower notion of language "repertoires" that is often referred to in linguistic theorising of language (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Nicholas & Starks, 2014).

Multilingualism was barely recognised in the ways NLC teachers spoke about their classroom practices. For example, the first language (L1) is not permitted in classroom discussions nor is it accepted in writing tasks at NLC. In other words, L1 is not a resource that NLC students can use to explore or facilitate their meaning making in their writing. In fact, views expressed by some teachers revealed they are still holding a traditional view that the importance of using only L1 in the classroom is one of the factors that students struggle with in writing. Adrian has a Master's degree in creative writing and usually teaches in the general level. As Adrian mentioned, "[o]bviously their first language is very strong, that's perhaps the main challenge." Although there is an acknowledgment of the diverse backgrounds of the students in NLC policies, even the policies of Department of Education and Training appear to be unhelpful in relation to the particular needs of students as English language learners and users. Rather, the emphasis is on "ELICOS Educational resources [that have been] developed for classroom and individual student use and [which] address specific student needs and course learning outcomes" (Department of Education and Training, 2011, 2018). And yet, the findings of this study suggest that multilingualism and students' diverse linguistic identities are viewed as negative factors and obstacles. Students have to ignore their linguistic identities in favour of writing an accurate text in English. This means that the dominant monomodal pedagogy at NLC does not only mean that students must use the linguistic form, but they must use only English.

### (iii) Decontextualized Writing Instruction

The third issue that emerged from the findings is the view concerning teaching of writing as decontextualised instruction of a skill. This study has endorsed literature, which argues that students' learning in the traditional teaching of literacy and writing is "too often divorced from context" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 63). NLC teachers tended to consider their literacy pedagogy as a "separate, refined set of 'neutral' competencies, autonomous of social context" (Street, 2014, p.114). This translates into a focus on writing as the written product, which is produced through regular drilling of grammatical exercises in a controlled context, and the ideas in a piece of

student writing are believed to be transmitted directly through language (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). A sociocultural critical approach to knowledge emphasises teachers as active agents who inquire into and transform knowledge depending on the sociocultural context and the needs of the students they teach, rather than simply consuming and transferring existing decontextualised knowledge among all settings (Giroux, 2011). Yet, teachers at NLC seem to be limited in their capacity to exercise their agency.

New literacy advocates, such as Street (2014), reject traditional decontextualised approaches to writing pedagogy, particularly because of “the ways language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from teacher and learner and imposing ... external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients” (p. 114). Social constructionist theorists (Emmitt et al., 2015) see language as deeply embedded within culture and strongly critique any approach to language and literacy development, which emphasises a fixed body of knowledge (that is linguistic knowledge). However, the findings of this study reveal that NLC teachers operate within a particular context, which is an ‘institutional’ one where writing is seen as embedded in “a particular course in a particular department, a particular assignment set by a particular tutor” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 61). As such, the culture of an institution is reflected in teachers who draw from the conventions and the norms of the institution in their practices. In ELICOS settings, this ‘institutional’ context tends to reflect more conventional and less creative practices, which lead to setting of restricted writing tasks. This was clearly revealed in samples of students’ monomodal writing I presented in Chapters Six and Seven. Nicholas and Starks (2014) are typical critics of decontextualized writing pedagogy, who argue for a culturally situated or holistic understanding of language where this is seen as inseparable from who is using it and where it is being used. By regarding academic literacy practices as something abstract and decontextualised, “communication difficulties are too easily regarded as learners’ own weaknesses and EAP becomes an exercise in language repair” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 6). Clyne (2005) argues that what he describes as a “monolingual mindset” does not attempt to understand the multiplicity of backgrounds of language learners, nor is it interested in the cultural differences of language users and the diverse contexts in which they are using language.

Over the past decade there has been a movement in EAP pedagogy towards “more context-sensitive perspectives” (Hyland, 2006, p. 16), partly in response to the increasing numbers of L2 students attending university who are culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse. This has led to an increased emphasis on a “rich diversity of texts, contexts, and practices” (Hyland, 2006, p. 16) in the curriculum and pedagogy of EAP. It suggests that there is

a growing realisation that English learners in EAP need more than linguistic knowledge to succeed in their language learning and higher education studies more broadly. Such critiques of monomodal conceptions of language underpin the argument, which this study is making in that ELICOS programs, and teachers of EAP practices in ELICOS settings, should learn from this research and explore practices that challenge the widely-held assumption that notions of successful academic writing are universal, independent of context, and unrelated to any particular disciplines. To continue to ignore literature and studies concerning this “undermine[s] ... professional expertise and leads learners to believe that they simply need to master a set of transferable rules” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 6). At the time of this study, outside of action research being enacted in three classrooms at NLC, the pervasive traditional writing pedagogy had yet to reflect any of these more optimistic developments that literature was revealing in other parts of the world. The dominance of this monomodal and monolingual ideology, which promotes a notion of literacy as decontextualized, has implications for the type of resources students can use to convey meanings and for the range of options that students have when writing. My interviews with students demonstrated, paradoxically perhaps, that institutions can impose additional and unhelpful pressures on students who are learning to write in a language that is not their native language. Some participants, such as Maha, a Saudi student, Lawrence, a Chinese student, and Yamen, an Omani student, described in simple words how they wrote more confidently and fluently if the topic was known to them. However, writing tasks rarely allowed students to choose their own topics. This raises concerns about the effects on writer identities (Ivanič, 1998), which I will discuss in detail in the last section of this chapter.

### *Students’ Perceiving L2 Writing as ‘Difficult’*

ELICOS students at NLC who were learning to write in a language, which was not their native or primary language tended to find writing in English especially difficult. According to Martinez et al. (2011), anxiety is prevalent among university students writing in L2. While many factors contribute to university students’ anxiety, high expectations for accurate writing in L2 across the curriculum are likely to contribute to increased writing anxiety. This was clearly expressed in the focus group interviews with students when they spoke of being “scared”, “so terrible” or “afraid” in response to my questions about whether they encountered difficulties in their writing in English. In fact, the study suggests that the dominant (monomodal) writing pedagogy employed at NLC, and the different strategies that well-meaning teachers utilised in writing classes to assist students with writing, did not appear to significantly alleviate their fears of writing, nor did the strategies address their deeply felt difficulties.

Regardless of their nationalities and educational backgrounds, NLC students, and even more confident writers, still spoke of experiencing difficulties in producing texts that demonstrated the required mastery of linguistic skills in addition to rational thinking and original ideas. This study has raised a number of possible reasons for this anxiety, but it has also gone one step further in advocating a multimodal pedagogy, which directly addresses students' anxiety and encourages them to use a much wider set of semiotic resources to express themselves in their writing. Students did not feel that writing under more traditional pedagogies permitted or acknowledged any sense of their own voices. According to the students, the main reason for these fears, anxiety, and diminished sense of voices in their writing was due to their lack of vocabulary.

It was noteworthy to hear the diverse ways in which the students expressed what they felt they needed to focus on in writing, such as spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Interestingly, there was complete consensus amongst the students interviewed for this study that what is essential in good writing is accuracy. As I delved deeper into these views, it became clear that the focus on accuracy left most of the students feeling concerned about their self-images and self-esteem and led them to questioning how they really thought about themselves. Yet, this focus on accuracy did not seem to be what they felt was most important when they were immersed in the activity of meaning making with multimodal texts. This aligns with Canagarajah (2011) view that bilingual students can become sensitive to the ways in which writing in different languages shapes their thinking and mediates their efforts to present knowledge. Multilingual writers face both challenges and exciting possibilities in this writing/knowledge interplay. As seen in excerpts of students' writing I presented earlier (such as Taysir's descriptive text about Oman on page 142), some students' understanding of writing and rhetorical conventions were influenced by their knowledge of such things in their first language. However, their L1 linguistic knowledge and backgrounds did not seem to be viewed by them as beneficial because ELICOS writing is presented as developing mastery of a new form of writing. These different perspectives of utilizing L1 in writing have to be considered as having implications for the representation of their knowledge.

Students' ideas, knowledge, and level of educational achievement are so often judged by the writing they produce. While the participants in this study were accustomed to being judged as having low proficiency in English (that is they were deemed as beginners or pre-intermediate), they were all pursuing the dream of one day undertaking university-based study. However,

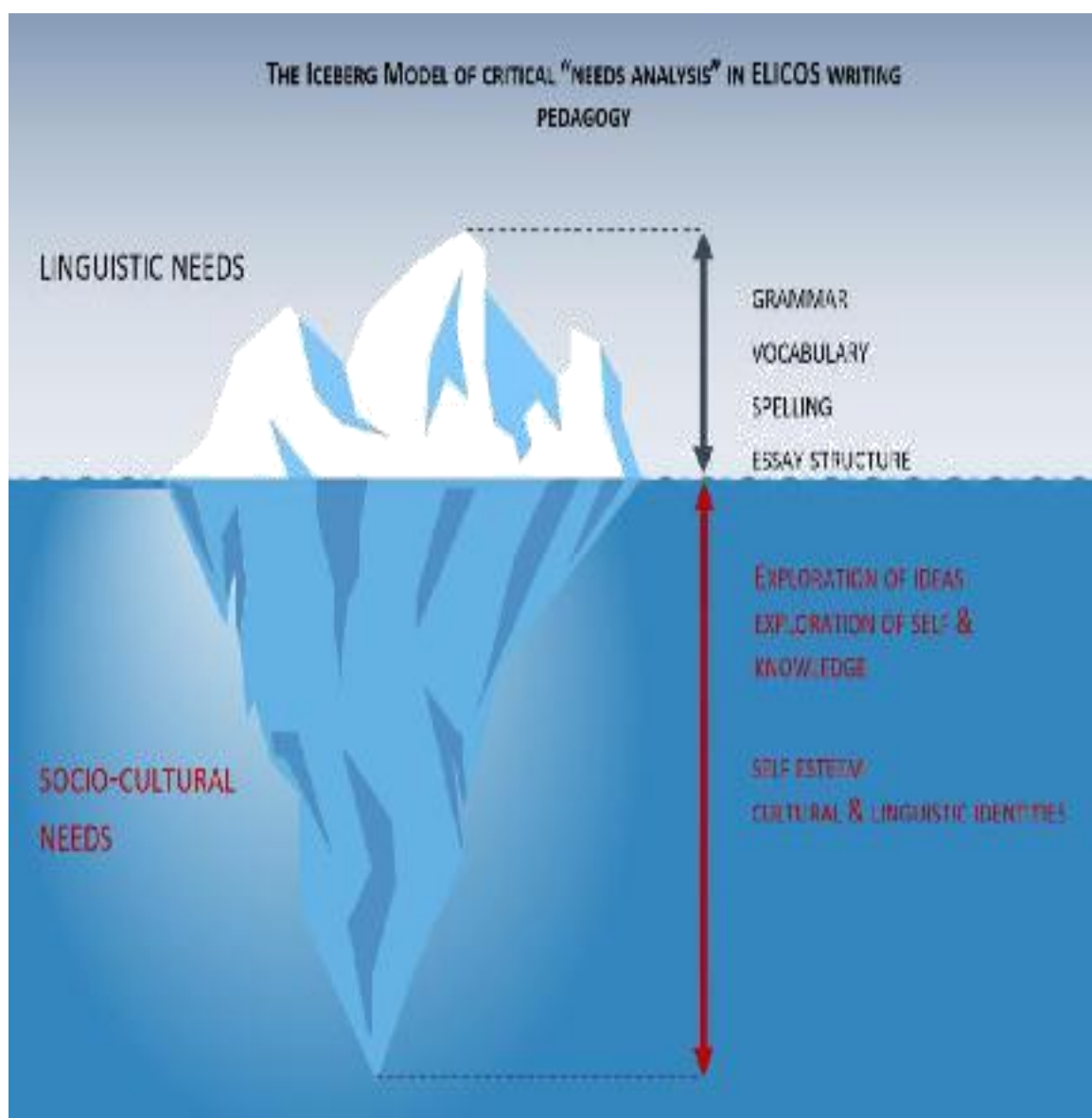
consistent with much of the research that uses a new literacy studies framework, students in this study repeatedly expressed that they were preoccupied with achieving linguistic accuracy in their writing. Tellingly, teachers spoke about their students' writing as inevitably failing to demonstrate an adequate level of English. Furthermore, many of the teachers believed that the ideas presented in their students' writing were superficial, lacked knowledge of the world, and reflected an inadequate and basic education. The word "childish" used by one of the students to describe his writing is illustrative of how most students were positioned by their teachers. Students often related their feelings about their writing as "childish" in the way it appeared in comparison to the level of knowledge and information they would have liked to express, and this suggested that their teacher's pedagogical manner might have been patronising or condescending. Although no student went so far as to accuse teachers of being offensive or rude, it was evident that they did not feel they regarded them as educated adults with any substantive knowledge of the world. It is important to note that some of these ELICOS students had been principals and teachers in schools in their home countries, and it should be no surprise that they considered their knowledge and experience were not appreciated or presented well in their writing as this was due to their lack of linguistic knowledge as EAP learners.

In short, students did not feel they were 'confident' writers. There is much emphasis in EAP literature on writing competence, which is linguistic competence. This is a term that was defined originally by Widdowson (1983, pp. 7-8) as "knowledge of the language system". Widdowson's study suggests that building students' "confidence" in writing should be prioritised over building their 'competence'. The notion of writers developing a *voice* in order to be able to communicate their own ideas in individual and innovative ways is sometimes seen as an essential element of competence (Lancaster, 2016). In such literature, voice is defined from the perspective of students as "self-representation within a text" (Tardy, 2012, p. 37). This expression of self is constructed both individually and socially, which was obvious in NLC students' multimodal texts, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Considering all of the above and based on the findings from students' writing and interviews, I propose an extension of the concept of competence beyond that of linguistic competence to include students' suppressions of self. Also, an essential aspect of successful academic writing is the writers' ability to establish competent authorial identity (Lancaster, 2016). However, this is not the case for students at NLC as they often expressed discomfort about the "me" they portrayed in their academic writing, suggesting a conflict between the

identities required to write successfully and those they actually bring from their writing (Hyland, 2006, p. 22).

Although the NLC students I interviewed were aware that they should focus on producing accurate texts, they also considered meaning (and ideas) to be equally important. They expressed their personal dissatisfaction with the level of thinking and knowledge they were able to represent in their writing. For instance, Leo, a Chinese student, mentioned “so sometimes I was in a simple way I just ... I try to make my writing, but sometimes my writing looks so childhood.” In fact, what seems to be a linguistic difficulty is only on the surface of another deeper challenge for ELICOS teachers of writing, which is how to encourage students’ willingness to want to express their ideas about themselves. The iceberg model below (Figure 19) highlights and reflects what student participants were able to report, and how their linguistic needs (although considered a priority in the eyes of the teachers and institution), were only a small visible part of a larger more substantive set of needs. These linguistic needs have long been acknowledged. From as far back as 1976, Shuy (1976) was presenting the argument that to focus solely on the surface linguistic needs ultimately denies opportunities to address the needs that lie beneath-the-surface (which are arguably more substantial). Later, Cummins (1980) elaborated upon Shuy’s iceberg metaphor to state that these deeper linguistic needs, although known, were largely ignored in policy decisions regarding language of instruction by those who elect to focus on surface linguistic needs alone. The findings of this study suggest that explorations of self and identities are deeply embedded within students’ needs to improve their linguistic knowledge. Considering all of the above, the next section focuses on the concept of students’ meaning making in writing as dependent on teachers’ pedagogy enacted at NLC.



**Figure 19:** The Iceberg Model of Critical 'Needs Analysis' in ELICOS Writing Pedagogy



## Monomodal Pedagogy: A Constraining Influence on Students' Meaning-Making in EAP Writing.

Extending on the previous critical account of institutional views regarding academic literacy at NLC, and based on the findings presented in the previous chapters, it is evident that the dominant monomodal approach to teaching writing at NLC encourages students to construct meaning with words and grammatical structures as the dominant focus of their efforts. Just as this study takes a critical approach towards pedagogy, I also take a critical approach towards 'needs analysis' in this section.

English for academic purposes (EAP) is widely seen as guided by learner needs to write like an academic (Benesch, 1996), and thus 'needs analysis' of the EAP learner is often cited as the main principle behind constructing EAP curriculum and pedagogy (Bruce, 2011, p. 9). Following the work of (Helmer, 2013) and (Benesch, 1996), this study challenges the needs analysis arguments that underpin much of the writing pedagogy at NLC. I argue that the discourse of 'needs analysis', as evident at NLC, regarding the importance of meeting linguistic and institutional 'needs', appears to subordinate students' deeper needs. This implies that meaning should only be constructed through learners' actual linguistic knowledge and skills (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). In fact, it imposes and reinforces the imperative for students and teachers, as revealed in interviews with them all that they conform to the linguistic and academic demands of the syllabus as mandated by the ELICOS system and its institutions. In such a teaching context, meaning making seems to be marginalised as discussed in the previous chapter. This is expressed by Hyland (2016) who mentions that writing in a product focused approach becomes "an outcome, a finished product that could be studied for what it told us about language, rather than about meaning-making" (p. 4). This view is also clearly stated by Patrick, who mentioned the idea of teachers as gate keepers:

*Yeah, it's all on the, you know, formatting and structure. There is a little bit of focus on development of ideas and the development of opinions at the moment, but there are other issues that need to be addressed, or there are other priorities that the institution thinks are more important.*

This traditional form of needs analysis "has avoided questions about unequal power in the workplace and academia, allowing institutional requirements to dominate" (Benesch, 1996, p. 724). As such, this interpretation does not adequately focus on power relations inside of institutional structures such as classrooms or staffrooms (Helmer, 2013). Almost two decades ago, there were calls for a shift in terminology from 'needs analysis' to 'rights analysis'. Benesch

(2001), for example, introduced the term 'rights analysis' to refer to a framework for studying power relations in classrooms and institutions. This rights analysis modifies target context arrangements rather than reinforcing conformity and highlights the point that 'student needs' are too often in conflict with institutional ones. As mentioned in both of the Methodology Chapters, the students in three classes, where I completed action research were multilingual and multicultural students, who in their writing, incorporated complex and rich identities from their social lives, histories, and cultures. As part of my action research on implementing multimodal pedagogies in an otherwise monomodal writing culture at NLC, I interviewed students individually before I asked them to write a monomodal text. I also interviewed them after they wrote monomodal and multimodal texts.

The findings from the interviews and students' monomodal writing products clearly show that all of them attempted to create pieces of writing that were as grammatically correct as possible. However, students' invariably felt that their writing did not convey their intended meanings. These students and their teachers were aware that the principal focus of students' writing was not about meaning making, but on their correct use of formal, linguistic structures (Khansir, 2012). In interviews, students often expressed their desire to convey the ideas they intended to include in their writing. Hyland (2003) mentions that traditional (monomodal) writing practices add another level of difficulty because engaging in competent writing in a second language requires having a wide range of skills and knowledge, such as a sound understanding of syntax and forms, and the ability to make correct choices regarding vocabulary and cohesive devices. These challenges are much greater for beginner ESL learners, who sometimes find writing much harder than their more advanced peers. These student beginners (like students included in this study) are only permitted to express their ideas in words, which requires the integration of understanding grammar and the correct use of sentence structures (Mansor et al., 2011).

Students with low levels of English particularly mentioned that they not only struggled with the challenge of presenting coherent combinations of English words on a page, but that also grappled with knowing what they wanted to express (Mansor et al., 2011). This was regardless of what the teachers' strategies and pedagogical choices involved. I had no doubt that the NLC teachers all intended to assist their students in meaning-making, but the evidence suggests that their approaches were more likely to inhibit or constrain than to enable. This was not a question of teachers knowingly engaging in unethical practices. Teachers were aware that

low-proficiency level students had limited vocabulary; therefore, these teachers mentioned that they felt obliged to 'give' students the vocabulary they needed.

In critiquing the dominant discourse about students' needs, this research presents particular data that contests the traditional approach to needs analysis. It might be argued that students' anxiety about their writing was not only due to pressure on them to achieve accuracy, but also their 'fear', or lack of agency, or the belief that they did not possess the linguistic knowledge required to convey their intended meanings clearly. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, when students were questioned beyond their ever-present fear of making mistakes in their writing, they suggested that meaning making was as important to them as the accuracy of their language use. In spite of this in EAP academic writing, the focus is mainly on the correct use of language and the accuracy of the final product. In this sense, meaning is constructed primarily through pre-existing grammatical structures and knowledge of vocabulary. The limitations of this focus are reflected in the participants' monomodal writing which they wrote for me after the initial interview. This writing tended to have many spelling errors, simple vocabulary mistakes, and included ungrammatical and awkward sentences. Some students chose not to try and write some sentences, which they did not think they could complete. This task illustrated students' difficulty in constructing meaning through the use of verbal language alone. Reflecting on their writing, students stated that that they could not construct their intended meanings and consequently were often forced to change these intended meanings to rather simplistic meanings, which demanded less linguistic competence (see Muller's text on page 123).

I now refer again to the literature regarding scepticism in some areas concerning the need to allow students to use multiple modes in academic writing. For some educators, the linguistic form is enough of a challenge, and as Goldsmith (2012) states, the students have "had more on their plates than we could ever consume" (p. 25). The findings of my study challenge such claims. Based on the findings from students' interviews and writings that were presented in Chapters Six and Seven, beginner ELICOS students have little on their plate (in the form of L2 linguistic resources) and they struggle to utilise the appropriate vocabulary or structures in order to make meaning from what is on 'their plates'. In reality, students had to continually change or limit their ideas due to a lack of vocabulary or because they were uncertain of the spelling or grammatical structures relating to what they wanted to express. As a result, in a sense, Goldsmith's (2011) statement might begin to sound valid if students were allowed to utilise the

vast quantity of semiotic resources that they use in their everyday use of English. This was the rationale on which I based my multimodal pedagogical intervention. Consequently, I permitted my students to use a much larger plateful of semiotic forms and resources that were readily accessible to them in their multimodal and multilingual world. Subsequently, this study has shown that teaching informed by linguistic theory, which prioritises structure and mechanical accuracy, can significantly inhibit low competence ELICOS learners' ability to make meaning in their academic writing. Contrary to Goldsmith's advice, a wider palette of language and semiotic options can extend the range of meaning made by ESL students. Therefore, the meaning these students make appears to involve less anxiety and stress.

In addition to the difficulty in expressing ideas using linguistic forms only, another level of difficulty participating students spoke about regarding their writing was their concerns about how they conveyed who they were in relation to their cultures, languages, and background knowledge. Because students' texts were typically viewed as merely comprising words, sentences, and paragraphs, the traditional pedagogy at NLC seemed to involve no awareness of cultural context (see students' multimodal and writing excerpts in Chapters Six and Seven). According to Hyland (2013), more sophisticated understandings of writing have developed through increasingly developed understandings of context. In this respect, meaning is not something that exists just in decontextualised words that language users select and pass on to others; rather, meaning is something that is created in the social exchange between writer and reader. Multimodal conceptions of language encourage teachers to see writing as a social practice, and a key dimension of one person communicating with another, rather than as an abstract skill that is separable from people and places in which these texts are used (Hyland, 2013, p. 48). Lillis (2003) argues that when considering these constraints in teaching ESL academic writing internationally, it is necessary to rethink higher education and academic literacy, not at the level of skills and effectiveness, but rather at an epistemological level. Kress (2000) also stresses the need for an epistemological shift from critiques concerning students' accuracy in academic writing to a "design" that emphasises new possibilities for meaning-making within academic contexts. These developments in academic literacy pedagogy challenge the conceptualisations of language that are implicit in monomodal approaches and urge policy makers to interrogate the current regulations surrounding meaning making in EAP discourses (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2003). The critical approach to needs analysis I have drawn upon for this study provides a framework in which educators may negotiate more equitable and theory-based teaching practices (Helmer, 2013), educators may than advocate for L2 students' writing,

and also for the needs of L2 writers. By critiquing the discourse of 'needs analysis' as it relates to students' writing and interviews, this study has shown that NLC's dominant (monomodal) writing pedagogy encourages a type of literacy that minimises and inhibits negotiations of meaning. The traditional approach to meaning-making does not fully address students' needs to express their ideas as much as it emphasises their development of a decontextualised linguistic knowledge.

### Multimodal Pedagogies: Exploring Identities and Accommodating Students' Knowledge and Backgrounds.

A third significant finding from this action research study revealed that the main issue for students was not what they displayed in their writing about their linguistic and general knowledge concerning the topic. Rather, it is what they *were* unable to reveal in relation to their limited ability to convey their identities and knowledge due to low proficiency levels in English. My analysis shows that the emphasis that NLC teachers placed on their classroom practices and pedagogical decisions to build students' linguistic knowledge and address their language needs did not seem to ease their struggles in writing, and crucially, did not address students' language needs.

I have shown how the majority of students became convinced through the enactment of traditional teaching approaches that they were "not good writer[s]". Interview data shows that students labelled themselves as deficient or not competent. This negative construction of their writer identities emerged throughout their engagement with dominant monomodal textual practices offered to them by teachers who also believed the students were deficient and not competent. The combination of classroom practices and attitudes of the teachers significantly contributed to students constructing deficit representations of themselves as writers. The problems with focusing on language proficiency, and instilling in students' a deficit perception of their language proficiency, as Hyland (2002) argues, is that teachers "concentrate [their] efforts on helping students manage the presentation of their information before managing their presentation of themselves" (Ken Hyland, 2002, p. 357). Emphasising such traditional practices serves to position students as needing to obtain a number of highly demanding skills before they can convey any aspects of themselves, let alone their intended meanings. These skills, as referred to by (Nik et al., 2010), include correctly organising ideas, choosing the correct

vocabulary (so that there is no ambiguity of meaning), correct spelling, and accurately using complex grammatical constructions to focus and emphasise ideas. As participating students in this study were of relatively low English proficiency levels, they lacked most of these skills. Their monomodal texts highlighted their deficits, and also highlighted their struggles to present ideas. Whilst some students spoke of modifying their ideas if they did not know a correct word or spelling, other participants decided not to change their ideas, even if they did not know how to spell the words. For this reason, sometimes students left a blank space rather than trying to write an idea or explain a word. Student writing 'products' invariably revealed grammatical and spelling errors and a limited range of sentence structure and vocabulary, despite their efforts to meet the demands of linguistic accuracy and correctness.

By implementing multimodal pedagogies in the context of dominant traditional writing pedagogies at NLC, I gave students an opportunity to use a wider palette of semiotic resources in their making meaning. Students' largely positive reactions to this opportunity, in terms of their interview comments as well as their writing products, suggest that improvements in such a context can be realised almost immediately. However, in order to avoid romanticising this process, it is important to raise and address some of the issues faced by some students in the action research process. Firstly, the anxiety that some participants had previously encountered when engaging in exclusively monomodal writing activities seemed to be significantly reduced. Offering students, the freedom to choose from a range of different modes and semiotic resources seemed to ease students' feelings of anxiety, and also reduced their dissatisfaction with their writing. These students found that they were not so preoccupied about accuracy in vocabulary and as many of them mentioned, they could utilise other modes such as images or L2 language to help them make and convey meaning.

Speaking about these options, students were less focused on self-deprecating judgements and more enthusiastic about the multimodal writing experiences they associated with words such as "interesting", "enjoy" and "freedom". And yet, what a student meant by "freedom" was not complete freedom from the demands of writing academically. By using different modes of making meaning, students were still connecting with the conventions of academic writing. In completing multimodal tasks on a variety of topics (such as the culture of China, the Sultan of Oman, or the land of Turkey), the students were still focused on structure, the accuracy of the texts they were constructing, and the coherence of the ideas they were conveying. Each multimodal task allowed students, in all their diversity, to convey knowledge and different

perspectives regarding their different countries: for example, they described their countries and structured their ideas into paragraph-like sections. Each paragraph tended to concentrate on a single main idea. Also, irrespective of the semiotic resources the students used, they were mostly able to coordinate them to present a text that developed ideas and conveyed meaning, as academic texts are expected to do. As outlined in the NLC syllabus (in the assessment rubric, Figure 20, students needed to demonstrate their abilities in writing with accurate grammar and vocabulary and needed to demonstrate understanding of essay structure. It is interesting to note that in this rubric only a small percentage of the marks are given for expression of ideas. It was evident in the students' multimodal texts that they did their best to address these criteria. In a small number of cases, emboldened by their greater confidence in themselves as writers, the students' multimodal writing sometimes revealed superior vocabulary, grammatical structure, and ideas.

### **Writing In-Class Criteria – 2B General English**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

CRITERIA	MARKS
150-200 words (in-class word count to be determined by the teacher) staging: introduction, body, conclusion appropriate paragraph	5
punctuation accurate spelling descriptive (use of adjectives/adverbs) use of appropriate vocab	5
correct tenses correct use of time markers and linking words general grammar	10
content (original ideas, did the student respond to the task appropriately) breadth & depth of ideas/info/supporting sentences	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>

**Figure 20:** Rubric for 2B General Writing Assessment

Secondly, the findings revealed that by combining different modes of composition with linguistic forms of writing, NLC students clearly felt they were being given an expanded opportunity to make meaning. The different semiotic modes that students employed, whether

they were used to add meaning to the linguistic form, or to duplicate or enhance it (when a student was not sure of spelling), or to present meaning of their own (developing a new idea), were not merely ornamental and subsidiary. Students drew upon these semiotic resources with renewed confidence to make meaning in their writing. The nonverbal resources such as images, videos, drawings, L1 language (rather than English), and zoom used by students did not overshadow or completely displace the linguistic mode of written language they were still utilising in places. In multimodal texts produced by the participating students, the different semiotic resources brought with them different meaning making potentials for students. These non-verbal semiotic resources could be seen as complementary to the verbal resources and thus as joint contributors to practices of meaning making enacted by students, rather than operating as separate modes (J. Liu, 2013).

Students also constructed meaning and ideas that were not evident in their monomodal writing. For example, Piza, a student who was studying English to pursue her postgraduate studies in International Relationships and Political Science, was adamant that she could not display the level of her knowledge and education she had acquired when she was restricted to writing in monomodal pedagogical spaces, because of her lack of linguistic competence. Piza constantly wished she “had a dictionary”. Lee (2008) argues that L2 students' challenges in their academic writing processes should not only be viewed as an inevitable function of their limited language proficiency. Additionally, Lee says that L2 student writers' struggles can be managed through a process of negotiating their learning identities rather than by highlighting their deficits and seeking to ‘fix’ them. The capacity to write accurately and explicitly seemed to have an important impact on participating students in their improved understanding of how meaning was conveyed. A comparison between students’ multimodal texts and the ones that they previously generated showed that students felt the multimodal pedagogies gave them space to negotiate meaning and ideas, which they did not have when they were preoccupied with producing accurate texts. More than this, in their multimodal tasks, students believed that they were able to convey ideas and emotions that were less compromised by the writing process than they were in a monomodal pedagogical space.

Thirdly, complexities of meanings were often evident through students’ expressions of their identities through their multimodal writing. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference between the *nature* of identity conveyed in students’ monomodal texts compared with their multimodal writing. Through deploying a wider range of semiotic resources



– including images, L1 language, and hyperlinks, students were able to clarify or elaborate upon their meaning making to reveal or construct aspects of their personal identities. Abasi, Akbari, and Graves (2006) argue that “[t]extual decisions that writers make as they compose are simultaneously decisions of self-representation and identity construction” (p. 104). When given the option of using different modes to express their ideas, most students felt able to represent themselves, their knowledge and beliefs throughout their writing. Students and teachers both felt that students were rarely ‘present’ as voices or identities engaged in monomodal writing tasks. In the dominant monomodal pedagogy, students had been told, in effect, to “leave their personalities at the door, and subordinate their views, actions, and personality to its rigid conventions of anonymity” Hyland (2002, p. 351). For example, Piza can be seen restricting her monomodal task writing to listing geographical and demographic facts regarding her country. However, in the texts Piza generated in multimodal pedagogical spaces, she demonstrated a strong political and national identity and dimensions of her character that were not evident when she was restricted to monomodal writing. Piza also showed a significantly enhanced sense of agency as she took more control over her subsequent interview with me (see page 144). Students’ newfound potential for meaning making encouraged by multimodal pedagogies could now accommodate descriptions of their cultural, political, and social identities, as well as meanings imbued with a sense of power. This prospect of students’ having or gaining a sense of power or agency did not seem to exist in the traditional monomodal pedagogical spaces that students had been accustomed to outside of the action research intervention.

Piza’s experience in her multimodal writing was similar to Omani’s and her Chinese peers, who demonstrated sound knowledge of the history and cultures of their native countries, as well as different dimensions of pride and loyalty for their homelands. It was as if the different pedagogies allowed them to engage in the intellectual work of negotiating ideological boundaries (Fernsten, 2008). By implementing multimodal pedagogies as part of the action research intervention, I made spaces within the dominant traditional pedagogy to promote students’ meaning making capacities, and I encouraged students to regard their first languages, cultures, or identities as positive resources and not barriers to their English academic writing. According to (Mills, 2011), encouraging students to engage in the creation of digital multimedia texts allows them to go beyond their aspirations to simply produce or reproduce legitimate texts and to concentrate more on transforming knowledge and meanings. Meanings is in this sense are dynamic and embedded in social life.

In this respect, my study shows that the use of monomodal pedagogy was not hospitable to students' multicultural and linguistic backgrounds. According to Kostogriz (2011), "If literacy education is to be hospitable, it should be open to the multiplicity of identities, knowledges, texts, languages and meanings that students bring with them into the classroom. Hospitable or welcoming education is what education is called to be in multicultural conditions" (p. 34). In a sense, multimodal pedagogies are about more than adding options (cumulatively) for conveying an idea or building an argument. L2 writing in multimodal pedagogic spaces can be enhanced when more attention is given to meeting students' needs as writers, communicators, developing individuals, and social groups of learners. As such, multimodal writing pedagogies can provide writers who are having difficulty in using language, including ESL students, with powerful tools for conveying knowledge and ideas, and for expressing and better understanding of themselves. These are pedagogies that stimulate a range of literacy practices in socially constructed spaces. It is about multiplicity of literacies and pedagogies. This is important as "different forms of literacy foreground different aspects of identity, and these can be tracked to specific discourse choices in written language" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 71). By narrowing the spaces and opportunities for L2 students to write and express themselves, monomodal pedagogies would seem to restrict teachers and students to operating within traditional and fixed sets of conventions that often fail to help students to explore a sense of self and identity, in as much as convey their knowledge and ideas through writing.

The data has provided a powerful argument as to why teachers should take care not to make hasty judgements, on the basis of students' writing in monomodal pedagogical spaces, about those students' (lack of) knowledge, education, or identity. Such hasty judgements become associated with discourses that turn students into subjects needing to be "colonized" (Gee, 2011, p. 175) into a particular language mindset and pedagogy. Whilst such judgements and discourses might address institutional needs (to generate grades from tests and to rank students), they fall well short of meeting the language and development needs of the students. Such discourses are connected with expectations that students display a required identity: "failing to display an identity fully is tantamount to announcing you do not have that identity – at best you are a pretender or a beginner" (Gee, 1996, p. 155).

Table 3 overleaf presents a dialogic contrast between practices and assumptions underpinning traditional monomodal pedagogy, in relation to the dominant writing pedagogy at NLC and those associated with a more inclusive and diverse notion of multimodal pedagogies, which is intervention as seen in this study.

**Table 3:** Summary of Contrasts between Monomodal Writing Pedagogy and Multimodal Writing Pedagogies

Monomodal Pedagogy	Multimodal Pedagogies
Writing is primarily about control of linguistic knowledge, using verbal resources to reproduce existing textual forms.	Writing is about meaning making, using a range of semiotic resources to explore and make meaning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 4).
Writing is a skill for individuals to generate certain textual products. The focus in teaching this skill is on students correctly producing the constitutive parts of these products, such as vocabulary, spelling, sentences and paragraphs (Khansir, 2012; Pincas, 1982)	Writing constitutes a range of dynamic and multidimensional practices whose products are not always known in advance (Doecke & Parr, 2005).
Writing activity invariably produces ‘written’ verbal texts. Meaning is made through interpreting the written texts.	Writing activity involves a wide range of meaning making practices. The meaning making is enacted in and through different modes—speech, writing, gesture, colour, emojis, moving pictures, drawing ... (Kress 2010,2013; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).
Descriptive needs analysis (Bruce, 2011) in monomodal pedagogy focuses on students’ linguistic needs, and what teachers should do to enable students to reproduce existing linguistic forms	Rights analysis (Benesch, 1996; Helmer, 2013) of multimodal pedagogy examines the full range of needs of students, including but not restricted to their capacity to reproduce linguistic forms.
Monomodal pedagogy assumes teaching knowledge exists independent of context. Students should reproduce the same linguistic forms irrespective of their context. Personal writing is rarely if ever encouraged.	Multimodal pedagogies acknowledge that teaching knowledge is shaped by context, including the educational and cultural backgrounds of the developing writer. Personal writing experience is important in the development of writers.
Teachers and students must comply with institutional requirements and not challenge power relations.	Teachers of writing are obliged to work within institutional requirements, but they value student voices and also seek to empower their students.
Writing identity is presumed to be independent of the writing produced by the writer.	Writing identity is dynamic and deeply embedded in and mediated by the writing practices pursued by the writer
Monomodal pedagogy is focused on producing monomodal and monocultural texts (only in English). A writer’s L1 is ignored or regarded as a barrier to English writing.	Multimodal pedagogies utilise a range of language practices and encourages the production of multimodal and hybrid modes of meaning making. A writer’s L1 is regarded as a valuable resource in meaning making
Students’ cultural and educational backgrounds are of incidental interest only.	A hospitable pedagogy acknowledges and values students’ prior knowledge and education (Kostogriz, 2011). It makes and allows space for this knowledge and education as resources in students’ meaning making

## Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest that monomodal, linguistic-based writing pedagogy, which promotes the accurate emulation of pre-existing forms of writing, can significantly constrict ELICOS learners' ability to make meaning in their academic writing. The monomodal writing activities that NLC students typically undertook within this pedagogical space did not encourage them to develop confidence in their writing practices or to reveal or develop their identities. In contrast, multimodal pedagogies, through which the students were encouraged to use different modes of communication in their writing, significantly extended the range of meaning making they were able to generate, and with considerably less anxiety and stress. Implementing multimodal writing pedagogies, which encouraged them to use a wide range of semiotic and their own L1 resources, opened up new spaces for the students in meaning-making, creativity, and potential for them as emerging writers to produce more complex meaning than in the more limited options open to them in monomodal pedagogy. As the classroom teacher, when I employed multimodal pedagogies in the teaching of writing, most students revealed some distinct dimensions of their identities and explored a wider range of knowledge and beliefs than they had done when working in monomodal spaces. This suggests that the nuanced use of multimodal writing pedagogies with students in multicultural and multilingual ELICOS settings can significantly enhance the ability of these students to make meaning by exploring their ideas and identities.

## Part 5: The End of One Story, the Beginning of Many More



*Deep beneath the soil, like my thesis, which is firmly planted, are the roots of the vine symbolizing my PhD journey. The roots have continued to grow, nourished by an ongoing research agenda: to investigate and improve the teaching of English language in ELICOS classrooms. Many will never know the barriers this plant has endured to become the beautiful vine it has grown into today, hardships it has faced, obstacles it has tackled, nor the storms and hurricanes it has witnessed. Although my research in this thesis is coming to a close in this concluding chapter, this is not the end. The vine will never stop growing. These vines thrive from curiosity and constantly wanting to expand and explore new fields. The buds on the vine burst with hope, potential, and dreams as fresh stems begin enlightening journeys of their own. Perhaps one day, someone may pick up a fallen seed from this plant and drop it elsewhere, helping an entirely different vine to flourish in a new landscape. In this final chapter, fresh new beginnings to an unfinalized story are presented to a story that has no end.*



# Chapter 9

## Conclusion

This qualitative study has investigated the potential value of multimodal pedagogies in the teaching of English to international students in an ELICOS setting in Melbourne, Australia. It has been important to me that this thesis, which has inquired into multimodal pedagogy with L2 learners, should in itself be at least partially multimodal in character. Thus, I have used multiple modes to complement and enrich the scholarly analysis of this PhD study, including visual and poetic modes to represent and illustrate dimensions of my journey.

My journey through this PhD research has had many beginnings, where roots have long been established. These roots began, as I explained in my prologue, at a high school in Syria. The vine that grew from those roots wove its way through my time at university in two countries, Syria and Australia. Later, this vine continued to weave its way during my teaching career in various contexts, with me finally ending up at an ELICOS centre in a university in Melbourne. In this practitioner inquiry study, I have delved deeply into my practices and contexts as a teacher in an ELICOS setting, which I called Nour Language Centre (NLC). I have explored in particular my implementation, in an action research design, of multimodal pedagogies in the teaching of English with an EAP writing framework at NLC. The findings from a rich range of qualitative data generated from two action research cycles have been presented in Chapters Six and Seven and discussed in depth in Chapter Eight. In this concluding chapter, I briefly summarise the study and its findings, and present my recommendations.

Firstly, I review my intentions for this research and the reasons why a study of this kind has great value for teachers and students involved in an ELICOS environment. Each research question is addressed with contributions to new knowledge presented and summarised. The implications of this new knowledge are examined, followed by a clear statement of the acknowledged limitations of this research. After this, I make recommendations for further research and changes to current practices on the basis of findings from this study.

### Intentions of the Research

I undertook this study to explore the possibilities that multimodal pedagogy can offer to students whose first language is not English. My intention was to carefully examine meaning

making in EAP writing in an ELICOS setting. This quest was prompted by what I saw as a significant gap in both policy and research literature. At policy level, there is much rhetoric about the needs of international students studying in Australia, and the importance for Australia to effectively address these needs if it is to maintain its prominent status in the international education marketplace (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014; Maringe & Foskett, 2012). This rhetoric is associated with a range of codes and requirements that the Australian Government has legislated for university providers wishing to offer ELICOS courses. The broader policy rhetoric speaks about the importance of improving educational offerings for international students studying in Australia, by means of innovative policies and so-called ‘standards’, and the English language policy is said to be based on an appreciation of Australia being a multilingual and multicultural country (Della-Chiesa & Miyamoto, 2008). Yet, this study has argued that this rhetoric and the codes can be seen as attempts by neoliberal universities to maintain their statuses and survive in the cut-throat world where they and other countries are competing to attract more international students to help fund their core operations. This study aligns with the existing research, which sees western universities striving to portray themselves as a ‘promised land’ for educational riches (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014; Liu & Rhoads, 2011). I name this land a ‘*sound paradise*’, which is in the verse that introduces Chapter Two, this study has shown how standards-based reforms of universities in Australia, as across the western world, are translated into standardised classroom practices with standardised assessment practices. I have shown how these standardising policies, rather than meeting the diverse needs of international students studying overseas, have contributed to the trend of narrowing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment offerings in English language education (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012).

The study has also argued that at theory and practice level, there is a disjuncture between the globally ubiquitous forms of digital composition and communication, which are invariably multimodal, and traditional academic literacy practices in higher education classrooms (Zawilski, 2011). In Chapter Three, I proposed the metaphor of a chest of daffodils (figuratively and visually in the image that I introduced, to signify the rich range of theories that view language as a socio-culturally mediated concept (Halliday, 1974), as well as the many studies on multimodal writing pioneered by researchers such as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Together, these all provide a conceptual foundation that helps to explain the positive effects of multimodal pedagogies on students’ abilities to express meaning and feel understood (e.g., Archer, 2006; Kress, 2013; Mills, 2013). Yet, despite this brightness and optimism, there remains darkness. Most studies have focused on school-aged children’s composition in L1 environments. Although studies have



begun to focus on how multimodal approaches may assist in ESL teaching of writing in the past ten years, there is little reference to L2 adults' writing and even fewer relating to the teaching of English language writing in higher education.

Considering the abundance of evidence showing the benefits of implementing multimodal writing pedagogy for children who are ESL students in schools, one would think that such approaches would extend to the teaching of writing in higher education institutions, which provide EAP intensive programs. However, beyond a small number of studies investigating multimodal writing programs at university level, and most of these being for L1 students (Zawilksi, 2011), multimodal writing pedagogy is still not widely integrated into the theories of teaching academic writing, nor is there evidence in practice. This study was in largely motivated by the need to explore this area of darkness in relation to the extensive gap between academic writing and multimodal literacy in ELICOS. The apparent gaps in literature in the field, and my own experiences of teaching in different contexts and in an ELICOS institution, prompted the following research questions:

- (1) What are the potential challenges for L2 adult learners in ELICOS writing classes?
- (2) What are ELICOS teachers' beliefs about meaning making practices in writing and how can they develop L2 learners' meaning making?
- (3) How can multimodal writing pedagogies in an ELICOS setting assist L2 learners' meaning making?

### *Addressing the Intentions: Exploring the Road Less Travelled*

Guided by the dim light before me in finding theories and research, I explored this gap between multimodal theories and practices in higher education. I utilised action research to implement multimodal pedagogy in the writing of pedagogy at NLC (Lynn Milton-Brkich et al., 2010; Mills, 2000), an ELICOS setting in Melbourne, Australia. Underpinned by a critical pedagogy paradigm, this study sought to investigate whether and how the introduction of multimodal pedagogies in selected classes at NLC could support changes in the students' attitudes to writing and their writing practices. I hoped that this practitioner inquiry study could influence change in the current dominant knowledge about writing pedagogies firstly in the institution where I have worked (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Also, I considered there was potential that my study might in some small way help to demonstrate multimodal pedagogies as a break-through and a "language of possibility" at NLC, and more broadly, in the ELICOS sector (Cho, 2010, p. 311). Consistent with many traditions of action research (McNiff, 2013), my study

has been quite explicit when inquiring into, and to some extent challenging, the existing dominant approaches to teaching writing in the ELICOS sector. Action research has allowed me to investigate ways of improving my writing pedagogies, explore my students' use of a wider range of semiotic resources for meaning making in their writing, and to contribute to new knowledge about the teaching of writing in ELICOS classrooms. My pedagogical intervention involved shifting the focus of writing classes from predominantly product-based monomodal writing towards multimodal writing activities, which recognised students' existing funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and experiences as starting points for inquiry.

Rich data was generated from cohorts of teachers at NLC as well as international students who were undertaking intensive English courses as a pathway to tertiary education. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers that provided a clear picture of the current practices at NLC, from the perspectives of teachers. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 international students from diverse backgrounds (beginners and pre-intermediate level) to explore their experiences of meaning making in writing monomodal and multimodal texts. Finally, I undertook analysis of samples of the students' writing prior to the intervention (in monomodal writing tasks) and after intervention (in multimodal writing tasks).

### *Key Findings: More Light Shines on the Road Ahead*

The key findings of this study responded to each research question, with the contributions to new knowledge summarised and listed as follows.

#### Challenges for L2 Learners in ELICOS Writing Classes

Before identifying the difficulties that L2 students currently face in EAP writing courses, the study delved into the current practices at NLC. This was particularly important to gain a deeper understanding of the context in which L2 language learners in ELICOS settings encounter those difficulties. The study showed that the dominant approach to teaching EAP courses clearly favours a focus on what I called a linguistic approach (Anthony, 2018; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), where attention is very much on the mechanics of writing such as syntax, vocabulary, and linguistic knowledge (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Pincas, 1982). This aligned with my study of the current practices employed by teachers at NLC. By providing a critical account of the current writing pedagogy employed by teachers

at NLC, and how this translates into practice, I was able to establish that a linguistic approach to teaching writing is *dominant and pervasive* at NLC.

During interviews, students and teachers agreed that the dominant approach to the teaching of writing at NLC was to focus on spelling, vocabulary, and grammar in preparing to write and then reviewing writing. Yet, the study showed that vocabulary, spelling, and grammar remain as key areas that students find the most difficult. This contributed to the finding that difficulties that participating students encountered in their EAP writing was closely related to a pedagogy that seeks to constantly remind them of their deficits in terms of their linguistic knowledge of English. These findings are consistent with a range of existing research about students' difficulties in different L2 writing contexts (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Al Fadda, 2012; Phakiti & Li, 2011). Also, these findings apply to feelings of apprehension that participating students in this study expressed about their writing in class. Students' feelings of apprehension can be related to insecurity, which is instilled into them through monomodal pedagogy relating to their limited knowledge of grammar, spelling, and vocabulary, as reported by them during interviews. The dominant monomodal pedagogy employed at NLC did not appear to significantly alleviate students' fears or anxieties about writing. On the contrary, it seemed to exacerbate their anxiety.

Strategies and pedagogical practices employed by participating teachers at NLC align with much of the literature that inquiries into the teaching of writing in EAP programs (Bruce, 2008; Grigorenko, 2012). There is similar alignment between the findings of this study and the existing literature about the significant effect of institutional cultures that support a traditional remediation view of literacy practices in writing classes (Alexander, Depalma, & Ringer, 2016). Interestingly, my study revealed that there was quite a diversity of views and interpretations amongst NLC teachers about the concept of 'writing', which ranged from a narrow linguistic perspective to more progressive, communicative, and creative perspectives. However, despite differences in teachers' views, when it came to describe their actual day to day practices, there was a strong unanimity among them regarding the teaching of writing. This unanimity suggested that these teachers believed that the teaching of academic writing for L2 adult international students in the end must focus on developing their linguistic writing. This perception demonstrated that these teachers felt a strong obligation to adhere to all requirements of the institution and the system, which they work within, even when their deeper pedagogical views may not completely align with institutional

requirements. These teachers appeared to not have agency to make independent decisions regarding their work, which is a critical factor in understanding their practices (Kincheloe, 2008b; Priestley et al., 2012).

Delving deeper into traditional writing pedagogy, this study revealed an interesting finding about the longer-term effects on students' identities in relation to their struggles with the technical aspects of writing. Because students were encouraged to only write texts that were technically accurate, invariably they only attempted to communicate the simplest ideas in their English writing. This led students to describe their writing as "simplistic", "basic" or "childish", and it appeared to have a negative effect on their self-esteem, even though they had demonstrated strong abilities to write in their native languages. The policies that regulate curriculum and teaching practices in the ELICOS sector strongly discourage students from using their native languages in academic expression and communication (Department of Education and Training, 2018). NLC teachers follow this direction and mentioned that for L1 students', this was an obstacle to development and progression to L2 writing. Nevertheless, in interviews for this study, participating students spoke of their desires to be able to use some of their native language vocabulary and grammatical structures to enable them to communicate some more complex ideas and meanings that they were attempting to convey in predominantly English language tasks. Whereas traditional monomodal pedagogy prevents this, multimodal pedagogies allow this as part of the funds of knowledge that students can bring to their writing in English.

#### ELICOS Teachers' Beliefs About Meaning-making Practices in Writing and How They Might Develop Learners' Meaning-making

Driven by institutional values and expectations, current literacy practices in writing in NLC classrooms (and due to teachers' pedagogical beliefs) seem to continue to be dominated by the conservative tradition of looking at meaning in its most basic form, which is constructed through given grammatical structures and vocabulary. These kinds of practices, which I characterise as monomodality, were pervasive among NLC teachers as they described their writing pedagogies. This study shows how students at NLC felt and were in fact restricted in their abilities to express themselves and convey more complex ideas, or just use language to make meaning (rather than merely emulate structures), by the monomodal norms of practice and pedagogy at NLC. The teachers at NLC sustained this practice in their everyday teaching and assessment practices.

At NLC, teachers typically assist students to write and generate ideas by using normative models, teaching them the grammatical structures needed to write a particular type of essay, and 'giving' them the vocabulary needed to emulate a particular structure or language pattern. Such teaching methods are, to some extent, effective in progressing students' skills, at least in terms of meeting assessment requirements. These methods are repeated through regular execution of grammatical exercises in a controlled context; students are encouraged to write generic ideas (often provided by the teacher) and these are transmitted directly through language in prefabricated verbal and linguistic structures (Tangkiengsirisin, 2012). This privileging of decontextualized language exercises takes away any opportunity students might have to invest something of themselves in their writing and seeks to work against what this study has theorised as the sociocultural aspects of students' writing.

The study demonstrates, though, how in taking such an approach to the teaching of writing, NLC teachers, and NLC as the institution as well, are interpreting the EAP principle that teachers need to utilise in order to meet the students' needs as writers in a particular way (Bruce, 2011a). It is considered that ELICOS syllabi and course materials are designed to maximise the possibility of students obtaining a score of 6 (out of a possible total of 9) or above in high-stake, summative ELICOS assessment tasks. This puts teachers in the position of needing to adhere strictly to all requirements of the system and the institution to produce scores of 6 or above. In such a system, teachers can appear to have little or no agency to make independent decisions regarding the needs of students as writers who want to express themselves in their work (Kincheloe, 2008b; Priestley et al., 2012). This system creates the imperative to teach to the test with the focus on being able to accurately reproduce specific language structures and communication skills. This approach might seem to be meeting students' needs, in terms of passing tests that focus on technical structures and skills of academic writing, thus enabling them to meet the prerequisite for entry into university courses of their choice (O'Loughlin, 2015). Yet, this approach to meeting students' needs overlooks their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and ultimately restricts their opportunities to develop as writers with minds of their own.

By taking a critical approach to what is seen as a reductive form of needs analysis (Benesch, 1996; Helmer, 2013), this study challenges the main principles of EAP courses, by showing that the key principle of these courses do not fully address students' deeper needs as

writers, thinkers, and academic identities. This is fundamentally through restricting and often denying students' meaning making potential as writers. This study finds that the linguistic needs of participating students, as tested in summative ELICOS tests, are just one component of their overall requirements as writers, and little or no account of meaning making is taken into account as a key need for emerging L2 writers. In only considering a linguistic view of writing, students' needs are oversimplified, and it restricts the ways in which they express themselves. When given opportunities to explore other means and modes of making meaning and express themselves through their writing, participating students in this study made it very clear that, as well as passing ELICOS tests, there were other needs which were of great concern to them. These students wanted opportunities to express their identities, utilise more of their existing knowledge, and experiment with ideas in their writing. My analysis of students' writing as well as the interviews with students strongly suggests that the dominant 'monomodal' writing pedagogy, which currently dominates NLC teaching, devalues students' linguistic, social, and cultural identities and has a constraining effect on their individualism as writers. Therefore, teaching of writing, which places the highest emphasis on emulating traditional linguistic structures, accuracy of grammatical structures, and correct spelling discourages students from exploring or revealing their individuality (Zawilski, 2011). This practice ignores and devalues the wealth of skills, experiences, knowledge, and identities that L2 writers bring to learning the art of writing.

#### Multimodal Writing Pedagogies in an ELICOS Setting: Promoting Learners' Meaning-making

All the evidence points to the dominant writing pedagogy at NLC being based on monomodal understandings of writing, and indeed there is structural and individual resistance to the prospect of students working in multimodal spaces when learning to write. Whilst it is very common for ELICOS teachers to use non-verbal semiotic forms such as websites, videos, and images to *introduce* concepts, *scaffold* tasks, and assist in the generation of ideas that students might need in developing an argument in an essay, these same students are not expected, nor permitted, to use any other semiotic modes other than the verbal linguistic modes when producing academic writing products. Computer-based instruction is widely utilised by teachers at NLC as supplementary to traditional paper materials. Thus, teachers are not resistant to applying multimodality in the preparing of ideas for writing, yet they are resistant to including multimodality in their pedagogy when the students are generating text in classroom writing.

Through the intervention of multimodal pedagogy into my practice with two English classes, which promoted the integration of students' different knowledge-making practices, beliefs, and experiences (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009), the action research dimensions of this study provided some guide to the potentials of multimodal pedagogy. This study theorises and provides practical pedagogical suggestions for how teachers can introduce some multimodal pedagogies into ELICOS classrooms. One overarching contribution of this study is to break the silence of ELICOS policies and practices regarding genuine pedagogical approaches to addressing diversity in real classroom practices. To best meet the needs of today's students, it is no longer adequate to utilize a monomodal pedagogy for teaching writing that dates back to the 1960s (Palmeri, 2012). Twenty years ago, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argued that educators were still standing with 'one foot' in the world of monomodal disciplines. Increasingly, research is calling for the integration of multimodal pedagogy in the teaching of writing (Richards & Pilcher, 2018; Rowsell & Decoste, 2012). Today, with the affordances of technology for students and the facilities available for teachers in modern classrooms, the findings of this study critique this notion of EAP writing practices as still 'standing on one foot. This study strongly argues for accommodating students' funds of knowledge and needs in EAP writing, allowing them to use multimodal semiotic forms of expression. The sign of 'no multimodality', which I used in my reflections to represent the monomodal pedagogy in EAP classes, does in fact exist in the form of rules set for classes as well as evident in practices at NLC.

The findings of this study were consistent with a range of research that advocates the use of multimodal forms in writing pedagogy in an L1 environment and for L2 children. The interviews and writing samples have shown that, once international students are given the opportunity to use multimodal communication, a number of positive outcomes are produced. Firstly, the significant anxiety that NLC students experienced when asked to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in monomodal writing seemed to be considerably reduced. Comments such as "interesting" and "enjoy" were frequently noted amongst student reflections about multimodal writing. Secondly, the sophistication of students' meaning making increased as they constructed different layers of meanings that were often not evident in their monomodal writing. Thirdly, in the creation of multimodal texts, NLC students showed a previously unseen sophistication in the complex ways in which they deployed a wide range of semiotic signs. By integrating multimodality into my writing pedagogy, I was able to provide a space for students in this ELICOS setting to use linguistic, as well as non-linguistic forms, in their writing. This

appeared to open up their capabilities to make meaning in their writing. Different semiotic forms, whether they were used to add meaning to the linguistic resources, duplicate them, or present their own distinctive meanings, became resources for the students to express themselves and grow as L2 learners. These semiotic forms became an important resource in meaning making and highlighting the shift from attention to the product to the *process* of writing.

Opening up a space for students to experiment with words and other semiotic resources, teamed with my use of multimodal pedagogy, allowed and promoted students' capacity to demonstrate their varying perspectives in writing about themselves. It was often through the use of verbal and nonverbal forms of expression that students were able to elaborate on their basic ideas and make meaning that were previously not seen or heard, and their identities as writers began to emerge (having been disguised or invisible in their monomodal writing). By giving my students the option to use different modes in writing, through the affordance of multimodal pedagogy, I invited new opportunities for them to express themselves and convey knowledge. I enabled them to extend their meaning making beyond just emulating pre-existing models of writing or demonstrating correct usage of language.

This study presented a shift in pedagogy by alluding to a scene often experienced in my culture and home country. With open arms, a hospitable host In Syria welcomes guests who come to visit her home, saying 'Ahleen', and in a similar sense I opened up my writing classroom for my students to elaborate in meaning making in their writing. As this study was conducted with adult international learners, the potential to produce more complex texts (than is perhaps possible with children or school-aged students) was also frequently evident in students' multimodal writing. The findings of this study have shown that learners are not only able to construct the meaning they intend to create when using multiple mode of expression, but they do so in more sophisticated ways. In multimodal rooms, students reveal and develop insights about their lives and worlds while also depicting social relations they have with those worlds and others who live within them. These insights are rarely evident in students' monomodal writing. Most interestingly, using different modes of expression in writing allowed international student participants' in this study to reveal some distinctive dimensions of their identities and beliefs. Briefly, it is by using multimodal pedagogy that as a teacher, I was able to promote my students' meaning making to empower them as writers, build their confidence, and help them express and develop their personal identities.



Altogether, the findings of this thesis present and unpack what ‘meaning making’ is in relation to writing pedagogy for international L2 students. A multimodal approach to meaning making acknowledges that it is more than just elaborating on ideas and intended meaning. This approach is extended to reflect the multi-dimensional aspects of the multimodal pedagogy in order for students to express meaning by sharing facets of their linguistic, political, and cultural dimensions of their identities.

## Reflections

Reflecting on action research from the standpoint of critically oriented practitioner inquiry, I gained a number of valuable insights. As I reflect on my study now, having concluded all aspects of it, and scanned memories, tasks, discussions, and interviews, I realise the immense value of this truly rewarding and eye-opening research experience. As a teacher, I have a newly found insight into the thought processes of my students. I learned so much about these students during the weeks I spent with them. What I learned, I would never have known had it not been for this research journey. I also learned lessons about the ways that I was manipulating power dynamics in the classroom, and the difficulty involved in taking up a critical reflective practice. I have had countless opportunities and moments to consider my previous teaching practices in writing classes. As I now reflect, I have flashbacks of all the times I adopted a very traditional approach while teaching writing to my students, as have many of my colleagues, if not most. This research provided a shared learning experience for the participants and me. As a researcher and teacher, I gained further insight into the importance of valuing the life experiences and contributions of others. My personal approach to teaching has adapted and will continue to do so. It is evident that my research has raised questions and concerns for my colleagues. However, at the same time it has encouraged many to be more open-minded and less ‘constrained’, as they had described themselves in the interviews, in regard to multimodal writing tasks for students.

As this was my first experience with action research and having to deal with its challenges or consequences, I admit that at many times I was unsure of what to do next or how to progress. At times, I had even doubted the value and importance of my research. However, the outcome has resulted in these struggles being deeply rewarding experiences. The headaches, frustration, many sleepless nights, and stress that stemmed from these hurdles have led to a positive result, just as I had hoped. The time that I spent interacting with students made me increasingly aware

of their individual needs. These are needs that many teachers have a tendency to make assumptions about or overlook. Being able to consider writing from students' perspectives allowed me to identify the issues and challenges that students face in writing from a whole new outlook, almost as if I had planted myself in their shoes. I feel very strongly that my research journey has been a success and that my students benefitted greatly from having a multimodal approach implemented in their writing. The students in both of my research groups were engaged in the process of multimodal writing and meaning making. It was this level of engagement and motivation shown by my students, which made this action research an enjoyable and academically successful project. It provided an opening for students to have access to and utilise varied resources and have greater opportunities within an intensive and highly prescribed ELICOS writing pedagogy for meaning making.

Overall, in the initial stages of planning my research, I was overwhelmed with feelings of excitement and optimism. I felt that students would be receptive to being involved in my research as ultimately the fundamental part of it was centred on providing options for them to express and convey their meanings in writing. At times, I felt isolated and challenged, particularly when Cycle One did not evolve as I had initially planned. I admit that I was excited about doing something different and I hoped that my research would influence some immediate changes in the current writing syllabus. The benefit of my study design, involving action research, was that I was able to consider my approach from a range of perspectives, which included interviews, discussions and interactions with participants. Restraints identified in Cycle One (including timing of classes, class levels, and definitions of multimodal writing) were modified and adapted for Cycle Two, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the multimodal writing path. The scaffolding employed in the early stages of Cycle Two led to greater collaboration and cohesion amongst students and increased understanding of the purpose for different modes of communication, which seemed to meet students' academic language needs. My reflections convey information that fellow English language teachers may find challenging to consider, and I expect should raise more questions than are answered in my study

## Limitations

There is much in the literature about multimodal ideology and multimodal writing, yet there remains a lack of pedagogical framework and clarity in which those modes can function and be implemented in classrooms and ultimately translated into practices. There was vague

awareness among teachers of the nature of the relationships between multimodal theory and how these integrated with traditional monomodal pedagogy. The first cycle of research highlighted a lack of clarity in the multimodal tasks so students (as well as myself) may not have gained the understanding, or confidence at this time as to what exactly needed to be done. The framing of multimodal literacy as shared discourse caused confusion and limited the number of students wanting to share their writing. More results could have been obtained if students felt confident about the task, or if the tasks were relevant in design and purpose to the course level. Another identified limitation identified was that I conducted this research as a solo teacher practitioner and completed it within a very tight time frame.

## Recommendations

Based on the knowledge generated in this study, I now present a set of recommendations for improving the experience of learning to write in English for L2 international students studying in the ELICOS sector. My recommendations relate to the following: leadership in the ELICOS sector and in ELICOS institutions; practitioners in ELICOS classrooms; and future research.

The first recommendation relates to the finding in this study that there remains a significant disjunction between what research into literacy and language education has been showing for several decades now. This is especially in respect to the multimodal nature of all language in the most advanced literacy and language programs across the world, and the dominant curriculum and assessment paradigms in ELICOS programs across Australia. This study recommends that the Australian Government, senior leadership in the ELICOS sector, and leaders of institutions that offer ELICOS courses for international students closely engage with up-to-date research into language and literacy education, especially literature that urges those involved in language education programs to understand the importance of identifying and valuing the funds of knowledge that students bring to their learning of English in Australia. The study is recommending that the sector move away from a once-size-fits-all vision of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ELICOS programs. The Australian Government has taken a leadership role in urging leaders to advocate for curriculum and pedagogy in the Australian Curriculum in schools. In doing so, the Australian Government is encouraging leaders of institutions to critically engage with relevant literature and investigate the value of multimodal pedagogies, which focus on meaning making enacted in particular contexts, so as to meet the needs of their particular cohort of international students.

This is partly means ensuring that ELICOS offerings are more effectively grounded in the most compelling and authoritative research into language education for international adult students. It also recognises and appreciates the ways in which ELICOS courses are now subject to competitive market forces. This study has shown that students are more engaged and confident when learning to write in English with multimodal pedagogies, and they are more likely to enjoy their learning. Students who are more engaged, confident, and happier are more likely to record positive evaluations in student satisfaction surveys. Such positive evaluations are key to sustainable enrolments in ELICOS programs in Australia. The Australian Government and educational leaders in ELICOS institutions should position the kind of work involved in engaging with educational research and best practice literacy/language education as central to ongoing efforts to develop their programs and to attract and retain international students. The ELICOS sector must elevate the importance of encouraging continuous improvement in writing pedagogy, particularly in EAP writing in order to enhance students' satisfaction.

The second major recommendation relates to the professional learning of practitioners who teach in ELICOS institutions and programs. This professional learning should, in the short term, include commitments from ELICOS teachers to learn about and implement the teaching of writing using multimodal pedagogies, including an appreciation of valuing the funds of knowledge that international students bring to their study of English in Australia. This should involve leadership sponsoring and supporting teachers' professional learning as this will create some accountability for teachers to incorporate and reflect on their learning practices. The onus of responsibility for this professional learning should be shared between the leadership and practitioners who teach in ELICOS programs. Over time, teachers through learning more while increasing their knowledge and skills in using multimodal pedagogies, an innovative and universally inclusive approach to teaching writing can become the new norm in ELICOS programs.

Finally, this study recommends more research being conducted into the teaching of writing to international L2 adult students in ELICOS settings. Such research should begin by conducting longer-term studies of students who benefit from sustained teaching of writing using multimodal pedagogies, which is certainly longer than shorter-term action research cycles have allowed in this study. This study has begun to show that multimodal pedagogy can benefit students' learning in all elements of their language learning, including expanding their vocabulary, yet this aspect was not explored in depth. Investigating how implementing multimodal pedagogy can assist students' vocabulary learning would be of more benefit if there

is a more sustained, longer term inquiry, rather than what shorter term action research could achieve. Studies of a larger number of ELICOS institutions could investigate the level of students' satisfaction within Australian ELICOS settings. Finally, further research is recommended to investigate the concept of hospitable pedagogy in EAP writing. EAP course developers would benefit from carefully investigating the needs of potential students when setting up or refining ESP courses designed to reflect a new pedagogical response by investigating aspects of their cultural and social identities.

This study takes the view that it is the responsibility of both governments and the ELICOS sector to continue to conduct and disseminate this research, and to report on best practice into the future. The international students who pay so generously to learn in the ELICOS sector deserve the very best that Australia has to offer. The very best can only be provided if governments, leaders and practitioners in the sector take on this responsibility.

## **Conclusions: And Preparing for More Beginnings...**

This PhD thesis stands as a critical and creative account of a five-year research journey. It has been a journey over time, place, and ideas. Conducting action research in an ELICOS setting revealed distinctive perspectives and understandings of EAP writing pedagogy as has been enacted for many years. Investigating the current practices for teaching writing at NLC uncovered and emphasized the disharmony between policy, practice, and learners' needs in EAP courses for adult international L2 students. Through implementing and exploring multimodal pedagogy in EAP courses, this study has generated new insights and understandings of L2 international students and the breadth of their knowledge.

The study has made a significant contribution to ongoing research and practices of teaching writing in ELICOS settings. It has shown that the dominant, monomodal approach to teaching writing in these settings largely devalues the experience, sophistication, and identity of international students enrolled in ELICOS. The process of conducting interviews with students and teachers at NLC allowed for personal interactions and explanations. This flowed to the classroom and opened up a multimodal space for students to express more about themselves and their knowledge. This enabled students to gain confidence in their abilities to make meaning through use of multiple semiotic forms. Through conducting my research in two classes of international students with their use of linguistic and non-linguistic forms in their writing, this

study has highlighted the need for teachers to use multimodal pedagogies when teaching writing and assessing students' writing ability.

I trust that the rich range of qualitative evidence that I have presented in this thesis will help to persuade leaders and practitioners in ELICOS institutions to be more flexible in their writing pedagogy and assessments of students' writing in English. I hope that leaders and practitioners will come to appreciate, as I have in done through this research journey that ethical teachers who genuinely wish to develop students' writing abilities will want to look beyond their linguistic knowledge. It is hoped that while acknowledging the importance of grammar, sentence structure, and spelling in the target language (English), that leaders and practitioners will also appreciate the importance of valuing the funds of language, in terms of knowledge, skills, and creativity, which international students bring to their learning when writing in English. Multimodal pedagogies allow for such acknowledging and valuing. This study has shown that international L2 learners in ELICOS centres have much to contribute and gain from the teaching of writing in these environments. Students are entitled to have opportunities to learn to write with multimodal pedagogies. The very best can only be provided if governments, leaders and practitioners in the ELICOS sector work together to take on this responsibility, giving teachers adequate resources and support to continually build their knowledge and practices.

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# APENDICES

## Appendix A: Teachers interview questions

1. How do you define 'writing'?
2. What do you usually teach in writing classes? What are your expectations of students' writing? What is your focus in writing classes?
3. From your experience, what are students' challenges in writing?
4. Are you familiar with "multimodal writing"?
5. What do you usually do to assist students make meaning in their writing?



## Appendix B: Teachers Questionnaire

In this research survey on writing, I am seeking to understand teachers' views of writing and their teaching practices in writing classes. Your responses will be used to help me learn more about teachers' and students' challenges in writing classes, and how teachers assist students' make meaning in their writing.

1. For writing assignments, how often do you ask\let your students use multimodal composition (i.e images –picture etc.)? (circle one)

Never      Occasionally      Sometimes      Often      Always

2. Do you think traditional writing tasks (without multimodal options) assist students' expression of thoughts and meaning?

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. Focusing on the accuracy of writing (form) in writing classes is more important than students' expression of thoughts and meaning (content).

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree '

4. The current writing practices and curriculum support non-linguistic expression of meaning?

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. In writing pedagogy, to what extent do you feel students' expression of meaning and thoughts is important?

Very important      important      netural      not important

6. In my classes, I believe I'm ..... (circle one or more)

- a. Teaching linguistics
- b. Teaching writing
- c. Teaching literacy
- d. Teaching meaning making
- e. Teaching multiliteracies
- f. Teaching multimodal writing

7. **From your experience in writing classes, what do you think are students' main challenges: (circle one or more)**

- a. Accurate grammatical structures
- b. Vocabulary
- c. Content
- d. Expressions of thoughts and meaning
- e. Other .....

8. **Would you encourage your students to use non-linguistic (i.e images, audio, video etc. ) modes to convey meanings if they cannot express in words?**

*Yes*

*No*

9. **What do you usually do to assist students' make meaning in writing? (In less than 50 words)**

.....

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## Appendix C: Explanatory Statements for Ethics Approval (Consent and Withdrawal Forms)

### EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Students)

**Project: Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches**

**Chief Investigator: Dr Fida Sanjakdar**

c/o Faculty of Education

Monash University

Email: fida.sanjakdar@monash.edu.au

**Research student: Huda Kahwaji**

Phone: 0410720444

Email : huda.kahwaji@monash.edu.au

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

This study investigates whether, and to what extent, the use of different modes in the teaching of writing can assist low proficiency adult ESL learners to more easily make meaning in their academic writing. By exploring multimodal writing, this study aims to better understand of what multimodal writing can offer to ESL in higher education, and to increase ESL learners' experience in learning English. To participate, all participants must be 18 years or over and have a beginner's level of English proficiency. The data collection takes a maximum of 40 minutes and will be carried out at Nour Language Centre in computer room CALL or in one of the classes in Nour language centre, Melbourne

It is important for you to know that your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to compose two pieces of writing. The first sample will be in traditional text mode and the second sample will be in a non-traditional text mode. This means that the first piece of writing will be standard print and the second piece will be using a variety of communication styles, including visual communication methods. then you will be interviewed about the differences in writing in these two styles.

No risk or harm will result from participation in the project.

You will be recorded, but you are free to ask to stop the recording at any time. The data will be used as input for data analysis in the thesis done by the investigator. The thesis will be in hard copy and electronic form and may contain extracts of your answers and reconstructions in the tasks and interviews with the investigator. However, your identity will not be revealed under any circumstances.

All information will be kept confidential and your name will not appear in the data and the thesis. Any extracts used in the thesis will be edited so that no personal information that might affect confidentiality is included.

You will be given the transcripts of your answers for review before submission of the thesis so you can check for accuracy. You will also be given a copy of the transcripts and a summary of the findings when the thesis is finished. All raw data in the forms of recordings will be stored confidentially in the office of the supervisor at Faculty of Education, Monash University, after the study.

Your participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time. There are no adverse consequences for not participating or withdrawing from the project. You may also request that data collected through your participation is not used in the project provided. If you wish to withdraw your consent you are asked to complete the *Withdrawal of Consent Form* or to inform the investigator that you wish to withdraw your consent for your data to be used in the project.

Any questions regarding this project may be directed to the investigator, Huda Kahwaji, via phone number 0410720444 or email [huda.kahwaji@monash.edu](mailto:huda.kahwaji@monash.edu)

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Chancellery Building E,

24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel : +61 3 9905 2052

Email : [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu)

Fax : +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Huda Kahwaji

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## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Teachers)

**Project: Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches**

**Chief Investigator: Dr Fida Sanjakdar**

c/o Faculty of Education

Monash University

Email: fida.sanjakdar@monash.edu.au

**Research student: Huda Kahwaji**

Phone: 0410720444

Email : huda.kahwaji@monash.edu.au

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

This study investigates whether, and how, the use of different modes in the teaching of writing can assist low proficiency adult ESL learners to make meaning in their academic writing. By exploring multimodal writing practices in ELICOS settings, this study aims to better understand what multimodal writing can offer to ESL in higher education, and to enhance ESL learners' experience in learning English.

It is important for you to know that your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview and/or questionnaire. The data collection takes a maximum of 20 minutes and will be carried out at NOUR Language Centre

There are no anticipated risks or harm from your participation in the project.

Your interview will be audiorecorded, but you are free to ask to stop the recording at any time. The data will be used as input for data analysis in the thesis done by the investigator. The thesis will be in hard copy and electronic form and may contain extracts of your

answers and reconstructions in the tasks and interviews with the investigator. However, your identity will not be revealed under any circumstances.

All information will be kept confidential and your name will not appear in the data and the thesis. Any extracts used in the thesis will be edited so that no personal information that might compromise confidentiality is included.

You will be invited to review the transcripts of your answers before submission of the thesis so you can check for accuracy. You will also be emailed a summary of the findings when the thesis is finished. All raw data in the forms of recordings will be stored confidentially in the office of the supervisor at Faculty of Education, Monash University, after the study.

Your participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time. There are no adverse consequences for not participating or withdrawing from the project. You may also request that particular data collected through your participation is not used in the project provided. If you wish to withdraw your consent you are asked to complete the *Withdrawal of Consent Form* or to inform the investigator that you wish to withdraw your consent for your data to be used in the project.

Any questions regarding this project may be directed to the investigator, Huda Kahwaji, via phone number 0410720444 or email [huda.kahwaji@monash.edu](mailto:huda.kahwaji@monash.edu)

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

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Tel : +61 3 9905 2052

Email : [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu)

Fax : +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Huda Kahwaji

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## CONSENT FORM

Project: **Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches**

Chief Investigator: **Huda Kahwaji**

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project. I understand that even though I agree to be involved in this project, I can withdraw from the study at any time. Further, in withdrawing from the study, I can request that no information from my involvement be used. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
The interview (about 15 minutes long) will be audio recorded and used as data for this research project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will be sent a copy of the results from the study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

Faculty of Education

**WITHDRAWAL OF CONSENT FOR USE OF DATA FORM**

**Project: Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches**

I,....., wish to WITHDRAW my consent to the use of data arising from my participation. Data arising from my participation must NOT be used in this research project as described in the Information and Consent Form. I understand that data arising from my participation will be destroyed. I understand that this notification will be retained together with my consent form as evidence of the withdrawal of my consent to use the data I have provided specifically for this research project.

Participant's name (printed):

Signature:

Date:

---

## Appendix D: Students' Interview Questions

### Students' Interview Questions

*The interview questions are divided into two sets: one before the writing tasks and one after. The questions of the semi-structure interview will be categorized as follows:*

**Feeling about writing\ writing classes:**

1. How do you see yourself as a writer in English?
2. Tell me about the kinds of writing you do in writing classes you currently are taking?

**Writing process:** when you write, what is / are the things that you most you focus on:

- a) Spelling
- b) Grammar
- c) Meaning
- d) Ideas
- e) Structure sentence (how do you put sentences together?).
- f) Other

**Writing difficulties /apprehension:**

Do you have difficulties when you write in English? If yes? Can you explain?

### ***Post writing task interview***

***The participants will be also interviewed about making meaning based on the two different type of texts they have written.***

- a. **Modes of writing:** Do you use multimodal writing \do you use images, symbols etc. in non-school writing?
  - b. Do your teachers let you choose a mode to write? ( words, pictures, etc)
  - c. **Meaning- making:**
    - Which form of writing (Multimodal /Traditional) do you prefer?
    - How do you feel about each form of writing?
-

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## Appendix E: Research Ethics Approval Form MUHREC



### Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

**Project Number:** 1013

**Project Title:** Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches

**Chief Investigator:** Assoc Professor Graham Parr

**Expiry Date:** 29/09/2021

**Terms of approval - failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.**

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is 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 MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC 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 letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MUHREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring - project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Thank you for your assistance.

Professor Nip Thomson

Chair, MUHREC

## Appendix F: Excerpts from Interview Conversations

These selected excerpts below are from the interview conversations with teachers:

### Example 1: Interview with Peter

- ME from your experience, what do you think are the students' challenges in writing classes?
- PETER Well at that sort of level, I mean obviously their first language is very strong, that's perhaps the main challenge, and another problem is they keep, I've got to wean them away from using Google Translate and those sort of things
- ME Why they are using Google Translate?
- PETER Well in my class they don't
- ME No, I mean do you think that students always need to ....?
- PETER Oh well I suppose they just think it's an easier way of ... an easy way of getting their work done for them. I've seen them do it, but I get them to do it in reverse now. I might give them some sentences in ... get them to put it in... write it out in the Chinese or Arabic or something and say now put it into Google Translate and then they're all very amused by what comes out
- HK Yeah. Do you think that just because of lack of vocabulary or something?
- ADRIAN Yeah vocabulary but also of the structure. They think Google's giving them structure. That's the whole trouble. They'll put a whole sentence in there
- KARIN Usually students, if you tell them that they have to do a writing, so usually they have to write in paragraphs, either a story or description or an academic essay. So that's how I define...

### Example 2: Interview with Karol

- ME So what's writing? What do you think writing is?

KAROL                    An expression of your feelings, your thoughts, your opinions, your views about any issue or it could be an experience, it could be a story. Yeah?

ME                        Okay and what do you usually do in your writing classes? what's your expectation of the students' writing? What's the focus in your writing classes?

KAROL                    Okay it depends, for example if it's a low level

ME                        Yeah

KAROL                    so writing to them is basically connecting a few sentences together because this is what they would be able to do okay because probably they do not have enough vocabulary or even like no or good knowledge of the sentence structure a good one, and as for like the higher level students – I would have higher expectations of them to be able to form like really good sentences with a wide range of vocabulary and being able to express themselves much better in writing as compared to a low level student

### **Example 3: interview with Donna**

ME                        What do you usually focus on students' writing, that's my question? When you have a class, a writing class, what do you usually do?

DONNA                    Well if they're doing the introduction, I give them a model of an introduction, so we'll look at a topic sentence and explain what a topic sentence is. I'll look at the idea of background, and I'll model and explain what a background is, and then they'll do a statement of purpose so I'll look at what a statement of purpose is

ME                        So it's mostly about the structure of the essay?

DONNA                    Yes

These selected excerpts below are from the interview conversations with students:

**Example 1. Interview with Lawrence (China, 2B General Level)**

- Me                      Now when you write in English, what are the things that you focus on? Is it the grammar, ideas, meaning, vocabulary, sentence structure? So what is the most... so when you write, you said this is important, this is important... what is important to you as a writer?
- LAWRENCE            Vocab and grammar
- Me                      So you focus on the vocabulary and the grammar. Why vocabulary and the grammar?
- LAWRENCE            It's difficult to me

**Example 2. Interview with Mahmoud (Saudi Arabia, Level 3A EFS)**

- Me                      I'll start my first question. How do you describe yourself as a writer in English? How do you see yourself as a writer in English?
- MOHMOUD            Actually my language not good until now, so that ... I can't talk about myself more, but usually I understand some thing. I can't talk with anyone new... I can't explain any idea... if I think about it I can explain but I don't... my problem is I don't understand the speaker native

**Example 2. Interview with Olivia (Cambodia, Level 3B EFS)**

- OLIVIA                No. In class writing is not difficult, I just afraid I can't write a good article
- Me                      You cannot write a good piece of writing?
- OLIVIA                And sometimes I have all ideas about an article, but I don't know how to use English to write

