Action Research Study: Exploring the Teaching of English and Academic Writing as a Social Practice in a British Malaysian University

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Abstract

English Language teaching in post-colonial university settings poses a range of challenges for the teacher as well as students. The main focus of this thesis is to analyse and improve English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in a Malaysian university setting. Drawing on Lea and Street's work in particular, an Academic Literacies (AL) perspective is employed to capture the complexities of teaching and learning academic writing within and beyond an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom. While providing a sound theoretical rationale, the AL perspective does not help with the practical aspects of teaching. Kumaravadivelu's Post-Method Pedagogy (PMP) is enlisted to guide a teacher with teaching principles. Three PMP teaching principles are collapsed and adapted from an original list of ten to activate three AL conditions: negotiated interaction to reduce power-relational mismatches, the promoting of learner autonomy to improve knowledge conditions, and ensuring relevant culture and contexts in understanding socio-cultural conditions.

The methodology used for this study is action research, undertaken in my own tertiary classroom, involving 117 voluntary student participants across six semesters or cycles, from 2008 to 2010. Different emerging issues are explored using AL and PMP strategies for each cycle and new practices are developed. A narrative presentation of data is pursued through short, critical-incident stories from various qualitative sources, collected via teacher diaries, student and colleague interviews, student letters, email exchanges and assignments. These stories reflect multiple voices from the teaching and learning community, and build a comprehensive focus for analysing the researcher's journey as a critically reflective teacher alongside the students' growth as academic writers.

From both contemporaneous and hindsight analyses, the first finding suggests that power mismatches can be significantly reduced between teachers and learners and between teacher colleagues when negotiated interaction is used as a teaching principle, making teaching and learning a more meaningful endeavour. Secondly, learner autonomy was found to be largely dependent on confidence gained through knowledge growth in students, paralleling their growth to higher levels of literacy. The third finding suggests that, by ensuring relevance in social and cultural contexts while learning, students remain engaged and committed towards learning. In other words, socio-cultural conditions need to be met before knowledge conditions can improve. Fourthly, as an EAP tertiary teacher, it was found that by using AL

and PMP principles, I could reflect, both on my feet and through the use of reflective journaling, in ways that maximised learning opportunities and created teachable moments.

Combining the two traditions of AL and PMP contributes to new knowledge in TESOL by helping English-as-a-Second-Language and EAP teachers understand new ways of learning EAP in university settings, especially if teachers operate in hierarchical institutions. The Vygotskian concepts of scaffolding and mediation, which are often used in TESOL debates, and linked to AL and PMP acted as a bridge between the larger concepts of power, epistemology and socio-cultural conditions.

In summary, without first making sense of power relations and rallying greater support from various segments within hierarchical institutions, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions could not be fully met, and nor would literacy dimensions increase significantly. The students themselves appear to understand this finding, which confirms the need to integrate the three AL conditions and PMP principles. The integration of theory and practice in this way supports this action research study and reinforces the role of teacher as an agent of change.

Student Declaration

"I, Alison Abraham, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Action Research Study: Exploring the Teaching and Learning of English and Academic Writing as a Social Practice in a British Malaysian University' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature:

Date: 20th December 2016

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Prologue: How the Journey Began

"How dare you embark on a PhD behind my back!"

These words serve as a reminder that my journey as a PhD student began amidst a setting of power struggles, identity clashes, and social and cultural misunderstandings. These words were spoken and directed at me by my line manager in mid-2006, while I was teaching at a reputable medical university in Malaysia. What I did not know at the time was it eventually caused me to break away from restrictive, method-orientated practice (i.e. what the boss prescribed as acceptable material for teaching) that permeated the academic English Language teaching culture.

The incident also gave me the impetus to document my understanding of power relations in my teaching and learning context in my next work place, not something most English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) setting appear to do, especially in hierarchical settings. In order to improve my teaching and understand why my students obtained poor results in English in writing, I kept a record of my feelings and reactions based on the experiences I underwent, not realising this was the beginning of my reflective research process. The reflective process eventually contributed to an action research methodology employed for my study, to make sense of what was happening around me. This was necessary as I was trying to make sense of the top-down attitude on the part of departmental and institutional authorities that encompassed teaching approaches and materials as well as staff relationships. Such an understanding eventually led me to also investigate what were broader political and social factors contributing to my students having difficulty in improving their English language and academic writing skills.

Chapter 1: Identifying the problem and need for action research

Writing effectively at university level can be a problem, especially for second language learners (Alwasilah 2004; Arkoudis & Tran 2010). They not only have to grapple with grammar problems but also need to understand and apply academic writing rules and styles, unique to each discipline or school. To this end, some universities have set up English language centres and academic support units to help students achieve satisfactory language and writing standards set by their respective university. This can be seen in most Australian, British and American branch campuses in Asia. Moreover, the success of English language and academic study skills programmes remain debatable (Wingate 2006). There have been recent collaborative attempts between language and discipline specialists in relation to large student bodies which report improvements in students' academic writing (Wingate 2006; Fernsten & Reda 2011). More research is needed to provide detailed analysis of practice in a higher education language and academic writing classroom between one teacher and a diverse class of different ethnic groups.

Indeed, there is too little research on how context may impact students' learning and teacher's teaching of academic writing, especially when learning and teaching are mediated by strong political and socio-cultural shifts within the country. For most Malaysian students, EAP is only introduced at university level and that makes it extremely challenging for largely ESL learners who are new to the concept of academic writing. Boscolo, Arfe and Quarisa (2007) suggest that deeper research needs to be undertaken to understand the relationship between learning difficulties and teacher intervention methods and how this relationship has impacts beyond the classroom. It is insider or emic research like this study that has the potential 'to document hidden transcripts within social institutions, illuminating new forms of micro politics' which may not be possible for researchers outside universities (Herr & Anderson 2005). This study will expand current knowledge in this area.

The original focus of this study was to improve academic writing skills through examining diverse teaching and learning strategies. This also included gauging the impact

of a longitudinal study that could shape future plans of teachers of ESL and academic writing in this university, and the Malaysian higher education system in general. The need to pay attention to academic writing arose from the weaknesses found in students' written tests at the start of the programme.

My students were enrolled as Foundation students in this British university, having finished either their fifth or sixth form in high school and it was compulsory for them to sit for tests modelled after the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams. However, IELTS is a language proficiency test but the director of the centre decided for the tests to be called diagnostic tests. There were more problems found in the students' writing compared to their listening and reading tests and that made it a necessity to understand what their writing problems were. As their teacher, I wanted to help them improve, especially in the area of academic writing which was a crucial part of their formal assessments for Business, Engineering and Computer Science disciplines at the university where I was employed. The realisation that the writing problems discovered during diagnostic tests needed to be worked on over a period of time, further piqued my interest to engage in an action research study.

The problems regarding my study eventually broadened to include the need to not only understand student writing but to explore power, knowledge and socio-cultural contexts and to build learner capacity in English Language teaching. A wider understanding of the core problem was needed because in a post-colonial setting, issues that relate to power are unavoidable. These issues then feed into knowledge and socio-cultural dimensions which in turn affect the identities of the individuals involved. The action research focus made it possible to appreciate subtler yet complex issues that were emerging through different teaching and learning cycles. Thus, this study allows for a more in-depth exploration of epistemological and socio-cultural elements surrounding learners and the teacher, and how the findings can be best utilised in tandem with globalisation so that students' academic writing goals can be realised.

I will provide some background information about the programme I was involved in to help unpack how some of these issues became relevant and needed to be explored.

1.1 Background information about the EAP programme

During the time the pilot study was conducted, a comparison between the specifications listed in the course structure of the EAP programme offered at the UK campus was made with that used in Malaysia. This comparison revealed that the UK EAP syllabus catered for any student who needed to improve their academic writing and study skills problems, subject to passing their English entry requirements, and being recommended for extra academic English and study skills classes by their respective schools. With the Malaysian programme, however, the module was made compulsory by the academic English and study skills unit teaching and management team (independent from the head office in UK), who wanted to cater for a different and unique context of students who were predominantly ESL students from Malaysia, irrespective of whether they achieved the required band (6.5) or above. What this meant was that all Foundation students had to undertake this academic English and study skills programme over three semesters. The move was seen to address the pressing need to provide quality education to ESL Malaysian students to help them cope with their next level of studies in their undergraduate years and in future.

However, eventually, policy makers from the institution decided to provide these classes only to students who failed to meet the required 'Band 6', which was the lowest band score needed not to have to take classes. This decision was not favoured by university English teachers, who felt that it was in the best interests of all students to be socialised into the university setting by learning academic writing and study skills which would help them in the long run, to adjust to the changing role of global English in their professions. Science-based school heads, however, felt it was more important to concentrate on the disciplines rather than language structures and writing. Hence, there was ongoing debate as to whether disciplinary knowledge was of more value in students' undergraduate studies compared to English Language knowledge and how epistemologically, the debate challenged the way English and academic writing was taught and may have also affected the socio-cultural notion of language learning.

In the midst of these political struggles within the system, I needed to think about how best to engage these students in a way that encapsulated the different skills in General

English and discipline-specific EAP at best. The students were acquiring various forms of knowledge from different disciplines. I also had to understand the political and social history of my ethnically diverse students' learning experiences, which have shaped them over the years. One example was when I discovered, while marking their tests, what I thought at the time was 'fossilised' or ingrained errors in grammar. These errors were later found to be acquired over their schooling years, as a consequence of the poor state of the English language in Malaysia which I perceive as having deteriorated over time and based on their interview comments.

In the next section, my own colonial experiences are explained to give a sense of how my identity was shaped as a result, and how that may have impacted some of my own decision-making processes as a teacher when dealing with student academic writing problems and issues beyond the classroom.

1.2 My colonial experiences

Since childhood, from the time I grew up in a rubber plantation managed by the colonial masters, the British for whom my dad worked, I was taught to believe that the British were superior in their language and mannerisms. This belief was exacerbated by British programmes on TV which I watched with my family, and by listening to convent school nuns who espoused the qualities of speaking and writing in good British English while at school. Although I aspired to emulate all things British, thinking it was best, I also realised that I could be just as good if not better than native speakers, so long as I was grammatically correct and logically coherent in my speech and writing. As an Indian Christian, a major shift in thinking only came about once I realised something of the potential I had as an individual to create change, subsequent to my education in university and some interactions with work colleagues. This fed into the experience I had with the difficult white line manager I wrote about at the beginning of this chapter.

I found the methods-focused teaching practice under this line manager restrictive, because teaching was based on a set of pre-determined lesson plans. If anyone decided to use anything that was not specifically mentioned in the lesson plans, it would upset my line manager. One related example was when one of the part-time teachers used power

point slides to teach content in one of the plans for semester two students of Pharmacy, thinking it would break the monotony of students seeing black and white print all the time. The line manager, who decided to walk into one of the part-time teacher's classes to distribute some handouts, was dismayed to discover the teacher using power point slides. Although an explanation was given to my manager about how other staff in the medical university also used various teaching tools to help students learn, it failed to make her change her views. What ensued was a series of attempts to frustrate the part-time teacher into leaving the unit. Although I was unhappy with these circumstances, I was afraid to challenge her, thinking it might affect my job.

The example above, among many others, propelled me to find a way to escape from this power-infused setting to be able to delve into more creative teaching pursuits. My quest for a better approach to teaching eventually led to the discovery of Post-Method Pedagogy (PMP) teaching principles, or strategies by Kumaravadivelu (1994) as a way for me to think about challenging my own assumptions about practice. PMP explores the notion that teaching is not method bound. It suggests that practical strategies used for teaching at the time were also about the choice I made as a teacher, according to what I considered to be best practice for my students. Being restricted to what the manager wanted and not according to what the students needed proved to be confusing and contradictory to my knowledge about teaching. The incidents in my workplace, while personal, were set against a professional scenario backdrop and made it all the more important to unravel power conditions, because the personal cannot be separated from the professional within a political setting. I was only beginning to discover, through practice, the need for a teacher to balance his or her personal, professional and political dimensions in an action research study (Noffke 1997) in order to be more successful at practice. Balancing these three dimensions also meant I had to reflect on power issues with knowledge and cultural issues, as they seemed to overlap or interact.

These reflections helped me change the way I taught. More creative, teacher-friendly ideas were added to the learning material packs so that any teacher who taught in the unit could pick them up and use them instantly. Drawing on what my students liked, I used music to connect healthcare with language. A lesson using power point slides was

designed, in which a music video that I received from a friend was incorporated to aid learning. The positive experience of the lesson confirmed my perceptions that teaching practice can be liberating, if not constrained, by specific methods prescribed by the institution.

The experience gave me the motivation to read, participate in conferences and engage in scholarly debates. Although trained to do ESL in my basic degree and post-graduate qualifications, I slowly moved on to do English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at this university and subsequently, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at a British university. The transition from ESL to ESP marked a crucial point in setting the scene to shape my researcher path. The difficult times I had with my line manager made me realise that teaching alone was not helping me grow as a teacher. Research was needed to not only enhance my knowledge and build on my teaching repertoire but consolidate my practice with theory, so that I could make sense of the complexities of teaching and learning. I enrolled to study my PhD part time, at a British university, in November 2008. Within a week of my enrolment, I was offered a part-time job at the same university to teach academic writing and study skills to Foundation students.

My line manager came to know that I had enrolled at this university and that was when she uttered those haunting words. The power-infused incidents, although challenging, were necessary to push me into discovering my real potential as a teacher. Such a discovery could only be achieved against a canvas of Malaysian social, cultural, historical and personal awareness within and beyond my classroom. My constant reading of literature and writing about my research enabled me to think beyond my normal horizon of teaching, and explore some of the associated emotional and psychological changes.

In this context, I was undergoing a personal and professional transformation which made me question what I wanted to achieve in life. At a personal level, there was a need to prove to my line manager that I could do both: become a successful teacher and a researcher. At a professional level, the need to obtain a PhD was compelling, because being a member of a scholarly community appeared to promise career advancement, research opportunities and recognition from higher education colleagues. An action

research focus would enable the needed changes of practice to be developed, enacted and understood through cycles of reflection.

Eventually, through this action research study, I was gradually able to reflect and shift my thinking about my role as an English Language and academic writing teacher having absolute power to a more democratic compromise of enabling students to have opportunities to make decisions about their own learning. While the shift in my thinking changed the way I taught, it also enabled me to know my students who themselves were struggling with how to make sense of academic writing in a way that would help them be successful in their tertiary studies. I was able to sympathise more with their needs as time went by, because they had to shift their thinking largely based on the Malaysian education system to a British higher education system, which was daunting and challenging for them. As my teaching and research evolved, I could not ignore the ways in which my identity evolved. My understandings about power relations, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions only further helped me develop a more open and flexible approach to teaching.

1.3 Situating the study in context

1.3.a **Introduction**

English language teaching in post-colonial university settings poses a range of challenges for teachers and students. In an EAP context, these challenges can be more difficult for ESL teachers to negotiate, especially for second language learners, who have never been exposed to academic writing. Academic writing is one of the areas in which students need to be successful (Arkoudis 2003) in order to do well within and beyond university. Unfortunately, the teaching of English and academic writing in universities is often treated as a technical activity (Lillis 2001); yet language is intricately associated to culture, identity, epistemological and power relations, within and beyond the classroom. Therefore, although the focus of this study is to improve students' writing, it cannot be viewed as a set of skills but rather a complex part of teaching as a social practice.

In order to understand teaching as a social practice in context, a brief historical background to the study is provided. The study is located in Malaysia, a country that came out of its colonial political period in 1957 post-independence. English was the language of the colonisers and after the British colonisers left, there has been significant inter-ethnic group conflict between the Malays, Chinese and Indians, which is a kind of legacy connected to the country's colonial past. Therefore, to teach English in this context is already a highly politicised activity. As an ESL and academic writing teacher, teaching and learning conditions needed to be framed, within personal, political and professional dimensions and that meant making sense of the local, within a global context. The framing of teaching and learning conditions within the personal, political and professional dimensions (Noffke 1997) also meant having to use action research as my methodology. In this action research study of EAP in a classroom at a British Malaysian university, the issues of colonisation, the nature of English, the epistemologies of the local in a global English context is brought to the forefront, although the core problem identified was to improve my students' writing skills. It was no longer about just teaching academic writing within the classroom but also paying attention to what was going on outside the classroom. Writing was embedded as part of a wider network of a social system where students and the teacher contribute their own cultural and historical input. What this also suggests is that this action research study is not only about a big research question; rather, it is about identifying a problem which needs to be solved by seeking ways to understand it through a series of cyclical reflections, encompassing a broad range of dimensions.

In summary, Chapter 1 begins with a broad overview of the challenges of teaching English and academic writing in an increasingly globalised world. The teaching of academic writing is necessarily a highly political and culturally specific social practice, linked also to the role of universities as a highly mobile workforce with expectations of graduates being able to compete globally. In foregrounding the post-colonial experience in English Language development in Malaysia, the legacy of colonialism has resulted in political, educational and economic consequences for the different ethnic groups. The rationale for the study includes the need for it to be framed within political, personal and professional dimensions. Debates on English Language teaching are thus presented

alongside personal post-colonial reflections, weighing in on the tensions between positive and negative views on post-colonialism. These tensions are necessary to show how the local ESL teacher can sometimes wrestle with her teaching choices, especially in hierarchical settings. They also add to the understanding that Academic Literacies is needed for this study to theorise and broadly encompass power relational, epistemological and socio-cultural conditions, within and beyond an English and academic writing classroom. To translate these conditions into action, post-method pedagogy strategies are employed. An explanation is also briefly provided for why only three strategies were selected from a range of twelve and how these strategies work in tandem with globalisation demands. More detailed discussion of the two theories ensues in Chapter 2. To dig deeper into the personal, professional and political dimensions of the study, an action research methodological focus was chosen, which in turn feeds into the conceptual framework and design of the study. The chapter concludes with the study's aims and significance.

In the next section, the historical, political and social development of the English language in Malaysia is traced to give a comprehensive view of how these developments could also shape the perceptions of power, knowledge and culture in research participants given this context.

1.4 The state of English language in Malaysia

The English language has evolved in Malaysia because of numerous political, historical and global shifts, from the time of independence (1957) until now. Many undergraduate Malaysian students struggle to reach proficiency in English (Primus, Sulaiman & Baki 2011; Enxhi, Tan & Yong 2012), as a result of inconsistent educational policies created by Malaysian politicians. For most students, the dominance of Bahasa Malaysia as their first language in schools and the overemphasis on learning English, as a set of skills in grammar, reading and writing, rather than focusing on achieving verbal and written communicative competence appears to be the main reason for students having serious English Language issues (Che Musa, Koo & Azman 2012). To complicate matters, the premium placed on mastering academic writing (Arkoudis 2003), according to the

requirements of universities, poses even greater challenges for higher education students, who have not been exposed to academic writing in schools.

To understand how this language proficiency problem developed, it is useful to trace the history of the English language and how it evolved in Malaysia. When the British were in power, English literature and grammar were given prominence and many non- and elite Malays could speak and write English well (Rudner 1977). However, post British colonisation, Malay became the official language. Subsequently, except for English, all school subjects once taught in English, were taught in Malay (Rudner 1977), thus reducing the importance of English as a second language in schools.

In 2003 (Yoong 2009) Prime Minister Mahathir decided to introduce the teaching and learning of Science and Maths in English in order to meet the objective of achieving an industrialised nation status by 2020. The move was also seen as an attempt to assist young Malaysian graduates to become more competitive in an ever expanding and challenging dynamic: the global workforce. That decision caused a huge intellectual shift for teachers and students, who until then had been educated in Malay for all subjects except English, which was taught a few hours a week. Initial studies revealed that the policy drew more positive than negative responses about teachers and students having to cope (Pandian & Ramaiah 2004). After five years, however, other studies from the period 2003 to 2005 revealed the policy to be flawed due to dismal performances in English tests by rural and poor Malay students, in particular, compared to their Indian and Chinese counterparts (John & Damis 2008). Strong opposition from Malay activists, Chinese and Indian ethnic rural schools plus reports of rural Malay students lagging behind and Malay-educated teachers struggling to teach prompted the decision for the policy to be overturned. The policy was overturned in 2009 by Muhyiddin Yassin, the new Education Minister, under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, despite a public outcry to retain the earlier policy (Yoong 2009). Now, all subjects are taught in Malay again, but more hours have been given to the teaching of English, with prominence given to English literature. These inconsistent educational policy decisions, especially concerning the teaching and learning of English, have affected all three ethnic groups significantly in the way they view their own progress in an ever-increasing global world. The role of the

English language had to be viewed as a significant part of the shifting global scene to keep up with current trends in language teaching. At the same time, it also had to be viewed as part of the local culture. Che Musa, Koo and Azman (2012, p.46) suggest that

> *literacy learning in Malaysia should be positioned within the theory of literacy as social practice. Viewing literacy in this perspective, language is seen as a tool for navigating the social world, constructing meaning, displaying identities and accomplishing social goals. The focus of teaching and learning is on processes and practices as they are situated in meaningful activity, not on cognitive capacities that are required for those practices.*

This view of a more functional and situated literacy in context was to be taken as part of a system or community of practice, not disengaged or isolated according to a certain type of skill or discipline.

When the British left Malaysia, Malay rulers had sovereign rights to rule and govern an Islamic country but the Malays were less successful economically compared to the Chinese. This led to a deadly racial riot in 1969 which then resulted in a Federal Constitution being formed to ensure the rights of rulers and the Malays and to restore economic balance between the races. Article 153 of the Malaysian Federal constitution states that the king has the right to 'safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives' and 'the legitimate interests of other communities' with regards to provisions mentioned in the article and this extends to the provision of scholarships in learning institutions as well.

The British established this law to ensure that the initial overwhelming numbers of Chinese and Indian migrants in Malaysia did not undermine the welfare of the indigenous population and the laws were ideally meant to be reviewed post-independence. However, the quota system for providing places for university students in higher education (Pak 2013) favours Malay students who secure places for studying popular subjects like Medicine, Engineering and Law in local higher institutions, even if their entry level scores are lower compared to their Chinese and Indian counterparts, resulting in 'mediocrity' which has 'crept insidiously into our universities' (Malhi 2012). The percentages of Malay students who win scholarships from the government to study

locally and overseas significantly outnumber those allocated to the Chinese and Indians. According to the Centre for Public Policy Studies, in 2008 the Malaysian Government announced that 55% of the scholarships were allocated to the Malays and 45% to non-Malays, having abolished the old ethnic quota system of 90% to 10% for university admissions in 2004. Despite scrapping the quota system in 2004, many Chinese and Indian students are still unable to gain university admission despite achieving outstanding results (Kee 2013).

The Chinese have become more resourceful in finding ways to accumulate wealth and educate their children. Rich Indians can afford to educate their children overseas or privately; however, the majority of Indians who come from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially from the rubber estates, struggle to cope. They often fail to finish school and few have opportunities for tertiary studies.

Fifty years on from independence, there is still an educational, social and economic divide between the races. Differing politically shaped policies and unequal distribution of wealth and privilege are causing huge shifts in the perceptions of the younger generation about what is right or wrong in all aspects of humanity.

With the knowledge gained from understanding the shift in educational policies and its impact on Malaysian students' English language proficiency levels, I knew what I had to do as a conscientious teacher-researcher. The teaching of English was part of the complex and evolving socio-cultural and political landscape of the local within the global. As English teachers, we have little choice but to embrace that change. As Pennycook (2008, p.86) reiterates:

> *We can never be "just English teachers" on two counts: There is no such thing as 'just English' – it always comes amid cultural, political, and economic relations. And we can never be "just teachers" since to teach is to organise people, knowledge and language according to certain moral, cultural and political principles. As English language teachers, we cannot but participate in aspects of globalisation. Like it or not, when we teach English, we become factors in the process of globalisation. Our challenge is to work out what that means.*

I set out on a mission to combat the language problems my ESL students inherited from their past as explained above. I also wanted to find ways to help them resolve difficulties in academic writing, which was totally new and daunting for them, from a global perspective.

1.5 English language and academic writing in a globalising university

At a time when the language of international research is English, where capital is moving in globalised ways without being under the control of nations, we as ESL teachers, need to think about how best to help our ESL students navigate this complex terrain. Globalization has indeed prompted such research discussions on what students need in order to be successful learners within and beyond universities. The premium placed on the quality of graduates has caused educational providers worldwide to rethink strategies to equip students to meet the challenges of globalisation (Graddol 2000; Arkoudis 2003; Foo & Richards 2004; Pillay & Thomas 2004; Arkoudis & Tran 2010; Basturkmen 2012). Considering the various types of learners from multicultural society (Pieterse 2011) and the way in which English language is an intricate yet evolving aspect of globalisation (Graddol 2000), it is therefore strategically important for ESL and the academic writing teacher, to think about how they can help their second language learners improve their academic writing. Being able to write effectively at university level is not only necessary for academic success at tertiary level (Arkoudis 2003) but such proficiency is also regarded as an important aspect that would boost future employment opportunities. This view is supported by Hyland (2004, p.x) who asserts that:

> *In an era of globalisation, English is now established as the world's leading language for the dissemination of academic language…English has transformed the educational experiences and professional lives of countless students and academics across the planet. Fluency in the conventions of English for academic discourse is now virtually essential as a means of gaining access to the knowledge of our disciplines and navigating our careers.*

When thinking about career trajectories, as suggested by Hyland in the quote above, it is useful for ESL teachers to think about what future employers may seek from their ESL

undergraduate students. Robinson (2000) cited in Shafie and Nayan (2010) defines employability skills as 'basic academic writing skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities'. However, the teaching of academic writing cannot be confined to just skills alone. Moving beyond skills teaching allows for critical thinking, mature decision making and character building. Koo (2008), cited in Che Musa, Koo and Azman (2012, p.45), cautions that 'as long as literacy continues to be viewed in terms of narrow utilitarian, decontextualized skills-based discourses..., Malaysian learners will find themselves seriously disadvantaged in today's global space.' Koo (2008, p.45) further affirms that:

> *a serious discontinuity exists between literacy practices in schools and universities and the expectations, norms values of the new workspaces in present 21st century. The new literacies for the 21st century command for the capacity to negotiate diversity, produce new ideas and think out of the box. The new language classroom should encompass learning environments which encourage critical thinking, foster innovative culture and acknowledge diversity in global spaces.*

In order to move beyond basic academic skills, reach higher-order thinking levels, and develop useful personal attributes for marketability and global mobility, the teaching and learning process has to include a broader understanding of the historical, political and social, encompassing a more holistic framework for teaching and learning.

Not all of globalisation has a positive impact on English and academic writing. Yang (2003) cautions readers about the negative effects of globalisation on higher education which include the gradual alienation of human interaction while teaching and learning, and eroding cultural identities when embracing Western ideologies as a result of fast-paced, technologically superior, knowledge-based economies currently shaping the world. In the same vein, Pennycook (2004) writes about the inequalities of the globalisation of English and how that can marginalise certain groups, if not provided with the right support. It is therefore important for us, as Ngoc Ba Doan (2014, p.81) suggests, to think about 'who mediates the connection between English and culture' and 'whose culture is language is connected to', drawing on work by several key researchers in this field (Widdowson 1994; Lantolf 2006; Kirkpatrick 2007 and Kumaravadivelu 2008).

Doan also asserts that learners need to 'adapt the language linguistically and socio culturally in order to make meanings in communication' (p.81), also known as semiotic processes in a global world, before making the English language their own.

The positive and negative aspects of globalisation are an important consideration because it is a necessary part of the evolving landscape of teaching academic writing and English, especially in a post-colonial setting like Malaysia. For this study, it means that as teachers, we cannot disassociate ourselves from the impact of globalisation on our teaching and learning decisions.

1.6 Tensions in post-colonial debates: learning from the past and moving forward

Since the study is conducted in a branch university campus of British origin where the design and content of the syllabus used for teaching seems largely influenced by an AL perspective to teaching, which is also a social approach to teaching, it was thought appropriate to use the AL framework or perspective on teaching academic writing in a Malaysian setting, and to critically gauge the impact the framework had on the learning experiences of Malaysian students. Moreover, with Malaysia being a former colonised nation under British rule, I wanted to explore the impact of its historically and socially situated educational settings over the years. And further how that has affected the students' understanding of their learning experience in relation to the broad framework used for this study, which emphasizes the need for in-depth understanding. Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004, p.2) define post-colonialism as a process that:

> *recognizes the philosophical, political, economic and socio-cultural consequences of colonialism. The post in post colonialism does not imply that colonialism has ended but rather the aftermath is contested. It does imply a space for moving beyond the negative patterns that persist after colonialism began.*

As a teacher-researcher, I have a duty to understand the trappings of a post-colonial era which will always be there as a backdrop to Malaysian history. I need to examine my own prejudices and assumptions about post-colonialism and work through them, before attempting to reconcile the legacy of the past with the globalised present, so that the learning process for my students becomes more meaningful.

However, it was not my intention to examine colonialism only as a negative inheritance. I realised this when I read Aljuneid's (2011) paper on how important it was to view colonialism in totality. I was attempting to understand colonial trappings in a way that would liberate me from bitter past experiences. He quotes, as follows, drawing on Burhanuddin Al-Helmy's (Adam 1996) theory of colonialism which is then compared with other colonialist theories from the West (Aljuneid, 2011, p.7):

> *A comprehensive theory of colonialism should also include an exposition of the various forms of resistance and responses popular or otherwise among native communities to destabilize, subvert and subdue an external power. Because all theories are, by nature, speculative and conjectural, it follows then that the theory of colonialism developed by Burhanuddin, like those developed by Marx, Lenin and Hobson among others, should be regarded only as a partial projection of the colonial situation and not a total and accurate view of that reality.*

What I learnt from this quote is that, unless I viewed past experiences in totality, I would be stuck in the past. There is no denying that colonisation brought about the destruction of 'indigenous civilisations', and the construction of 'artificial boundaries' which in turn encouraged 'local particularisms' to increase and this 'minimised interaction between communities' in Malaysia (Aljuneid, 2011, p.12). There was also a division of class between ethnic groups which contributed to inequality between the masses and is still prevalent today (Aljuneid, 2011). Much of Burhanuddin's work, as explained by Aljuneid (2011), rested on the negative implications of colonisation. There was no mention of positive traits arising from colonial control. Aljuneid reiterates:

> *Absent from Burhanuddin's analysis was the fact that it was colonialism that brought the rise of a modern consciousness in the Malay world; a consciousness that he had turned on its head. He was unwilling to submit, as Maznah Mohamad has rightly observed, that his ideas were not necessarily freed from the dominance, if not taint, of the Eurocentric-Enlightenment epistemic framing of histories, worldviews and prescriptives*.

Burhanuddin could not escape from his oppressive past, and that is a great loss in thinking critically and moving beyond the chains of colonialism. Being emotional about how past systems were inherited and how they still have a hold on the ongoing practices of the Malaysian political and social systems does not help me as a teacher, to make

progress with my students' learning. It only ensnares me further into a feeling of hopelessness. Yet the tensions between positive and negative aspects of colonialism are needed to help teachers transition to a new phase of seeing, being and doing. I argue that my own knowledge about what is an inherited problem can be turned into a fruitful endeavour, to help my students get on with their future. As Auerbach (1992, p. 18) asserts:

> *If a central tenet of state-of-the-art second language and literacy theory is the importance of contextualizing instruction around real, meaningful usage centered on content that is significant in learners' lives, who is better qualified to draw out, understand, and utilize learners' experiences than those who themselves have had similar experiences?*

Knowing where the students come from and how they have been shaped by socio-cultural and historic points of view, coupled with my own past experiences in the system, provide the knowledge and assurance I need to work out the next step on their learning journey.

On my part, having grown up in the same type of environment as a child, I remember seeing my father work hard to please his colonial British master. While we spoke fluent English at home and were invited to the colonial master's home for parties, I was never really accepted by the white kids at those parties, as I was told by them that I did not speak nor look like them. Our parents never knew what was happening as I never told anyone. I can therefore relate to what Vandrick (2002) stresses when she writes about teachers who are 'immersed' and 'affected' by this colonial legacy because of 'life circumstances'.

Such life circumstances create an impact on my beliefs when I reflect on how Vandrick's teachers in her book are meant to be native-English teachers while I am not. That upsets me, as I view myself as a native-English teacher, and some of my students as native-English speakers even though we are not white. English is no longer exclusively white or belonging to inner-circle English speakers; it belongs to a diverse group of voices (House 2001). Even though I was told by the white kids I was not like them, I spoke English as my first language all my life. I always had a fascination for British stories and movies as that was what I was taught to aspire to in schools and at home. This was considered a

superior variety of English, similar to what Singaporeans also aspired to, despite post-colonial efforts from both the Malaysian and Singaporean governments to undermine British influence through politically motivated agendas promoting national identity.

As I grew up and attended university to read English literature and ESL, I just could not understand why, as Asians, teachers like me were still classified as non-native English speakers. This is because I met so many people in Malaysian academia who were Asian and who displayed a high level of English usage and knowledge, which in my view surpassed speaking and writing skills of some native-English speakers who also taught me at the same university. The diction, field knowledge, writing prowess and teaching quality displayed by some of these local professors and teaching scholars inspired me to be the best I could be and to shake off the native-English speaker image as being exclusively associated with whites. House (2001, p. 1) points out:

> *Non-native speakers of English have created their own discourse norms and genres. And they do this out of their free will, happily ignoring the 'linguistic domination' ascribed to them. In other words, there is no didactic-linguistic replay of former colonial and militaristic means.*

I chose to reject 'linguistic domination' as I saw fit, to embrace a more local and cultural understanding of my practice. It did not make sense to me to continue to use so-called 'authentic material offered to learners' that was 'based only on a corpora of native speaker use' (Jenkins & Seidlhofer 2001, p. 2). These understandings were important for me to make a socio-cultural connection between what I know and what my students know, so that the teaching and learning experience can be mutually beneficial. As Vandrick (2002, p.12) remarks:

> *We don't often look at our backgrounds and how they lead us to teach ESL and how they affect the way we teach. We are more likely to discuss students' backgrounds. But it makes sense that instructor's backgrounds would have an enormous effect on their motivation, teaching philosophies and styles, and attitudes towards and interactions with students.*

The quotation above stresses the importance for teachers to make meaning for themselves first before their students. Coming to terms with how teachers' views are shaped as a result of past experiences and learning how to use those experiences to reconceptualise

teaching, can greatly aid the ESL teacher. Lavadenz (2011, p.39) argues that the emphasis on the socio-cultural can provide the 'lens' for second language learners to make sense of their academic instruction. Most ESL teachers however, especially in hierarchical settings like mine just want to get on with their jobs. They find this self-exploring journey cumbersome and confrontational because of their inner most insecurities and concerns which can be laid bare and this is not something they are accustomed to doing.

Reminiscing about past colonial experiences to explain tensions I faced in many of my deliberations as a teacher, alongside my students' own experiences as we journeyed through this study together, is crucial and serves as a backdrop for further understanding and analysis of evolving complex teaching and learning situations discussed in the hindsight analyses sections.

1.7 Locating myself as an action researcher

Action research became a necessity for this study because of my context. The study is site specific, and making sense of the complexities of a British Malaysian university site became a priority, as the old colonial power structure was inherent in the way the university operated. Most heads of departments were British expats while the junior ranked staff constituted local people. It was the same in the English Department where I taught. For an ESL teacher like myself, such an understanding of power structures replicating colonial relations offers deeper insight into the legacies left behind by the colonial masters, which indirectly affect the teaching and learning settings. Appadurai (2006) argues that everyone has the right to embark on research. He says that all individuals have the right to live and discover the meaning of life as they research and live through their experiences. He also argues that individuals have what it takes to aspire, for 'without aspiration, there is no pressure to know more' (Appadurai 2006, p.116).

Influenced by Appadurai's arguments about democratic citizenship and set against this colonial context, I set out as an action researcher-teacher, to improve and make sense of my practice and to know more about my role within this context. If my students were to

improve their writing enough to move to the next level of study and pass IELTS modelled tests to be mobile in a global employment market, my teaching had to change. In order to do that, I locate myself in the four positions advocated by Anderson and Herr (1999). First, I am an insider teacher-researcher, working in an ESL and academic writing setting in a British Malaysian university. Second, I am part of a hierarchical community within and beyond the university, which to a large extent has been shaped by a British colonial legacy. Third, I explore my own and my participants' socio-cultural influences from our ethnic and educational backgrounds. Fourth, I examine the historical, educational and social impacts of past colonial influence on both the participants and myself. As an Indian Christian teacher, I struggled with issues of power from a young age; by exploring tensions that appear from these positions, I hoped to 'avoid blind spots that come with unexamined beliefs' (Anderson & Herr, 1999, p.440). The emic perspective of this study allows for a close examination of my role through these four positions. Furthermore, the cyclical nature of this action research study allows for continuous reflection on my part, as each cycle is completed.

In my classroom, plans for practice did not necessarily translate into actual practice because unexpected events changed the way teaching was originally intended. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon explain this through their concept of 'practice architectures' (2014, p.55) which they define as 'arrangements (cultural-discursive, material economic and social-political) that hold practice in place – that make the practice possible' (p.55). Kemmis and McTaggart initially drew on Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge to explain action research as teachers making sense of their practice, relating to changing practice and living out the conditions in which practices are built.

The way power is intricately linked to language and work means this action research addresses the socio-cultural approaches of Academic Literacies (Lea & Street 1998) and Post-Method Pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu 1994) theories, the two conceptual frames of this study. I briefly explain the two theories in the next section to give some background, while leaving a fuller discussion to Chapter Two.

1.8 Academic Literacies and Post-Method Pedagogy

A suitable theoretical construct to explain the complexities of teaching and learning that I experienced was needed. Relevant theory to explain such conditions was sourced as I began reading about Academic Literacies (AL). In fact, Lea and Street (2006, p.369) argue that the AL model is:

> *concerned with meaning-making, identity, power and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context. It is similar in many ways to the academic socialization model, except that it views the processes involved in acquiring appropriate and effective uses of literacy as more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated and involving both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions, and social identities.*

Lea and Street (1998) also suggest that higher education student writing problems would be better understood using the AL perspective or approach to writing. Hyland (2004) affirms that view by adding that AL helps

> *decouple university language from the focus of grammar, literature or personal writing approaches of earlier days and moves it towards developing new kinds of literacy so learners are better placed to critically engage with values of institutional goals and practice.*

Lea and Street (2006) echo this view, arguing that 'an academic literacies perspective also takes account of literacies which are not directly associated with subjects and disciplines but with broader institutional discourses and genres' (p.227). According to them, the AL perspective for English language teaching as a social practice. What this means is that it is not only about viewing academic writing as part of the disciplines the students are engaged with, but also about the complex political, historical, social and cultural dimensions students face in their everyday lives, within and beyond the institution and how that can affect their learning. Che Musa, Koo and Azman (2012, p.46) in citing Azman (2009) and Abdul Rahman (2005), equate this understanding to an ethnographic understanding of language within the local culture, as a way to improve the standard of English language among Malaysian learners:

> *To situate English literacy learning in a non-native context such as Malaysia, it is necessary to have an ethnographic understanding of how English language is viewed by the local communities (Hazita Azman, 2009). Teachers and curriculum developers need to investigate the extent to which English is positioned in the learners' repertoire (ibid) so that they can design a literacy curriculum that will better suit the learners' needs. By connecting and situating English literacy learning in the learners' social lives, learning English to our learners would no longer be perceived as irrelevant and devoid of context. As suggested by Razianna Abdul Rahman (2005, p. 22), 'unless teachers understand the social and cultural nature of learning, it is not possible for teachers to provide the kind of English learning experiences that can help learners to develop their overall language proficiency.*

Although there have been a few studies undertaken in the Malaysian context about undergraduate writing (Hung 2004; Thang 2004; Shafie & Nayan 2010), they have not been examined from the AL perspective. Power relations, knowledge or epistemological and socio-cultural conditions in teaching and learning, all of which are part of the cultural and social dimensions of the academic community, are still under-examined in higher education in Malaysia. It is important to know how students learn and make sense of these issues or difficulties encountered in learning academic writing, with the right support from teachers. The writing of academic texts cannot be produced in isolation; in fact, it is part of many 'complex globalizing practices and systems' which affect the way the text is distributed (Lillis & Curry 2010, p.1). The writing process therefore not only involves the teacher or the learner but the whole community they belong to. As a result, compared to other theories, the AL theory appeared to have a more holistic dimension in assisting me to understand my students' writing problems and my own teaching dilemmas or the 'conflicting and contesting nature of writing practices' (Lea & Street 1998, p.1).

Various approaches have been suggested in both Western and Asian settings about what teachers could do to help students write more effectively, and a large proportion of research focus appears to propagate a more social approach to teaching and learning (Razali 1992; Lea & Street 1998; Duff 2003; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Duff 2010). The AL theory, which views teaching as a social practice, was then seen to be able to provide

a feasible and concrete theoretical framework for ESL teachers to think about their practice in terms of the three conditions mentioned earlier. I will provide more detail about AL in the literature discussion in Chapter 2.

However, most of these suggested approaches, like the AL theory, do not contain concrete teaching strategies to assist ESL students to smoothly progress from the language and academic support programmes to their respective disciplines (Wingate 2006; Arkoudis & Tran 2010). That is why Post-Method Pedagogy (PMP) teaching strategies were employed in this study to translate power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within and beyond my classroom into action. PMP, according to Kumaravadivelu (1994) is

> *an awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation (p.28).*

Over the years, PMP has taken up a wider focus, broadening the whole concept of literacy to include a more democratic understanding of language teaching. PMP allows for an understanding of power relations that can change the way students learn. As an ESL teacher, tasked with the role of theory maker and practitioner for this study, a decision was therefore made to merge the two traditions (i.e. AL and PMP) together, so that the conceptual framework for this study could be strengthened. What AL lacks in pedagogical strength (Lillis 2001) is compensated for by three strategies selected from a pool of 10 macro strategies proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), to assist ESL teachers when teaching ESL learners. The three selected strategies are: negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches; promoting learner autonomy; and ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts, all of which are explained in detail in Chapter 2. The strategies selected go beyond the skills level of teaching English, as the other strategies tend to focus on grammar and linguistics. These combined strategies were also specifically selected to address power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions, in tandem with what AL broadly suggests as necessary to improve teaching and learning conditions. In short, PMP is a theory within the TESOL tradition, proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), who

advocates the idea of not being bound by any specific method of teaching. As Can (2010, p.2) suggests,

> *there is not a need for an invention of another method but a need for post-method pedagogy which is not a method. I believe post-method pedagogy does not mean the end of methods but rather it involves an understanding of the limitations of the concept of method and a desire to go beyond those limitations.*

PMP therefore allows for some freedom of choice for the ESL teacher to work out and decide what best suits his or her class. For this study, the PMP strategies were deemed to be practically useful to translate the theoretical AL conditions into action.

The next section discusses the aims of this study to foreground the value of this study.

1.9 Aims of this action research study

Firstly, this study aims to explore the practical power-relational conditions affecting the AR teacher and learners, within and beyond the British Malaysian EAP classroom, and its implications for the teaching of English and academic writing. Secondly, it aims to identify the socio-cultural conditions affecting learners and teachers and how these conditions can impact learning. Thirdly, the study aims to explore the epistemological or knowledge conditions of the students to gauge how that may affect their understanding of what is being taught in the classroom. The study also aims to link the AL tradition (i.e. focusing on power relations, epistemological conditions and socio-cultural conditions) with three specific strategies from Kumaravadivelu's PMP, as part of the framework or design for the study. Finally, the study also aims to identify in what way these three specific strategies (negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches, promoting learner autonomy, and ensuring relevant social and cultural conditions) appear to have impacted students' learning of academic writing.

The aims of this study then lead to the research questions.

1.10 Research questions

The research questions in this action research study arose from interaction with literature and the exigencies of practice, unlike empirical-analytical studies. The overarching research questions that frame this study are:

1. To what extent can the broad understanding of teaching academic writing and English in a post-colonial global context, which includes investigating power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions, affect the teaching and learning of academic writing?
2. In what ways do the selected PMP teaching strategies translate the three AL conditions into effective action?

These two broad questions are later framed into more specific questions for each of the data chapters, mainly to highlight how the three conditions significant to the AL framework play out and to what extent they work with PMP strategies. Some of these questions were formulated later because of the unpredictable nature of how any action research project develops in relation to reflection on practice and theory during the conduct of the study. In the data chapters of the thesis, the questions were more focused to specific conditions within the AL framework.

1.11 Significance of the study

This action research study is vital because it investigates the difficulties ESL/EAP learners experience in learning academic writing in a British branch campus set in Malaysia, which opens up complexities arising from post-colonial issues. It therefore provides insights into what can or cannot work in an EAP context, set in a hierarchical context. By documenting narratives drawn from classrooms, the study helps EAP and ESL teachers think of ways to improve their own practice by understanding their respective local contexts within the global context, as part of the evolving nature of the globalising English language. It pays attention to history, politics and the social dimensions that may impact their own teaching practice. The study also provides an alternative for teachers to think about theories that may work for their own classrooms. The AL and PMP based teaching strategies, the two main, broadly situated social theories

and practice frameworks that underpin this study, offer ESL and academic writing teachers a way to challenge themselves in evaluating and monitoring their own practice.

This study also provides insight into how to merge the largely Western AL perspective into an Eastern proposed PMP framework, which is then used in a Malaysian setting, paving the way for other similar research to be conducted in different contexts. The two theories could then become tools for systematic and reflective understanding of the underlying currents, which increase ESL teachers' 'stock of knowledge' (Appadurai, 2006, p.168).

1.12 Overview of chapters

In **Chapter 1**, I have revisited stories from my past. These storied experiences paved the way for me to think about and document stages of my personal and professional transformation throughout the course of my research. It also helped build my knowledge and understanding of the theory I needed for my action research: the AL perspective on academic teaching and learning with the help of three concrete sets of teaching principles, adapted from PMP to activate the theory and guide me through my teaching process. This chapter also contains crucial historical and social background to trace the way English has been taught and learnt in Malaysia and how the language has evolved over time to mirror political shifts in deciding what's best for the country's education system. Against this post-colonial backdrop, an attempt is also made to understand the identities of participants in this community of practice. By clearly stating the positioning of the teacher-researcher, this chapter also creates an opening into how the thesis writer's views are 'located' and subsequently presented. By drawing on global discussions and current debates in TESOL, this chapter also touches on the significance of the study, the problem statement, contributions to research and the research questions. The latter seek to address the complexities of teaching and learning of academic writing, and they are addressed in Chapter 7.

In **Chapter 2**, I outline why within a post-colonial setting, a broader understanding of literacy is needed, especially in relation to the learning of English and academic writing. I theorise my research study using two traditions that have been used in the teaching and

learning of academic writing and ESL within a global context – AL and PMP. Different writing theories are discussed, for example, language socialisation theory, but AL, in comparison, appears to have a more critical and higher-order edge. I employ AL as a broad theory to think about teaching academic writing effectively and activate this theory with the use of practical teaching strategies borrowed and adapted from PMP. I outline the need for ESL and academic writing to be taught in a way that engages both the local and global, to maximise teaching and learning opportunities within the three AL conditions.

From Kumaravadivelu's PMP, I outline three teaching principles: negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches; promoting learner autonomy; and ensuring relevant social contexts and raising cultural consciousness to activate power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions respectively, within the AL paradigm. To further understand these three principles, I first define and discuss power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions. Further, I categorize them into different typologies to make the analysis more distinctive. The power conditions that are examined within the classroom are divided into three broad typologies which include: power as a result of relationships that are socially independent of influence; socially dependent on surveillance; and socially dependent without surveillance. The knowledge typology includes dualism, multiplicity, relativism and commitment to relativism. The socio-cultural conditions are examined through a literacy typology consisting of operational, cultural and critical levels of literacy.

Since teaching and learning as a social activity within socio-cultural theory is making a huge impact on the ESL world, it made sense to also examine mediation and scaffolding, two Vygotskian concepts that provide the bridging link to combine AL and PMP. These concepts are examined within the three broad teaching principles from PMP selected to translate the AL conditions into action. The other principles by Kumaravadivelu are subsumed under the three broad teaching principles because there is some overlap. The meditational elements which occur all the time within and beyond the classroom need to be understood and taken advantage of by the teacher. Scaffolding techniques built on the understanding of the process of mediation can provide more realistic opportunities for learners to achieve their learning systems within the ZPD interactional space. The

teaching and learning of academic writing and English appear to be a complex endeavour, especially in a setting which replicates the trappings of the colonial past. The chapter closes with a summary of my conceptual framework and how it can promote ideal conditions for learning.

In **Chapter 3**, I explain how and why my research methodology is action research and presented using narrative representations. The cyclical nature of this study enabled me to be reflective and critical. I provide details of my research participants and rationalize why I use interviews, diaries and letters as my research instruments. Evidence for ethical clearance for this study is presented and discussed. I use various qualitative data to identify some common themes that emerge later for my analysis, using content analysis and critical incidents technique (CIT). CIT is used as an analytical tool for a more robust understanding of critical events and several steps are provided. The cycles of action research are explained and presented, showing details of student types or cohorts, dates, data collection method and number of participants. I also present an actual example of a contemporaneous phase cycle of a grammar lesson to illuminate what went on in other cycles, than those drawn on for the present study. The contemporaneous phase is used as a platform to think further about using and presenting the hindsight analysis phases, as I deeply reflect on each completed cycle in relation to the framing theoretical concerns.

A brief overview of power is given before I draw on French and Ravens and Engestrom's theories on power for use in analysing the classroom for **Chapter 4.** I examine elements of how power-relations impact my teaching and my students' learning, and how that affects the overall teaching and learning of academic writing and English. I use McCormack's four step analysis to unpack the elements of power in story form, collected from my diaries, student interviews and letters. Discussion is centred on the why and how of power relations and unexpected elements that emerge are reflected by using contemporaneous and hindsight phases in analyses. The chapter ends with the argument that theoretical and practical understanding of power issues can greatly assist the ESL teacher to plan his or her teaching and deliver her lessons well, because he or she will know how to navigate through those difficult structured systems and seek ways to rally

support from different hierarchical segments. The teacher then has an opportunity to become an agent for change following this line of argument.

In **Chapter 5**, a broad discussion of knowledge is presented before using Moore's knowledge typology (1994) to make sense of the knowledge conditions in the classroom. Four types of knowledge conditions are examined from a selection of diary, interview, and letter-based data. Unpacking issues in this chapter is achieved through McCormack's (2004) four step analysis, and discussion focuses on both the learner's and the teacher's knowledge, and how that evolves and what it means at different stages of cycles. I argue that learner autonomy, the teaching principle to activate knowledge conditions, is seen to be operational in different stages of knowledge growth although the level of autonomy is subject to various power and socio-cultural conditions within and beyond the classroom. The chapter ends with the argument that teachers need to embrace their local contexts and that knowledge ties in closely with social practice. What is clear is that the stages of development in knowledge parallel the growth levels in literacy and higher-order thinking skills in university, with the help of scaffolding and mediation.

In **Chapter 6**, a broad understanding of what socio-cultural means is initially presented. The socio-cultural conditions of the classroom are then examined using Bill Green's literacy framework (1988). Three dimensions of literacy are seen to be operational is different situations in the classroom, expressed through narrative representations critically selected from the pool of qualitative data used for this study. These dimensions clearly illustrate that students' engagement levels in the classroom increase considerably when material used to teach relates closely to culture and context, which are relevant to learner needs. The higher the engagement level, as a result of relevant material used, the higher the critical level of literacy observed. The chapter also highlights the role of mediation and scaffolding in my classroom and how they work in tandem with the main teaching principles in PMP. The use of Engestrom's idea of division of labour also helps in making sense of my role and my students' roles in the university system I belong to, and mediation plays a huge role in helping with the meaning-making process.

Chapter 7 is a reflection of the larger story of the thesis and concludes the study. What I have discovered from analysing knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions is

summarised. The three conditions explored alongside three teaching principles are presented as a new conceptual framework. A discussion ensues about possible directions for teachers of ESL and academic writing to consider future developments in teaching and learning based on this new framework. The links between power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions pave the way for more in-depth use of typologies used for each condition in different settings to be examined. There appear to be overlaps between these conditions and the teaching principles also complement one another. My own assumptions and my identity as a teacher-researcher and an Indian woman in a post-colonial setting, which has evolved over time, are laid bare. My students' growth in this journey is also documented and both my journey and theirs come to a closure at the end of this study, with insights to help ESL and academic writing teachers gain renewed perspectives on teaching. Notions of power and knowledge are questioned and the understanding of socio-cultural conditions crosses into unchartered territories of the Malaysian education system, creating an opportunity for more catalytic change to take place in future. Finally, limitations of this study are addressed and suggestions for further research are offered.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction: Starting an action research study

In this chapter, I begin by presenting two major conceptual elements which are central to this study's theoretical framework: Academic Literacy (AL) and Post Method Pedagogy (PMP). As an action research study, the theoretical focus was not fully formed at the beginning: it continued to evolve over the multiple action and analysis cycles, deriving from the initial problematic, which in turn also altered in relation to changes in practice and understanding emerging from each cycle. The study began with an investigation of students' academic writing and English language problems which drove the selection of AL and PMP: as new practical problems emerged, more theoretical resources or concepts were needed for different stages of this study. Thus, the theoretical framework can be divided into three distinct stages: 1. oriented to improving academic literacies in a post-colonial setting, 2. making sense of the types of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions that were activated through three carefully selected teaching principles from PMP, and 3. understanding the roles of scaffolding and mediation as bridging concepts which tie AL and PMP together, within socio-cultural practice.

For the first stage, the need for using AL and PMP arose from the complexities of teaching academic writing and English in a post-colonial context. Charles Bazerman, in his editor's introduction (cited in Prior 2009, p.vii) captures the idea of complexity in writing:

> *Writing is a constant struggle, as we project a text by considering multiple resources memories and experiences, conversations with colleagues and mentors; perceived restrictions imposed by genre, audience, and occasion, our attitudes and desires; and a thousand other considerations that bear on the moment of articulating our thought.*

Complexity arises not only for the students, but for the teacher, in deciding which strategies to use to help students negotiate difficulties in writing. As a female Malaysian-Indian ESL teacher, coming from an education system steeped in British colonial influence, I was especially interested in understanding how power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions play a part in shaping pedagogies. My study needed to explore a

stronger understanding of the role of pedagogies for ESL teachers, especially in teaching academic writing in Asian settings.

For far too long, academic textbooks or materials have been determined by Western authors according to what they think is suitable for non-native learner needs (Auerbach 1993; Kumaravadivelu 2003). Auerbach cites Phillipson (1992) to support this view, which privileges native speaker language input over local constructs, alluding to the idea that there is a power imbalance when such privileging happens:

> *In the case of British neocolonialism structural dependence is perpetuated "as the presence of native speakers and books from [Great Britain], and all that they signify, is necessary to implement the native speaker tenet" (p. 199). Even the term native speaker itself is an ideological construct to the extent that it implies a single, idealized native English although there are in fact many native Englishes, some of which are valued more than others for socio-political reasons (Phillipson, 1992, in Auerbach 1993, p.12).*

This power imbalance is made more complex when Asian students find it difficult to meet so-called native-speaker based academic tenets, because they are socially, culturally and historically different in the way their thoughts or epistemologies have been shaped compared to their Western counterparts. As a result, there is a possibility that these students are being marginalised because they cannot fit into mainstream academic society (Han & Price 2015). In recent years, however, with the growth of global English, non-native researchers and practitioners have begun to lend their voices to a more inclusive understanding of localised practice (Kachru 1994; Canagarajah 2002).

In trying to achieve a more localised approach to teaching and learning, careful theoretical and practical considerations were explored to maximise teaching and learning outcomes for this study. AL was selected as a central theory to this study because it builds on multiple debates on socio-cultural literacy (Lea & Street 1998) that take on complex understandings of literacy, which is necessary for a post-colonial context, explained earlier. These complex understandings include making sense of power, knowledge and social-cultural conditions which are crucial in unpacking academic writing issues.

However, AL while providing a helpful rationale does not contain enough guidance on teaching strategies for an ESL action research practitioner. Therefore, I sought a key theoretical resource with appropriate focus on teaching strategies consistent with power, socio-cultural context and knowledge, identifying Kumaravadivelu's (2003) PMP teaching strategies.

Kumaravadivelu conceptualises an overarching view of a democratic form of pedagogy which can be adapted into my context and is suitable to translate most of the AL conditions into action. Together, these resources help me, as a practitioner-researcher, make sense of the ESL context for this study, and develop literacies that combine AL and PMP traditions. Three specific pedagogical priorities are drawn from Kumaravadivelu's (2003) PMP to form principles that could guide my decisions in the classroom plus preparation and reflection on teaching and learning activities.

I will now explain in detail how AL was selected after looking at several writing theories which I explore below. These theories include skills, genre and socialisation regarding writing approaches. A brief history of AL is provided which leads to a discussion on how AL was selected for this study and further, how AL later merges with another tradition, PMP, to form the basic structure of this theoretical chapter.

2.1 Debates on academic writing theories

Several writing theories were examined for my study but none had the comprehensive take of Academic Literacies on broadening the understanding of teaching and learning academic writing, especially in a post-colonial setting like mine. The focus on the social and contextual using AL was important to develop the literacies students needed in order to be able to keep up with changing global trends.

Before I go on to discuss how and why I selected AL, I briefly explain four key sets of debates relevant to academic writing: skills focus; and more broadly, the role of discipline-specific writing, reading, speaking and listening; academic literacies; and language socialisation. According to Baynham (2002), **the skills-based perspective** to

teaching academic writing is rooted in behaviourist principles, which was explored by Skinner (1975) and embedded in the study-skills approach, which provides opportunities for students to learn basic academic language features (Jordan 1997). These basic features include grammar, referencing skills, spelling, note-taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, step-by-step paragraphing and essay writing skills, which are disembodied from their disciplines. Lea and Street (2000a) referred to this as the 'fix-it' approach, whereby students learn a set of rules or generic skills to fix problems that occur in their respective contexts, problems which appeared to be mundane, 'technical and instrumental' (Lea &Street, 1998 p.34). Street (1984) characterises the autonomous mode of literacy as restrictive in part, because such a separation of the linguistic understanding of the rules of the English language fails to take into account the need for students to develop literacy that is useful in their own disciplines and in a situated context.

The **academic socialization perspective,** also known as the disciplined-based perspective, emerged in the 1980s when students in universities were found to lack the knowledge or understanding of rules needed to negotiate academic discourse (Hounsell 1988). This is when students learning English were encouraged to become familiarized with the writing of lab and research reports related to their specific discipline areas. Students were expected to be acculturated into their respective university settings; however, this perspective still treated students as disengaged from the encompassing social practice of teaching and learning, which AL sought to include. Although students may become more familiar with discipline-based texts, they do not become aware nor are they able to use social and cultural influences around them to develop a more comprehensive view of learning and a well-rounded approach to literacy.

The **AL perspective** was developed to include an understanding of epistemological, power-relational and socio-cultural elements that affect learning and teaching academic writing (Lea & Street 1998). As a tripartite model (encapsulating the earlier models), these three perspectives are meant to be integrated as a way to help students develop a more holistic approach to learning academic writing. The AL perspective is comprehensive enough to cover aspects of both power and structured, skills-based writing. The skills and socialisation approaches are both encapsulated within the AL

model, making it easier for the teacher to encompass what he or she thinks is required for effective teaching. This model is not unlike Green's (1988) three levels of literacy: operational, cultural and critical. Operational is more about students being able to recognise and produce appropriate features of texts, cultural refers to how students make meaning from texts and their relevance to lived experience and the critical refers to deeper, reflective and higher-level thinking skills, addressing values and encompassing operational and cultural dimensions.

However, many practitioners tend to treat the three as separate dimensions that can be quite hierarchical in practice (Lillis, 2001). For example, the course structure of my department was designed to reflect different 'stages' of academic writing development. The grammar and discipline-based concepts were incorporated with the higher-order skills that AL propagates across the three semesters, starting with grammar in semester one and finishing with research projects in semester three. In practice, therefore, it was difficult not to separate the dimensions. My literature review on AL helped me to plan my teaching of grammar within a more comprehensive view of literacy learning, incorporating the other two perspectives as well. The term **Academic Literacies**, referred to as AL, was coined by Lea and Street (1998) to encapsulate a more comprehensive understanding of how academic writing should be taught, in view of the criticisms levelled at the prevailing grammar and academic socialisation perspectives to teaching academic writing, which were inadequate explanations for the complexities encountered in teaching academic English. They suggest that AL should broadly cover in-depth understanding of power-relational, epistemological and socio-cultural conditions of both teachers and learners within and beyond the classroom, in a way that includes the earlier two perspectives as well.

AL's origins can be traced back to Brian Street's generative work on Literacies (1984), drawn from his experience as an ethnographer in Iran. He researched the lives of Iranian farmers and their use of 'maktab literacy' where formal knowledge, gained from Quranic classes in 'maktabs' or Islamic schools, was appropriated for functional use in society. The farmers were eager to discuss and debate Street's Western notions from all three perspectives. Street discovered that the farmers were able to use the knowledge by first

discussing it in community gatherings before applying it to their business or trade transactions. On the one hand, there was autonomous literacy from their religious schools which was traditional and controlled. And on the other, there was ideological literacy which appeared to be more social and functional because it was fuelled by community interaction and everyday living experiences. Street (2003, p.77) suggests that the autonomous model

> *disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these benign effects.*

The idea was to improve the thinking skills and wealth of the illiterate poor, irrespective of whatever socio-cultural conditions they faced. Street (2003, p.77) contends that the ideological model presents an alternative view to literacy, in that

> *literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts.*

The ideological model therefore has a more culturally driven focus, making literacy prone to being contested at all times because of the need to preserve the ideal. In summary, the table below shows two models of literacy in which the contextual model is what I aspire to achieve with my students. I have chosen to use the word 'contextual' instead of 'ideological' which Street used originally. Street's definition of ideological literacy involves a more learner-centred, critical and socially empowering way of developing literacy in comparison to the autonomous model, which is limited to cognitive abilities of the learner, trained to perform for economic gain.

However, as literacy has evolved to include many domains (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004) this suggests that literacy can never be only ideological. As a result of literacy's fluid nature or changing needs according to the times, I thought a contextual sensitive approach would be more suited to the type of literacy I was interested in achieving with

my students, without losing sight of Street's original focus. The table below compares Street's two models of literacy, which I adapted from Lonsdale and McCurry (2004).

Table 2. 1: Street's models of literacy, according to Lonsdale and McCurry (2004, pp. 7 & 8)

Autonomous model of literacy	**Contextual model of literacy**
Literacy is viewed primarily as the expression of a person's intellectual abilities and various psychological tests are used to determine individual literacy levels. Illiteracy is viewed as a deficit, with the individual held largely responsible for this lack. Literacy is considered separate from its context and is mainly print-based. The underlying purpose of literacy is to imbue into individuals an acceptance of the dominant ideologies and its explicit purpose is to enhance the economic productivity of the nation. This model is aligned with the concept of human capital, in which intellectually trained workers form the backbone of the workforce and knowledge becomes a commodity to be exported to other countries.	Literacy is viewed as a social practice and as a social responsibility. There are multiple learner-centred literacies involving a diverse range of skills and understandings, including technological and computer literacies. Critical thinking skills play an important role as enabling tools in this conception. Ethnographic approaches are adopted as assessment tools. There is a strong focus on the social context in which literacy practices take place and a consequent shift from narrow vocational outcomes for individual learners to more holistic outcomes related to empowerment and capacity-building for both individuals and communities.

In developing this overview, Lonsdale and McCurry (2004, p.8) quote Freire (1972) who says:

> *Literacy is a process of 'conscientisation'—the acquisition of skills and understandings which enable individuals to recognize and challenge the unequal political, social, cultural, economic contexts which govern their lives. This concept of an active and socially active literacy based in the cultural context of the learner is a strong element in current conceptions of literacy.*

This understanding of literacy is what I think all language and academic writing teachers should aspire to, that is, to help students develop a consciousness towards learning which

compels them to take ownership for their learning progress in line with their social, cultural and political environment.

The autonomous model places much emphasis on the learner being responsible for his or her own literacy levels, whereas the contextual model embraces learning as a social encounter enriched with input from surrounding communities. For the contextual model, it is not solely the learner's responsibility if he or she is illiterate; accountability lies in all those who have had contact with the student to help them learn. Autonomous literacy is also largely print-based, relying on cognitive and psychological testing, while contextual literacy promotes social interaction for learning, relying on methods that include social interaction for testing.

Around the same time as Street's work, the general concept of literacy was problematized by New Order Literacies because there were now many other types of literacies emerging (Street 2003; Cope & Kalantzis 2009). This gathered momentum with a number of researchers coming together as the New London Group (1996), to define literacy that had evolved over time in response to global demands. The New Literacy Studies, according to Street (2003, p.77) represent:

> *...a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice.*

Cope and Kalantzis (2009) suggest that literacies encompassed a wider scope, including contested power relations. Literacy thus needed to not focus on reading or writing exclusively because the world was changing in terms of economics, politics and socio-cultural structures (Richmond, Robinson & Sach-Israel, Unesco Report, 2008, p.6). With new forms of globalisation came the advent of a new knowledge-based economy which thrived on Information Technology (Yang 2003). In universities, the skills- and discipline-based approaches or perspectives to teaching academic writing did not seem to help students, especially new undergraduate entrants, who could not understand the rules and style of academic writing required.

Street, together with Lea (1998), came up with the concept of AL as a tripartite or three-dimensional model which also encapsulated key dimensions of the earlier two traditions (skills and academic socialisation). Russell et al. explain (2009, p.400):

> *In some respects, the third model, academic literacies, subsumes many of the features of the other two; Lea and Street (1998) point out that the models are not presented as mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, they argue that it is the academic literacies model which is best able to take account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations and identities, in short to consider the complexity of meaning making which the other two models fail to provide.*

AL has been theoretically argued to be effective for teaching academic writing in higher education settings by several researchers (see for example Lea & Street 2000, 2006; Hyland 2004) and that it has a comprehensive take on teaching English and writing. The AL model helps teachers to look beyond the skills and discipline-based models to focus on a more social understanding of practice. Thus the AL model is not just applicable to the teaching and learning of academic writing or English within the academic discourse or domain. It has an implicit focus on the macro and micro of socio-cultural and socio politics of the system in which teaching and learning takes place, not dissimilar to Duff's (2010) explanation of language socialisation theory. Such a wider appeal adds to the complexities of teaching and learning academic writing and English.

Finally, I consider **language socialisation theory**, which has a level of prominence in the field, but not specifically chosen as a theory resource for this study, because it does not adequately include the skills approach in learning like AL theory. There is also no specific mention of power relational issues in the definition of academic discourse socialisation, although issues related to macro and micro politics are implicit and invariably linked to wider contexts of actual academic teaching and learning process (Duff 2010). There is also no specific reference made to grammar as an integral part of the theoretical framework unlike the AL theory, which incorporates grammar skills, alongside language within the disciplines and language as part of social practice. Grammar cannot be neglected, especially for ESL learners who are still struggling to cope with the basics of language when they first enter university.

Language socialisation calls for language to be learnt through social interaction from mentors proficient in the target language and culturally informed of practices within the immediate and broader academic community (Duff 2010). Duff (2010, p.171) notes that several UK theorists (see for example Lea & Street 1998; Lillis 2001) propose that AL 'takes into account power relations, identity and institutional practices and contestations in a way that the term socialisation does not' and therefore AL 'represents a higher-order, value-added perspective'. She finally contends that it is her preferred choice to use academic socialisation rather than academic literacies or enculturation as a feasible term to explain her favoured socialisation theory, mainly because Academic Literacies appears to sound more static than academic socialisation, although they are similar in terms of the social processes involved.

On the basis of analysing this overview, I could then argue that AL is my preferred theoretical choice for this study, which I expound in the next section.

2.3 Why AL was selected as a theory for this study

The AL theory is suitable mainly because it can explain a range of complexities within and beyond the classroom. Auerbach (1999, p.1) cites Severino (1998) and Freire and Macedo (1987) in arguing for a more critical approach to writing pedagogy. She says that social change proponents put forth the notion that

> *the genre approach makes the mistake of claiming that acquiring the discourse of power will actually lead to gaining power (Luke, 1996). In fact, they say, experience, history, and research show that other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and race are equally important in determining access. This approach argues that all writing pedagogy has an implicit political stance, whether or not it is acknowledged (Severino, 1998). So within the critical approach, writing pedagogy is tied to analyzing student experience in relation to broader economic and political relations. Writing focuses on content drawn from the social context of learners' lives (connecting the word and the world, as Paulo Freire would say) and is used in the service of action for change (Freire & Macedo, 1987).*

The AL theory however, can take on the critical outlook that Auerbach advocates in the above quote, appealing to a broader view of literacy which can address complex

contradictions within teaching and learning domains, on an everyday basis. Such complex contradictions facing the teacher and learner then make AL not static, as Duff (2010) pointed out earlier, but fluid according to the situation the teacher or learner is in. This view is what I argued for earlier in terms of accepting literacy as fluid but contextual, rather than ideological for my classroom situation. Collins and Street (2014, pp. 357-358) allude to this ongoing fluid process of literacy:

> *No one process always determines the course of literacy. Rather, processes coevolve and generate contradictions for actors to resolve or work through as they read, write, speak, think and listen. When literacy is conceived in this way, literacy research may be understood as an investigation into actors' efforts to adapt forms of literacy as they work through particular kinds of contradictions.*

The contradictions mentioned in the above quote are especially important to be understood within the post-colonial context for this study. As a post-colonial setting researcher, I am interested in understanding these contradictions which need to be investigated in my own teaching and learning community, so I can make meaning for myself and my students. In this regard, it is important to understand the dimensions of the colonial experience which may contribute to such contradictions. According to Kumaravadivelu (2013, p. 3),

> *there is nothing inherent in any language that makes it colonial. A language takes on colonial coloration when it is used as a tool to serve the cause of empire. The history of English language and English language teaching (ELT), shows that its colonial coloration has four interrelated dimensions – scholastic, linguistic, cultural and economic.*

Kumaravadivelu expands on all four interrelated dimensions which can contribute to tensions if not understood properly. These dimensions are: scholastic (furthering the selfish interests of Western based knowledge at the expense of local knowledge), linguistic or 'non-English language made inconsequential for applied linguistics inquiry' (Kumaravadivelu, 2013, p.15), cultural (the link between culture and practice from the West with the English language), and the economic dimension (work and wealth associated with colonised countries).

These four dimensions seem to broadly point to power, knowledge, social and cultural issues, which are important elements in post-colonialism, often neglected by the ESL teacher. Power, knowledge and socio-cultural issues, which constantly evolve, constitute the fundamental framework of AL that needs to be explored in the Malaysian context. This is where the link between PMP and AL occurs. These three conditions were briefly reflected on historically through post-colonial explanations of the way political and socio-cultural shifts affected the country from the time of independence until now, in Chapter 1. They were also briefly alluded to in the opening section of this chapter. The three conditions are not something new that I propose, but they have already been implicitly referred to by AL proponents to be explored for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing. This can be seen when Lea and Street (1998) first suggest AL as a suitable theory to investigate writing issues in university. They claim that AL theory

> *suggests a more complex and contested interpretation in which the processes of student writing and tutor feedback are defined through implicit assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge within a particular context, and the relationships of authority that exist around the communication of these assumptions. The nature of this authority and the claims associated with it can be identified through both formal, linguistic features of the writing involved and in the social and institutional relationships associated with it.*

Lea and Street (1998) suggest the necessity to focus on knowledge and power, to see how these two conditions are linked to a broader socio-cultural view of what happens within and beyond academic writing and the English classroom. In fact, Hyland in his preface to *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing* (2004, p. x) asserts the same, claiming AL 'recognizes the complexities of contemporary modular and multi-disciplinary courses and demonstrates a concern with issues of identity, epistemology, interaction and power relations'.

Lea and Street (2006, p.368) argue that:

> *The literary practices of academic disciplines can be viewed as varied social practices associated with different communities. In addition, an academic literacies perspective also takes account of literacies not directly associated with*

> *subjects and disciplines, but with broader institutional discourses and genres. From the student point of view, a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch their writing styles and genres between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of literacy practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes.*

The above quote highlights how Academic Literacies is not just limited to academic subjects and disciplines but should be viewed in a broader context that goes beyond institutional practices. The identity issues that emerge should be viewed not as a stand-alone feature, but as part of evolving literacy practices that highlight power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within and beyond the institution. Such a view helps me make sense of my own role as part of power positioning in my context. This in turn helps me understand how my students' identities subtly evolve over time.

Taking heed of both criticisms and positive aspects levelled by researchers at other approaches (Christie 2013; Doecke & Breen 2013; Rosen 2013), and language socialisation theory (Duff 2010), AL was finally selected as a theoretical framing for this study. Here, the AL perspective was used to help me think about my teaching as social practice, as it was seen to encompass a more holistic and inclusive view of teaching academic writing, touching on power, knowledge and social interactions which may affect learners and teachers of academic writing (Lea & Street 1998), while incorporating earlier deficit models as well. The other factor that contributed to the selection of AL as a theory was because the study was conducted in a Malaysian branch campus of a British university, which already had an original UK-based Academic Writing and Study Skills course structure that appeared to be modelled on an AL framework. The course structure could not be provided as an appendix as it would reveal too much information about the university where this study was conducted. The course structure was adapted to suit the needs of ESL Malaysian learners in a Malaysian setting. I decided to explore how effective it was to use an AL framework in the Malaysian context.

In section 2.4 below, I explain the three conditions of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm (AL) in more detail. I explain more specifically, how the three conditions within the AL framework need to be considered by the ESL teacher for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing. These three

conditions can help the teacher view literacy in totality. This view is supported by Green (1988) who advocates understanding literacy in a non-linear or non-rigid fashion. Green suggests viewing literacy as a holistic process, covering operational (grammar-based language systems), cultural (behavioural and interactional occurrences in the classroom, as a result of social influences) and critical (meaningful engagement with context, involving higher-order skills dimensions as a whole), without being overly concerned about following a particular hierarchical order.

The need for a more holistic approach to writing in relation to reading, writing, speaking and listening and also as in a cultural, post-colonial and globalised context, must be embraced by ESL learners and academic writing teachers. The reason for such awareness is because all these elements interact and relate with one another. AL thus helps illuminate a comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning academic writing, when combined with PMP teaching principles. However, the conditions which affect AL teaching and learning need to be fully explored and understood first, as explained below, so that the informed action-research teacher is in a better position to select appropriate teaching principles needed to activate the aforementioned three AL conditions.

2.4 Understanding the three AL conditions

The teaching of English and academic writing cannot be done without paying attention to power relations, which in turn impact knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within and beyond the classroom. These conditions are closely inter-related and impact the identities of the participants involved as well. The teaching of English through the disciplines, for example, cannot be separated from the teaching of English as part of the colonial experience, especially when the colonial masters of the country are British and also the university. Therefore, paying attention to power was integral for me and my learners to make sense of what counts as our knowledge, another important condition to be explored, and how that is connected deeply to our surroundings, influenced by the socio-cultural conditions that could also affect learning and teaching. The three conditions are therefore tied to a broader sense of literacy and must be understood at a deeper level, for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing and English.

2.4.a Power-relational conditions

According to AL theory, power-relational conditions need to be understood in-depth by the teacher in order for them and their learners to make sense of both teaching and learning experiences. Barraclough and Robert define power as

> *the potential or capacity to influence the behaviour of some other person or persons. Compliance gaining, or behaviour alteration, is the realization of that potential (2009, p.4).*

In undertaking action research in an academic writing classroom, I wanted to understand the level of influence I had over my students, how it impacted their learning and if they influenced me in any way. I also wanted to know how power-relational conditions around me affected my teaching decisions. Initially, I read several power explanations and typologies. A brief overview of these power debates revealed the following different foci: in class systems and their links to power (Weber 1978), power and its connection with knowledge (Foucault 2000), structure and agency in organisations (Giddens 1984), and a range of explanations of power focusing on exertion of influence, manipulation and agenda-shaping (Lukes 1974). While there were some elements of power in these discussions that were seen to be operational in my context, they did not quite capture the complexities of ESL and academic writing in context. Gaventa (2003) advises us to study power as closely as possible to its authentic context. Since relationships are essential in setting the tone for teaching, French and Raven's (1959) teacher–student relationship approach to analysing and discussing power conditions made sense in my context. This power typology literature was discovered once I began to analyse my data. It appeared during the second stage of my theoretical understanding and development of my action research practice.

2.4.b Stage Two of theoretical framework (types of power conditions)

During stage two of my theoretical framework, I found French and Raven's (1959) take on power helpful, as it helped illuminate my classroom situation, since it was also based on a classroom context. The five power types French and Raven (1959) categorise were later expanded into six and they are summarised in Table 2.2 below. They included reward, coercive, referent, expert and legitimate types of power, to which informational

power was added, by which they mean power influenced by intrinsic or cognitive elements (French & Raven, 2008, p. 173). These six forms of power were categorised broadly into three main types by Collins & Raven (1969) which included 'socially independent of influence, socially dependent on surveillance and socially dependent without surveillance' (French & Raven, 2008. p.174).

Table 2. 2: Abraham's (2014) summary of French and Raven's definitions and categories of power (1969)

Categories of influence in power	**Types of power**	**Definitions of power**
Socially independent of influence	Informational power	Power emerging from intrinsic cognitive elements
Socially dependent on surveillance	Reward and coercive power	Power emerging from by agent's capacity to provide rewards (in material or emotional form) or coerce a person to do something
Socially dependent without surveillance	Referent, expert and legitimate	The ability of the agent to exert influence over a person because he/she is at the top of the organisational hierarchy and is considered as having authority or expertise or legitimate rights in deciding matters

A number of researchers have used French and Raven's (1959) social power dimensions to explore the relationship between staff and students of an organization (see for example Cobb 1980; Frost & Stahelski 1988; Rahim et al.2000; Kim & Guan 2008). The first type of power mentioned by French and Raven (1959) is *coercive power.* This type of power often denotes negative consequences as the person who has this power can inflict punitive measures to get the subordinate to comply; for example, in a classroom scenario, when a student believes that the teacher can punish him or her if they do not comply with her wishes, perhaps by saying 'If you do not complete this task, expect five marks to be deducted from the total score'.

The second, *reward power* is a more positive type as it denotes the ability of the person with the power to activate the desire to achieve something. In a teacher–learner situation, for example, a student works to receive rewards from the teacher, if he or she complies with the teacher's promise that 'students who finish their work on time will get an extra three marks'. A consequence of this type of power is that when it is used often, it can lose its value. *Legitimate power* is the third type in which the teacher is viewed as having the right to expect certain tasks from students because the teacher is merely carrying out her job or role and the students think it is important to listen to her. In other words, the students feel obliged to obey the teacher because her responsibility is to help them learn. To illustrate, 'please check to see if you have all the answers right…and if you have all the points written down clearly for further reflection…in fact, this may be useful for you to consider for the next assignment'.

The fourth type of power, *referent power*, is used to denote how the relationship a student has with the teacher determines their views about this type of power. For instance, if a student wants to please the teacher by doing what he or she wants, then the teacher's power over the student increases. The student, wanting to please the teacher, correlates with the student having a positive vibe about having power over the teacher. This type of power is prevalent among role models because they affect the behaviour change in those who are interested in modelling their positive behaviour. It could also be a short-term type of power as sometimes role models make mistakes and lose their following. The last type of power is *expert power*, which signifies the student expecting the teacher to have competent or appropriate knowledge for teaching, and the student respects the teacher for having that expertise. For example, the teacher may say 'A topic sentence has a subject and an attitude expressed towards the subject'. The students will follow what the teacher says, especially if the person who has this type of power is often viewed as a leader who is intelligent and successful. Although the above narratives are examples from the student's perspective about notions of teacher power, the same can be applied to teachers who perceive students as having the power to dictate changes in the classroom. Attention to power-relational conditions is a central feature of AL tradition. This set of categories is useful for a teacher-researcher to analyse power in the classroom. Knowledge of these

categories can help ESL teachers who often forget how power conditions can affect the dynamics of teaching and learning.

In the next section, I discuss the second condition that needs to be explored within the AL paradigm for the effective teaching of academic writing, which is epistemological or knowledge conditions. These conditions needed to be understood to see how the students' thought processes worked and in what way they applied their knowledge to their academic writing.

2.4.c Epistemological or knowledge conditions

In addition to power conditions, the other condition that AL proponents (Lea & Street 1998) explicate is epistemological or knowledge conditions, in order for the teacher to effectively teach academic writing. Here I unpack how student epistemologies are formed and why it is necessary for these epistemologies to be understood. Most scientific and psychology based researchers define epistemology as how a person comes to know what he or she knows (Perry 1970; Jaworski 1993; Sandoval 2005). In recent years, within the higher education context, universities have begun to pay more attention to student epistemologies (Harvey, Drew & Smith 2006) to improve learning conditions. Walker et al. (2009) warn that first year university student epistemologies vary considerably from what universities expect from them. It is not surprising then that some students have 'surface' as opposed to 'deep' approaches to learning in many higher learning institutions (Marton & Saljo 1997; Ramsden 2003). Using Kardash and Wood's (2000) revised epistemological beliefs questionnaire for mathematics by Schommer (1990), Walker et al investigated first-year student beliefs and epistemologies. The categories of knowledge investigated were beliefs about knowledge, the speed at which knowledge is acquired, how knowledge is constructed, how to reach an understanding of knowledge truths, and how to become successful knowledge builders.

Their findings revealed that understanding how students make use of their knowledge helps improve their learning approaches. Groups of students who have problems are identified earlier and can be supported by the teacher and this in turn can affect the

philosophical way teaching is approached in an institution. Although Schommer's study was useful in a mathematical context; I tried to think of how her principles would be relevant for my context. For an ESL context like mine in a higher education setting, I needed to find a knowledge scheme that would show gradual growth in students in line with my teaching principle to translate knowledge conditions into practice, which is promoting learner autonomy. I discovered this while analysing data for knowledge conditions, which was the second stage of my theoretical framework alongside my discovery of the power typology.

2.4.d Stage Two of theoretical framework (types of knowledge conditions)

For this stage, I drew on Perry's nine-position knowledge scheme (1968) which has broadly been divided into four categories of knowledge by various scholars (see for example Bizell 1984; Belenky et al; Baxter 1989; Moore 1994; Rapaport 2001) to understand how college students learn. The first category, *dualism,* is a knowledge condition in which the learner understands knowledge as absolute truth (knowledge from teacher, parent, church, etc.), slowly progressing to understanding dualism as knowledge that has both positive and negative attributes, especially when the learner realises that the authority in which the knowledge comes from could be wrong. Such realisation leads to *multiplicity,* the second knowledge condition, whereby the learner takes in different views before making a decision as to which view is right or wrong. This is also a stage where there may not be a right or wrong answer and the learner would need to be content with 'I don't know' for an answer. It is a stage of discovering the process of how knowledge is formed.

The third broad knowledge condition is the *relativism* stage in which only the learner can acquire knowledge, once he or she makes sense of it. This can be achieved by being aware of various views and circumstances through an understanding of the context in which he or she operates. The learner becomes an active agent in making an informed decision based on his or her judgement and is comfortable with the decision. The final knowledge condition is what is known as *commitment to relativism*. This category signals the growth of the learner as an individual who considers alternative choices, undergoes

doubt and confirms individual identity in the process. It is a transformational change that indicates a struggle towards a learning goal meant to be an empowering experience.

These four categories of knowledge conditions suit my action research study, in that they showcase the knowledge journey the students undergo in stages, from the beginning of their course to how the knowledge processes shape their learning and decision-making skills over time. This category system provides a key element of the framework for analysing the narrative data from student letters, my teacher diaries and student interviews.

This action research is an explorative study that inevitably challenges me as the researcher to question my own perceptions or understandings of student knowledge conditions which change, as different stages of the action research cycle unfold. Since my teaching principle of promoting learner autonomy needs to activate these knowledge conditions within the AL perspective, I wish to encourage my learners to take control or action of their own learning and become agents of change, just as I wish to become an agent of change who influences their learning. As Walker et al. (2009) suggest, lack of independence in learning can deter student progress in later stages of university learning.

Mercer (2012, p.42) defines agency by separating it into two categories which include feelings and behaviour:

> *Firstly, there is a learner's sense of agency, which concerns how agentic an individual feels, both generally and in respect to particular contexts. Secondly, there is a learner's agentic behaviour in which an individual chooses to exercise their agency through participation and action, or indeed through deliberate non-participation or non-action. Agency is therefore not only concerned with what is observable but it also involves non-visible behaviours, beliefs, thoughts and feelings; all of which must be understood in relation to the various contexts and affordances from which they cannot be abstracted.*

This definition of agency is also explained in relation to the context and affordances facing students. That means interacting with cultural elements around the students and making sense of those interactions through the use of artefacts or tools afforded to them. van Lier explains agency as 'a contextually enacted way of being in the world' (2007, p.

1). In other words, it is not so much an individual endeavour although it can start in that way; ultimately it requires the individual student to look at his or her own historically and culturally situated experiences and use that knowledge to work closely with other students in the same setting to bring about a transformative change.

As an ESL teacher, this awareness of student agency also helps me understand my own journey as a teacher and what shapes my students' epistemologies. Knowing what student agency is assists me in trying to develop the desired types of student behaviour. Sinclair et al. (2000) highlight these behaviours as 1) learners who need to be willing to learn before anything can take place, 2) understand that they may be different to other learners as each individual is different in his or her learning styles, 3) be aware of circumstances that may be beyond teacher help, and 4) also take into account socio-cultural, political, and psychological dimensions that can affect levels of autonomy.

Sandoval (2005) suggests that the students' epistemology should include a more practice-oriented understanding of inquiry than a theoretically formal one to encourage a more robust understanding of how students appropriate their own living circumstances, and applied to what they learn in school so they can adapt. Although his paper reports science based research, I use his concept to see how my students appropriate their own historical, cultural and social knowledge underpinnings in my context. Students use their socio-cultural knowledge to further make sense of a more formal and theoretical knowledge of academic writing in a British context, before producing their written work derived from new 'combined' forms of knowledge.

Such approaches to appropriating context in relation to epistemology have to be understood by the teacher as well in order, to make progress with the student; thus I need to pay attention to my own knowledge perceptions and how these progress throughout this study. This second AL condition points me, as a teacher-researcher, to strategies to help me know my students and bring their knowledge into the classroom. In the section that follows, I outline the third and final condition from the AL tradition, in order to teach academic writing effectively.

2.4.e Socio-cultural conditions

Culture is a complex concept to understand as it intertwines with so many levels of social interaction (Kumaravadivelu 1994, Hollins 2008, Moll 2009), yet, for this study it needs to be closely examined as part of the AL theoretical framework, which suggests that socio-cultural conditions need to be understood for the effective learning and teaching of academic writing. In an ESL context, language is deeply connected to culture (Li 2005). Dalglish, Evans and Lawson (2011) present an understanding of culture from a global classroom perspective in line with the changing trends of teaching and learning worldwide. They define culture at two levels: 'explicit' and 'core' culture (p.10). This first explanation of culture can be seen clearly through the use of language, expression, art and clothes, for example. They also suggest that explicit culture is a more deliberate form of displaying aspects of culture which could be deemed prejudicial. Core culture is more implicit and it is the core of a person's being. It is about the person's 'norms and values' (p. 11). The teachers and students bring these 'values and norms' into the classroom. It is an integral part of who they are and how they think. However, these values are

> *seldom talked about, let alone discussed or challenge... It is these often unacknowledged assumptions that create miscommunication and impair learning in a global classroom* (Dalglish, Evans & Lawson, 2011, p. 12).

In line with this quote, the political, economic and social shifts that occur between differing cultures in a culturally diverse community can cause an imbalance in power relations that result in conflict. The need for social interaction is extremely important, especially if it encourages learning (Kauchak & Eggen, 2012). This fits well with AL and PMP theories that view teaching and learning as a social endeavour, occurring in particular cultural and social contexts.

That is why, for this study, I needed to be a culturally responsive teacher who not only adheres to one of my teaching principles – to create socially and culturally relevant contexts for my students – but also promotes a type of pedagogy that is not hegemonic. Johnson (2006) warns that hegemonic practices or the application of a Western based culture of practice that undermines or does not take into account the local cultures of

learning, can be detrimental to the overall impact of teaching and learning in a multi-ethnic ESL classroom. My goal is to help my students improve their academic writing according to the standards set by a British university. The challenge is to find a balance in showing them how to do it without losing sight of their own rich cultural inheritance, which they bring to the classroom. Studies have shown that students who perceive the target culture as superior to their own learning cultures can be adversely affected in their learning progress (Schumann 1978)

Hollins (2008) emphasizes that a teacher who understands her learner's cultural background and shares some common values or perceptions with them can help improve learning conditions. In the case of Luis Moll's work (2009), when one of his colleagues goes into the homes of her Spanish students who come from poor farmer households, she discovers the potential of using the knowledge her students are already familiar with in their culture. She makes use of the 'funds of knowledge' they already have to create familiarity with topic selection and writing practice relevant to their everyday living experiences. This is about making practical choices for the learner and for this the teacher needs to be culturally intuitive as the global classroom requires. It is no longer about what the institution prescribes for learning, yet institutions still behave as if they know what's best for the students. They still fail to engage the learner through the inclusion of cultural elements from the learner's values that would help the learner progress to a higher level of thinking.

In my context, understanding how Chinese, Malay or Indian students learn and what they bring from their cultural histories, can also help me as a teacher plan my teaching more effectively. For example, in a study conducted at Stanford University in the United States (Krampetz 2005), the researcher investigates how international students make meaning, when they first arrive for their first-year studies and begin learning the Stanford culture of academic writing. She claims that they are first in 'academic shock' before they learn to adapt and cope with the demands of the university. One of the ways in which they help themselves is by code switching (Krampetz, 2005, p.37), and what the researcher realises is that it is heavily influenced by their respective cultures and social milieu. She finds it fascinating and encourages them to use this background knowledge. The students use

their cultural tools to help them learn and the researcher concludes that a greater awareness on the part of teachers is needed to accommodate cultural influences students bring with them to the classroom, to assist with their learning. Rather than frown upon these cultural tools, teachers need to embrace whatever possible strategies learners use in their learning repertoire to help them improve their academic literacy. The learners can also become 'cultural informants' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), where they share news from their culture and the teacher can tap into their information as 'tools' to teach the whole class; in a way, this idea paves the way for community experience as the students' cultures are recognized as a necessity to assist with their learning, eventually creating a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), which aligns with the AL concept of viewing teaching as a social practice. As Freire argues, in Macedo, Koike and Oliveira's (1998, p.1) translation of his work:

> *When men and women realise that they themselves are the makers of culture, they have accomplished the necessity and the possibility of owning reading and writing. They become literate, politically speaking.*

The culture that the teacher has to be informed of includes not only the student's cultural background, but culture within the classroom and that of the institution. Johnson (2006) talks about different layers of culture and how there are multiple facets in those layers. Identity is formed by participation in diverse cultures and sub-cultures. If different cultural layers are operating for the student, then his or her identity may develop in relation to these layers. Holland et al. (1998) describe identity as 'the social, cultural and historical with a human face' (p. 145). The identity of a student, originally shaped by the student's upbringing and social background, for example, may change when functioning as a student in a new classroom culture, or as a person belonging to the larger teaching and learning community that fits within university culture. This is because the student's identity evolves according to the collective experience of being in a teaching and learning community that does not operate in isolation as a result of 'social roles that need to be acted out' (Stubbs 1976, p 99). The students therefore need to learn how to negotiate such cultural terrain in order to make meaning for themselves.

Even the different forms of literacy explained in earlier sections belong to certain types of culture. For example, just as academic literacy is a culture of the institution, computer

literacy is a culture of the new globalised world, and differs in different countries, disciplines and institutions. Many researchers write about the use of computers as tools to help students become more familiar with the culture of writing in universities (Nunan 1989; Warschauer 2003). In my classroom, I use computers as tools to help students make meaning of academic writing activities, because their generation grew up and is comfortable with computers, which is part of their cultural practice. The complexity of the different types of culture in my classroom required me to use Green's literacy typology to make sense of the different levels of culture operating in my classroom, and this occurred in the second stage of my theoretical framework development alongside my discovery of power and knowledge typologies.

2.4.f Stage Two of theoretical framework (types of socio-cultural conditions)

Armed with knowledge about the complexity of different cultures and considering several definitions and explanations of culture for analytical purposes, I employed Green's three dimensions of literacy to understand the cultural layers within and beyond my classroom, as they provide a more comprehensive understanding of culture from a literacy point of view. What Green (1988, 2002) adds to the literacy discussion are three clearly interrelated dimensions of literacy: operational, cultural and critical, making the job of the ESL and academic writing teacher easier in tracing the development of the student, as each literacy dimension is achieved.

Also, since this study is based on AL, it makes sense to use the dimensions which are literacy based. The operational dimension would mean the everyday teaching of language elements in my academic writing of English. The cultural dimension would include all aspects of behaviour and interaction that are cognitive and affective, and how that affects meaning-making in learning and teaching, encompassing AL knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions. The final dimension is the critical dimension in which learner engagement to interrogate their context is meaningfully explored.

Green suggests that a teacher 'can start anywhere, at any point – as long as you take into account, equally, all three dimensions' (2002, p. 69). He further suggests (p. 69)

> *drawing the critical and the operational in, organically, as the occasion and the need arises, although it also entails making quite sure that this does in fact happen, somewhere along the line...As always, teaching is unavoidably a matter of tact and timing, a subtle mix of strategy and tactics, theory and practice.*

In other words, as long as all three dimensions are considered, in a holistic manner, in designing and enacting teaching, there is room for improved literacy and a higher level of learning operating in the classroom, which I is why I employed the use of Green's Literacy Model.

All three conditions need to be effectively understood within the second language learning paradigm, especially in a post-colonial academic writing classroom like mine. Each of the typologies for the three AL conditions was discovered in the second stage of my study. In the next section I explain the connection between PMP and second language learning, to show how theory is investigated and emergent with interactions of practice in my second language classroom. These three conditions are used to organise the three data chapters of the thesis.

2.5 Post-method Pedagogy and its connection to second language learning

According to Taber (2008), the history of second language teaching and learning evolved from a traditional grammar translation method (early 1960s and 1970s) into behavioural learning (late 1970s, early1980s) and finally into a more communicative practice (early and late 1990s), where the emphasis was on task- (Ellis 2000) and genre-based activities (Gee 1997). However, in recent years many teacher-researchers still find some rudimentary grammatical and sentence structures have not been mastered by students, and they have come to realise that it is important to include some fundamental English structures while embracing a more socio-cultural view to teaching and learning. In other words, second language teaching and learning should encompass a wide variety of methods and skills, rooted in social and cultural contexts to provide a more comprehensive model of literacy. This echoes the AL view of teaching academic writing as a tripartite model, involving a combination of basic and more complex levels of writing as an embedded model. Teachers may be informed of theoretical implications but

the practical needs to be fleshed out with concrete teaching strategies enable teachers to explicitly see what works or does not work in the classroom, making links between different elements of literacy. For that reason, I turned to PMP to translate AL into practical realities. The other reason for choosing PMP was because it is associated with second language learners, who formed the majority of my learners.

Post-method Pedagogy (PMP), which advocates not being restricted to any kind of methodology, is a theory in the TESOL tradition, mainly designed for second language learners (Kumaravadivelu 1994). Kumaravadivelu's PMP (1994) not only provides language teachers with an alternative to the method bound tradition of the 1990s, but also challenges them to make changes for themselves and for their students, so that teaching and learning can be maximised. Indeed, Kumaravadivelu suggested that in writing *Beyond Methods* (2003), his intent was to provide alternatives for teachers to think about and theorise their practice. A shift from a more cognitive approach to learning language to a more cultural and social approach was evident through post-method strategies employed while teaching second language students.

I should also point out that while Kumaravadivelu claims that teachers should not be constrained by methods, he nevertheless provides methods or strategies for teachers to think about. This might appear contradictory but, upon deep reflection, I am of the view that Kumaravadivelu is challenging readers to make that decision independently. Both teachers and students need to become agents of change, embracing a more autonomous and independent approach to social analyses practice and language use, respectively. It then becomes a social responsibility for both the teacher and learners to engage in social behaviour that empowers them to effect change.

The ten teaching strategies for ESL teachers suggested by Kumaravadivelu were collapsed into three broad teaching principles for this study. Originally, these strategies by Kumaravadivelu (2003) are listed as follows. He calls them macro strategies as they are big strategies that also comprise smaller or micro strategies which can be grouped into these major strategies.

Table 2. 3: Ten macro strategies (abridged from Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 39)

Maximize learning opportunities	envisages teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers strike a balance between their role as managers of teaching acts and their role as mediators of learning acts
Minimise perceptual mismatches	emphasizes the recognition of potential perceptual mismatches between intentions and interpretations of the learner, the teacher, and the teacher educator
Facilitate negotiated interaction	refers to meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate topics and talk, not just react and respond
Promote learner autonomy	involves helping learners learn how to learn, equipping them with the means necessary to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning
Foster language awareness	refers to any attempt to draw learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of their L2 in order to increase the degree of explicitness required to promote L2 learning
Activate intuitive heuristics	highlights the importance of providing rich textual data so that learners can infer and internalize underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use
C*ontextualize linguistic input*	highlights how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, extra linguistic, situational and extra situational contexts
Integrate language skills	refers to the need to holistically integrate language skills traditionally separated and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing
Ensure social relevance:	refers to the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which L2 learning and teaching take place
Raise cultural consciousness	emphasizes the need to treat learners as cultural informants so that they are encouraged to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge

There is an overlap between macro and micro strategies and although Kumaravadivelu provides micro strategies to help the teacher delve deeper into student learning issues, these micro strategies are open for interpretation by teachers who may wish to use them. He suggests that the teacher has the ultimate power to decide what is best for her class and is not expected to conform in any way to the macro strategies outlined.

For the purpose of this study, Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies were thought to be more useful when subsumed into three broad teaching principles that translated AL conditions (power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions) into action. These principles include 1) negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches, 2) promotion of learner autonomy, and 3) ensuring social relevance and raising cultural awareness. They echo what the AL tradition advocates, viewing teaching and learning as a social practice. In that vein, they help unravel and examine power relations, knowledge conditions and socio-cultural situations. These three broad strategies were then adopted as my main teaching principles for this research to counter criticisms levelled at AL lacking pedagogic strength (Lillis 2001; Lea & Street 1998) or concrete teaching strategies (Arkoudis & Tran 2010). My three main teaching principles helped me launch AL into action in my classroom.

In choosing these macro strategies, I then decided which ones would most likely work in my classroom, especially if intuition and experience dictated on my part to maximise any learning opportunity which presented. I chose to combine the second and third strategies from Kumaravadivelu's list to form my first teaching principle, 'negotiate interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches' as a way to activate power conditions within the AL paradigm. I thought 'promoting learner autonomy' as my second teaching principle would work as a strategy to activate knowledge conditions. Within these knowledge conditions, I would also be paying attention to Kumaravadivelu's other macro strategies; for example, fostering language awareness (making sure learners build on formal and functional properties of their L2), activating intuitive heuristics (ensuring learners understanding the grammatical rules of the language in context), contextualising linguistic input (ensuring situational based linguistic emphasis) and integrating language skills (combining all speaking, listening, reading exercises as part of the writing process).

The idea is to build student autonomy where the student will ultimately monitor his own progress and learning. These principles have a language or linguistic dimension which is important. (I was already working on these principles and was aware of them as an ESL teacher before this study was undertaken.)

My focus was to develop a more social and inclusive approach to teaching, as suggested by the AL model, rather than a fix-it approach to learning language. The last two macro strategies from Kumaravadivelu's list were combined to create my third teaching principle, 'ensuring social relevance and raising cultural awareness' to activate socio-cultural conditions. The idea here is to encourage students to be active participants in the classroom, allowing for their voices to be heard and applied, according to their socio-cultural context. Every strategy in the list ultimately points to maximising learning opportunities for students, the first macro strategy in Kumaravadivelu's list. The teacher uses his or her skills to create and/or seize opportunities for learning.

Even though I adopted these strategies from Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001), I drew on various other researchers to confirm my selection and continued to draw on more research to deepen my understanding about perceptual mismatches, learner autonomy (Cothran & Ennis 1997; Sinclair et al. 2004) and ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts (Nunan 1989; Kachru 1994; Pandian 2004).

At the time, these three 'new' teaching principles seemed to correspond with the AL perspective, in that they would allow me to investigate the epistemological, social and cultural issues that affected my students' perceptions about writing. The adoption of a broader view of literacy, as explained above, helped me greatly in determining which teaching principles were needed for my study. There was a need to think of how these selected strategies could help students prepare for a more global understanding of literacies, given their understanding that they had emerged as products of a post-colonial establishment. Below, I define and elaborate how these teaching principles are meant to assist me with my teaching and analysis in subsequent chapters.

2.6 Reducing perceptual mismatches via negotiated interaction

The teaching principle of reducing perceptual mismatches via negotiated interaction would help my learners, as I try to understand what their perceptions of academic writing are in terms of style, structure, content and language through negotiated interaction. I draw on ideas about perceptual mismatches between the teacher and learners, which have been extensively discussed by researchers in higher education (Lea & Street 2000a; Lillis 2001). Lea and Street (2000b) note that various research articles point to the 'gap between academic expectations and student interpretations' (p.35). Lillis (2001) laments that students often do not know what their teachers want in their academic writing. To make matters worse, second language learners of Asian descent, especially in post-colonial settings, often keep quiet when they do not understand teachers and this causes mismatches between the teacher and the learner. This is similar to Freire's (1972) explanation of how education is not unlike a banking system.

> *Students are still suffering silently from the outcome of banking education, that is, suffocation of their personal voices both in the classroom and in society as a result of considering themselves as objects in this world rather than subjects.*

Mismatches, according to Kumaravadivelu, can occur as a result of sources that are cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional and attitudinal (1994, p.35). Such an approach informs my investigation about my students' writing. Through negotiated interaction, however, the students are able to not only actively clarify but also confirm doubts, conduct comprehension checks, repair work, react to discussions and engage in taking turns (1994).

Moreover, making sense of power relations in my context – one of the conditions that need to be understood within the AL perspective – can also be done by using negotiated interaction, one of the teaching principles adapted from PMP. Kumaravadivelu did not mention the idea of using negotiated interaction to understand power relations. However, I suggest that the link between them will work in my context. Kumaravadivelu (2003) did

however suggest there is a divide between the role of the teacher and that of the researcher. He sums it up by saying that there is

> *a corresponding division of labor between the theorist and the teacher: the theorist conceives and constructs knowledge and the teacher understands and applies that knowledge. Thus, the relationship between the theorist and the teacher is not unlike that of the producer and the consumer of a commercial commodity. Such a division of labor is said to have resulted in the creation of a privileged class of theorists and an underprivileged class of practitioner (2003, p.1).*

I argue that by combining theory and practice to understand issues, such as power, I can attempt to reduce the division of labour that Kumaravadivelu refers to in the above quote. The teacher is seen as a researcher who theorises practice in the process of understanding and changing it. Negotiated interaction is a practical strategy from PMP while power relations are a theoretical perspective from AL. The merging of these two traditions is an important step to attempt to break the layers of oppression rooted in tradition and history over the years. This merging also helps me as the teacher to plan ahead and adapt to evolving literacies as time progresses. It requires me, as a teacher-researcher, to embrace a broader understanding of literacies. Collin and Street (2014, pp. 357-358) argue that

> *no one process always determines the course of literacy. Rather processes coevolve and generate contradictions for actors to resolve or work through as they ready, write, speak, think and listen. When literacy is concerned in this way, literacy research maybe understood as an investigation into actor's efforts to adopt forms of literacy as they work through particular kinds of contradictions.*

This view of a broader literacy also compels me 'to see how literacy involves the interactions not only of identification and ideology but also of technologies, social relations, institutional arrangements, labor processes, relations to nature, and the reproduction of daily life' (Collin & Street, 2014, pp. 357-358).

Negotiated interaction also allows for mediation to be used as a bridging principle, to further reduce mismatches between the teacher and the learner. In an ESL context, it felt as though the earlier discussions or debates I looked at, for example, Lantolf (2001) and Turuk's (2008) work appeared to be more surface-based technical solutions to fixing

language problems rather than a meaning-infused, cultural and historical representation of the psychological elements to learning. Such technical solutions are thus not in line with the broader understanding of literacy that AL advocates.

I needed to examine mediation and scaffolding in my context, beyond the operational level of ESL which was important in terms of achieving a higher form of literacy, especially in the context of improving academic writing skills. This realisation came about in stage three of my theoretical framework, as a result of developing AL and PMP conceptual tools, which were followed by power, knowledge and socio-cultural typologies in stage two. It was about paying close attention to knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions though mediated activity within and beyond my classroom, which I was a part of but had no real control over.

Negotiated interaction as a teaching principle is the most interactive teaching principle, which will provide rich cognitive, linguistic, social and cultural data for me to investigate. In view of the fact that it is used to help minimise perceptual mismatches, it would be the most appropriate principle to help me understand power conditions in the classroom, which to a large extent depends on miscommunication and relationship issues between people involved in this context. I now move on to explain my second teaching principle, that of promoting learner autonomy.

2.7 Promoting learner autonomy

The principle of promoting learner autonomy allows me to theorise that learners become independent thinkers when opportunities are provided for them to work at something on their own and this is where the Zone of Proximal Development could be worked on in practice. Vygotsky developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which informed extensive research carried out by educators on implications for teaching. One such theorist who was greatly influenced by socio-cultural theory is Lantolf (2000), who describe ZPD as:

> *the interactional space within which the learner is enabled to perform a task beyond his or her own current level of competence, through assisted performance (p.54).*

The zone itself is a focus of opportunity for teachers to get close to students to try and understand how they learn by monitoring their progress. It also encourages greater interaction between the teacher and learner through dialogic activity, so that more barriers to learning can be bridged. As a result, many second language learning theorists began to explore learning-centred approaches, and much emphasis was placed on teaching learners to develop strategies for them to become more independent (Ellis & Sinclair 1989; Oxford 1990; Kumaravadivelu 1994). Although there has been a shift in concentrating on learners to make them more autonomous, the teachers are also tasked to become agents of change (Wenden 1986; Cohen 1998) since education is now seen as a transformational exercise, in line with the idea of viewing teaching as a social practice. AL affirms this view and PMP consolidates further with its teaching strategies.

The use of scaffolding as a bridging principle within the broader principle of promoting learner autonomy fits well here. As a teacher, I could provide assistance to help the learner realise his or her potential but in due course, leave the learner to work things out on his or her own. The teacher who provides various options for learning independently can generate an interest in autonomous learning through scaffolding. I believe that by combining language and linguistic based macro strategies within the broad learner autonomy principle allows for flexibility to develop this quality. The fostering of language awareness, integrating of language skills and activation of intuitive heuristics provide rich contextual data opportunities for the teacher to work with students to harness self-monitoring behaviour. The same teacher can also consider helping students change their attitudes into believing that autonomous learning is useful for them.

Having the confidence to trust their own decision-making skills is important for students to develop. Kumaravadivelu (1994) proposes that if learners are taught to equip themselves with resources available that could assist them with their learning, they will eventually be able to direct their own learning. They may have to work with groups first before having the confidence to work on their own. Woolfolk (2004) suggests that dialogic activity that is co-constructed can result in internalizing subject matter and

developing as independent thinkers. The promoting of learner autonomy principle makes it possible to see if the collaboration between the teacher and learner is effective in ZPD (Lantolf & Poehner 2008).

That would also lead to an opportunity to investigate how much impact scaffolding would have on my learners. In fact, it is important to consider and to first take advantage of the types of mediation that exist and whether the learner reciprocates that understanding of mediation before scaffolding. The ideal for learners to become autonomous is quite the norm, but expecting them to continuously be autonomous is not something that can easily be achieved (Sinclair et al.2000).

There are three learner autonomy levels that teachers can recognise in their students as their learning progresses. Kumaravadivelu (2001, p.547) calls them 'academic autonomy',' social autonomy' and 'liberatory autonomy'. The first is more about the personal aspect of an individual taking control of his or her learning. The second type of autonomy requires the learner to enlist further help from the teacher or classmates by interacting with them. The third type of autonomy requires the student to explore what is beyond his or her classroom, and this is where the historical and social aspects of education can affect the mind of the learner in making insightful decisions about learning. The decisions made at this stage of autonomous behaviour are more critical than those at an operational or cultural level of literacy (Green 1988), which indicate a more progressive attempt at learning. Kumaravadivelu explains as follows:

> *If academic autonomy enables learners to be effective learners, and social autonomy encourages them to be collaborative partners, liberatory autonomy empowers them to be critical thinkers (2001, p.547).*

This way of learning is what PMP promotes and what all ESL and EAP teachers should aspire to achieve with their students. It ties in with the AL view that teaching is social.

In tracing the developments of autonomy in language learning, Sinclair et al. (2000) reveal that research over the years has indicated a gradual shift from focusing on the individual learner, to the context in which the individual operates. However, researchers have come to realise that in doing so, there are many other things that need to be considered. Broadly, after taking into consideration many definitions of autonomy in

TESOL, there appear to be four main concepts alluded to: 1. that autonomy is dependent to a large extent on whether the learner wants to learn according to his or her capacity and whether the learner is aware of the processes involved in developing autonomy, 2. the degree of autonomy vary considerably from one learner to another depending on the tasks set and is difficult to assess, 3. the situations in which learners are placed in order to experience autonomy may not culminate in desired expectations and therefore are not totally dependent on learning or teaching strategies, and 4. autonomy is significantly dependent on the political and psychological dimensions of learning which involve interaction within and beyond the classroom, and how such interactions are interpreted differently in various cultures. In other words, much depends on how individual students makes sense of what is offered and whether they want to make sense of it.

Promoting learner autonomy is therefore a huge undertaking on the part of the teacher but it is important because this principle works to activate knowledge conditions within the AL paradigm. In the next section, I elaborate my third teaching principle, ensuring social relevance and raising cultural consciousness.

2.8 Ensuring social relevance and raising cultural awareness

The teaching principle of ensuring social relevance and raising cultural awareness suggests that if what the learners are learning is culturally sensitive and socially relevant, time and effort put into a task is valued, because there is intrinsic motivation or an inherent desire to learn. Richards (1990) suggests that achievability and relevance of content are two important elements in successful teaching. Since culture is deeply rooted in human action, including language, it has to be viewed as part of the classroom experience to make sense of what is being learnt or taught. Thus, the individual learner or teacher cannot be investigated alone: instead, the individual's learning or teaching experience must be explored alongside the community in which the learner lives.

Thus my role as a teacher is to take advantage of knowledge about what goes on within and outside the class and use it. Students need be given an opportunity to be heard and this needs to be emphasized, as I aim to provide contexts for learning which can richly stimulate my learners' thinking about their writing. There is also opportunity for me to

provide scaffolding activities to help them develop stages in their writing, by identifying mediational elements from social and cultural influences around them. It then becomes a community activity, as my students draw upon their knowledge and understanding, both within and beyond the classroom, to help them write as part of the social heritage they belong to, as I explained earlier. This principle is effective to activate the final condition within the AL paradigm – socio-cultural.

The two socio-cultural elements, mediation and scaffolding, are central to the understanding of learning as a social practice in which successful learning conditions are co-constructed between the teacher and the learner. This ties in well with the understanding of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm, which also views teaching as a social practice.

However, my understanding of mediation and scaffolding, two more additional theoretical elements, only deepened once data started to be analysed. These two elements developed following my understanding of the use of AL and PMP in stage one, which was then followed by the development of their respective typologies and teaching strategies in stage two. These elements became instrumental in guiding me to decide on what actions to take in my teaching.

2.9 Stage three of theoretical framework: Mediation and scaffolding

Mediation and scaffolding became my third set of conceptual elements developed for my theoretical framework, as I tried to make sense of my action research project. It was impossible not to include these two concepts within the AL and PMP traditions, which viewed teaching as social practice. Building on the premise that social interaction is pivotal for human cognitive development (Vygotsky 1978); socio-cultural theory places an emphasis on the role of mediation in the language classroom. The importance of mediation in the second language classroom is explored by Lantolf and Thorne (2000) by drawing links to socio-cultural theory, which has its roots in Vygotsky's early work (1978). Lantolf and Thorne (2000) explain the role of mediation through regulation and the use of symbolic tools. Regulation is achieved through linguistic and object-

identifying activities while symbolic tools are used to enhance learning. Kozulin (2003, p. 17) presents the argument that

> *Vygotskian theory stipulates that the development of the child's higher mental processes depends on mediating agents in the child's interaction with the environment. Vygotsky himself primarily emphasized symbolic tools-mediators appropriated by children in the context of particular socio-cultural activities, the most important of which he considered to formal education.*

There are two types of mediation: human interaction and through symbolic artefacts. Teachers in the ESL classroom use interaction all the time to complement the AL notion of viewing teaching as a social practice, and in doing so use various symbolic tools which are culturally connected to their students.

Although teachers may not have control over the range of mediating elements that affect their students, this knowledge helps them to become aware of and use the meditational elements which occur frequently, by using certain teaching strategies or techniques that could more likely affect which types of mediation are most likely to be brought into the classroom. They need to be alert and seize teachable moments and create conditions for learning or suitable spaces in which their students can go to with some guidance. This ties in neatly with Kumaravadivelu's suggestion that social interaction (1994) helps with maximising learning opportunities within a PMP framework.

While mediation is useful for teachers to be aware of, it cannot be fully utilised unless teachers also apply scaffolding in an ESL context. There is no point in seizing teachable moments through mediation unless ESL students who struggle with language issues are prepared to absorb what needs to be taught or learnt. Therefore, scaffolding, my next bridging concept for this study, is needed to help struggling learners reach their potential. It useful to understand what constitutes some of the underlying features of scaffolding, which are listed below, to tie in the link between scaffolding and mediation. These features include:

- *There is an adult and a child or an expert and a novice interacting*
- *Assistance is provided*
- *A range of support is given*

- Support is temporary as the child is assumed to make progress and acquire independence.

(Stone 1998, p.368)

The idea is to use scaffolding support as a tool to help students progress. Even though a teacher uses mediation to help learners make sense of what is important and needed in class, a struggling learner would not be able to fulfil the requirements of the task without adequate scaffolding provided by the teacher.

Earlier in this chapter, I attempt to differentiate how scaffolding has been traditionally viewed and how it has devolved to a lesser and technical meaning (teaching technique) in the ESL world, which is popular but not something I wanted to emulate, as my goal is to be as closely committed to the original conceptualisation of what Vygotsky intended ZPD to address, later developed by Bruner (1972), as scaffolding.

I use mediation and scaffolding as my bridging concepts to cement the link between the three AL conditions and the three PMP teaching principles. Since both traditions view teaching as a social practice and since mediation and scaffolding sit within the parameters of socio-cultural theory, which also works on the premise of social interaction, mediation and scaffolding, this appears to bridge the gap between these two traditions and socio-cultural theory. The bridging is necessary to make a connection between the two traditions and socio-cultural theory as a cohesive conceptual framework for this action research study.

While it liberates teaching practice, Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies also caution teachers to exercise their expertise according to their context. As a second language teacher, I am greatly drawn to his macro strategies, as I myself was trying to break away from tradition, as explained earlier in the first chapter. I find that these macro strategies complement my values and hopes for good teaching and therefore are appropriate for me to adopt as my teaching principles. In Chapter 1, I explained how I struggled with not being able to try out creative teaching methods due to a line manager who was over-controlling and restrictive in her methods. PMP provided the liberation I needed to be free of restricted methods. The teaching principles were liberating for me on a personal level and useful as practical strategies to help my students. These teaching principles serve as tools for me to operationalise the AL perspective.

What really sets PMP apart from other approaches to ESL pedagogy are the three-dimensional parameters of practice that entwine with the AL perspective of understanding the contextual, power-related and socio-cultural underpinnings of writing within the institution. Kumaravadivelu does this by presenting a case on how PMP reflects cultural and social approaches through the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. *Particularity* is about the teacher teaching by making connections with the real life-world of the participants, considering social and historical underpinnings. For me, it means looking at past colonial practices and how they have shaped the way Malaysian society works and further, how that has had a continuing effect on the education system. *Practicality* refers to how teaching practice meets theory in a sensible way. This is shown through my attempt at merging AL with PMP, which provides the practical strategies needed to activate the theoretical conditions within AL. *Possibility* is about the non-native teacher making changes in teaching and learning through his or her own sense making experience, whilst considering local and global influences that both the teacher and students bring to the classroom. In my context, what is important is how I make use of my socio-cultural knowledge and power to help my students learn. Armed with this knowledge, I aim to bring about change through my own teaching, so that I can affect change in the way my students learn to appropriate academic English. Both AL and PMP place importance on the need to view teaching as a social practice. The three parameters of practice encourage a democratic form of pedagogy that is necessary for transforming practice in hierarchical situations such as mine.

2.10 Conclusion

AL allows for the development of a broader and critical understanding of teaching academic writing in a post-colonial context. It is flexible enough to accommodate emerging theoretical concepts needed to examine and explain new practical problems which emerge from each action research cycle of this study. Specific teaching principles drawn from Kumaravadivelu's teaching strategies were investigated due to their consistency with AL. The teaching principles were necessary for the teacher to make sense of the different typologies examined under these three conditions. Taylor (1997) points out that to activate new approaches, efforts

> *to develop the potential of the classroom, structures and strategies are required... However, if strategies are to be more than techniques which rattle like stones in a bucket, they must be located within a coherent framework which is underpinned by some general principles for using experience for learning in professional education. (p.53)*

To take up AL in daily teaching practice requires careful justification in terms of practical teaching strategies to work in the relatively rigid ESL and academic writing context where I worked. Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies (1994) for teaching appeared to connect with the AL perspective quite well, because both theories places emphasis on teaching as a social practice. The connection between the AL perspective and PMP can be further strengthened by principles of mediation and scaffolding taken from the socio-cultural theory (SCT) perspective, influencing second-language theorists into developing ideas for pedagogy, seen as situated in social and cultural contexts. Mitchell and Myles (1998) emphasise that SCT provides second-language learning (SLL) teachers with 'the exhilarating agenda for the renewal of classroom practice'.

The different stages which led to the development of a robust framework for this study help expand the AL repertoire in a way that provides more rich resources for the ESL teacher. AL then becomes more testable in practice and its principles strengthened, as a result. Finally, through the merging of AL and PMP, my aim is to create conditions of learning which ideally encompass the following points, as proposed by Auerbach (1999, p.1). They include: 1) a focus on meaning rather than form (grammatical correctness) encourages writing development; 2) instruction should stress writing for real reasons, to real audiences in order to promote authentic communication; 3) writing should be contextualized and content should be meaningful and relevant to learners; 4) learners need some degree of overt instruction, which includes talk about writing, substantive, specific feedback, and multiple opportunities for revision; 5) social and cultural variation in writing practices and genres needs to be taken into account; and 6) all writing pedagogy reflects a stance about the learner in relation to the social order. The most important point is that teachers need to be conscious of the implications of their practice and of the power of messages their pedagogical practice conveys.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Research design

The methodology employed for this study is action research, working from an understanding of personal and professional experiences. These experiences shaped my teacher intellect and ongoing evolving researcher identity, as I embraced my practical teaching context in the light of theoretical resources for this study. This study is more suited to action research methodology than case study (Woodside 2010; Yin 2014) or ethnographic study (Street 1984; Roper & Shapira 2000). A case study approach would have required a more individual understanding of phenomena over long periods of time, which was not possible for this study as students and programs kept changing for the teacher over the semesters, in short cycles. In the same vein, an ethnographic approach would need the researcher to be immersed in the cultural lives of participants to learn from their behaviours.

This study however happened largely in a classroom setting. It allows me, as practitioner-researcher, to gain an insider or emic perspective (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead 2003) of lived experiences (Niemi et al, 2010) whilst carrying out, reflecting and improvising the ongoing phenomena of teaching and learning in my research context as it unfolds (Patton, 1987). The action research methodology employed for this study also allows for improvements to be suggested, considered and reflected upon, as theories and practices used at different stages are analyzed and made sense of.

The study began with the aim to investigate my students' academic writing problems. Although specific research questions were set, they evolved to include a broader dimension of Academic Literacies as power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions were explored in multiple cycles. When the study's focus extended beyond my immediate classroom context, this small-scale approach provided me with a safe environment to begin confronting complex issues that arose when I explored power, knowledge and socio-cultural notions within the teaching and learning of academic writing in my classroom. I used narrative inquiry and critical incidents to explore the

more complex nuances of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions, which needed to be addressed in a post-colonial context.

As much as this study was about the students' learning difficulties, the study also helped contribute to the teacher-researcher's self-discovery in breaking away from the fear of confronting authority, as a result of past post-colonial experiences. Initial tacit knowledge about power conditions, for instance, played out through reflection on institutional and classroom practice into a more explicit understanding of the manifestation of power within and beyond the classroom setting.

In this chapter, I first provide the context of the study, then a rationale for and definition of the approach to action research used in the study, in order to give a broader view of how it works in the complex research context. Following that, my context is explained in detail and further information about data gathering is provided. Data collection used for the study, procedures for data collection, management and analysis are also outlined. While the overall action research covered multiple cycles of action and reflection over from 2008 to 2010, the focus of this thesis is to unpack dimensions of the study that are relevant to exploring three key dimensions of AL and PMP: power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions, as explicated in Chapter 2.

3.1 Context of study

This study was conducted in a British University in Malaysia. I began my research whilst teaching at the Academic English Language and Learning Support Unit, part-time. My workload varied between 8 to 12 hours of teaching per week. I was assigned to two or three classes per week. Each class would run for four hours per week. I taught Engineering, Business, Computer and Bioscience students. The integrated skills course, which ran for 11 weeks, was compulsory but not credit bearing. This meant that all the Foundation Programme students were required to undergo a three semester Academic English programme to get their academic and English language skills ready for the commencement of their undergraduate programmes.

The syllabus was designed and prepared by the Head of Department, in consultation with other teachers. The design and scope was initially meant to reflect the UK syllabus but changed to accommodate the needs of the local students as time went by. Materials used for teaching were fairly consistent with other teachers using the same printouts. Teachers were given the flexibility to use their own materials, provided they met the requirements of the syllabus. Two textbooks were also prescribed. Assessments were continuous and covered a vast range of skills that students needed to master. Six assessments were given for each semester.

The students who participated in the study comprised Malay, Chinese and Indian students, ranging from 18 to 25 years. In Engineering programmes, 90% of the students were males. In Computer Science, Business and Bio Science, the ratio between male and female students was more balanced. Their first language was mainly Malay or another mother tongue, where English was their second language in primary and secondary school years. However, there were some Business cohort students from different ethnic groups who came from middle to upper class families of mixed parentage and spoke only English at home. There were also cohorts which had predominantly Malay students because they were known as Mara students who were sponsored by the government. These students had more problems with their English language usage compared to those students who had come in after their Fifth Form or SPM (Sijil Penilaian Malaysia) exam, whereas some of the non-Malay students would have gained one more years' experience at senior school and completed their Sixth Form before entering the university. Other non-Malay students, who had the money to pay for their fees, entered the programme after Form Five. The Fifth Form is the last of the 5-year secondary schooling that most Malaysian students undergo. Only Malay students can apply for direct entry to University after that. So, most non- Malay students would have to study Form 6 to enter University.

From the context of this study, it is now useful to understand what action research is and how it can be applied in my research context.

3.2 Action research

McNiff (2013) defines action research by looking at 'action' and 'research' as two separate terms. She says:

> *The action part of action research refers to thinking carefully about the circumstances you are in, how you got here and why the situation as it is, i.e. your social, political and historical contexts. It also involves you thinking carefully about whether your perceptions of the situation are accurate, or whether perhaps you need to review them in light of what you have discovered about the current situation.*
>
> *The research part of action research involves data-gathering, reflection on the action shown through the data, generating evidence from the data and making claims to knowledge based on conclusions drawn from authenticated evidence (2013, p.29).*

McNiff's version of action research is about teachers making a conscientious effort to improve their practice through a series of carefully thought out actions and reflection, drawn from data collected throughout the study. The same emphasis is put forward by Burns (2010, p.10), who notes that 'one of the main aims of action research is to identify a problematic situation or issue that the participants' might face and the 'action part' in action research is where the teacher can 'intervene' to improve practice. For this research context, the problem was about students having difficulty in academic writing. As an action researcher and teacher, I needed to find a way to help them with their writing problems. There was a gap between what they were doing at the time, in the classroom, and what they should achieve as effective academic writers. I wanted to address this gap. According to Burns (2010, p.10):

> *Action research is based on democratic principles; it invests the ownership for changes in curriculum practice in teachers and learners to conduct the research and therefore is empowering.*

However, in order for the action researcher to enact change, as mentioned above, he or she must first undertake a process of action and reflection. McNiff's definition for the research part of action research indicates an exhaustive process of data collection, not unlike Kemmis and McTaggart's spiral model (1988) that shows the process of planning,

action, observation and reflection. It is a classic model most researchers refer to as a starting point, although it has been criticized for being rigid in design by McNiff (1988) and Ebutt (1985), both of whom are cited by Burns (2010). Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, p.18) also admit that the original spiral model is not 'as neat' as the representation of stages of the model suggests. Plans can change unexpectedly and the different stages in action research may overlap, thus adapting to those changes can make the action research process complex. Noffke, in Somekh and Lewin (2005, p.4) explain the action research process as follows:

> *Crucially, action research involves a process of collection and analysis of data that provides the practitioner with some objectivity and distance, looking at his or her own practice from another point of view, sometimes through bringing to bear more than one kind of data in a process of triangulation.*

The process involved for action research consumes much time for the researcher who may refine his or her methodological tools to collect data in a cyclical fashion (O'Brien 2001). The aim is for the teacher not only to improve her practice and theoretical knowledge but also improve the environment or conditions of practice (Carr & Kemmis 1983). Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) explain that action research is part of a socio-cultural experience. The explanation below provides a rationale for practice to be considered as socially and historically formed. The explanation ties in neatly with my overarching theories, AL and PMP, which also views teaching as a social practice. They argue:

> *Through critical participatory action research, people can come to understand how their social and educational practices are produced by particular cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political circumstances that pertain at a particular place at a particular moment in history, and how their practices are reproduced in everyday social interaction in a particular setting because of the persistence of these circumstances and their responses to them. By understanding their practices as the product of particular circumstances, participatory action researchers become alert to clues about how it may be possible to transform the practices they are producing and reproducing through their current ways of working (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon 2014, p. 21).*

In other words, the experiences encountered in the socio-cultural context, which are particular to their own cultural setting, need to be reflected upon, in order to provide teachers with the necessary insight to address the emerging practice issues. The insights gained would help them become more confident about what they know and how they come to know what they know, resulting in improved practice.

This explanation ties in closely with Kumaravadivelu's understanding of PMP as pedagogy of particularity (2006a), which touches on how important it is for teachers to engage with their cultural contexts in order to know their students. The *pedagogy of particularity* paves the way for the teacher to initiate possible changes to improve and even transform his or her practice, therefore confirming PMP as *pedagogy of possibility* (Kumaravadivelu 2006a). Once these two pedagogies are met by the teacher, it is practical for the teacher to combine knowledge in theory with strategies that meet the conditions of practice, or what Kumaravadivelu (2006a) refers to as *pedagogy of practicality*.

Action research, as a methodology, therefore allows for locally situated practice to be investigated, examined, changed and theorized, in order to be understood, analyzed, improved and challenged. EAP or ESL teachers can make decisions about teaching and student learning and link these decisions to the pedagogies of particularity, possibility and practicality, which help to further consolidate the AL understanding of teaching as a social practice.

However, criticisms have been leveled at action research for not being robust enough for several reasons: a) it is generally small scale, b) it can be overly subjective and anecdotal, c) it cannot make a large contribution to causal theories of teaching and learning, and d) it is often reported in a non-scientific format, therefore not adhering to what accounts for the traditional understanding of what constitutes research (Burns 2005).

In the next section, these criticisms are addressed by explaining how action research could help address the evolving research questions for this study.

3.3 Action research: what it means in the context of this research

Although the class context for this study was small, as a teacher-researcher in a hierarchical system, it was thought necessary to begin with a pilot before extending the explorative understanding of this study to several classes for a period of two years. The idea was to see to what extent a complex issue such as power, in a small group, could be examined. It was also a way to develop more pertinent research questions and possible analytic procedures by using and reflecting on the theories, teaching strategies and analytic framework the teacher-researcher was interested in.

Moreover, Schon (1987) suggests that there is no one method that suits the teacher; instead, the teacher experiments and intervenes, as deemed appropriate for the students, based on her knowledge and experience, which he called reflection-on-action. This approach is similar to Kumaravadivelu's PMP concept of not being bound by methods but drawing on the teacher's experience to fully maximize the teaching and learning experience (Kumaravadivelu 1994). In this study, action research and the understanding of what constitutes student academic writing become enmeshed in the complex process of teaching and learning. In discovering the subtle working dimensions of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions affecting my students and my own lived experiences; I also develop a more holistic approach to teaching and build a strong sense of teacher agency when I start to make sense of this experience.

The three pedagogies advocated by Kumaravadivelu can also be realised through the three dimensions that Noffke (1997) posits for sound action research study. She argues that there are personal, political and professional dimensions in any study, helping me to focus on these different dimensions of my action research experience. The personal is about my own development as a teacher, transforming my understandings of teaching and learning and undergoing an identity shift as I emerge from this process, having acquired new forms of knowing and new practices enriched by my encounters with student participants.

The second dimension is political because of the hierarchical system in which I operate. It makes sense to explore power issues and further understand how and why power operates in academic classrooms, and the extent to which it impacts teaching and

learning. This action research study makes it possible for me to confront such issues which have long been suppressed in Asian settings like mine. The politics of global English in post-colonial settings require careful understanding. The third dimension is professional, grounded in the need to understand the entire action research study in relation to my career growth as a teacher, and how that fits in with the general plan or scope of the English Language Teaching department and the institution as one of the leading private educational providers in Malaysia. It is also about understanding how my teaching and my students' learning could contribute to the growth of the institution in terms of learning outcomes students are expected to achieve, especially in relation to the global needs the country aspires to, for its university graduates. This is further linked to the political dimension of TESOL in most educational settings across the world.

The discussion above shows that action research is never linear. The teacher, using her reflections and understandings of practice and theory has the ability to make changes where needed, according to the situation he or she is in. While confronting the personal, political and professional dimensions need to be fully engaged with in a post-colonial context for a more meaningful outcome within the teaching and learning experience.

In keeping with my own creative and expressive interests that complement personal, professional and political dimensions discussed by Noffke (1997), I have used narrative to focus my discussion, to maintain a real, lived resonance for various data collecting encounters. In the next section, narrative inquiry and critical incidents technique, which are needed to select and present selections of data for this study are discussed, based on the research questions.

There was a total of six cycles in this action research study. Each cycle had a different focus: grammar for Cycle 1; power conditions were the main focus of Cycle 2; knowledge conditions were the main focus of Cycle 3; scaffolding and mediation were the main focus of Cycle 4; and socio-cultural conditions became the main focus of Cycles 5 and 6. The PMP strategies that became useful were seen in Cycle 2-negotiated interaction, Cycle 3- promoting learner autonomy and Cycles 5 and 6- ensuring relevant socio-cultural conditions, all of which were used to activate power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions respectively. Scaffolding and mediation became more significant as

bridging principles in Cycle 4, because as I continued to read I became more informed. By the time I reached Cycle 6, all other foci were constantly in my thoughts and I paid attention to whatever foci stood out or needed to be investigated.

Even though the focus was different for each cycle, I collected stories from the time the pilot started. What that meant was that even though my focus was on grammar for Cycle 1, for example, I recorded incidents that highlighted any other kind of issue. At the time, I may not have known that it was more of a power issue than a grammar problem. That is why although a large amount of data was collected for this study, I used most of it to improve my daily practice between semesters. However, when I started reflecting more in the hindsight analysis phases, I selected specific but illuminating data through the CIT, to show how action research really worked via the elements that unfolded across semesters, especially for power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions. The goal was to try and understand my action research in a way that could help contribute further to the AL and PMP theories.

3.4 Narrative inquiry

The decision to use narrative inquiry for this study arose because as each teaching and learning cycle was completed 'difficult' stories about power began to emerge. These power stories were reflected in student letters and interviews which otherwise may have not been discovered. It was important to weave a story that accommodated all the unexpected issues that arose from my data analysis. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) offer a narrative inquiry framework to help researchers understand how stories can be framed sensibly. They are explained as follows: a) all experiences are temporal, in that they are interpreted to suit our autobiographical life experiences as we carry on with our lives (Carr 1986); b) all experiences are situated around social conditions which shape the emotions, thoughts and understanding of the person undergoing the experience; and c) all experiences happen in a specific place which is closely linked to our identities (Silko, 1977).

In a sense, the three dimensions of narrative inquiry can be closely linked to the Academic Literacies theory proposed earlier, as a way to think about my teaching. Since

this theory views teaching as a social practice which cannot ignore the epistemological, cultural and social underpinnings that affect students' teaching and learning, and in my case the teaching and learning of academic writing; these three dimensions add value to my experience as a researcher and a teacher because my story resonates with lived context, using my own personal voice as well as my research participants' voices.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) also suggest that rich qualitative data from an action research study, built on excerpts from narratives collected from participants, add to the creation of what may seem to be the truth. The idea of portraying the truth in stories is not something the action researcher should concern himself or herself with, as Badley (2003, p. 442) points out, citing Clough's (2002) work:

> *…stories should not be tested for their reliability, validity or replicability since they are inappropriate ways of judging biographical truths and stories inevitably reflect something of the teller.*

Clough (2002) is further cited by Badley (2003, p. 442), as trying to present his stories or 'to tell the truth as one sees it' (2002, p. 17). My research story is a culmination of various narratives from personal diaries of my own reflective journey, that of the students and my colleagues. This story is representative of the researcher's version of what is understood as truthful from the entire collection of stories, which are then analysed and interpreted, to provide findings that can be examined within the theoretical framework of this study.

Storied landscapes provide the rationale for the researcher to closely consider the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of his or her research (Clandinin & Murphy, 2010). In doing so, the researcher also reduces the gap between collected data and final interpretation of the data. It is my aim then to link the experiences of my research participants and mine with lived experiences in the real world. The relational context between the researcher, participants and the reader, if seen to be coherent, adds to the ethical validity and reliability of this research.

Following the narrative inquiry explanation for this study, it is helpful to understand why the critical incidents technique was applied to select relevant data. As data was emerging from my daily recording and collection of narratives, critical incidents were needed to

point to bigger issues situated on the teaching and learning periphery. In the next section, a brief history of critical incidents along with the processes involved when applying this technique for data selection is presented. Data selection was based on the narratives gleaned from the data sources.

3.5 Critical incidents as a technique to analyze and present data

The selection of critical incidents for this study was identified through student letters, teacher diaries and student interviews, and was based on the research questions. The critical incidents selected for this study as previously mentioned reflected power, knowledge or socio-cultural issues that took into account a wider understanding of AL and PMP. The stories presented in subsequent chapters may seem minor but the Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) highlights the need to address underlying but serious issues that could affect teaching and learning in a post-colonial context. Although students' written work was analyzed, what became more important was how the students reacted and related to conditions around them (i.e. their environment), in order to write more effectively. The CIT allowed for such subtleties to be uncovered.

The CIT was originally conceptualized by Flanagan (1954) as part of a psychological aviation exercise to train pilots for flights based on their behaviour when flying. Critical incidents were recorded to help or hinder flying missions and requirements for a successful mission were listed from the data that was generated from the recorded incidents. This technique has since been adapted and used in psychology, nursing, management, teaching and other domains of qualitative research (Tripp 1993; Woods, 2015).

Researchers examine those events that are significant for a particular process. They collect examples of critical incidents in the situation under study, and participants give an account of the way in which they act in critical situations or times of crisis. According to Woods, (2015, p.1) critical events are:

> *…unplanned, unanticipated and uncontrolled. They are flashpoints that illuminate in an electrifying instant of some key problematic aspect or aspects of the teacher's role, and which contain, in the same instant, the solution.*

During the research process, anything related to power, knowledge or socio-cultural conditions was recorded in the diary, which was thought to be a critical incident. However, some of my participants expressed their own versions of critical incidents through interviews and letters. It was necessary to select these critical incidents as they were not reflective of the usual occurrences in an ESL classroom. Issues dealing with power, for example, needed to be unearthed and discussed, as they are rarely dealt with in a post-colonial ESL context.

As the above quote suggests, research participants and the teacher give insight into critical events in our lives that have made an impact on our English language and teaching and learning skills. For students, critical incidents allow them to explore their higher-order thinking skills by seeking out alternatives, disagreeing with viewpoints expressed by fellow classmates or teachers and reflecting on their experiences (Woods, 2015, p.10). Critical incidents that appeared to impact my dual roles, both as teacher and researcher, were observed, recorded and selected. They were categorized under certain topics or themes to fit my research questions. A critical incident works like a qualitative study (Woods, 2015, p.11):

> *… where initial conceptions prompt data collection which is then analysed, which then, in turn prompts more data collection, which fills out and refines ideas, and so on.*

Flanagan provides five steps as a guide for researchers, should they choose to use the CIT framework as a critical, yet systematic way, to understand data for research. These five steps include:

1. <u>Having a general aim or purpose for the critical incident and how it should also fit into narrative</u>

The purpose for this study is to find ways to help the students become more confident academic writers. If there are behaviours within or beyond the classroom that indicate a need to intervene, so as not to hinder progress or the improvement of writing conditions,

then the teacher-researcher would intervene and try to find out why such critical incidents occur. In a sense, it is similar to scaffolding where the teacher also intervenes to provide assistance for students when they need it, in order to progress to another level.

2. Making plans to observe and record behaviours that display critical incidents

Drawing up a plan to observe and record data involves time management skills and a commitment to inquiry that is systematic and rigorous. The teacher diaries, student letters and interviews, helped triangulate critical incidents discovered along the journey.

3. Collecting relevant data

Flanagan (1954) explains incident and critical as follows:

> *By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (p. 1).*

Understanding what incidents and critical mean is crucial to observing, recording and collecting the right data. Critical incidents reflecting power-relational, epistemological and socio-cultural conditions were selected according to the AL theory about teaching academic writing.

4. Analysing collected data

After collecting these incidents, the data were analyzed to see if there were emerging themes that corresponded with the research questions.

5. Interpreting and reporting data

The final stage was when interpreted data was reported, according to what was found after triangulating the critical incidents with other data sets.

The CIT helped develop stories embedded in my data collection, extrapolated to understand my action research journey. The stories were selected by paying close

attention to the themes that emerged from AL and PMP, and any critical incident which warranted further attention was examined in relation to the research questions.

In the next section, an explanation is provided for a table which summarizes the chronological development of this study.

3.6 Description of study

This study was carried out across six semesters viewed as six action research cycles over a period of two years, from 2008 to 2010. This action research study applies to all students in the classroom, which also meant recording interactions in the classroom in teacher diaries while teaching. The number of participants varied between cohorts as class size kept changing and students were not obliged to participate. Students had the option to submit letters or turn up for interviews, even if they did not initially sign up for them.

Unlike other types of research, action research rigour comes from the reflective cycles (Herr & Anderson 2005) which I carefully observed and recorded. The written work analysed through these reflective cycles include diagnostic essays and self-assessed portfolios (Semester 0), in-class assignments and assessments, cause and effect essays (Semester 1) and research projects (Semester 2). Semester 0 refers to the first semester the students undergo in the Foundation Programme. Semesters 1 and 2 are subsequent semesters they undertake before finishing the course.

Each of the students' works, alongside my own, were collected and analyzed in three groups: low, average and high test scores. Data were collected through student interviews, teacher diaries and student letters. Interviews conducted were recorded, stored on my laptop/computer and transcribed. Teacher diaries were kept under lock and key. Letters were collected and stored in boxes. They were also scanned and archived under labelled files on my computer. A lot of data was collected; however, not all of the data was selected, as CIT was used to critically illuminate appropriate data for presentation of issues to be explored in a post-colonial situation. The table below provides a summary of the chronological development of this action research study.

Table 3. 1: Summary of action research study

Study Plan/ Time Progression	**Type and number of students**	**Instruments for data collection**	**Method for data selection**	**Data management**
Pilot Study April–June 2008 First Semester (Sem 0) Cycle One	2 Engineering 1 Business	Student letters, interviews, teacher diaries, diagnostic tests	Critical Incidents Technique applied, selecting power, knowledge and socio-cultural based issues from AL theory	1.McCormack analysis method for analysis. 2. interviews taped, transcribed and stored on computer/laptop. 3. letters collected as hardcopies, stored in files and scanned. 4. Teacher diaries, kept safe under lock and key 5. Assessments and written tasks collected, copied and stored safely in boxes
Main Study First Semester (Sem 0) 1. April–June 2009 Cycle Two	 20 Engineering 12 Business	Student letters, interviews, teacher diaries, assessments and written tasks	Same as above but also paying attention to PMP strategies, to gauge how they work with AL	Same as above
2. July–Sept 2009 Cycle Three	17 Engineering 13 Business	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above
3.Oct–Dec 2009 Cycle Four	17 Business 13 Business	Same as above	Same as above but now selecting aspects in class reflecting scaffolding and mediation	Same as above
Main Study Second Semester (Sem 1)	9 Computing 13 Bioscience	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above

4.Jan–March 2010 Cycle 5				
Main Study **Third Semester (Sem 2)** 5.June–August 2010 Cycle 6	9 Computing 13 Bioscience	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above

3.7 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out as part of a reconnaissance phase to gauge if this study was indeed feasible, and how the results would help me plan the steps needed for the larger study. My pilot study involved three students from three different ethnic backgrounds who had low, average and high diagnostic English test scores in each of the Business and Engineering disciplines. These two cohorts (Business and Engineering) were the classes I taught part-time, from April to May 2008. My main study research participants were mostly Business, Engineering, Computing and Bioscience students who were with me from 2009 to 2010.

From this pilot study, I learnt that I needed to continuously inform my teaching repertoire with more theoretical input, and expand my teaching methods to include a wider understanding of culture, knowledge and power issues operating in the classroom. The standard textbook and teaching materials plus assessments carried out using the fixed syllabus were not enough to improve the weaker students' understanding of grammar and academic writing. There seemed to be no interest in learning, if there was not enough teacher support or student engagement in learning.

3.8 Main study

The main study took place from 2008 to 2009. The actual number for each class every semester varied from 13 to 22 students. Participation in research was voluntary but due to

inconsistent class sizes, numbers sometimes exceeded the number determined for purposive sampling and quota selection (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). In the beginning, I purposely selected nine participants based on their diagnostic test writing scores, to maintain rigour and some form of consistency for the actual study. During each selection, I chose three participants for each category of low, average and high scores from the class list to represent a total of nine for each class. I also tried to select three different ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) to represent each of the categories, to gauge if ethnicity played a role in their learning, but this did not get addressed in the end as my focus shifted to include a broader understanding of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions in teaching and learning.

However, the number nine did not make any difference once students started asking me if they could participate, even though they were not selected. In the end, all interview transcripts and letters of research participants who wanted to be involved were analysed. This was because some of the non-selected students requested for their letters to be analysed. They may have asked to participate because they wanted some English assistance with their writing. The results of the students' diagnostic test were made known to them at the beginning of term, before actual teaching began. My research process however, was only explained after the classes began, not wanting to make the selected students feel that they were special of different, based on their diagnostic test results. All research participants had the option to withdraw at any point of time during the research. Hence, the number of participants varied for certain cohorts for the different data collection methods used in this study.

From the explanation of the pilot and main study, the discussion continues with data gathering for this study, which focuses on student letters, student interviews and teacher diaries.

3.9 Data gathering

The choice of research data was based on the nature of this study, which explored sensitive power, knowledge and socio-cultural issues. The data from these sources provide some degree of safety and assurance for stories to be told without repercussions.

The data for this study are from student letters, student interviews and teacher diaries. A total of 61 letters were collected, 72 interviews were conducted and 6 teacher diaries were completed from 2008 to 2010.

3.10 Data source 1: Student letters

The analysis of letters allowed me to understand the students' perspectives on whether my lessons were actually useful or not, to help them improve their language and academic writing skills. I learnt their likes and dislikes about what was being taught in the classroom, and I also learnt to improve on my teaching strategies based on their suggestions. I learnt to identify and deal with issues about power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions which were highlighted in these letters through the analytic use of the critical incidents technique.

Letters of 100-200 words were anonymously typed and placed in a folder outside my office. Although I started the research by saying I wanted to purposely select nine participants based on their diagnostic tests (three high, three average and three low scores) to maintain some form of consistency, that proved to be inadequate, because other students who were not selected wanted their letters to be analysed too. Finally, I analysed all the letters received in my folder. Initially, I asked the students to write about what they learnt or felt about the lessons and where I could have improved. When some of the students' responses came back as unintelligible, I decided to give a few short questions to help them think of what they may be able to write, since they had never done this before. For example, I asked them to share if the lessons were useful or not and give reasons for their answers. I asked them specifically to identify which part of the lesson was useful or otherwise, how they felt about the lesson, and whether they had suggestions to change the way the lesson was presented. I asked them specific questions to elicit yes or no responses to gauge how many of them actually liked or disliked certain learning processes in the class (see letter question sample on p.191).

Writing letters has its particular merits (Clandinin & Conelly 2000), especially in stigma-based or embarrassing situations where research participants may be afraid to speak up (Harris 2002). In my context, for example, the power-relational hierarchical systems that

Malaysian students face from childhood to adulthood make letter writing a more viable option for them, to speak up without fearing repercussions. The common complaint regarding letter writing would be lack of 'immediacy' in replies, as students take time to reflect and respond to my questions and also 'invisibility', in that I do not see my students when they write, and I cannot tell from typed letters which student is participating. However, Harris (2002) suggests that the challenge then is for the researcher to arrive at a balance in being sympathetic while not losing interest in the core issues.

Other benefits to having letters for this action research study are:

- to elicit responses that may not have been revealed in the interviews or diaries;
- to encourage students to write and express their thoughts and feelings in a non-face to face manner;
- to study, in detail, the kinds of comments students highlight in order to understand the effects of my own teaching principles and students' reactions to them;
- to allow time for students to slowly develop and write down their thoughts after reflecting on them, since language and learning theories also suggest that writing produces thinking; and
- to encourage students to remember each lesson's features, and how that might help them realise the potential of learning something new and relevant for their needs.

3.11 Data source 2: Teacher diaries

Teacher diaries were maintained each semester for the period 2008– 2010 to record teacher observations, classroom interactions and activities between the teacher-researcher and students during the teaching and learning of academic writing. Each entry was between 150-300 words. The teacher-researcher explained that diary recordings would be an ongoing activity until the teaching ended. The diaries reflect the researcher's perceptions of activities within and beyond the classroom. Much planning and thinking go into diaries (Snowden 2015), making it one of the more rigorous tools for research.

Diaries are popularly used within a social science research context to collect information about detailed historical and personal information (Corti 1993; Elliot 1997; Snowden 2015). Corti (1993) suggests that diaries capture 'pictures of social reality'. He further outlines how the diary trumps interviews in terms of collecting data. Unlike the interview method which requires meeting people face to face and, planning interviews at a later date, the diary is a safe alternative to air views privately and write events as soon as they happen, providing further or additional data to be triangulated with other data types. The writing remains fresh and raw as feelings and behaviour are expressed and explored, often culminating in reflection.

Other benefits include:

- recording observations of emerging patterns from my teaching, from different reactions of students according to their disciplines;
- making speculative evaluations of what works and what doesn't for my students, according to my selected teaching principles;
- testing what I am reading in my research literature;
- identifying themes related to my research questions and see how they fit into my write-up;
- reflecting and thinking about how to improve teaching and learning; and
- attempting to understand students' problems and learning needs and finding ways to provide solutions.

3.12 Data source 3: Student interviews

In this research context, the interview with students paved the way for participants to be more open and honest with their feelings and experiences. The number of interviewees varied for different cycles. For the pilot study (or Cycle 1) in 2008, a total of six interviews were conducted (two each for pre-programme, during programme and post-programme periods of study). However, for the actual study, only pre and post study interviews were conducted, as I found this did not allow for students to reflect enough to realise any long-term impact in learning.

For Cycle 2 in 2009, both single and group interviews were conducted. Group interviews were conducted to see if students responded differently to interview questions when placed with peers. In some instances, I found they were not as open as they were in the letters, or when they spoke to me individually. They seemed not to want to challenge their friends' responses and seemed to generally agree with what was discussed. A total of four group interviews were conducted, comprising two groups of five and one with three students, amounting to 13 students in total, and two other groups with three and one with four students, amounting to 10 students in total. However, following some negative feedback from a couple of students about not being able to open up in front of their peers, single interviews were once again used to collect data in Cycle 3.

The Computing students did single interviews (a total of 18), as this was their first attempt at being involved in my research. The Bioscience students, however, asked if they could be interviewed in groups and did so in three groups of two and one group of three students (a total of nine), since they already had single interviews in First Semester. The students also requested fewer interviews as their study workload had increased; hence one interview per cycle was conducted for Cycles 3 to 5. For Cycles 5 and 6 in 2010, email interviews were conducted, as the students had more work, and could not meet up for face-to-face interviews.

Interviews seem popular with qualitative research, mainly because they allow for an in-depth exploration of feelings and perceptions of participants (Gill et al., 2008). They are helpful when interviewing second language learners, for example, because the interviewer can adjust the level of language used to engage with or comprehend the views of participants.

Other benefits for having interviews are:

- to probe students' feelings, perceptions and attitudes about learning academic writing, the course and my teaching;
- to explore mismatches/tensions between students' perceptions and my observations, theories, and practice;
- to gauge whether students understand what is being taught;

- to evaluate what students need or prefer in terms of learning;
- to understand students as fellow human beings with feelings and thoughts; and
- to understand students' culture, family and social background, and to explore whether and how these factors might impact their learning.

In the next section, two analytic phases are discussed to give an idea of how data was analysed at different stages of this study.

3.13 Data analysis

The initial analysis began by using the theories used for this study (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). What this meant was coding involved identifying an idea or ideas within the large pool of data (letters, diaries, interviews) that related to the research questions. Themes were based on issues surrounding power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm. Themes were also gleaned for reflecting the teaching principles from PMP. Research questions were continuously reflected on and first thoughts that came to mind were written down.

For example, for the theme power, specific examples of power typology in the data were identified to fit the theme. Although predetermined codes existed or the types of power were already identified, they were redefined as new codes emerged. New codes emerged as each stage of study was completed, because I was not only reading more about the types of power but finding new ways of categorizing these power types into broader definitions, which could also be linked to knowledge and socio-cultural conditions. Some of the literature used to discuss the theories for this study in Chapter 2 were later redefined or supported by other new readings which emerged through subsequent action research cycles. As a result, codes that did not necessarily fit with the earlier theme-based analysis were also examined, as new critical understandings emerged. The CIT for selecting data made the researcher aware of the need to stay open to all types of emerging data.

The criticism with this approach is that it can be too focused on the researcher's existing views, especially when, as a result of limited findings, interviewees could be further

probed to elicit answers. To counter this criticism, an audit trail was created to have a clear record of all that was undertaken for collecting data, keep track of the processes involved and make sure all participants' views were considered (see Appendix I). The audit trail inspiration came from a qualitative research talk presented by a professor, specializing in qualitative research methods at University Malaya, in Kuala Lumpur in 2010. The professor had some time to look at my work and supported my use of the audit trail.

The use of action research and the presentation of data using narrative inquiry is a way to understand the storied landscapes in the interviews, letters and diaries analyzed. More detailed analysis was carried out by employing McCormack's (2004) four-stage analysis pattern, especially in the hindsight analysis phases, comprising:

- elaboration and logical explanation of story;
- language of story;
- context and culture of the story; and
- unexpected elements form the story.

McCormack's analysis method provided the rationale to explain the selected critical incidents in my classroom, in a clear and rigorous manner, maintaining consistency across the analysis in each of the three main foci for the data chapters.

In sections 3.14 and 3.15 ethics and validity are outlined to show the processes involved in making this research as rigorous and trustworthy as possible.

3.14 Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant university in 2007 to conduct this study after submitting a brief proposal covering (see Appendix A):

- the research questions;
- aim of the study;
- details about research participants for study;
- data collection instruments;

- the participant consent form; and
- the schedule that explained research participants' roles.

In preparation for ethical clearance, I followed guidelines set by the university and prepared all the necessary documentation listed above to assist with my data collection as a means to complete a certain stage of my PhD. In hindsight, as I began unpacking my data over time, I was and still am wrestling with the idea that I am revealing untold or unexpected elements in my data, which would not have been unearthed had I not embarked on this action research. As Newkirk (1996, p.3) points out:

> *because we present ourselves as completely well-meaning, we find ourselves in moral difficulty when we write 'bad news' in our final rendering. Even though the negative might be balanced by the positive, and even though we have carefully disguised the identity of the person we render, we (and often the subject) feel as if a trust has been betrayed. And often it has.*

Notions of power are exceptionally difficult to underpin and discuss in hierarchical systems without addressing all three personal, professional and political dimensions (Noffke 1997); however, I am aware of the fact that I also had a moral obligation to stay true to my female Malaysian Indian identity in an ever-changing Malaysian historical and socio-political climate. What I did not realise at the time was that my identity was also evolving. I could not just be content with the notions I grew up with, when the whole world was changing. I therefore had to wrestle with notions of trust because when I initially wrote about issues dealing with power, it was an analysis contemporaneous with the class. This was later expanded into more reflective understanding of the classroom based on influences from my literature review about power, and my own changing understandings of what I perceived as right or wrong in decisions I had made at the time about teaching and learning.

Whatever I recorded in my personal diaries about my struggles with my students and colleagues in terms of what ensued in the classroom, was initially put down as a personal reflection; but as time went by and I began to question the hierarchical system that I was operating in, I had to confront my colonial insecurities and address pertinent power issues that otherwise would have been ignored or quashed. Although most of my colleagues gave me permission to write about what occurred, not many of them know the outcome

of my reflections as perhaps ‘bad news in our final rendering’. And further, as Newkirk (1996) notes, because of the length of this study and also because I had left the institution after the data gathering was conducted.

It was not my intention to deliver ‘bad news’ but rather to highlight the inevitable need to improve practice; I had to develop a sense of agency which meant taking the steps to raise sensitive issues between work colleagues in an oppressive system that otherwise would never get discussed. It was also about how critical incidents affected the whole class rather than the individuals in question; but the individuals’ actions had an impact on the practices in the classroom and that needed to be examined in relation to the whole activity system within the institution. This action research therefore compelled me to take action. It then became my goal to develop meaningful representations of the teaching and learning community in my context, with the aim to contribute to new knowledge in research and improved practice.

Student participants were given the option of freely choosing to participate at any point of the research and this was conveyed to them from the outset. Their contribution through letters and interviews would remain anonymous when used for analysis, and they were given the option of listening to their interviews and reading their transcripts. They were also aware of me recording in my diaries whatever I thought was relevant or critical in the classroom. The project information was in writing in a participation and consent form which they voluntarily signed.

At the time, I did not think much about what ‘informed consent’ meant (Zeni 1998, p.15) and just prepared my documents for the students to sign, according to university regulations. Smith (1990) according to Zeni (1998), illustrates that the complex yet subtle ethical dilemmas of action research are not fully understood by the teacher-researcher until the project is undertaken. This can be quite challenging because of the length of time involved in undertaking action research. While my students and colleagues were aware of what I was doing at the time, and were given the opportunity to read and hear their interviews, many eventually moved on and did not keep in touch with me, even though I sent emails to let them know the progress of the research. It could also have been because they viewed me as a teacher with authority and therefore having some form

of power over them. I eventually left my workplace due to migration and family commitments and now, as I write up the stories from my collected data, my reflections over time have been deeply affected by many further experiences.

While all my participants were informed that their recorded interviews could be listened to and the transcripts made available for viewing, only a couple of students came back to listen and read their transcripts in the early part of the data gathering process. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the teacher-researcher in developing a nurturing role that ensures there is a balance between the students' needs and the teacher's professional role (Mohr 1996). I strove hard to ensure that the theoretical constructs used for this study helped minimise any words the participants may have used which I perceived as having some implications arising from power, knowledge or socio-cultural conditions.

3.15 Validity

Validity, according to Watkins (1991, p. 4), 'has many forms'. Watkins cites Brinberg and McGrath (1985) to explain three main forms of validity. These include: validity in terms of its 'value' or the nature of the action research project; 'correspondence' or how the methodology is explained; and 'robustness' or suitable criteria used for data selection and analysis (Watkins, 1991, p.5). Validity in action research is different to validity in empirical studies. This is why, as action researchers or qualitative researchers, we should not comply with rules set by scientific inquiry approaches (Denzin, 2009), because the nature of action research varies considerably from quantitative studies. Action research, according to Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and MacGuire (2003, p.17) is valid and due to:

> *...expert research knowledge and local knowledges are combined and because the interpretation of the results and the design of actions based on those results involve those best positioned to understand the processes: the local stakeholders. Further, action research meets criteria of validity testing more effectively than do most other forms of social research. Action research projects test knowledge in action and those who do the testing are the interested parties for whom a base result is a personal problem.*

The validity explanation above directly links with Noffke's personal, professional and practical dimensions (1997) in action research. The personal dimension can be seen

through engaging with local knowledge and testing interested participants. The professional dimension can be seen by combining research knowledge and local knowledge and knowledge in action. Checkland and Holwell (1998, p.1) affirm this view by suggesting 'claims to validity requires a recoverable research process based upon prior declaration of the epistemology in terms of which findings count as knowledge will be expressed'. The practical dimension comes to life when personal and professional dimensions are seen to be operational.

Anderson and Herr (1999) provide a comprehensive list of validity criteria for practitioner research that helped clarify my research design. They label the range of possible approaches to validity as outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and/or dialogic validity. For *outcome* validity, I examined whether my actions addressed my research questions, and how I reflected and improved on my teaching for further practical action. In my situation, my reflections on each completed action research cycle in relation to how I may have conducted my actions during teaching were recorded in my diaries. They were critically examined through analysis of selected critical incidents, as soon as each class was taught.

Process validity places importance on the detailed planning of actions, the reviewing of outcomes and the careful selection of what constitutes good data to be examined, so that findings will not be superficial or partial. This helps address the problem of accounts being too anecdotal. An exhaustive process inquiry (Johnson 2002) requires careful deliberation on actions and immediate recordings of reflections afterwards, to build on what did or didn't work. My audit trail was useful in this regard, ensuring that data was systematically stored and analysed.

The third type of validity, which signifies the combining of various democratic 'voices' around the researcher to lend credit to his or her claims, is *democratic* validity. Niemi et al. (2010) consider polyvocality or the use of multiple voices to authenticate the storied lives of research participants. They suggest that the researcher could use an authoritative voice (their interpretation of the stories they hear), a supportive voice (the stories of participants) and an intermediary voice (a neutral meeting of the two voices). My version of democratic validity arose from a combination of stories from different sources,

coupled with my own observations of what was considered to be true events. There was no intermediary voice as suggested by Niemi et al. (2010).

Catalytic validity is whether the research results in some kind of change, or transformation in the participants or the researcher. For me, I highlight the changes I undergo and those observed in my students as I complete each cycle. Finally, *dialogic* validity dictates that the study should be subjected to public scrutiny. Any form of presentation, publication or review is welcome to encourage debate and ongoing discussion about action research within the field, and this would help counter the criticism of action research being non-scientific in format (Johnson 1997). This is met through my presentations at conferences, paper publications (see appendices C and D) and the thesis, allowing for ongoing dialogue. Not all types of validity could be covered, as my research data was largely dependent on critical incidents that emerged from the narrative inquiry of this research. Although the aim was to be as rigorous as possible with validity, not all different types of validity could be explored due to time constraints and because it was beyond the scope of thesis. However, there was a genuine attempt to keep the flavour of the stories by reporting them as accurately as possible.

3.16 Contemporaneous analysis phase

There are two phases to the data analysis for this study. The first or contemporaneous phase involved daily or weekly teaching activities, mainly focusing on language teaching and learning issues which needed to be addressed within the scope of academic writing. In the teacher diaries, activities in the class were detailed as much as possible, as and when each class unfolded. The diary contains descriptions of what was taught, what I thought students learnt, observations of student behaviour and speech, classroom dynamics, level of student engagement, and comments on what did or did not work in class, according to my teacher perceptions. Elements beyond the classroom, which contributed to teaching and learning, were also recorded in diaries, especially if they affected the way students and the teacher operated on a daily basis.

The use of teacher diaries to record data allowed me to note whatever I thought was useful as it happened, so that the rich spontaneity of the events would not be lost. It also

allowed for information to be written as accurately as possible before details were forgotten (Palojoki 1997). It provided an avenue to capture the teacher's raw emotions and the observed emotions of the students firsthand. Issues related to power which were quite sensitive were captured in the teacher diaries, as this was not confrontational like interviews (Alaszewski 2006), where students may not necessarily open up to questions about power. Meth (2003), in her research, analysed South African women's diaries to capture their beliefs and their social selves. She used the diaries in tandem with interviews and discovered that the women could be empowered through diary writing, and this was my experience too.

The letters from the students highlighted teaching and learning issues, while the interviews allowed me to probe their thought processes about learning, their personal and background information about schooling years from primary to secondary level, their families and their perspectives about educational policies of Malaysia, political and socio-cultural issues within the country and global issues in general.

In the students' letters, for example, they expressed what teaching strategies worked or did not work and I found the feedback useful in revamping my strategies as each cycle of action research finished. Since time was short for each cohort and I had to complete aspects of the syllabus fairly quickly within the semester, improvements or changes to my strategies occurred for the following cohorts, demonstrating catalytic validity. In terms of language teaching throughout this study, I focused on grammar, content, structure and style of academic writing. Reflection and action during this contemporaneous analysis phase occurred on a weekly basis.

The next section, which is the highlight analysis phase, is when I was able to reflect more deeply on the cycles and make sense of critical incidents that were selected from my stories. There were times however when I used to go back to my contemporaneous phase data or critical incidents and reflect on them again in hindsight.

3.17 Hindsight analysis phase

The second or hindsight analysis phases of the action research project involved going back to all my data and reflecting on deeper issues like power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions which were important to be addressed in order to improve the teaching and learning of academic writing, in line with the AL perspective. The realization of what issues to explore and interpret sometimes came about much later, partly due to the reconnaissance phase in the action research cycle, which required further ongoing reading and reflecting, thereby causing action to be taken only in the subsequent cohort. It also meant going back to my theoretical framework and my research questions to consider links that could be made with the data.

The hindsight phase also enabled me to delve more deeply into my teaching principles – negotiated interaction, promoting learner autonomy and ensuring socio-cultural conditions – as well as my embedded teaching principles of scaffolding and mediation, which were relevant to the entire learning experience. As each cycle was completed and also long afterwards, I could reflect on which principle had or had not worked and under what circumstances they operated. I could also reflect on scaffolding and mediation, those embedded principles I used to help enact with my main teaching principles to ascertain to what extent these principles worked.

The contemporaneous analysis phase of the action research cycle provided me with many issues to reflect on. Each cycle, research questions and actions grew out of the contemporaneous analysis phases. However, to understand these issues more deeply I embarked on the hindsight analysis phase to reflect more deeply on power, knowledge and socio-cultural issues which I deal with in subsequent chapters of this study. The personal, professional and political dimensions (Noffke 1997; Varghese et al. 2005) of action research touched on earlier became closely intertwined in this complicated journey, which forced me to question my own perceptions about teaching and learning in a confronting way.

The issue of power relations, in particular, was difficult but crucial; and it needed to be addressed, unpacked and understood in line with the socio-cultural and historical context in order for me to be an effective catalyst for change, so that teaching and learning

conditions could be improved. The difficulty in unpacking power issues, for example, was made easier with questions I adopted from understanding Engestrom's division of labour within the human activity system (1987), as explained in Chapter 2. Engestrom's work is an extension of the CHAT theory first popularized by Leontiev (1978). I was inspired by Popova's questions (2014), based on Engestrom's work, to help the English language teacher think about his or her own activity system within a structured organization. Subsequently, I developed my own questions (Abraham forthcoming) to suit my own context and they included the following:

- Who was the subject? Was it me or the learners? Or was it my colleagues?
- What was the object of my writing tasks?
- What tools did I use to accomplish the writing tasks/ did I make use of all that was available? Was I aware of the culturally mediated tools that existed?
- Who made up the teaching and learning community within and beyond the system? What socio-cultural influences affected the students' learning and my teaching? In what way was power evident in the division of labour, and how did it affect the teaching and learning within the activity system in my classroom?

The questions listed above helped me to think carefully about my choices in teaching and how that impacted my learners, as I reflected on my hindsight analysis phase for this action research, which in turn helped me to improve my practice and change conditions. Kemmis (2008, p.26) argues that:

> *Educators are thus confronted by an individual choice: to conduct, their practice by praxis, oriented by tradition and by consideration of the good for each person and the good for humankind as these are expressed in education, or to conduct themselves as operatives of the education systems in which they find themselves, following the rules and procedures that constitute the functional rationality of these systems.*

This position led me to make a change to address circumstances affected by my past historical and social influences. It made me think of Noffke's (1987) professional, political and personal dimensions which interrelate. When these dimensions become closely intertwined, practice is informed by praxis. These dimensions reflect 'the shared

perplexities, uncertainties, contradictions, conflicts and problems about contemporary educational practice' (Kemmis, 2005, p.18). They challenge the practitioner-researcher to think about transformative change. The action researcher's deep investment in practice, as a result of taking a research perspective to the whole exercise, makes it more meaningful. Kemmis (2005) provides a brief summary of quality action research, noting it is 'in and not for the school' (p.18) and a 'deep, rich way' (p.18) to engage with the participants as part of a wider community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is therefore, important to eventually set up a 'communicative space' (Kemmis, 2005, p. 14) between the teacher and the learners and the wider community, to explore and understand further issues that may arise.

By gaining an insider perspective on what I learned to call my activity system, I realised I did not want grammar lessons, for example, to be just an operational element of the syllabus if I wanted my learners to progress to critical levels of literacy (Green 1988). I was actually breaking away from fixed methods (Kumaravadivelu 1994). My goal was to steer away from the routine of teaching grammar from prescribed textbooks and allow students to make meaning for themselves, promoting learner autonomy by taking the initiative to discover for themselves through their own research-based initiatives, what certain grammatical items mean and by linking these items to a broader understanding of the global world.

The subsequent action research cycles involved looking at two student assessments for the first semester, which included paragraph writing, and referencing, paraphrasing and summarizing. Following that, I looked at classification writing essays, process and cause and effect essays for the second semester. For the third semester, I undertook cycles on oral presentation, and questionnaire development for research reports. All these cycles represented different cohorts at different times of the year. For each cycle, I designed specific research questions to seek answers for critical issues I deemed relevant and thus needed to be addressed. For the thesis, I used both contemporaneous and hindsight analysis to reflect on my findings.

The analytic phases within several of the action research cycles helped me to draw out important contributions to this research by using analytical conceptual tools from AL and

PMP. In short, through my hindsight analysis phase, Engestrom's division of labour work, for instance, was instrumental in making me think about a different way to analyse conditions in my classroom, which was not altogether possible with AL or PMP alone. Through my hindsight analysis, I was able to use this knowledge as a tool to assist me in developing a more robust understanding of the socio-cultural elements of my setting. My methodological approach to this study was therefore undertaken with an understanding that good action research needs to be supported with sound theoretical and practical principles.

I have offered this detailed summary of each of the cycles of the action research to summarise the study as a whole, since the data chapters do not follow a chronological order. Rather, they are organized around key themes related to this study's research questions and the theoretical challenges offered by investigating teaching practice in an EAP classroom in a Malaysian university. Each chapter is introduced through the use of a critical incident in the form of a story. Chapter 4 focuses on power conditions in the classroom, where different power typologies are identified and examined, and the extent to which negotiated interaction as a teaching principle is successful in reducing power conditions is discussed. The focus of Chapter 5 is to examine the types of knowledge conditions prevalent in the classroom, and how these conditions were used to translate the teaching principle of promoting learner autonomy, as significant in increasing literacy levels. In Chapter 6, socio-cultural conditions are examined within and beyond the classroom, using the teaching principle of ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts to translate these conditions into action. Students' literacy levels were also explored. In all three data chapters, embedded teaching principles, scaffolding and mediation, were also examined to see to what extent they helped support my main teaching principles. The analysis of practice and theory were combined at the time of each cycle and its reflective phases, as well as the added hindsight derived from the development of the thesis.

I conclude this chapter with an example of an action research cycle focusing on grammar.

3.18 How the grammar focus which began in Cycle 1, led to changes in the teaching of grammar for other cycles, for this action research study

In this prelude section to the analytic chapters, an example of the action research phases for this study is explained in detail, with a focus on grammar for Cycle 1. The experience and information gained from Cycle 1 then feeds into other cycles. Although they have different foci, this allows me as a action research teacher to be more reflective in my analysis of data, as new findings emerge. Grammar is one aspect of English language that needs to be taught – not in isolation but as part of the tripartite model proposed by proponents of the AL framework, as explained in Chapter 2 (Lea & Street 1994).

An explanation of each action research cycle for grammar is provided here to give an overview of the study that includes both hindsight and contemporaneous analysis phases, before the data chapters are presented. The grammar focus began in Cycle 1, with the pilot study for this action research. Although the focus was grammar, the grammar aspects were still covered in Cycles 2 and 3 as the action research study continued, because new ideas and understandings emerged for the teacher as each cycle was completed. The focus for Cycle 2 was power conditions and knowledge conditions for Cycle 3. After Cycle 3, students focused on paragraph writing and essay writing. Grammar was less emphasized, although they knew it was important. I paid more attention to scaffolding and mediation in Cycle 4. For Cycles 5 and 6, I looked at socio-cultural conditions. Even though the focus was different in each cycle, I recorded anything critical that needed to be discussed. So, if the focus of a particular cycle was power conditions, for example, I still recorded critical incidents related to grammar or knowledge, if I thought it was important.

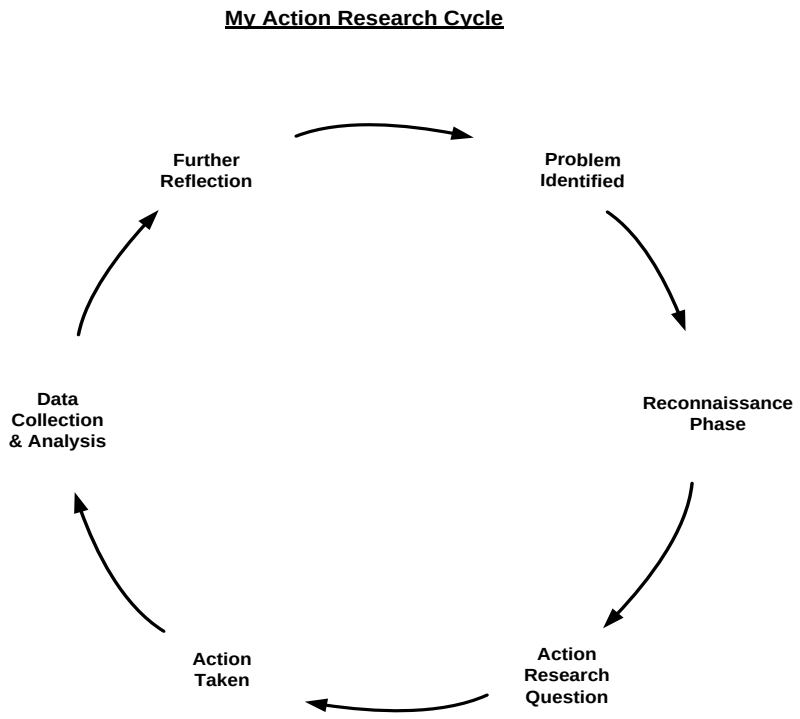

Figure 3. 1: My action research cycle

3.18.a Analysis in the contemporaneous and hindsight phases: Making sense of grammar issues in Cycle 1 (April–June 2008, pilot cohort)

In Cycle I of this action research study, after marking their diagnostic tests upon entry into university, I found that my students had serious grammar problems along with their structural and content development issues in academic writing. I tried to make the learning of grammar more enjoyable and was hoping this would inspire them to make an effort to minimise their mistakes in academic writing.

In the reconnaissance phase of the action research cycle, as shown above, recognizing that grammar problems were rife, I attempted to make sense of their learning experience and my own teaching experience in response. I then reflected on how the AL perspective was evident in my teaching or their learning experience and to what extent my teaching methods affected the overall learning experience in line with the AL perspective to teaching academic writing. My research question for this cycle was: how do I help my students minimise their grammar problems in academic writing?

During this time, I was influenced by creative methodology and decided to take action and show the first episode of the British situational comedy, 'Mind Your Language' via the internet in the classroom. It was mainly about how a group of migrant students from various parts of the world learn English from a British teacher in a British language school. It was a huge hit among Malaysians in general and I wanted to see how my students would respond to it.

> *'What I enjoyed about today's class was that through watching the clip, it enhanced our listening and observation skills. We learnt the basic dos and don'ts of English while having a good time. Everyone was very receptive towards this teaching method and everyone was rather animated about the jokes in the clip' Letter from Sammy, Engineering student*

When I analyzed the data for this study, comments such as these from a student letter about the lesson seemed to suggest they enjoyed the video and the interaction afterwards. They felt that it was fun and invigorating to learn grammar in that manner. However, their sentence and paragraph writing activities revealed they were still making mistakes. I realised then that that they made these mistakes because they were not aware of them, or they had been doing them for so long, without making a conscientious effort to correct their mistakes.

Upon further reflection, in the hindsight phase, I realised that making the class interesting and engaging through creative teaching pursuits was not enough. They understood the funny bits and we discussed the mistakes made by the migrants in the video. I explained how they could have improved their conversations by giving examples. Of the three teaching principles, which I used for my teaching, using negotiated interaction, promoting learner autonomy and ensuring socio-cultural relevance, two were evidently effective. The students were able to see that they were not different from the video migrants in making grammar mistakes and could relate to the cultural similarities in the video characters portrayed (e.g. an Indian of Hindu faith, a Chinese of Taoist belief and a Pakistani Muslim), especially since some of their comments reflected their beliefs and everyday living practices. They could negotiate such difficulties with me and explain how some of these difficulties came about.

While there was awareness among the class about common grammar problems in their writing, I noticed that the more vocal students were normally the ones who were competent in English. Culturally, the weaker students could relate to the video migrants, but I was wrong in assuming that they had the ability to transfer that knowledge to their academic work. After marking some of their written work following that video, I realised I needed to scaffold elements of grammar and then provide exercises to help them consolidate their understanding of the grammar aspects taught.

While my interests and personality had some impact on the selection of material I thought would develop a cultural understanding towards how language was learnt (Peiser & Jones 2014), it did not fully resonate with every student in the way I had hoped it would. Thus, I realised that I needed to find a way to reconcile my professional understanding of teaching (Korthagen 2004) with my own understanding of self (Varghese et al.2005) in relation to what the students needed. The action research cycle enabled me to reflect on my own understanding and development as an individual teacher in relation to the culturally rich classroom in which I was teaching. Varghese et al. (2005) suggest that:

> *in order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them (p. 22).*

In my attempts to investigate who I was as a teacher and how that affected my teaching plans, I started to ask pertinent research questions. I began by asking questions in the contemporaneous analytic phases of each cycle. As each cycle was completed, I started asking further questions and that became more redefined in the hindsight analysis phase. Not only did I need to make sense of the goals I wanted to achieve with the students, but make sense of my own identity through this journey. I was mindful of the cultural dimensions working in the classroom, and my aim was to connect with the institution and the students to fulfill my professional, cultural and political roles (Noffke 1997).

3.19 Analysis in contemporaneous and hindsight phases: Making sense of grammar issues in Cycle 2 (April–June 2009 cohort)

In Cycle 1, through the pilot study, I had discovered that learner autonomy was not strongly evident in my students' learning of grammar and I wanted to tease that out. As part of the reconnaissance phase, I read more about student autonomy and tried to make sense of it within the AL framework. My research question for this cycle or Cycle 2 was: how do I promote learner autonomy in my students? I played a game with the students, using pronouns as a grammar element that they needed to work on. They had to work in groups and solve a quiz. They were required to match eight different types of pronouns to corresponding examples given in sentences. When I was analysing the students' letters, most were happy with the game but one letter caught me by surprise:

> *'I did not like the grammar game we played as the first group to complete would score additional marks for the next test.... firstly, some groups had more people than others, which made it unfair...secondly, the game could have gone on forever as we were not given a time limit...'*
> *Letter, Lena,– Business student*

I did not expect that something that I had negotiated with the students at the start of the game would cause this student to be unhappy. I assumed that the idea of the winning team getting an extra mark each for their next assessment task would make the class happy. As for the time factor, I thought I had said 20 minutes for the task but the student claimed she did not know about the time limit. However, there were also students who liked the game and admitted learning from the experience:

> *Student: 'The game was enjoyable, fun'.*
> *Me/Teacher: 'Did you get anything else out of it'?*
> *Student: 'At, least I know what a pronoun is now. Before this, I don't know what is verb or subject...'*
> *Interview, Jim, Engineering student*
> *'The grammar game was interesting. I liked the way we were allowed to present our research in front of everyone. It was interesting to see different teams come up with their own different ways of presenting their topics and from that, I have learnt a lot by just comparing their strengths and weaknesses. I realised too that*

by presenting the topics, it has increased my understanding of the subject tremendously.'

Letter, Mark , Bioscience student

I realised then that each individual is unique and each would have his or her preferences in learning and may react differently to my teaching methods. The awarding of marks was not an issue for this student, who managed to see the bigger picture of the activity, which was learning as an autonomous and collective experience. As their teacher, I needed to understand how best to include every individual's concerns before I attempted to make changes to my next cycle of teaching.

As I reflected further during my hindsight analysis phase in Cycle 2, on my desire to promote autonomy, I felt I failed to understand the culture of group work and individual preferences and clearly did not emphasize certain rules of the game when I interacted with them at the start. I did not think that the marks were important; but I did not realise how different cultural groups or individuals put a premium on marks as an indication of high achievement until I read some of the student interview comments.

However, on a more positive note, some students did learn from this game as shown by this letter:

Today we had a grammar game on pronouns. Everyone was divided into groups and every member was asked to jot down all the sentences which were pasted around the walls. After that, each group had to brainstorm the type of pronouns from each sentence. Even though we were given some clues on the whiteboard, it was still a hard task. I had difficulties on identifying the pronouns and this might be due to my insufficient knowledge in basic grammar. I learnt there were several types of pronouns such as personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and demonstrative pronouns. They are useful to construct a sentence. I also did some basic exercises on grammar from the handout given. They were quite simple and easy to understand. But still, to improve my grammar, I might have to refer to other online exercises.

James, Engineering student

James realised that the grammar game showed he had to improve because he believed he had insufficient knowledge in grammar. He was already thinking of looking for more resources to help him improve, indicating the potential for him to become more autonomous. The different experiences shared by these students made me think of how I should teach next time, and whether I should revamp my teaching strategy.

3.20 Analysis in contemporaneous and hindsight phases: Making sense of grammar issues Cycle 3 (July– September 2009 cohort)

In Cycle 3 I realised that not all students were benefitting from my method of teaching grammar, and I needed to find a way to get my teaching principles to work together, taking into account the students' backgrounds, history and social influences. I began to read more about ensuring socio-cultural relevance for my students, taking into account their epistemologies and evolving identities. I also tried to work on my negotiation skills as a teacher. While there was improvement in some of their written work, students were still making mistakes in grammar. My research question for this cycle was: how do I teach grammar, incorporating negotiated interaction, learner autonomy and ensuring socio-cultural conditions as my teaching principles, within the AL perspective?

I wanted to try another method of teaching, to see if this was more feasible as an approach to a more comprehensive view to teaching grammar. I asked the students for this cycle to give an oral presentation of any aspect of grammar which I gave them in a list. For example, they could choose to do prepositions, or verbs or adjectives. They had to work in groups of four or five and explain each aspect with examples, using any method of conveyance in a fun or engaging manner. They had a week to prepare and every team or group would get a copy of their other team friends' slides or notes, which they had to photocopy for themselves, to enhance their own understanding of each chosen aspect from the list. As I analysed my diaries, the excerpts below highlighted a few important issues that needed to be addressed.

> *'Jake was upset, he did not agree to go on the following week just because another person from the earlier group came in late and delayed the presentations' – my diary entry*

'The whole class applauded, it was fun, enjoyable and even though Aida had lost her voice, she was clever enough to use this technique to present and her cupcakes were delicious!' – my diary entry

Anxiety levels increased when certain groups did not perform as well as others, and when members within groups arrived late and subsequently delayed their own presentations and subsequent group presentations. That made an impact on other students wanting to improve their own effort, so they would not be taken to task by their peers in the class. Jake from the Engineering group was quite vocal about his feelings and that caused tension within the group; but in my view, it was a necessary wake-up call for others not to procrastinate and get on with their work. They were beginning to be more responsible for their own actions and consider other people's feelings within the group.

Aida, from the Business group, however, created a different dynamic altogether by improvising her technique of presentation after she lost her voice. Her teammates had presented earlier on another day without her, thinking she was too sick to join them. She then asked me if she could do it solo, because she wanted to contribute to the learning experience. I was worried, thinking she would not recover from her sickness as she had lost her voice. She took me completely by surprise at her innovative presentation method. She used a cartoon with a song to explain prepositions. It proved to be a hit and the students said it was their favourite. She was also very clever to finish the presentation with cupcakes, emphasizing they were made 'BY' her, another preposition to consider.

My hindsight analysis for Cycle 3 revealed that written work was much better subsequently, after I asked them to highlight the grammar aspects that they learnt from their own presentations and from others in their written paragraphs. In the Engineering cohort, some students took the task more seriously than others, resulting in some heated exchanges when views were given about presentations. Negotiating the complex difficulties in understanding how to work with one another in a group, despite individual differences, brought their understanding of learner issues to another level altogether. It reduced some of the power mismatches within the group because the goal was to get the presentation done. Learner autonomy was evident as they took ownership of the

presentation for each grammar aspect chosen. Students also appeared to be more confident about their knowledge gained from this exercise.

With Aida, elements of socio-cultural relevance in terms of how she presented her findings, using a cartoon video which suited the students' interests and knowing that cupcakes would engage them and win them over, showed her commitment not only in making progress for herself, but for the whole class. Aida showed me a level of autonomy that was clearly superior to other students, despite having been ill. Even more surprising was when Aida, in an interview later described herself as 'not good at grammar' because she did not 'get it'. Aida shared that she was never taught grammar in this way, in her previous school. She would normally 'listen' to hear if her 'writing sounded good'. She also reported being influenced by her mother who was an English language teacher and her father, a lawyer, who both speak English at home, although with relatives, they resorted to speaking Malay. Thus, in Aida's situation where she presented grammar creatively for other students to understand, academic writing through grammar learning was seen to be a more socially interactive endeavour, encompassing a more holistic approach to learning.

What I learnt from these three abovementioned successive cycles is that change is possible for both the teacher and learners, as long as there is reflection on the part of the teacher to see what went wrong, and make the necessary adjustments to improve teaching and learning conditions. The three principles I adopted from Kumaravadivelu (1994) (i.e. negotiated interaction to reduce power mismatches, promoting learner autonomy to encourage the building of knowledge conditions and ensuring relevant cultural contexts for learning to improve socio-cultural conditions), can also help with the teaching and learning of grammar. Although they were not my focus for these cycles, scaffolding and mediation were also evident. The language video in Cycle 1, the grammar game in Cycle 2, and the grammar presentation activity in Cycle 3 were all scaffolding elements but I paid more attention to it in Cycle 4. It was the same for mediation, which I was aware of and this was evident from the influence of Aida's parents, and the interactions in class and in the language video. Such realizations indicate that contemporaneous and hindsight

reflection and analysis offer the teacher many insights to improve her teaching repertoire and help the teacher plan the next teaching cycle.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Power Conditions

4.0 Introduction

Power needs to be examined and analysed in post-colonial contexts, in particular, since the norm has been to accept Western teaching ideas (Koh 2014) regarding what constitutes good English language standards or teaching materials. However, such a practice is not necessarily the way forward, especially if Malaysian students need to become globally competent graduates who can adapt to the ways of the world.

After my pilot study, when I realised that power is a complex concept that is under-examined by non-native teachers of English, particularly among ESL students within Asian contexts (Goollamally, Shahran & Ahmad 2007; Majid 2010), my focus shifted to include a broader understanding of writing issues, to encompass how students emotionally and cognitively reacted to conditions within and beyond the classroom that could affect the way they write. Thus, knowing how to recognise power conditions and deal with them makes it more useful for teachers to negotiate difficult terrain in language teaching, especially when it comes to developing academic writing skills according to the needs of their local students.

This chapter, capturing what happened in Cycle 2 of this action research study, focuses on power. To that end, the research question is:

To what extent does power play out in the academic writing classroom and how does negotiated interaction, as a teaching principle, minimise power conditions?

As discussed in Chapter 2, wider debates on power need to be brought into the local institutional experience, hence the focus on French and Raven's (1959) power typology for my analysis. I briefly revisit their work. From French's original five types of power, French and Raven later (2008) expanded the list to six, which they broadly categorized into three major areas comprising: a) socially independent of influence (informational power), b) socially dependent on surveillance (reward and coercive power), and c) socially dependent without surveillance (referent, expert and legitimate power), as summarised in Table 4.1. The purpose of this action research study was not to analyse

and evaluate writing, although that was done in the initial stages; nor was it based on pre- and post-tests; rather, it is about opening up the TESL classroom to different kinds of practices, so that aspects such as power can be investigated. This meant viewing writing as a broader form and understanding that AL is connected to other forms of literacies.

The findings for the research question are explained in the conclusion of this chapter, after the selected power stories are presented and reflected upon in the contemporaneous and hindsight analysis sections.

4.1 Revisiting power and making the connection with analysis

Using McCormack's (2004) four-stage analysis method alongside the critical incidents technique in deciding which stories will represent my data, I attempt to strengthen my narrative representations from data selection, to cover 'blind spots' as described in my methodology chapter. A table created by Abraham (2014) and presented in Chapter 2, makes it visually easier to grasp the power concepts when grouped together. Since power can be a sensitive topic, the use of McCormack and CIT made the analysis more objective.

Table 4. 1: Raven's broader categories of power (2008)

Categories of influence in power	**Types of power**	**Definitions of power**
Socially independent influence	Informational power	Power caused by intrinsic cognitive elements
Socially dependent on surveillance	Reward and coercive power	Power caused by agent's capacity to provide rewards (in material or emotional form) or coerce a person to do something
Socially dependent without surveillance	Referent, expert and legitimate	The ability of the agent to exert influence over a person because he is at the top of the organisational hierarchy and is considered as having authority or expertise or legitimate rights in deciding matters

The types of power in their broad categories help illuminate which types were operational in my classroom, which were then recorded in the teacher diaries, student letters and interviews. By being aware of this power framework, the teacher was also able to use PMP's negotiated interaction as a teaching principle, to minimise the effects of some of the power issues that occurred.

The analysis of selected power stories is divided into contemporaneous and hindsight phases. The contemporaneous phase required me to record observations in my diaries, conduct interviews, collect letters, and conduct and mark assessments while the teaching cycle was going on. This led to changes in practice, further reflection and analysis. The hindsight phase occurred during the post-action research cycles when I reflected on contemporaneous analysis. During this reflective period, I tried to make sense of the teaching and learning experiences from a broader understanding of literacy, often going back to my selected theories of AL and PMP to see how much of the two theories were applicable to my context and how they relate back to my research questions. In doing so, I also had to think beyond AL and PMP and become more open to embracing other concepts that could strengthen my understandings about power.

More importantly, the relationships between the participants in the data were tested and those testing situations unravelled conditions of power which were, to a large extent, negated by negotiated interaction, my teaching principle derived from Kumaravadivelu's PMP strategies to activate power conditions, as explained in Chapter 2. The names of all participants have been changed to protect their identities. I present three narratives below to illustrate how I see the hierarchy of the institution being operationalised. These stories may seem minor, as explained in the CI section, but they were selected for the unexpected interruptions that affected teaching and learning and subsequent analysis. They caused me, as a teacher, to pay attention to my students' needs in different ways. In paying attention to power, it was not just about contributing to research but also about creating the capacity to make change. Power issues also needed to be discussed to provide a deeper understanding of their implications, especially if power issues are swept under a pervasive culture of post-colonial authoritarian control. Understanding how power works can assist change in the teacher's repertoire of practice.

Although there were many stories collected throughout the research, I deliberately chose three power stories from Cycle 2 to be analysed and discussed for this chapter. The first story is between my line manager and me; the second, between a student and me and the third, between a group of four students. In all three narratives below, I demonstrate the analysis that occurred contemporaneously with the action research cycle, using McCormack's (2004) first three stages and the analysis for the hindsight phase using McCormack's fourth stage, which is reflecting further on unexpected elements in the story.

4.2 Power Story 1

Personal Diary Entry – May 2008

"Could you keep it down? I can't do my work!"

I was surprised with Gertrude's sudden and 'loud' appearance asking me to tone down the video. What can I do? This is the room I was given to teach. It is right next to hers. I want to be able to play the video without interruption. If I reduce the volume the students won't be able to hear properly. Couldn't she have waited until after class to do it?

I couldn't focus…the students missed out on the bit where the intrusion took place…maybe I'll ask for another room next time.

Later, she comes in to my room to apologise…. how confusing!

4.2.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

The background to this story is that while I was teaching my students, my colleague suddenly appears in my classroom. My diary entry above shows how I perceived the situation at that time and how I felt, as a result of her interruption. It highlighted the power relations between my colleague and me and this affected my teaching. I quickly wrote down my thoughts in my diary, a safe place to unleash my worries. Intuitively, I knew that this scenario needed to be understood further in order to truly unravel the extent to which this power relational situation could affect the teaching of my students, which is what AL proposes in theory.

Context and culture of the story

The students were being taught grammar, which is a necessary part of the AL framework for teaching academic writing, while also paying attention to relevant social and cultural contexts within the socio-cultural domain of AL (Lea & Street 1998). I showed a popular sitcom, 'Mind Your Language' which was well received by a large number of Malaysians when it was first aired on national television. My decision to show this video was in tandem with my PMP understanding of going beyond a prescribed method (Kumaravadivelu 1994) and feeling empowered to choose a video, according to my knowledge as to what suited the students best. My prediction was that they would enjoy the sitcom. The objective was to get the students to identify the grammar errors in the video and discuss them in relation to writing. In order to make sure that the students could hear the conversations in the video, I turned the volume up and proceeded to enjoy the sitcom with them, until we were interrupted by my colleague.

Language used in the story

The language expressed in the story above registers my shocked reaction at what was uttered. I felt embarrassed that she had interrupted me in front of the students. The tone used to convey the message to me appeared to be humiliating and confronting. Subsequently, I turned the volume down, apologised and carried on teaching. Unfortunately, the students at the back were not happy, as they said the volume was too low for them to capture all the words in the conversations. I decided to use more non-video based examples to continue with my grammar lesson plan.

4.2.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements in the story

Upon reflection on unexpected elements, I began to examine my reaction further and question why my colleague reacted the way she did. I know now that I should have told her about my feelings as soon as it happened. At the time, I was afraid to do so as I was reporting to her. The fears from the past, especially with the episode involving my line

manager, kept coming back to haunt me. I felt it was my duty to obey Gertrude and not question her. I took her outburst as a personal attack. This then echoes how mediating elements in the classroom can affect my teaching (Woods et al. 1976; Moll 2014). Since language is a mediating element, in this case it appeared to cause negative emotions on my part (Bell 2012). It distracted me from carrying out my teaching duties effectively as I kept thinking about the incident. I did not use my teaching principle, negotiated interaction, to reduce perceptual misunderstandings (Kumaravadivelu 1994), to try and resolve the matter amicably. Bell (2012) also suggests that emotions tie in with geographical boundaries within a hierarchical system, such that positive or negative emotions are sometimes dependent on where a person sits within the system and that can affect their decision-making skills. This caused me to be afraid of challenging her, as I had the notion that she had power over me as a senior member of staff, and therefore had the authority to set rules or guidelines at work which were meant to be adhered to, even though I was unhappy about the incident.

A couple of weeks following the incident, the CEO of the university paid a visit to my colleague's room to discuss some important departmental issues. I happened to be teaching at the time, in the adjoining room. There was a game about writing going on, which required the students to build on their topic sentences so that the next few sentences were coherent and unified, all of which would nicely set up a paragraph. Owing to the game, the class was noisy. After class, my colleague came into my room and said that whatever I was doing in the class should be continued (even the playing of videos) as the CEO was impressed with the level of engagement displayed, since he could hear intermittent laughter and conversation which suggested that the class was having fun. To me, although I was happy with what the CEO had conveyed to her, it sounded as if she wanted to please the CEO, who was her boss:

> *Knowing how power affects satisfaction will allow superiors to change or maintain their power bases to achieve desirable outcomes (Kim & Guan, 2008, p.1).*

Since the CEO had legitimate power over my colleague, she wanted to keep him happy as that was something she desired to maintain. I could have said something to her then, but held back as I realised the power I also had in this situation. As much as I did not like the

change in her attitude, I was also to blame for suddenly realising that I could use this information to my advantage without telling her about it. I had informational power which was not dependent on any kind of influence. And this was quite liberating, as a result of my own development in my knowledge based on the literature review I was doing at the time for my research on power. According to Kim and Guan (2008, p.2), 'leadership and influence are a function of power. Power has the potential to influence'. The ability to single-handedly affect change through my teaching, especially if it meant causing the CEO to make my colleague change her attitude, meant that the power typology, 'socially independent of any surveillance' (French & Raven 1959) worked well in this context. This finding made me more conscious of my role as a teacher to inspire not only students but teachers around me, to not only seek the knowledge to find more meaningful and creative ways to engage students while they learn how to improve their academic writing skills, but seek ways to improve working conditions within and beyond the classroom. Kemmis (2008, p.26) argues that:

> *Educators are thus confronted by an individuous choice: to conduct their practice as praxis, oriented by tradition and by considerations of the good for each person and the good for humankind as these are expressed in education, as agents of education, or to conduct themselves as operatives of the education systems in which they find themselves, following the rules and procedures that constitute the functional rationality of those systems.*

I therefore had a choice to make about following rules or instructions without question, or to make the teaching experience more meaningful to my own understanding of what practice should be, according to what I know works for my students. This then echoes what Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests with the pedagogy of possibility, which challenges the teacher to aspire to something bigger than intended as a means to break away from old institutionalised practices and start building new ones infused with a local and social understanding of practice. It also highlights the need for the professional dimension which Noffke (1997) posits, to be aligned with the political dimension of the workplace culture. Knowing what to do in situations like this requires experience and such an experience, when reflected upon, can teach the teacher to be open to interpretations of power in a way that can enhance his or her teaching repertoire.

4.3 Power Story 2

Personal Diary Entry – 18/11/09

Titus called me the night before his presentation...he wanted to do 'Mummification'...a technical process for his presentation. I was annoyed and tired...calling me at night and trying to persuade me to give in.... I listened for a while.... He argued passionately about it, saying he really liked it and was confident about it... I said while I won't disagree, I was disappointed that he didn't submit an outline like the rest to show what he had originally planned to do. I reiterated that I had clarified about what was needed for this project right from the beginning of the semester). I also pointed out that it was unfair to the others who stuck to their topics and even if they changed, they did it much earlier. What if they knew about this situation? All the rest stuck to the deadline I gave them. Titus did not care about deadlines...I made it clear that I did not like what he was doing...but I also said that I would let him decide...something in me told me to relent (I normally don't give in ...so why now?) He apologised and said he would do a good job. I was still sceptical...

4.3.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

This extract shows power relations between me and my student Titus. The background to the story is that Titus was one of many students I taught in Semester 2, from the Bio Science, Business and Engineering cohorts. The students were required to present a 20-minute oral presentation on three themes set by the teachers which included a) any technical process, b) a scientific invention, or c) a business plan or project management deal that has been successful. The three themes or topics were chosen to cater for science, engineering and business students respectively. Oral presentations were given prominence in this course, as it was thought useful for students to do research on selected topics before they develop the structure and confidence to write their research reports. It provided the backbone for their essays which to a large extent would be modelled on what they had presented. In my view, this was something useful at the time for the students considering researchers like Malhi (2012), who complain that Malaysian academics lack critical thinking and presentation skills which could be attributed to Malaysian university graduates having poor, soft skills that they carry into the next phase

of their working lives. Students were required to prepare an outline for me to check before their presentation, at least a week before their presentation. This was not a problem for all my students except Titus, who chose not to comply with my requirements.

Context and culture of the story

On the night before the presentation, Titus called me. The call was not expected and it made me feel uncomfortable. At the time, when Titus called me to ask for a change in topic at the last minute, it appeared as though he was challenging the ongoing system and I was rattled by that, as it was not something I was used to. I knew that most teachers in my department did not give their mobile numbers but I chose to do it as I felt that, as a part-time teacher, I would not be able to see the students as often, and I wanted to remain connected to them. However, I had made it clear that while they could ask questions about their assessments and assignments, they should not abuse the contact line for personal reasons that were not related to class work.

Language used in the story

The language used above is an indication that I was upset with Titus because I felt he was abusing the lifeline contact that I gave him for something that he was doing at the very last minute. The emotions I felt were an intricate part of the interaction I had with Titus. Topic selection was over one week before presentations were about to begin and most of the students had already given me their outlines to check. I had never encountered this last-minute topic change situation before. Even if students wanted to change they would do so early on in the semester. From past teaching experiences with earlier cohorts, if the student was an efficient speaker and writer in English, a topic change would be possible but in Titus's case, it was different. He struggled with grammar issues, did not rehearse or submit an outline for me to check like other students and was not a regular class attendee. All these attributes, in my view, spelt trouble for him. Upon reflection during the contemporaneous phase, the anger I felt was closely connected to my position as someone who traditionally is expected to have authority over students. When Titus displayed a lack of respect for my authority, I reacted with anger. This then confirms the

idea that emotional links cannot be separated from the social constructs of whatever takes place within and beyond the classroom (Maulucci 2013).

4.3.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements in the story

Upon reflection over the episode with Titus, I gave in to Titus's request because I was emotionally exhausted. In fact, Hsee et al. (1990) suggests there is a possibility for the student to be able to exert his emotions as a form of 'emotion contagion' or his emotions persuading me to take on his feelings, because at that point in time, I was the powerless or tired one.

Although I made it clear to Titus that I did not approve of the topic change, and tried to exert control through coercive power (French & Raven 1959) by telling him that his grades may be affected if he did badly, especially since I did not see an outline from him, I believe that my readings about negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches (Kumaravadivelu 1994) also changed my perception about control. Usually, from past experience, students would try to please the teacher by following set guidelines or rules. Students comply to get high grades from their teachers and this is a form of referent power (French & Raven 1959) that the teacher has over his or her students. Students also tend to please their teachers by behaving well, showing respect to someone who has authority as the teacher has legitimate authority over them (Cothran & Ennis 1997). When Titus displayed a lack of respect for my authority, I reacted with anger. As a result of my research, I began to question the hold or the 'legitimate authority' I had over students. Normally, in higher educational contexts, students would be disadvantaged as they are placed at the bottom of a hierarchical system (Jamieson & Thomas 1974). Therefore, this suggests that they would hardly challenge the system or division of labour (Engestrom 1987) that exists in settings that are power infused.

Caught up with the hierarchical organisation ingrained in most teachers in Asian settings about conforming to rules, I realise now that I did not stop to think about Titus's rights. Titus did not do anything but negotiate with me. He was not rude to me. He was just very

persuasive. Did he not have the right to do so? Did he cross personal or professional boundaries when he called me late at night? These were questions plaguing my mind for a while, especially after the incident when I had more time to reflect.

The following day, Titus's presentation was a success. Although he had fluency problems, his structure and content were quite good. In fact, during feedback session, his classmates thought he did well. Some of his closest friends spoke up and said he had worked through the night. It appeared as though they were rallying for him to do well and I was surprised at that. They did not mind that he did this at the last minute. On the other hand, I felt it was unfair to the students who had worked hard and put in the effort right from the start of the semester, doing extensive research on topic selection, preparing presentation slides and handouts and rehearsing prior to presentations. I wanted to reward the students who complied with all I had requested. To me, these were desirable learning habits. Through the marking scheme prepared, I had reminded students about the desirable learning elements I was looking for. One student, Rhea indicated in her letter to me that my discussions had helped her:

> *'I think all the questions you had provided as our guidelines to find which topic is suitable for the oral presentation is very useful. At least I had found one topic which I thought is relevant to our discipline....*'

I wanted order in my classroom by exerting control over my students. Titus completely changed my plans. His negotiating with me reduced my control over him. It also paved the way for me to reduce the negative perceptions I had over his work ethics. This narrative representation then reinforces the idea that although as a teacher I have power to decide matters in the classroom, I am human and have an emotional and caring side that can be persuaded to preside over legitimate power. I began to realise that not all students learn in a set way. Every individual is different and Titus is different. His learning style was very different to what I perceived as desirable learning elements. He challenged my notions about legitimate power and my views about student learning styles. Our relationship improved, as I realised that the teaching and learning experience became more meaningful as a result of the interaction I had with him, which caused some form of collaboration between me and Titus (Barischa 2007).

Despite not being happy with his last-minute effort, I passed Titus because his presentation met most of the requirements in the criteria checklist I prepared. In my view, after much reflection, Titus was brave enough to call me and argue his case because he was passionate about it. Not many ESL students in Asian settings would do that, because of the way students have been conditioned over the years to obey and comply with authority in their schools.

Titus appeared to be emotionally vested (Seifert & O'Keefe 2001) in this project and therefore persuaded me to give in. His emotions motivated him to negotiate with me. It is thus important to note that teachers must take into account their students' emotional needs, as part of the social learning experience, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of their learners' needs. I on the other hand, undertook emotional labour (Maulucci 2013, Zembylas 2005) trying to neutralise the situation by having an open mind about allowing Titus to change his topic. It was something that many ESL teachers, for example, may not do because it is not common practice although they may be familiar with it (Boler,1999). By giving it a name, this experience also helped me overcome a moral judgement on my part, which was a difficult thing for me, as moral judgement can be attributed to the power imbalance teachers hold over students because we are considered superior in knowing what values or principles we should adopt and teach them to our students. It was also difficult for me to acknowledge there was a power imbalance. This is what Noffke (1997) asks of teachers in action research, to consider in terms of the personal dimension. It is about learning how to release control and encourage freedom of choice in the learner which, on my part, required me to change my teaching repertoire to suit the students' needs.

4.4 Power Story 3

Letter from Peter, a student from Computer Sciences (April 6th 2010)

'Firstly, I had a hard time enjoying doing the whole questionnaire assignment; I really did. I'm disappointed that many of my course mates lack the dedication, motivation and ethics that are expected from a university student. Bruce sometimes can be unethical while we were collaborating,

which is somewhat intriguing. Honestly, I expected more from him as a scholarship student. It also felt like I was doing a solo assignment despite the fact that it was a group assignment. Often at times, Joan and Stan are absent from class. This makes it hard to come to a unanimous decision regarding everything.'

Interview with Peter (March 29th 2010)

'Joan has friends who are important for my future connections...she has contacts that are too important for me to lose.'

4.4.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

This story concerns Peter who was part of a four-member group in Semester Three of the Foundation Programme in the ESL and academic writing class. The students were required to research and prepare an oral presentation that reflected a current scenario, either in the sciences or humanities area. They also had to prepare a research report individually. For ESL students, in particular, group work is deemed as an important part of the learning experience which can help the students improve their written and spoken skills (Krishnan et al. 2012). Group work is also useful in equipping them with appropriate communication and other living skills which has been something the teachers aimed to include in this programme. Guidelines were given to help them understand and achieve targets for each stage of their research project. There were several stages they needed to complete before writing their final research reports. These stages were broken into 'two or three week' research related targets to be achieved over a total of 12 teaching weeks.

The oral presentations were carried out in groups. It was thought important to help them build on their team-playing skills towards building an understanding of working with one another and appreciating new found knowledge as they researched their topics. This was considered an important attribute to develop in line with their working years ahead. Peter and his team or group decided on 'The Impact of Tuition Centres on the Learning of Malaysian Students during End of School Exam Years' as their research topic.

Language used in story

Peter's language suggests frustration at not being able to get cooperation and contribution from his team mates. He expresses surprise at Bruce's attitude, especially since Bruce holds a scholarship. Peter appears upset since he claims he did most of the work. However, in the interview much later, his language suggests a deflated ego compared to the earlier comments, because he was subject to Joan's power of having important connections, which were too important to him to lose. In a small community of students at this campus, social connections appeared to be more important than his earlier mentioned principles and to some extent this affected his learning decisions.

Context and culture of the story

The context of the story suggests that Peter's group presentation did not work out as well as it should have. Peter's body language indicated that something was wrong, as he stood far away from his mates, stuttered and appeared to be nervous during his presentation slot. It was quite apparent that fellow group members were not even talking or communicating properly with one another. I could tell that they had not rehearsed their presentation like the other groups had. It was common in my class for all groups to invite feedback from the rest of the class after presentation. Constructive criticism was welcome so that students could learn from each other's mistakes and improve on them. With Peter's group, it was generally agreed by the class that the group did not cooperate or work well together as they were ill-prepared. They did not present clearly or fluently and this caused some classmates to voice their dissatisfaction with the group's efforts, as there were students who took these presentations seriously and wanted their time in class to be worth their while.

When class was over, Peter came to see me. He wanted to explain what happened and I could sense his frustration at not being able to deliver. I assured him that all that he shared with me would be kept confidential, since he volunteered to be interviewed. Peter was keen for me to use his story as he seemed fascinated by the research which I had shared with him. He and the rest of the class knew that I was carrying out action research and many students volunteered to be part of my study. That provided the opportunity to

record, observe, interview and collect letters from them. They also knew that I was writing what I thought were critical incidents in my diaries. Peter was very willing for me to use his voice. His narrative became my way of making sense of power relations between him and his friends. When he started the project, Peter was extremely enthusiastic; but he lost this enthusiasm when he found himself doing most of the work or at least that was how he perceived the situation. He felt it was unfair for him to do everything as he claimed to have contributed the topic, research questions and the developing of the questionnaire. As a result, he wanted the others to do the other stages. The rest of the group however did not contribute because they felt he had 'betrayed' them. They were unhappy that he had confided in me. They did not want me to know that they had not been contributing as much as they should have. I knew all this from him and also from the others when I had the opportunity to speak with them privately. Even though the whole class agreed with me prior to presentations that should there be any conflicts in groups, they would try and resolve problems on their own before seeing me; Peter's group was upset he had chosen to see me instead of trying to resolve it among themselves. In Peter's mind, however, he had tried to talk to them but could not solve the issues and that is why he felt he needed help. He chose to come to me out of desperation. My reflections at the time were to rethink how to set up group work for future projects. I was able to share with other students about using appropriate language when communicating with fellow groupmates about tasks that needed to be accomplished. I used this experience to talk about power in groups for the next group work projects, hoping to make the students understand that every member of the group had equal power.

4.4.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements in the story

Upon reflection in my hindsight stage, from the three stories presented above, three power typologies (French & Raven 1959; Raven 1969) were able to be observed in action in the classroom and the institution. Having named the power typologies was a useful exercise for me as an action researcher to resource my reflection in order to enhance my teaching skills for subsequent cycles. The first story (Story 1) was useful for pushing

teacher reflection in that there were two aspects to the 'socially dependent power based on surveillance'. One aspect involved me as a subordinate, being under the surveillance of my colleague or line-manager while the other involved my colleague who was my line-manager, but was under the surveillance of the CEO. She may have reacted that way with me as she believed she had the 'legitimate' power to do so.

However, I thought she was exerting her control in a negative manner and should have talked to her about it, but I was fearful of offending her. The roles reversed however when she tried to please the CEO by complimenting me on my 'noisy' class, just because he was pleased with the class having an enjoyable time, possibly suggesting they were happy with what the university offered through their teachers. Knowing that I had the power to influence change was liberating. My informational power, independent of any kind of surveillance proved to be the most powerful type of power, because with this kind of knowledge teachers can change the way they work without being afraid of surveillance. Such bargaining power can affect teaching and learning, especially in hierarchical settings and without undermining the position of the teacher. An individual teacher can be an agent of change no matter how small that change is, especially if it is seen to be a positive change.

As a result of this finding, in later teaching sessions, I chose to deliberately talk to my line-manager and seek her opinion about changes before implementing them because I wanted to work well with her. I put aside my personal prejudices as a result of past experiences to try and find a way to resolve issues. It did not always work out the way I wanted it to, but at least I was able to exorcise the colonial ghosts of the past and make attempts to improve my practice. My reading about negotiated interaction also strengthened my confidence in using it as a principle to negotiate what I wanted. It is likely that the way in which I have been brought up is also something that has caused me to be afraid of questioning people in power positions.

Ironically, in Story 2 when I had power as a teacher, I found it strange for Titus, my student, to challenge me. This is the colonial legacy that has been entrenched deeply in our minds (Koh 2014) and it embodies practice we must seek to break. We see our colonial masters as superior in many aspects, such as language, education, wealth and

class, and this makes it difficult for us to seek change for ourselves, or make meaning because we do not know how to move on from past influences. Our socio-cultural conditioning is such that critiquing is not encouraged (Ng & Kulasagaran 2012). Power is usually a stumbling block for progress if it stops us from breaking free from traditional practices that hinder our individual potential to be fully realised, as teacher and as students.

Story 2 indicates a power shift from me to Titus. Although I had expert and referent power or power as a result of 'social dependence without surveillance' over Titus, it did not turn out that way. Titus was just being himself and had no idea that he was in control when I gave in. He just tried his luck but it was actually my knowledge about negotiated interaction and power relational conditions through my literature review which was affecting the way I perceived teaching and learning elements at that time. I was motivated by this intrinsic knowledge that I had gained and was able to let go of the control I normally had over my students. Mondillon et al. (2005) carried out a study on how power can affect the emotions of people according to social, historical and cultural circumstance and this helped me to see how Titus is emotionally charged to make that plea for topic change because of his desperate circumstances.

This incident also showed me how I had also shifted by that time as a result of my research. It taught me to set guidelines that were more flexible and less strict about what was acceptable or not for later cohorts, in discussion with the students, prior to any given coursework, so that they had choices and responsibilities in the decisions they made. Salim, one of the students from my programme, said the following about my role:

Teacher:	*What do you see me as? In terms of teaching. What do you see me as? How do you view me? As a person, what is the role I play?*
Salim:	*Teacher, friend, mother. Because you give me more advice.*
Teacher:	*Does it help you in anyway?*
Salim	*Yeah. It helps.*

The students saw me as a close confidante. My teaching became more organised yet flexible because I took into account students' possible difficulties in achieving targeted goals. There was a lot of opportunity for them to talk to me about issues prior to set deadlines and that was conveyed to them many times.

Story 3 was very useful for me to gain deeper insight into the workings of social lives of students. Joan had coercive power over Peter and that made him subject to her as he was under her surveillance. Although he had informational power to help him with his project, he let that slip away because he wanted social recognition more than high grades. My role as his teacher with legitimate power and authority was not seen to be particularly influential. As much as I advised him to concentrate on his project, he did not comply fully because Joan's connections were 'too important for him to lose'. My application of the principle of negotiated interaction helped them to eventually work together, but their choices outside the university were not dependent on what I said.

In other words, I had little if any control over what was going on outside the classroom and beyond the university. There were clearly socially mediating elements outside the classroom that affected the students' choices in learning. And while I was aware of them I could not do much, as these students were adults who had their own way of understanding and doing things, irrespective of my influence. Mediation then became my next focus in the subsequent action research cycle.

Nevertheless, this experience taught me to improve my teaching skills. For example, subsequent cohorts were provided with strategies to avoid conflicts early on in the semester and discussion on the matter was held at different stages of their research projects, often taking student views seriously, so that they felt they had a part in planning some of the learning activities. It dawned on me then that teaching and learning is collaboration between the teacher and students and this is what teachers must strive for in the ESL setting, especially if they want their learners to achieve autonomy.

4.5 Conclusion

The use of power stories selected by using the CIT technique helped me unpack AL and PMP in a way that required a broader cultural reflection of teaching and learning issues in the classroom. By focusing on power, AL enabled me as a teacher to highlight small incidents of power, which ESL teachers in post-colonial contexts often take for granted. If power issues as a result of hierarchical barriers continue to exist, complications leading to mismatches in teaching and learning could seriously affect learning outcomes.

The findings from the analysis and discussion of the three power stories illustrate how important it is for ESL and academic writing teachers to use PMP's negotiated interaction as a teaching principle (Kumaravadivelu 1994) to reduce power-based mismatches between people. It certainly contributes to the discussion of activating power conditions within the AL framework. Knowing the different types of power which operate in the classroom is useful for the ESL teacher to plan strategies that could assist teaching and thus help the teacher think of ways to deal with power issues. This is also where Noffke's (1997) personal, professional and political dimensions which are closely interwoven through teacher experiences will be drawn on, as dimensions that could strengthen the action research study. The three dimensions are seen to be operational in all three stories because the teacher has to make judgements on the run. Such judgements are made at the point where the three dimensions' interconnect.

Secondly, learning outcomes can be more peaceful for both the teacher and learners if there is a genuine understanding to using this principle (negotiated interaction) effectively. It is a form of analysis that not only teachers but students can benefit from. Thus, PMP's negotiated interaction as a teaching principle needs to be cultivated by ESL teachers, in order for it to be fully appreciated. It takes time and considerable effort on the part of the teacher to develop and embrace it as an effective teaching principle, especially if the teacher is not used to being democratic about their approach towards students. It also enables the teacher to understand his or her students better and build rapport.

Thirdly, the analysis of stories through McCormack's method provides a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which power works. It can help teachers realise

that power is often taken for granted and as a result they can become complacent and accept power mismatches, even if it may be wrong. Thus, teachers need to constantly update their knowledge about power issues and find ways to minimise power conditions so their practice improves. The three findings point to how the research question on power has been answered.

What was also discovered during analysis was that the types of power identified and discussed contributed to outcome validity. The systematic collecting of data, according to different stages in the research, covering many cohorts and data types, showed process validity, enhanced by stringent and critical analytic methods (McCormack 2004). The use of multiple voices (Niemi et al. 2010) from different narrative sources gave a more comprehensive view of teaching and learning issues that were historically and socio-culturally founded, and this helped with democratic validity. Catalytic validity (Herr & Andersen 2005) was evident in the actions that ensued, following reflection on each narrative, as participants realised how they could affect change in the process. The final validity or democratic validity was apparent when the abovementioned findings were accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal of high standing, following feedback from supervisors and colleagues about this study. Not all outcomes such as the Titus case, as explained above, may appeal to ESL teachers but they are outcomes that cannot be ignored. Power relational conditions do affect teaching and learning situations in so many institutions for higher learning, at so many levels. When there is a peaceful solution that encourages learning, the operational level seizes and the cultural and critical levels of literacy in students increase, as can be seen in Titus' and Peter's stories. Therefore, the fourth point to consider is that support must be garnered from all levels of the institution for real change to take place. Change is never easy but it is something teachers need to embrace in order to help students compete in a global world, which is also subject to power conditions.

Moreover, the role of emotion in power conditions needs to be further examined (Bell 2012). It appears to be a significant finding in the stories above because it either promotes or discourages learning. Such a finding is supported by Vince who states, 'power cannot be separated from the emotions and relations that reinforce it' (2001, p.1341). He

suggests that the link between power and emotions is important in further understanding the organisational setting of learning (2001, p. 1331).

Finally, it is important to recognise that a non-native or local teacher-researchers need to make a call for change to break power conditions that can affect teaching and learning, and this must be done according to what works for the local communities of which they are a part (Holland & Lave 2009) rather than subject to Western notions of which type or strategy or method is needed for the teaching and learning of English and academic writing. There is an opportunity then for ESL teachers in such settings to make their teaching more socially inclusive and culturally responsive, creating a more meaningful learning experience for their students.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Knowledge Conditions

5.0 Introduction

While power was discussed in the last chapter, this chapter focuses on the analysis of knowledge conditions. Knowledge conditions, the second of three proposed AL conditions for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing, were the focus for Cycle 3 of this action research study. Knowledge conditions are important because they are one of the key issues in AL debates. As an action researcher and teacher, I am looking at ways in which the broader societal conditions infiltrate the Malaysian students' classroom in an institutional setting and affect knowledge conditions. I am also interested in knowing how my teaching principle, promoting learner autonomy (Kumaravadivelu 1998) from PMP (explained in Chapter 2), was effective in activating these knowledge conditions. To that end, the research question for this chapter is:

How do the different types of knowledge conditions in a higher learning institution, activated by the promotion of learner autonomy, assist students with the learning of English and academic writing?

Unpacking these knowledge conditions was necessary for the ESL/EAP teacher to understand students better and to make changes where appropriate to meet the students' learning needs because of the wider implications for pedagogy. A literature review of epistemological conditions in a classroom (see Chapter 2) highlights the varying contexts in which these researched knowledge conditions operate. They include artificial intelligence (Moore 1994), mathematical (Schommer- Aitkins 2002), educational (Krathwol 2002) and socio-cultural (Engestrom 1987) backgrounds. The context of this study however is steeped in the socio-cultural history of the Malaysian people from colonisation until now. Therefore, the non-homogenous group of students in this study, bring with them knowledge from their past, mixed with the knowledge they gain in and outside the classroom. The mix of different types of knowledge can be complex and the ESL teacher could benefit from understanding how students use that knowledge for their writing.

In order to investigate Kumaravadivelu's teaching principle to promote learner autonomy, a knowledge typology that would allow a comprehensive analysis of how student knowledge progressed from a simple to more complex level was needed. The knowledge typology needed to also take into account the socio, political, cultural and historical changes that affect student learning in the country. Inspiration for this understanding was drawn from Kumaravadivelu's definition of pedagogy, which was applied to this research context. He viewed pedagogy broadly as (2001, p.538):

> *...not only issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures, but also a wide range of historical, political, and socio cultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education.*

Kumaravadivelu's idea of 'pedagogy of practicality' prompted me to reflect more about the links I make between theoretical underpinnings and teaching practice (2001, p.540). The work of pedagogy of practicality allows a teacher to interpret students' epistemological conditions and respond reflectively and appropriately (van Manen 1977). The practical aspects of pedagogy also tie in with 'pedagogy of particularity' (Kumaravadivelu 2001, p.538), referring to the need to localise my practice in a way which connects and includes a Western colonial heritage. It is deeply connected to context and begins with

> *practising teachers, either individually or collectively, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying their problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what does not. (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.539)*

Kumaravadivelu's ideas reflect the main principles of action research methodology. This natural synergy provides my research with the necessary analytical tools to examine students' knowledge development.

Another cultural aspect I need to consider is my own positioning within the post-colonial context. This is important because as a conscientious ESL teacher, I cannot deny the past British traditions that have influenced how political, educational and social systems operate in the country. It was important for me find a way to acknowledge that colonial presence, learn from it and reconcile with it, so that new meaning could be made with the

local in the present. In order to do that, new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and acting out those experiences with my students needed to be developed. These new ways tie in with the third parameter that Kumaravadivelu refers to as the 'pedagogy of possibility' (2001, p.542), which challenges the boundaries teachers set for their teaching.

The 'pedagogy of possibility' suggests that the teacher can teach students from different cultural backgrounds and make a connection with them. In my case, even though I am Indian, I can still connect with my Malay or Chinese students, and this is critical in understanding the students and making meaning with them. For ESL and academic writing teachers in global settings, it is a cultural imperative to be socially inclusive of how they chart their own histories and stories along their pedagogical journey, and how that journey is also reflective of changing participant identities. There are many ways for teachers to employ teaching strategies that suit the needs of their culturally divergent students, according to the historical and social circumstances they are shaped by, so long as teachers recognise their own strengths and match it with a deep understanding of what their learners need.

It was important for me to use Perry's (1968) knowledge scheme (as explained in Chapter 2), which he designed after his experience teaching Harvard students to examine knowledge conditions. It therefore made sense for me to apply it to my own student setting, which is also higher education. Perry's knowledge scheme was selected because I needed to consider the pedagogy of practicality (Kumaravadivelu 2001) in my choices, and to follow the AL tradition of the importance of understanding the knowledge conditions of students. Briefly, I revisit his scheme, broadly categorised into four areas: dualism or received knowledge; multiplicity or subjective knowledge; relativism or procedural knowledge; and commitment or constructed knowledge (Moore 1994; Rapaport 2001; Hall 2013). Dualism or received knowledge refers to students accepting what the teacher or lecturer says as the right solution or answer. There is therefore no questioning, but just accepting or learning. Multiplicity or the second knowledge stage refers to the students wanting to find out more. There could therefore be a solution or no solution at all, or many answers to the solution; they listen to their own voices to make a decision. In the third relativism stage, they begin to look for evidence and evaluate

choices made, because they become more analytical and source for contextual clues. Finally, in the fourth commitment stage, there is a serious challenge posed for them to take their knowledge further as a commitment to their beliefs or sense of responsibility. It is more about espousing values which matter to them.

By using Perry's (1968) four broad knowledge types to further make sense of the stories in this chapter, I am able to see how and what types of knowledge can be developed for higher education students during the teaching and learning process and what situations enhance or diminish a student's progress. The use of the critical incident technique, which I explained in Chapter 3, enabled me to pay attention to knowledge issues based on Perry's scheme. Had I not taken into account theoretical underpinnings for this research, I may have overlooked these critical incidents. As O'Neil (1996 p. 136) aptly suggests in the following quote**:**

> *the most exciting moment occurs when some theoretical insight clarifies a knotty problem in practice, or when the obscurity of theory is illuminated by memory of a significant dramatic event in the classroom.*

The selection of critical incidents about knowledge conditions from this study's data was therefore guided by theoretical knowledge and provided the 'initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling and moving' (Greene, 1999, p.42), which is an exciting feature of action research.

This chapter began with a theoretical underpinning of the analysis. It will now present knowledge stories as follows: 1) conversational interaction between two students in a classroom and its effects on other students in the classroom, 2) conversational interaction between students and me, 3) conversational interaction among students as a whole, as part of a classroom activity and 4) a computer-based lesson on process writing. The stories will further be analysed using McCormack's (2004) four-stage analysis patterns (as explained in Chapter 3), also known as the contemporaneous phase. The contemporaneous phase will be followed by the hindsight phase for each story. Perry's knowledge stages are discussed in the hindsight phase where more reflection occurs. The chapter concludes with what can be learnt from the knowledge stories.

5.1 Knowledge Story 1

Diary entry (18/11/09) – Computing students (names have been changed)

John asked Mary, "Why did you choose the Bird's Nest for your topic? You could have spoken and written about the Olympic Swimming Pool ...that was really a huge success when China hosted the Olympic Games". She was a bit flustered at first...slowly she overcame that and explained that the Bird's Nest had greater appeal in terms of its architecture and proceeded to explain its technical design.

I was pleased with this exchange between the students. Mary, who was usually passive, slowly responded and stood up to a student who normally overpowers classroom conversations.

5.1.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

The story underlying this diary account was that students had to select a topic for discussion and writing, and the topic had to showcase a recent science-based, technological or business project that was successful. Mary chose the hosting of the Olympic Games by China, which in her view displayed technological extravaganza at its best. She focused on the Bird's Nest stadium which she felt was a masterly display of craftsmanship in terms of architectural design, taking a long time to construct with accuracy. Its shape and elegance was an accomplishment and received many accolades. However, John, another student in class, said that the project was a failure because the amount of money spent building the stadium did not match the returns afterwards, as it eventually became a white elephant. He argued that the swimming pool proved to be more successful in the long run, as it was used to produce some of China's best swimmers.

Language used in the story

The language used by John to Mary in writing (as recorded in my diary) appears to be a normal question. However, in class, I observed Mary's body language and realised that she flinched a little, probably because John sounded as though he was reprimanding her.

Later, in an interview with John, he confirmed that there was power in that relationship and maybe Mary was uncomfortable with that initially.

Interview with John (December 2009)

Teacher:	*How did you and Mary work together in this assignment?*
John:	*I think, between us, I was the dominant member of the group. So, I ended up leading. So, I was pretty much directing her on what to find and what to do.*
Teacher:	*Was there a kind of power play? Do you think if you were working in a group, must there always be a dominant person and someone to follow? Is there a need for a leader and a follower?*
John:	*I think from what I experienced, I think there should be and there was. Because I… we just don't know… I mean our work wouldn't really synergise. Maybe I could do something else, and she could do another thing… once we combine our work together it won't be synergised and there will be problems later on, so I believe there is power play.*
Teacher:	*So, do you think it's positive power play?*
John:	*Define positive power play.*
Teacher:	*No ill feelings between each other, because you are working as a team perhaps?*
John:	*Yeah, there were no ill feelings: my relationship with her can be considered alright.*

Initially, John was focused on using language to get Mary to do the work. He was not paying attention to the 'dominant' power he had until he reflected on the situation. Although Mary may have had different feelings about the incident, she managed to work things out in her own way too. What I did not understand at the time was that these Chinese students had a complex relationship, which unravelled more during the hindsight analysis phase.

In the end, Mary stood by her decision and instead, chose to continue to highlight the strengths of her chosen project. I remember feeling proud of her when she did that, and knew that something had changed in the way she answered the many questions thrown at her.

Culture and context of the story

Through personal interviews, entries in my diary and observation, I was able to understand both these students better. In fact, Frank (1999), another researcher I read at the time, encourages teachers to develop 'ethnographic eyes' in the classroom, to really know and appreciate their students without being judgemental about their behaviour or actions.

Mary is a female Chinese who appeared to be proud of her roots. Educated in a Chinese school and brought up in a family that is proud of having good education for the children, she worked really hard at her assignments and always wanted to do well in her exams or projects. She never hesitated to ask questions and correct her mistakes during and after class. She shared with the class how she was especially enamoured of China's success in the Olympic Games. John, who is also Chinese, had different views. He speaks English all the time and has minimal contact with the traditional Chinese community. Traditional here refers to Chinese people who only speak Chinese and still practise Chinese traditions and customs. He is used to debating challenging issues, having grown up in a family which challenges each other's opinions and is more exposed to Western ways of living. Even though John and Mary were both Chinese, they each had a different way of learning. I was not aware of how their values differed culturally from mine as an Indian Malaysian teacher, or how it would have differed from the Malay students. Knowledge conditions and relationships appeared to be shaped by cultural traditions, specific to a subgroup. I focused more on the cultural and language aspects in this contemporaneous analysis phase, because I did not have the conceptual tools to name the knowledge typologies, according to Perry's (1968) stages.

5.1.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements from the story

At first, Mary's response to John appeared to be a surprising outcome because she had previously been passive and quiet. Using Perry's knowledge stages (1968) helped me to see that the shift from a dualistic stage of knowledge, as absolute truth from a friend or teacher to relativist and committed stages in selecting and justifying the topic selected for presentation (Perry 1968), marked a significant change in her autonomous behaviour. Renewed confidence through the stages of knowledge growth seemed to have enabled Mary to challenge herself further because she was in control of the situation. Rossiter (2003) posits that 'performance can be facilitated by self-efficacy' (p.1). Citing Bandura (1986, p. 391), Rossiter (2003, p.1) goes on to say that self-efficacy refers to:

> *People's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance.*

In this case, Mary had the 'self-efficacy' to do well. Her confidence was shown when she made the judgement to stand by her decision. The interview with John suggests that he had authority over Mary. If Mary had decided to view John as the authority on the subject matter, perhaps she would have succumbed to his strong suggestion to change her content matter. Instead, Mary used her judgement to be firm about her beliefs about learning and fought for what she believed in and liked, eventually producing a piece of writing that was commendable, as seen in the interview extract below:

Interview with Mary (December 2009)

Teacher: What have you improved in the most?
Mary: The flow of the essay.
Teacher: You think you have improved?
Mary: I think I have improved.
Teacher: How do you know that?
Mary: Because I can see from the comments.
Teacher: From the comments I gave in your essay but you yourself, do you feel there's any change in your writing?
Mary: I feel like I'm not so reluctant to write essays anymore. I want to write essays.
Teacher: Do you like it?

Mary: I like it because I want the comments from other people when I write the essay. I want the comments, so I like to write.
Teacher: Is that motivation for you to write? To see the comments?
Mary: Yeah. To see the comments.
Teacher: If there are no markings, no essays, no comments… would you write?
Mary: Depends on the topic. If I like the topic, I would write it.
Teacher: Are you using anything that you learnt from here in your own discipline?
Mary: Yeah, the academic writing style.
Teacher: Where have you applied it?
Mary: When I write reports for the business assignments and all those things.
Teacher: How do you feel in terms of your confidence level now? Compared to say Semester 0?
Mary: I feel more confident.

What the interview also shows is that when students are given the opportunity to describe their work, they may overcome tacit knowledge problems related to academic writing (Elton 2010). The idea is what AL (Lea & Street 1998) suggests, which is to view writing as a social practice. In this case, Mary overcame her lack of confidence and proceeded to consolidate her views, first in speech and then in writing. Mary slowly developed the power to be confident in her knowledge. Therefore, power conditions can affect the knowledge conditions of the learner. To support this interpretation, an interview with Mary's classmate Musa, is given below, to show the connection between speech and writing and how that can consolidate learning:

Interview with Musa (December 2009)

Teacher:	*What did you think about the oral presentation this semester?*
Musa:	*Oral presentation? It is interesting.*
Teacher:	*Did it assist you in any way? Did it provide you with help?*
Musa:	*Yeah, it helped me to do research… find what I need to do and improve my speaking also.*
Teacher:	*Do you think that had an impact on your writing?*
Musa:	*Yes. Because when I do the slides, I still need to correct my writing. I cannot have grammar errors… it will help me with the pictures in the slides.*
Teacher:	*In the planning of the presentation, did you find anything similar compared with the essay? The ideas… and everything?*
Musa:	*I can see…it's the same as an essay. I need the introduction, I need the body, I need the conclusion. For intro, when it comes to essay writing and presentation, I see that it's still the same.*

Knowledge is therefore built through speech, in both formal and informal situations. Complex understandings, as described in the interview above, indicate that the student not only develops a capacity to write out knowledge in different modes, as a result of her confidence in speech, but also develops literacy. As a teaching strategy, it signals to teachers to pay more attention to speech, as a way to improve writing skills.

However, Dornyei (2001) points out that self-confidence does not move in tandem with self-efficacy, because the former refers to perceived ideas of how one performs over many types of jobs while the latter refers to one specific type of job. My observation of Mary in the past was that she was rather passive about arguing her case, especially with John, but for this specific task, she really wanted her voice to be heard. Mary's huge boost in confidence arose from the fact that her prior reading and research into the subject had been thoroughly rehearsed and researched and she was prepared to defend her work, because she had a significant interest in the topic. Mary's interest in the topic is confirmed by my reading at the time of Aufschnaiter et al. (2008) who, in their scientific study to understand how students argue and build their knowledge, posit that good student arguments tie in closely with a deep understanding of prior knowledge or experience, or in this case a sound understanding of the development of the subject matter through talking.

Mary appeared to have invested a lot of time and effort into her work, and was therefore passionate about what she perceived as correct and useful information, or knowledge she had gained at that time. Mary's change in attitude and behaviour also affected the way other students perceived her and themselves. Her display of courage motivated the other students to speak up in support of her as they could identify with her struggles. Mary also showed maturity in dealing with John as she continued to work with him on other projects.

Interview with Mary (December 2009)

Mary:	*His grammar is good and mine is not so good. We can help each other. Sometimes I can think of the points. He can help me elaborate on the points and sometimes he helps me check the grammar mistakes. So, I can learn from him that way.*

Teacher:	*So how can you contribute to the essay? You learn from him that way, but how can he learn from you?*
Mary:	*Because most of the time I can get the points. I can find the points but I just don't know how to elaborate.*

Teacher:	*Do you both disagree? When you work together?*
Mary:	*Sometimes, but we tolerate it.*
Teacher:	*How do you negotiate the difference?*
Mary:	*We both explain our points. Then, if he says no, he explains and then I explain. Maybe I can accept his explanation.*
Teacher:	*How did John and you prepare for this cause and effect writing?*
Mary:	*We go to the computer room together, find the points, discuss about the journals and the information and print it out.*
Teacher:	*I see. So, you wrote the stuff together or wrote it on your own?*
Mary:	*We bring it back.*
Teacher:	*Bring it back...to class? So, when you read all these things…were you communicating with each other through the phone, emails chats or did you use to meet outside?*
Mary:	*We meet here, during the exams.*
Teacher:	*And then you talk?*
Mary:	*No… before this, we talk about the points and which points we want to use…and which articles is best for our essay.*

What is significant from this story for ESL pedagogy is that Mary's quest to improve her knowledge brought growth in her capacity to exercise power. She knew how to play to her strengths but was also willing to compromise. If John's explanations made sense, she would listen and she accepted that his grammar was better than hers. Both the students also interacted and negotiated to reduce power mismatches (Kumaravadivelu 1994) and that made their project work. Power roles shifted from John to Mary as soon as she realised that power had become more equal. The movement in her position of knowledge was parallel to the movement in her level of autonomy in her, which in turn gave her power to realise her actions and beliefs. Such an understanding could assist ESL teachers in understanding why and how students' knowledge and power conditions, when examined in depth, can shed light on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning for an ESL teacher.

To a certain extent, as shown by Mary's story, a deep and thorough understanding of knowledge does give power to an individual to rise above others, especially in one-to-one situations, with the right kind of rallied support. Mary's growth did not just stop there. She sent a letter to me (see below) when she moved to America to pursue her studies in another university, after obtaining a scholarship. In her letter, she expresses confidence and satisfaction in dealing with her problems at the new university, after having gone through the oral presentation project:

> *I feel that I can prepare my speech better because I have gone through the process during my third semester. Although I am not able to compete with the native speakers here, I feel contented, and I am now trying hard to improve my English-speaking skills, especially in the aspect of pronunciation.*
> *Mary's letter – 20th September 2010*

John, who worked with Mary, however had a different view about learning in that he learnt better when he was socialising (Interview quote 2009):

> *By socialising I think I learn better. I learn more and as I said earlier, when we talk more, the way we talk can somehow translate to our writing. Especially since I'm not really fluent in Mandarin and the other dialects… so I use English pretty much 95% of the time, so my English is improving pretty much day by day.*

John was able to write better after talking about the work. Mediation through language and social interaction helps build complex thought processes and guide students to make more meaning out of their learning experience.

Although there have been studies that emphasize the need to develop autonomous behaviour in students for improved learning conditions (Kumaravadivelu 1994; Sinclair et al. 2000), they have not yet been explicitly linked to power conditions, as this study attempts to address. This incident indicates that knowledge and power are linked and that every effort should be made to fully develop the potential of these two conditions in tandem. This helps an ESL teacher to translate the AL theory into action, to assist teachers to create favourable knowledge conditions. The other important point to note is that the teaching principle of promoting learner autonomy from Kumaravadivelu (1994)

is needed to activate knowledge conditions (Perry 1968) into action, and that is further explained in the stories that follow.

5.2 Knowledge Story 2 – Part A

Interview with Salim, Engineering (2010)

Teacher:	*Do you think citations are important?*
Salim:	*Yes.*
Teacher:	*Why?*
Salim:	*For plagiarism, it's important to learn citations. We have to cite because we don't want to steal people's ideas and commit an offence.*
Teacher:	*Did you know about this before coming to this school?*
Salim	*No.*
Teacher:	*In secondary school?*
Salim:	*No. Teachers did not mention that.*
Teacher:	*In MRSM? (Maktab R Sains Mara)*
Salim:	*No.*
Teacher:	*Did you steal ideas?*
Salim:	*Oh yeah!*
Teacher:	*So now that you know, how do you feel about it?*
Salim:	*It's not good to do that.*

5.2.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

In this interview, Salim, a Malay student, is candid about how he used to plagiarise in his early education settings prior to joining this university. According to Billic-Zulle et al. (2005):

> *Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit and usually claiming it to be one's own (p.126).*

Cutting and pasting chunks of material from other resources is not unusual for Malaysian students. Like many other students who were interviewed, Salim explains that he never knew it was wrong to plagiarise simply because he was not told by his teachers, whether in a normal public school or the private boarding school he last studied in, catering for Malay students. Although he admits to stealing ideas, once he discovers it is wrong to plagiarise, he attempts to break the habit. The plagiarising could also be attributed to the fact that he and the other students were more accustomed to writing creatively in schools And because there was a lack of emphasis on plagiarism and its effects on academic writing as a whole in the Malaysian education system.

Language used in story

I was surprised to hear him say 'yeah!' to the stealing of ideas. It was as if it was not a huge problem at all. His not knowing appeared genuine and the seriousness of plagiarism only dawned on him in this British Malaysian university campus. However, he seems to be able to explain why it is important not to steal ideas from other people and is aware of what he needs to do in order to improve. One reason could be attributed to the fact that I repeatedly emphasised the importance of using their own words for their writing to students, whenever they write in the classroom and how it can be a serious offence to plagiarise. This is echoed by Brown and Howell (2001), who in their research found that students are more fearful of plagiarising when policies about plagiarism and punishment are read or explained to them. The change in his attitude towards plagiarism promised to be positive. Although, that being the case, I still felt Salim's knowledge level at this stage was more dualistic as he was listening to me and accepting what I was saying as the absolute truth.

Context and culture of the story

The emphasis in Malaysian schools to pass exams creates a situation where notes or information are regurgitated rather than fully understood; this can impact the ability of students to think about how to summarise or paraphrase properly when they revise their lessons in order to write for exams or project papers. In most Malaysian educational

contexts, plagiarism is not an issue as it is not given much emphasis in secondary or high schools.

Many Malaysian students struggle when they get into university through their foundation or undergraduate years, as the rules of academic writing have not been made explicitly clear to them prior to university entry (Arkoudis & Tran 2012). There is a serious lack of understanding on what students should know about plagiarism (Pak 2013) and that affects their perceptions about it. For Malaysian students, it becomes a new skill that they need to acquire and, coupled with language or grammar problems they have inherited from primary school years, the task seems Herculean.

5.2.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements from Knowledge Story 2 - Part A

Salim's quick acceptance of plagiarism as an unacceptable practice was indeed admirable. His willingness to learn the rules of academic writing, despite knowing that it was difficult, is indicative of a maturity level that denotes the desire to comply with the culture of the classroom, even if he did not fully understand what the academic writing culture within the department was. Salim was doing whatever it took to succeed and wanted to do what was right according to what was expected of him within the culture of the academic writing department. The interview extract below shows how, after an open book test for cause and effect essay, Salim reflects on his work and shares what he learnt from the citation experience:

Teacher:	*What do you think about the test itself, the way it was carried out… you know I gave you all the questions first and then asked you all to look for the information and come back and write? What do you think about that?*
Salim:	*It is better, because it is open book test. It is also with a partner… we can find the articles and still have time to find what we need to do. I also tried to find sample essays and what I needed to do to cite because we need to cite.*
Teacher:	*How do you find the citation exercise? You know when I always tell you to look for a journal article, something more scholarly and cite afterwards, how do you feel about that?*
Salim:	*I think it's quite challenging…it also teaches me to do it the correct way, because before*

	this I just search in Wikipedia and I don't know how to find the article. Then, when you force us to find scholarly articles, which I think is better… because in degree courses, you need to find all these things.
Teacher:	*Do you find it helpful… in your own discipline when you look for journal articles?*
Salim:	*When I try to find the journal article in my stream, it really helps me to do it in a correct way. Before this, I just search in Wikipedia. It won't be correct because people just write…it's not scholarly… not cited, don't have reference.*

As a result, his knowledge about citations developed slowly and his autonomy level increased once he was aware of the rules. Tang (2012, p. 1) explains:

> *Even if learners themselves are not initially aware of the cultural associations attached to the language, others are and will perceive them as being aligned with that culture. And if social theories of identity formation are to be believed, a person's identity is a social construct, and is (in part or whole) the product of societal perception.*

Salim's story inspired me to seek ways to make it easier for the students to learn these rules. The introduction of internet sites where the learning of citations was based on a colour-coding system followed by quiz-like exercises appeared to help the students become more familiar with the rules. My decision to use colour and computers to teach them was largely due to my reading of how to engage today's more technologically savvy learners (Dziuban, Moskal & Hartman, 2005). Colour coding in plagiarism sites on the internet helped my students to make sense of style and format quickly, as they were visual learners as well. My use of colour-coded sites was a mediating tool that assisted them to understand the style and formatting procedure of the bibliographic entries they chose to follow.

Salim's viewing of me as an authority on the subject made him more compliant, since I had expert power over him (French & Raven 1959). His humble confession about what he thought was wrong set the stage for him to try and understand the seriousness of plagiarism. Although he began learning from a dualistic knowledge stage, he moved onto the multiplicity stage (Perry 1968; Moore 1994) as he tried to make sense of the various resources available to him. The need to move onto the relativist and commitment stage of

knowledge took quite a while to develop, as he was not used to it from his previous experience of working with others' knowledge. Lacking in confidence, he would often ask for help with answers. His level of autonomy was not very high in the beginning because he did not have the capacity to answer some of the citation questions by himself. His lack of capability and his perception of the task being difficult are some of the reasons why he struggled with developing autonomy (Sinclair et al. 2000). However, at the end of the course, he felt that his autonomy level had increased as indicated in the interview below.

Salim:	*I had to become autonomous. More autonomous. I had to ask my friends, lecturers… to meet them. I had to make meetings.*
Teacher:	*Have you changed in your character? From the first time you came and now, 10 weeks into the course?*
Salim:	*Not so much.*
Teacher:	*Not so much? Etiquette changed?*
Salim:	*Still the same.*
Teacher:	
Salim:	
Teacher:	*Still the same? Ok. You said you have become more autonomous.*
Salim:	*Yes, I have. More autonomous*
Teacher:	*Why?*
Salim:	*Because I can do all this by myself. Because when I was at secondary school, I always depend on my friends…. too dependent on my teachers.*
Teacher:	*So now if you don't know something, what do you do?*
Salim:	*I try to figure out first, then if I can't, I will ask my friends, then if my friends can't help me, then I will ask my lecturers.*

While Salim was more accepting of what was taught to him, the story below, which I consider as an extension of Story 2, provides a different perspective on how learners think about learning when the task set does not meet with their approval.

Reflecting on unexpected elements from Knowledge Story 2 - Part B

Conversation recorded in my diary – 25th August 2009

Cal: Why are we studying this when we could use Harvard style instead?
Me: For this course, we are using the APA style for referencing purposes. But it is good that you know the Harvard system. Why don't you apply that on your own, when you are doing things for your own discipline?

Background to the story

Cal asked me the question above while we were in the language lab, which could be booked when teaching the Academic Writing and Study Skills programme. In the previous cohort, I found that just using a handout and reading out the format or referencing style, or just leaving it to the students to read and understand for themselves at home resulted in poor results later for their referencing test. They were not motivated to try manual exercises out by themselves. This time, I spent a great deal of time in the language lab where I decided to show them different APA style referencing sites and finally stopped at the Long Island University site, which was colour coded and appeared to be more student friendly. In my view, the site had visual appeal that could help them understand the rules faster and they could then proceed to practice what they learn with some related online referencing exercises. From what I observed, most of them found it useful and were happy to do the corresponding online activities in class rather than at home, except for Cal who uttered the above words to me.

Language of the story

Cal seemed frustrated in his tone towards me. I could see that he was finding it difficult to do something which he thought was irrelevant, since he was studying the Harvard format for referencing for his own discipline which was Business. He also used the phrase 'a waste of time' after the words above were expressed. I was upset that he was bold enough to say that, in an Asian context, because it was considered rude to speak in such a manner to teachers. The shock I experienced was mainly because no other student before Cal had spoken that way to me. It was not the norm and it took me by surprise.

Culture and context of the story

Cal expressed his opinion and had every right to say what he did, although in my context not many students would be brave enough to voice their complaints. He merely expressed unhappiness over being asked to do something that he perceived was pointless. I argued that the APA style was needed for his next test in line with this course and suggested that it was good to know the style as a new piece of knowledge. He found it tedious to read through the colour-coded site. While most students complied, he tried to negotiate his way out of the task. The culture of my department's teaching was clearly different from what he was used to in his discipline's culture. In this instance, perhaps one could ask whose knowledge actually counts? Is it important to pay attention to what the English language teachers want or to do what the discipline experts want? Or is it important to actually consider the student's needs and find a compromise? These were some questions that were on my mind at the time. What was evident was that there was tension between what Cal perceived as important or rather, not important for learning, which was different from what the department established as necessary for learning.

5.2 Further reflection and discussion

Cal's remark was unexpected as, throughout my teaching time there, he was the only student who questioned me regarding what knowledge needed to be learned. This observation was shared with the rest of the teaching staff at a meeting. It was a piece of knowledge I wished to share with my colleagues in the hope that the rigid rules set in the course structure, that were pre-planned by the department, could be changed to help students learn better. It was eventually decided that students could use whatever style they were comfortable with, if they did not want to use the APA format, even for testing purposes, so long as they were consistent.

What that meant in practice was that teachers were also required to know several formats just in case the students decided to use a format other than APA for testing purposes. For a long time, the teaching team had operated separately, without really paying attention to the needs of other disciplines' requirements for teaching academic writing. Teaching was more about me adhering to the English department team's concerns about teaching English and academic writing which originated from the UK, according to their

perspective on what was right or wrong – which did not necessarily advance or enhance student learning in a way that would connect them to local experiences and the global world. There had not been any necessity on my part to question my teaching choice until the student questioned me.

At the time, I felt my power as a teacher was being challenged, but Cal was actually exercising his right to question the validity of what was being taught. The experience opened my eyes and the department's as to making sure that what was being taught was relevant to students' needs. This illustrates that my third teaching principle, ensuring relevant context and culture, was not at work in this situation. My perception of what needed to be taught was clouded by the need to fulfil course structure requirements and not what the real-world experiences of the students dictated. Cal's remark, to me, was seen as a critical incident that needed to be unpacked and understood at a deeper level. There was tension about learning preferences which I did not pick up on until after reflecting on this incident.

Research shows that most ESL teachers fall into the trap of ignoring such critical incidents because they lack the time or the resources to explore beyond what is required of their teaching duties (Thomas & Brown 2011) and they are afraid to challenge set traditions within hierarchical organisations (Noffke 1997). I was fortunate that my views were heard by my colleagues and that there was change in the way the next cohorts were taught. If not for my own theoretical growth in knowledge for this action research study, I would not have challenged my own narrow understanding of teaching, or have been brave enough to share this incident with my colleagues. My own increase in research knowledge reduced my teacher power in relation to my students.

In terms of Cal's knowledge growth, he moved from the dualistic stage to multiplicity stage (Perry 1968; Moore 1994) very quickly. In fact, he was at a relativist stage when he questioned me about the importance of the task. In his mind, he had already made up his mind that the task was not useful. As a result, he did not commit to the learning experience as well as the other students. Whatever mediation and scaffolding principles (explained in more detail in the next story) I applied in this context were not useful to him. What this taught me is that students will not commit to learning something or build

autonomous behaviour if they perceive the task as not being meaningful for them (Kumaravadivelu 1997; Sinclair et al. 2000) or relevant to their needs because of the type of motivation involved in learning.

In Cal's case, he knew what the rules of academic writing were, but he was acting outside the traditional culture of compliance with teacher rules. He did not perceive its importance as he operated on instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), which is a type of motivation that builds on achieving a set of goals or tasks for the short term, unlike integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert 1972) which requires a more committed investment in the culture of the target language on a long-term basis. Salim, on the other hand, operated (first story) on integrated motivation because his goal was to succeed for the long term, and thus he was willing to take time to do it. Therefore, it is also important for ESL teachers to take heed of different student's motivation levels and how that may affect student's knowledge about learning and how they perceive the way things are done within or beyond their cultural set-up. Motivation levels were explored in the hindsight phase as I reflected and read more.

The whole experience also challenged me to think about how, with increased understanding of learning, comes reduction of power. Cal's ability to negotiate and establish his own set of rules relinquished my power over him, because he had the knowledge to do so. When I set out to conduct this research, I wanted to explore the AL perspective of deeply understanding power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within and beyond the classroom, to help with the teaching of academic writing in a way that would add to research dimensions. Perry's knowledge scheme (1968), while observable in this story, does not add to the overall improvement of ESL pedagogy unless it is tied in with power and socio-cultural conditions. When a student experiences power in his or her learning decisions, autonomy levels increase and knowledge in turn increases. As Morgan (1998) reiterates:

> *If theoretical knowledge is to be relevant, it must begin by negotiation and a considerable amount of autonomy (p. 131).*

From a student's point of view, Cal's negotiation of what needed to be studied implied a level of knowledge and autonomy and pushed me to critically examine the boundaries I had set as a teacher. Cal was liberated enough (Kumaravadivelu 2001) to ask for a change in referencing style, as he had achieved liberated autonomy and therefore he was already being critical as a learner (Green 1988). As one of my first teaching principles, negotiated interaction is meant to help minimise power conditions and that is exactly what happened. My power as an authority of the subject matter was somewhat challenged and reduced by Cal's negotiations with me, and this knowledge helped me to rethink how best to proceed with my teaching in general and my interactions with fellow teaching colleagues about future course developments.

While this may not be easy for many ESL teachers to pursue (Thomas & Brown 2011), the critical dimension of pedagogy seen here pushes the teacher's knowledge about what and how to teach, and encourages further action into thinking and developing a higher level of practice. When pedagogy resonates with theory, as mentioned in the above quote, it further contributes to ongoing debates on the extent to which AL conditions can be activated where the gap between practice and theory can be effectively addressed. The addressing of this gap between theory and practice for the ESL teacher is crucial for the development of student knowledge conditions in the classroom.

5.3 Knowledge Story 3

Classification exercise – letter from Badrul, Bioscience, 2009

I learned how to write a classification essay in week 3. Firstly, I had been asked to draw a tree diagram about our campus. At that time, I still don't know anything about classification. After that, a slide show about the detail on how to draw a tree diagram was showed in class. I knew that a tree diagram should have included a title, main categories, sub categories and examples. Next, I also knew that each of the elements should write in the same rule. This is very important.
I enjoyed the lesson very well because I was learned a lot of extra information which I won't learn or know in the daily life. Example like you told us about the earthquake happened in Padang and others.

I knew more extra general information about the things happened around us. At the end of the lesson, we were given a numerous topic of practice to write classification essay. It is quite useful for me as a source to practice on my own.

5.3.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

Badrul's letter shows his view on learning how to write a classification essay, which was taught to the students as the English department considered it was important for them to learn for their discipline. For the second semester of this English programme, students also had to learn how to write both 'process' and 'cause and effect' essays. I began the class with definitions about classification essays. Students were asked to draw a tree diagram of what our campus had or offered. It was explained that the tree diagram should contain a title, main categories, sub-categories and examples. The goal was for the tree diagram to provide the basic structure for the classification essay. I then walked around the class to see if they could draw the diagram without any further explanation.

Language of the story

Badrul struggled with the diagram at first as indicated in the language expressed in the letter above. He did not understand it like some other students in the class. He only 'got it' when I showed an example of the complete tree diagram on my slides. He needed a visual representation of what was explained by the teacher earlier to understand what was being taught. The 'same rule' he writes about in his letter indicates he is aware that it is important to draw or explain these categories, according to specific divisions.

Context and culture of the story

The idea to use the tree diagram was from a textbook, but the reference to campus and the earthquake was related to what was relevant at the time. I had to consider bringing in elements that students could relate to and not just explain or teach with a page from the textbook. The earthquake affected a popular Medical University in Indonesia and I knew some of the Bio medical students in class may have had friends and relatives who were

studying medicine in Padang at the time. The use of slides made it easier for them to visualise what was being explained, and the drawing of the diagram itself provided a good practice to build a solid foundation for them to start writing up the classification essay. Since this was a contemporaneous phase, it was more about making decisions on the go, as I gauged what I perceived as important for student learning at the time. What I discovered was that not all students in my class could accomplish what I wanted to do without some guidance. Some of the students were stuck at the most basic level and I realised that they needed more help, as indicated by the student below, Marissa, who was in the same class as Badrul. Her interest was in animals and she chose to draw a tree diagram based on animals. I analysed her letter:

Marissa's letter – 2009

The classification class gave a big impact to me because it made me realise how much I know about the names and types of certain things. I like the lesson 'cos when there was a doubt or something weird in the names…we would discuss and search for information via the internet. Some of the new words learnt were oboe, mudpuppy, plateaus, buzzard, falcon, mare, Great Dane, Dalmatian and trout. Besides, I also learnt that this lesson demanded a lot of reading to help me classify the types and groups of these creatures.

When I reflected further in the contemporaneous phase, I realised that I needed to structure the lesson in stages for the students to follow, before coming up with a tree diagram that would be the visual model for their written piece. Learners like Badrul, unlike Marissa for example, needed more scaffolding to understand each stage of the structure. They needed help to recognise the main elements that collaborate with the topic and then be provided with more such examples, before they were confident enough to come up with their own structures (see appendix B). They looked at all the different tree diagrams and I also gave an example of a paragraph based on a selected tree diagram to help them understand the connection. The students then finally paired up and produced a short classification paragraph.

5.3.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements of the story

The level of resonance my students had with the people of Padang, Indonesia, was something I underestimated at the time. The Padang earthquake discussion happened in class as an interlude. It was not pre-planned. The fact that many of my students were Muslims and that all of them were Bioscience students, made it possible for them to identify with the Padang Medical students who were affected by the crisis and who were largely Muslim.

From an ESL pedagogical stance, it is important for teachers to bring in global and cultural elements into their teaching because the way the English language has evolved over the years demands that it be treated as a language that cuts across world boundaries. It is no longer a language that only native speakers can claim entity to (Doan 2010) as it has expanded to include non-native communities who speak, read and write the language as a means for multifunctional discourse.

References made to the earthquake in class opened up discussions about the plight of Malaysian medical students residing there to complete their medical degrees, some of whom were friends and relatives of the students in my class. Social or catastrophic events like this can bring students closer together. And although there was no major loss of life in the university, just talking about or living through the possible stress and problems in the daily lives of the Padang students, following this tragedy, enabled the students to visualise a structure for presenting their ideas in a coherent manner. Street (1984) argues that such events are crucial for building contextual or critical literacy. Bouncing off ideas with fellow students also increased their confidence to write out points in their writing, as they were sure of what to say or write, underscoring the interrelationship of speaking and listening with writing literacy.

The ideas were then depicted in a tree diagram to understand the classification process further. It became the basis for more classifying exercises where the students were challenged to try different topics that were broken down or classified into relevant categories. Badrul, just like the others in class, was able to do more written work as time

went by with such diagrams, together with a study partner (see appendix B). The stages of knowledge (Perry 1968) were evident as follows. Badrul made the commitment to move from the accepting or dualism (stage 1), taking in my explanations at the start before exploring and making his own decisions about learning (multiplicity and relativism stages/ 2 and 3), then finally making a commitment (stage 4) and completing the task as required. The earthquake discussion and the tree diagram set the tone for more complex writing which followed suit afterwards, showing movement from operational to critical levels of literacy (Green 1988).

The ability of the students to begin with the idea of classifying information into structural tree diagrams and then transferring that knowledge to form the skeletal structure of their essays, indicates that the scaffolding technique or the assisting principle I used initially helped them to build on the knowledge learnt. They were able to autonomously use smaller bits of information and piece them together into more difficult but meaningful construction. Promoting learner autonomy (Kumaravadivelu 1994) was the main teaching principle I used, to negotiate knowledge conditions and scaffolding was the embedded principle used, to help with promoting learner autonomy. In Chapter 2, I argued that scaffolding and mediation, the other embedded principles I used for this study, bridge the gap between the two main theoretical traditions I attempt to merge: AL and PMP. Scaffolding is widely used and researched in TESOL and TESL and is recommended for improved learning (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer 2003; Sinclair et al. 2004).

The scaffolding technique may have begun in the contemporaneous phase, with me showing them how to break down a topic into supporting points, and using that information to form the basic structure of the classification essay. However, it was only in the hindsight phase that I started thinking more about the Zone of Proximal Development. This zone means the gap between what the learner can do with the teachers carefully selected and appropriate prompt and what the learner can do on his or her own, by observing and using the tools provided to get to a more difficult or advanced level. I was looking to see if my students were in this zone.

In Chapter 2, I theorised that autonomy in learners is subject to the learner's desire to learn, the level of difficulty in the set task, the varying degrees of capability in each

learner and the psychological/ emotional barriers to learning which may or may not be related to the teaching strategies (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer 2003; Sinclair et al. 2004). Badrul's level of autonomy was heightened because he was engaged in the Padang topic emotionally and psychologically, which then led him to build his autonomous behaviour. Scaffolding was required to help him get to the next level, but because he was engaged in this topic, it made it easier for him to get to that point. His grammar and content developing difficulties proved to be a struggle at first, but he was determined to get the task right.

The scaffolding type used was inscriptional and interactional (Mitchell & Myles 1998). It was inscriptional because there was a model to follow and interactional due to my story or narrative used to explain the concept of natural disasters, and the possible types and effects. Since mediation occurs all the time and especially through interaction going on in the classroom, I was thinking of using an extra mediation tool to make a stronger connection or build on the concept of breaking down the topic further. The tree diagram became the mediating tool for them to make a connection with the concepts I was explaining, as indicated in Lihanna's letter below, which I read after the contemporaneous phase:

Lihanna's letter –2009

I did not know anything about classification until after the slide show, showing details about how to draw a tree diagram. I knew it had to include a title, main categories, sub-categories and examples, I also learnt that each element should be written using the same rules. This is important. I enjoyed the lesson because I learnt a lot of extra information which I won't learn in my daily life. For example, when you told us about the earthquake in Padang. At the end of the lesson, we were given numerous topics to practise. It is quite useful for me to practise on my own.

Lihanna understood what needed to be done after listening to my power point based teaching. She also gained extra knowledge from what was discussed and realised the benefits of autonomously working on the practice topics. The tree diagram was therefore the key to develop the students' writing further into an essay, once they understood the concept.

For ESL teachers, it is useful to note that when the topic selected is highly engaging, the teacher can release her control as the students become more confident in handling tasks independently. This confirms how my third teaching principle, ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts, was selected to activate socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm, which worked well when tied in closely with my second teaching principle, promoting learner autonomy.

5.4 Knowledge Story 4

Daim's letter – 2009

Today, we had our English class in the computer lab! It was quite fun! I learnt about process writing. Actually, I did know anything about Chernobyl disaster before. So, it was great when you ask us to get a look at the pictures before, to get ideas for writing. Besides, you also let us know about the Vietnamese girl- Kim Phuc, who had her skin burnt during World War 2. I'm interested to hear such extra information from you. For me, I think it is important to get a basic idea first before we go into writing. In order to start writing, we should get more information about the topic. Only then, we can understand the topic well.

5.4.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

The background to this story is that students were asked to write a process essay. However, instead of using the textbook, I decided to have the lesson in the computer lab. I asked the students to Google everything they could on the Chernobyl incident in Russia and get a feel for the incident through pictures. My aim was to get them to also read a little about what happened, even if the information was from Wikipedia. I wanted to see what they could tell me about the incident after spending about 20 minutes searching the internet for extra information about the disaster.

Language used for this story

The language used by Daim appears optimistic because of the words 'fun' and 'interesting'. It shows that Daim was engaged with the topic and interested in learning

more. He is honest about what he did not know and displays some details about what he had learnt by reading about the Vietnamese girl. He also explains what he thinks is useful for learning process writing.

Context and culture of the story

The teaching of process writing is a boring task. I was dreading teaching the process essay structure. The plan was to read aloud with the students and go through the difficult words about the Chernobyl incident, which was the focus of the process essay in the textbook. My decision to use the internet to help students understand the topic better was a contemporaneous decision. I did not know what they would say and or think about it and took a risk. However, I knew that students enjoyed using the internet.

5.4.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements arising from this story

When I reflected on this lesson, I realised that I did not think or anticipate, at the time, that the Chernobyl incident would resonate much better with the students, after they looked at pictures and researched more about nuclear disasters on the internet. I thought the students would think the subject matter of nuclear weapons to be dry. As their teacher, I just wanted to make the class more exciting. The students appeared genuinely shocked by some of the pictures which showed the aftermath of Chernobyl. They also wanted to see more pictures of nuclear destruction and were interested in seeing pictures of the victims of World War 2 ('I looked at many pictures, which showed the pain and suffering of people in that area'). The students started asking questions and discussing amongst themselves. They expressed how they felt and decided to spend more time looking at more destructive war pictures 'to feel the situation of the explosion' in Chernobyl.

<u>Lihanna – 2009</u>

We learnt about process writing in our previous class. Personally, I like writing this kind of essay as it usually discusses topics that are factual. Since it requires a lot of general knowledge in order to write a good essay, the internet helped me a lot in order to finish the essay. Getting to know more on Chernobyl incident, which happened 23 years ago

was very interesting news to me. The Oshima textbook also helped me a lot in understanding more about the process writing, later.

As I reflected on further letters like the one above, I also realised that the students were gaining knowledge all the time and this is mediation. Whether it was from me, or the internet or the textbook, knowledge was all around them and they were free to use whatever they thought was useful. It was also interesting to note that they used the knowledge when it appealed to them. The students got the knowledge from the internet and then used the textbook to help consolidate their learning. The textbook teaching method would have been insufficient as students needed to understand the concept first, before writing, and in this case via online input.

Moreover, while the textbook provides 'good explanations about grammar and sentences', it does not help students who are 'unsure whether the answers are correct or wrong' because it does not have answer sheets, making it difficult 'to check for answers when' they 'really need it'. In other words, the weaker students needed me to go through the textbook with them, to make them understand what was being taught, even though they wanted to be autonomous. However, with students who were good in English, they found 'some uncertainties pertaining to some topics, clarified', after 'doing most of the exercises' from the textbook.

The students demonstrated dualistic knowledge when they heard about the incident from me, and slowly developed their multiplicity and relativist stages of knowledge when they decided to research more about the topic. That led to an interest in developing more environmental issue-based writing, showing up the relativist stage (Perry 1968). An example of this stage is provided in appendix G where one of the class students took the initiative to write an essay about the earth and asked me to check it. However, in Story 4, my second teaching principle of promoting learner autonomy (Kumaravadivelu 1994) to activate Perry's knowledge conditions (1970) was only seen when students were engaged with topics and given enough support to build their confidence in writing. The support came from looking at pictures, reading, and more discussion. I underestimated the power of literacy through the internet and other non-textbook forms. Therefore, Green's (1988) operational and critical literacy dimensions (doing the task, while reading and reflecting

on it) came into being only after the cultural dimension (engaging in related topic discussion through internet research) was addressed.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyse knowledge conditions within the AL framework. The use of Perry's (1968) scheme for knowledge provided me with a systematic way to understand the types of knowledge that students were using, within and beyond the classroom. The knowledge stories collected for the study revealed the following findings.

Firstly, knowledge is shaped by cultural traditions, as shown by John and Mary's story. The understanding of how students learn from different cultures can assist the ESL teacher to plan her lessons in a more engaging way. I had no idea that John and Mary needed to work out their differences and did not think much about their differences until I reflected on the interviews. The other type of culture to pay attention to is internet culture, as shown in Story 4. It is important for the ESL teacher to keep up with current trends in student culture, including how students use online media to learn. It appears to be a powerful tool in building knowledge compared to the traditional method of using a textbook. Furthermore, academic writing seems to be more effective when knowledge is tied in with social practices. The desire to know or learn more brings on a more autonomous behaviour when the conditions of learning make sense to the learner. Kenji & Kemji (1997, p. 1) present a similar argument to support this view:

> *Content English textbooks should be useful, meaningful and interesting for students. While no single subject will be of interest to all students, materials should be chosen based, in part, on what students, in general, are likely to find interesting and motivating.*

If the students perceive the subject matter as important for them they will make an effort to learn. From the stories presented in this chapter, it appears that while translating knowledge conditions into action is possible through the promotion of learner autonomy (Kumaravadivelu 1994), my second teaching principle, there first needs to be a culturally relevant context for learning before learning can take place. Learners need to like and appreciate what they are going to learn before they can become engaged in set tasks. It is

therefore imperative for ESL teachers to think carefully about what materials they choose for teaching.

That is why Kumaravadivelu (2001) suggests that ESL teachers consider the pedagogies of possibility, practicality and peculiarity, which ultimately mean breaking away from set traditions to embrace challenges that are real and relevant. The connections made with everyday occurrences within and beyond the classroom seem to have a strong impact on how English, as knowledge, is being learnt in different ways, and how it is important for teachers to recognise the need to interface the global with the local and seek ways to be a part of it.

Secondly, knowledge contributes to confidence in speech, which in turn consolidates writing. In the all the stories provided, opportunities for social interaction heightened awareness about knowledge-matter and, as a result, helped students develop confidence. Students who develop confidence find more success in writing (see appendix F). Examples evidenced by the stories indicate how students develop the capacity to write based on their ability to articulate their thoughts well. The link between speech and writing furthers the importance of viewing the teaching of academic writing as a social practice, according to AL debates (Lea & Street 1998).

Thirdly, small group work forces dialogue in a knowledge situation. It opens up opportunities for students to challenge themselves and work harder to build their autonomy. It was interesting to note that both John and Mary stayed in the same seats/positions in class and finished the task, even though they had issues. I did not have to change anything for them, as they were culturally comfortable in their ways. It also shows that teachers need to be aware of student culture which in turn has a bearing on student epistemologies, so the teacher can plan her or his lessons better.

What this means is that from an AL perspective (Lea & Street 1998), socio-cultural aspects in the classroom need to be explored for knowledge to prosper. Without some form of agreeable interaction between the teacher and the student, or with anyone for that matter, the student may not be able to develop critical literacy (Green 1988) and critical literacy is important. As Larmar and Lodge argue (2014, p. 95), students who lack

'metacognitive capital' or critical thinking may not stay on to finish their studies in university. Hence, the interviews with both John and Salim suggest there was some level of critical understanding going on, as they had to reflect and think about their actions or learning in order to believe there was progress. The interactions the teacher had with the students helped to confirm some of the tensions they were undergoing in terms of positive power or how learner autonomy could be developed. However, it must also be pointed out that there can be little increase in knowledge if power conditions on the part of the teacher undermine student efforts for improvement and meaning-making in the process of learning, because of the way the system or institution works, as pointed out by Jing (2006) and shown in the interview with Cal.

Fourthly, scaffolding and mediation played a part in helping the students build their autonomy levels, as can be seen in Badrul's letter and John's interview. By using my teaching principle, promoting learner autonomy, I was able to see the benefits of scaffolding and mediation (my bridging principles) on developing students' knowledge. These conceptual tools provided assistance for learners who were weak in English and they were encouraged to work harder to produce written work. From the stories presented and explained in this chapter, it could be argued that while scaffolding can help students move from operational to cultural forms of literacy (Green 1988), or from dualistic to multiplicity levels of knowledge (Perry 1968; Moore 1994), the relativist or commitment position of knowledge appears to be only thoroughly developed once different types of meditational elements affect the learners. It is at this deeper and complex level of social interaction through mediation that critical dimensions of literacy are met. Wertsch's (1994, p.204) elaboration seems to deepen this understanding:

> *Mediation is the key.... to understanding how human mental functioning is tied to cultural, institutional, and historical settings since these settings shape and provides the cultural tools that are mastered by individuals to form this functioning. In this approach, the meditational means are what might be termed the 'carriers' of socio cultural patterns and knowledge.*

Lastly, the stages of knowledge as suggested by Perry (1968) were seen from the simplistic/dualistic level right up to the complex, relativist stage in all the stories. The highest level of Perry's scheme was seen when students had to overcome cultural

differences and negotiate their differences to prove their point, as in the case of Mary, who eventually left to pursue a highly-acclaimed university course in the US. Even the Chernobyl story showed how students, when culturally engaged through the computer, made an impact on how they learnt process writing. Such a critical level of literacy is seen when operational and cultural levels of literacy are experienced, as proposed by Green (1988).

In conclusion, there seems to be an ongoing interplay between culture, knowledge and power that cannot be avoided in the classroom. The ESL teacher needs to embrace 'this continuous process of mediation, negotiation and personal interpretation concerning teaching-learning content' (Huang 2006, p.38). This is important to develop student autonomy and improve knowledge conditions.

Chapter 6: Analysis of Socio-cultural Conditions

6.0 Introduction

In Chapter 2, it was theorised that in order for the teaching of academic writing to be effective within the AL perspective, knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions needed to be explored and understood by teachers. It was also argued that these conditions needed to be transformed into pedagogical practice rather than mainly operating at the level of theoretical rationale. The question for this chapter is to examine socio-cultural conditions, which prevailed in my classroom, and to what extent they could be negotiated constructively for the teaching and learning of academic writing. I also wanted to know how they shaped my pedagogical identity and those of my students. To that end, the research question for Cycles 4 and 5 of this action research study was:

To what extent did PMP's ensuring of relevance to socio-cultural contexts as a teaching principle, have an impact on promoting socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm?

The analysis for socio-cultural conditions in and beyond my classroom is broadly based on Green's three (1988) dimensions of literacy which were used to make sense of the socio-cultural goings on within and beyond my classroom. They include operational, cultural and critical dimensions of any literacy moment or event. Green's work, unlike that of other researchers considered in my literature review (see for example Street 1984; Cope & Kalantzis 2009), helps me to think about pedagogy in terms of explicit guidance for analysing literacy in ways that otherwise may be difficult to imagine. Green (2002, p.69) defines his 3D literacy in this manner:

For me, literacy is always already political (although it may not yet be politicised …). I've wanted to resist starting necessarily from the critical dimension, partly for practical pedagogic reasons. At the same time, I think it's quite counter-productive to start (programmatically and, as it were, 'naturally') from what I call the operational dimension: the 'language' system, as such. You can, of course. Indeed, the whole point is that you can start anywhere, at any point – as long as you take into account, equally, all three dimensions.

Green explains literacy in a non-rigid manner. Literacy does not necessarily begin with the operational dimension. It can start with either cultural or critical dimensions and that is particularly crucial to note for the ESL teacher, as it aligns closely with the fluid design of an action research study. Green also provides a model which gives us an idea of how literacy may be linked to language, although he warns us not to follow the diagram strictly because the teaching of language is never a linear process.

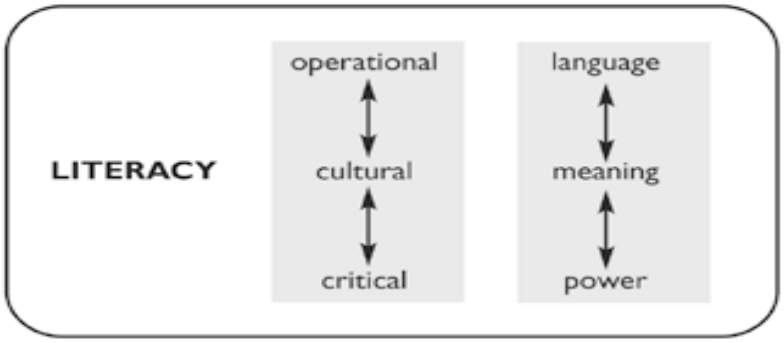

Figure 6. 1: Bill Green's 3D literacy model (2002)

The operational dimension, in this study's context, points to the everyday teaching of language elements (Ludwig 2003); in my academic writing context, it refers to grammar-based, language structure elements. The cultural dimension includes all cognitive and social aspects of behaviour and interaction and how that affects meaning-making, learning and teaching; this may include sharing their cultural backgrounds in the context of raised issues in the classroom which are mediated by language and socio-cultural tools (Vygotsky 1962). Ludwig calls it a meaning-making dimension (2003). The final dimension is the critical dimension in which the level of learner engagement to understand their contexts is meaningfully explored within and beyond the classroom. The critical dimension, while encompassing operational and cultural dimensions, is a stage where literacy functions demand higher-order thinking skills, therefore requiring students to make significant learning progress from the operational to critical dimensions. According to Ludwig (2003, p. 4):

> *The three dimensions operate together to provide an integrated view of literacies as social practices. As interrelated, interdependent, complementary and interactive dimensions they involve language learning which involves cultural*

> *learning, cultural learning which involves language learning, and critical learning which involves language and cultural learning. In this way, there is a complementary and mutually informing relationship between the language system, the meaning system and transforming practice. The three dimensions therefore are bound together necessarily in a reciprocal, mutually enriching relationship and need to be considered in understanding literacies as social practices in the fullest sense.*

For most ESL and academic writing teachers, the operational dimension is achievable – indeed many writing, ESL and EAP teachers will see that as their main task. However, as Green (2002) points out, the different aspects of literacy are always interrelated, so operational literacy always brings in the potential for cultural and critical moments to be explored. This is not usually part of English language teachers' education and professional development, and thus does not tend to be part of their pedagogical repertoire. PMP teaching principles are brought in to critically enact AL conditions, and to make sense of those cultural and critical dimensions in this action research study.

In this chapter, I provide four sets of stories to show how Green's three dimensions help me as a teacher to see literacy and language learning issues at work. Using the critical incident technique (Flanagan 1954; Tripp 1993), I elicit critical moments in my teaching which then require further analysis and understanding. Again, I divide the analysis into the contemporaneous (what I did at the time of teaching) and hindsight (what I reflected on later) analytical phases, which I introduced and explained in Chapter 3. Presented in this way, the thesis then enables me to guide the reader to a) follow the practice-oriented activities as shown through the classroom stories first to get a feel for the real issues in the classroom before b) exploring theoretical insights. The stories are specifically selected from teacher diaries, student interviews and letters. The stories capture what was perceived as a wide range of socio-cultural issues at the disposal of the ESL teacher to make sense of what is happening in the classroom, and how that understanding or knowledge can be used as a stepping stone to improve teaching and learning conditions. All these stories are further supported by other letters, interviews and examples of students' written work.

6.1 Socio-cultural Story 1

My diary entry (27th May 2008 – Business class)

Remark by Teoh, "Miss, my aunt in a 'kampong' used to ask her family members to fill a bucket with faeces or piss before throwing it away...since there were no toilets!". Most of the class went... "Eeoww...we just had our lunch!"

6.1.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

This remark was made when I showed the Business class of Semester 0 (first semester), some presentation slides in the hope that they would understand what water shortage means and how it impacts globally. My goal was to get the students to think about writing an academic paragraph about water problems and how that may affect the world. At an operational dimension (Green 1988), I instructed them to write a clear and concise 100-word paragraph which contained a topic sentence, relevant support details with examples and a conclusion.

Language used in the story

They were also required to use appropriate vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and linking words, all of which were taught much earlier in this exercise as required elements in paragraph writing, according to the prescribed academic writing textbook and course outline. They were also given the choice of using some words from the presented slides. The language used in the story is interesting. Teoh's tone, through his friendly sharing of a personal experience, enabled the class to be relaxed and equally responsive with their own banter. Teoh was comfortable enough to open up about his childhood, because the content and the language used in the power point slides triggered him to think about his past.

Context and culture of the story

When a student walked in late, another student from the back of the class, who was already engaged in banter said, "You've got to fill the bucket up for being late!" While the class was laughing, this student who had just walked in had no idea what was going on. I had to explain the whole context and although she was embarrassed at first, she eventually settled in. It appeared to set a context for a more effective learning outcome, in that the class engaged in spirited discussion. I had no control over what he was going to say, or what the other students were going to say. All I knew, at the time, was that I had a teaching moment and I seized it. Most of the students could identify with the 'kampong' concept, but may not have experienced living in such conditions, since they have more modern comforts compared to their grandparents' time; at least this was what I gathered at the time of doing this contemporaneous analysis. The word kampong means village in Malay and is commonly used in Malaysia interchangeably, or in other languages. Instinctively, I felt Teoh's sharing made it possible for the other students to understand the difficult water situation in their own homeland. Although my slide presentations created an abstract global awareness, the story sharing made me feel as though the discussions that ensued became more personal, real and believable, helping the learning process become more tangible.

The complex meaning of socio-cultural conditions was not properly understood until I reflected on unexpected elements which arose from the stories from this action research project in my hindsight analysis. I knew what I had to accomplish to cover the operational literacy dimensions while I was teaching (Green 1988): like many teachers in the department, my role was simply to tick all the academic writing elements in my box of teaching goals. The cultural and critical dimensions of literacy were paid more attention to in the contemporaneous and hindsight analysis phases, although there was further reflection in the latter phase.

6.1.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements of the story

The importance of scaffolding cannot be underestimated or overlooked by the ESL and academic writing teacher. The development of the bucket story as a scaffolding element was something that was not expected and, upon hindsight analysis, I realise now that it provided the connection for students to visualise and empathise with the worldwide water shortage crisis. The students were also able to use that connection to build an identity for themselves after having understood the historical or social /cultural background to the whole story. My own teaching style may have started off as what a typical ESL researchers' understanding of scaffolding is (as explained and critiqued in Chapter 2), because I was still learning and developing my theoretical ideas; but it eventually developed into Bruner's interpretation of scaffolding as a psychological dimension to learning.

To a large extent, the conditions for learning in the classroom were activated by the student's story. Although I knew how to manipulate the conditions to help with the teaching and learning process, the way in which the lesson was transformed into a more social and inclusive interactive experience was because of this unexpected story sharing. This ESL teaching and scaffolding incident confirms the idea that mediation happens all the time and largely through social interaction, which teachers need to be aware of. Both these bridging principles, scaffolding and mediation, were needed in order to make the main teaching principles (i.e. negotiated interaction, promotion of learner autonomy and ensuring relevance in socio-cultural conditions) work in improving the teaching. Although lumped together as my bridging principles in this context, scaffolding and mediation are not hierarchically equal concepts. Scaffolding appeared only after Bruner applied the concept of mediation to educational contexts. Therefore, the pedagogy of possibility, as advocated by Kumaravadivelu (2001), is seen here where change is possible in teaching and learning when opportunities present themselves for the teacher to seize and use for teaching.

Secondly, what I learnt upon reflection was that there is a need for language teachers to pay serious attention to the cultural and historical domains of the system in which they are involved (see explanation of CHAT in Chapter 2). It was not only about culture but identity in this story. Knowing that culture and identity are closely intertwined and that they cannot be detached from the learning of language, hugely aids the teacher in negotiating the dynamics of the classroom. Teoh was revealing a part of his identity of which he was proud. He was not embarrassed about the story, although I thought it was something young people did not share readily. Peirce (1995) criticizes second language teachers for largely ignoring identity formation and change as a result of evolving social constructs and power relations. For far too long, colonial-inspired educational systems have blinded teacher perceptions of learner cultures as unchanging and foreign (Canagarajah 2002; Pennycook 2004; Morris 2005).

Teachers then fail to recognize the complexities of learning English in a second language classroom, especially if faced with ethnically different students from different cultures. Thus teaching will only be concerned with linguistic or operational elements without including social, emotional or cognitive aspects of learning as a whole. It was imperative for me to explore how identities are closely connected to culture and how within the AL paradigm, ESL teachers need to pay attention to their own and students' evolving identities in order to make progress with their teaching and their students' learning activities. It does not matter if the identities are complex and unsettling; what is important is for the teacher to recognise that there are challenges that need to be embraced to fully understand these socially constructed cultural identities. And they need to be embraced rather than cast aside (Morris 2005).

The cultural context became relevant for students since the story happened in Malaysia, and thus they could relate to it. That is why students laughed and joked some more about the toilet situation, creating a relaxed and fun atmosphere for learning, paving the way for more open discussions and an interest in learning, to write about it afterwards. The student was also unknowingly inviting all in the class to partake of a piece of cultural history that students may know, but have forgotten. This further paved the way for more engaged discussion because they suddenly realised that their own grandparents may have

had similar experiences. As a teacher, I knew that it was a teaching moment for me, to use this interactive story as a mediational element to help with the learning process. I became aware of mediation once I combined the results of the literature review and observations from my own practice. Teoh's story provided the springboard for me to further question and tap into my students' thoughts.

It dawned on me that my third teaching principle, ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts actually worked. The bucket story was relevant to the whole learning experience. It made sense for me to connect it with the slide presentation through questions I asked of the students. While the water crises I presented through the slides were from a global perspective; Teoh's tale put a local spin on the crises, enabling students to view the experience in a local and meaningful way from a cultural understanding of kampong lifestyle, making it easier for them to understand and connect with the plight of the less fortunate around the world who have similar water problems. As a result, learning transcended the local to the global experience. From a critical socio-cultural lens (Green 1988), students were able to make sense of what they had learnt and use it in a formal context more confidently. They began to understand the structural changes that had occurred. It was much easier afterwards, for me to explain and teach the academic writing elements for paragraph writing (highlighted in bold), because the students found it relevant to their learning experience, as expressed in Teoh's interview and those of other students who echoed similar thoughts:

"Very useful miss, prepares me for future tests!"

In other words, relevance here does not just apply to the teacher using her judgement in ensuring the subject matter was relevant, but also the students' perspective about what was meaningful for them to learn. In my view, the statement above, uttered after class, captures the coming to life of both cultural and critical dimensions, as the student is able to do the work and then see how he can apply it to another context.

If it had just been my slides about the water crisis or the prescribed textbook for developing paragraphs, perhaps the class would have been bored. However, it also provided me with an opportunity to think more clearly about the students' own

positioning in the world of water and water shortages, which is what the critical dimension of literacy requires. Therefore, the fourth lesson learnt from this story is that the textbook approach to learning is limited and stops short at the level of operational literacy and perhaps cultural literacy. The textbook approach to teaching, especially in ESL settings, has always been a safe approach and possibly a cheap means to accomplish set goals, hence the concentration on operational dimensions of literacy. There is not much creative thought that goes into planning a lesson if the textbook is often used, as the teacher merely guides the students and provides answers from the textbook. The challenge therein lies in the teacher being able to makes links between operational, cultural and critical aspects or dimensions of literacies, because that provides a more meaningful teaching and learning encounter for both students and teacher. It also provides a more effective means of learning language.

The fifth lesson learnt from this story is that the critical dimension of literacy was made possible after the cultural discussion of his grandmother's bucket use; this experience and engagement supported students to move beyond skills to using writing for exploring complex issues and thus using higher levels of language, in which operational elements were embedded rather than foregrounded. This incident showcases a gradual build-up of confidence and autonomous behaviour in students, both in discussion and in writing. I provide a diagram to show the gradual development on literacy levels which match increasing autonomy levels and knowledge types as well as power conditions (explained in Chapter 2) as students make progress with their work.

At the operational level of literacy, students tend to follow what the teacher says and understanding is more at a structural or grammar based level. Knowledge is largely based on what the teacher says. The teacher appears to have the power to dictate how lessons run as the teacher is seen as someone having expert, referent or authoritative power or someone the students are socially dependent on. In relation to a cultural dimension of literacy however students bring cultural awareness and knowledge into class discussions which pave the way for a more critical understanding of issues at a global level. These cultural knowledge experiences influenced by past historical and socio-cultural practices enable students to share their culture and make sense of the entire experience by

connecting it to the local and current context and nature of the global world. At a critical level, students are able to produce their writing, having gone through and understood the operational and cultural dimensions of literacy.

Finally, what I discovered through hindsight reflection was that the degree of power (Kumaravdivelu 1994) held by the teacher is greatly reduced, as the students begin to engage and contribute to discussions confidently and make some important decisions for themselves about learning along the way, whether right or wrong. Students are still socially dependent on the teacher, who is now more of a friend than an authority figure. At critical levels of literacy, students are able to evaluate and justify their decisions, largely independent of the teacher's help or influence. The teacher merely facilitates discussions as students are able to make evaluative and critical decisions about their learning, irrespective of what the teacher says. The gradual build-up from operational to critical levels of literacy, also showcases the movement from dualistic to relativist stages of knowledge, all of which denote a more independent and autonomous form of learning.

Table 6.1 below was only developed after Cycles 5 and 6. I could not see the connection between AL conditions and the literacy levels until after I had reflected on the action research cycles. Different literacy levels, within the right socio-cultural contexts, reflected different movements in knowledge and power typologies. In a socio-cultural situation where literacy lies at the operational level, the knowledge type evident was dualism and the power type observed was mostly dependent on surveillance. In a more cultural domain of literacy, the knowledge progressed to multiplicity and power was socially independent of surveillance. Finally, when a student achieves critical literacy, they show some commitment to relativism and they are socially independent from any influence of power. Such a finding made it more easy for me as a teacher to understand how the students worked, what types of literacy thrived and in which circumstance.

Table 6. 1: Understanding literacy dimensions in relation to knowledge and power typologies

Literacy dimensions	Knowledge types	Power types
Operational	Dualism	Socially dependent on surveillance
Cultural	Multiplicity	Socially independent of

		surveillance
Critical	Relativism and commitment to relativism	Socially independent of influence

The students had time to reflect on their learning as I did for my teaching. In a later interview, Teoh suggested that he needed time to review his work before he could improve:

> … I'm actually quite a slow learner… maybe other people can catch up things very fast. Uh, I mean, uh, once the teacher teaches, they can just catch up on the spot …they may get it. Yes, I will get it too, but I find if I don't revise, I will forget…for the next class. So, it's really important for me to go back home and at least read through once.

Hence for him to produce a piece almost immediately after the discussion was surprising. Teoh would normally have required a few drafts over a period of time compared to this single class production, because he spends time researching things he is not familiar with on the internet:

> I can actually get many resources from the net, as in recently I actually, um did some, um, research, can I say it's research? Yeah, um, on academic writing and I found many, many, things on academic writing. And, yeah, most of the information is actually same as the during classes. Yeah. And, yeah, first cause I'm those people who learn not only by, uh, what do you call that… like through listening… I need to see... I need to… you know, need to interpret, I need to do this stuff.

The bucket discussion in class helped to organise and invest in ideas, helping students to position themselves in writing more quickly, as well as covering content. In group work that followed the discussion, one student (Julia) remarked in her letter to me:

It was difficult to think carefully before putting words down...we had to agree as a group.

The task appeared to be challenging, especially since the groups had to arrive at a consensus as to what was suitable for their decided topic sentence and paragraph building. They had to make sense of what they were learning in a collaborative way. They did that via the mediation of social interaction. Speaking, listening, writing and reading and scaffolding principles were taking operational and cultural dimensions

(Green 1988) to a higher level of thinking, as they learnt how to negotiate their thoughts with other people's thoughts. It was a type of group learning via discussion, while taking into account all the (operational) academic writing elements they had learned, as indicated in Teoh's interview extract below.

> ...sometimes, what we learn, uh especially if we learn by ourselves, might not be right, might not be accurate. So, when you discuss, you can actually discover that there's not only that one thing, there is even more. And yeah, you can learn from each other.

This move into a more complex knowledge domain, made possible by interaction with classmates, also moved the writing towards more complex and accurate outcomes. The final work produced in class (Teoh's group) follows:

> *The world is facing a major problem which is water shortage. This is because human wasting water constantly without being aware of the consequences. First of all, water affects human directly. Shortage of water contributes to dehydration because water keeps our body hydrated. Malnutrition is also one of the effects of water shortage, for water is the source of minerals. Many children die due to lack of edible water. Apart from that, water shortages also cause serious agricultural issues.* For *instance, over pumping of groundwater leads to a decrease in grain harvest, which in turn leads to a shortage in food. Hence, we should start conserving water from now.*

The paragraph above was written prior to my editing and still contains some grammar and structural errors. After discussing it with them once again and trying to keep the original content, they were able to correct the above to form the paragraph below. The numbers are added to the paragraph as an indication of the specific operational features being explored in this academic writing piece. Some time was spent by the students to reflect on what I suggested before they decided to rewrite the paragraph.

> *Water shortage is one of the main problems facing the world today (1). This is because humans (2) are wasting water constantly without being aware of its consequences, explained as follows. Firstly (3), water shortage affects humans directly by causing us to feel hydrated when we have insufficient water to drink (4). Since water is also the source of minerals, lack of minerals from water consumption can also contribute to malnutrition in young children, causing unnecessary deaths (5). Thirdly, water shortage causes serious agricultural issues. For example, insufficient water supply could lead (6) to a decrease in grain harvest and ultimately lessen food supply to vulnerable people. Hence,*

it is important to take steps to conserve water and ensure that more people have access to clean water for everyday use (7).

In operational terms, what the students tried to achieve is seen through 1) clearer topic sentence, 2) plural form, 3) linking words and connectors, 4) clearer explanation for first point, 5) further details to support point, 6) cautious use of academic language and 7) concluding sentence

The edited version came through a few weeks after the first class, when they had had more time to think things through. The work could still have been improved but I decided not to keep pushing them to achieve perfection, as the objective was to get them to think and produce for themselves without much input from me. I kept as many words as I could from their original version when editing, to respect their work so that they could own the outcome as an autonomous piece of group work. This was yet another example of me stepping back to give them ownership and power over their work, which I only realised when they finished the task. The story then suggests that by ensuring relevance to socio-cultural contexts (Lea & Street 1998) in the teaching of academic writing, students can eventually take control of their own learning and be independent of any kind of power-relational control (French & Raven 1959). The story started with a cultural understanding of literacy and students moved on to operational dimensions of literacy. Critical levels of literacy appeared when there were more reflective discussions as a group and more writing practice. The students could develop critical dimensions of literacy by having reached the relativist and committed stage of knowledge development (Perry 1968), as shown in table in Table 6.2, p.196, because they were engaged in the task.

6.2 Socio-cultural Story 2

Diary entry (September 1 2009)

For today's lesson, I shared about my breast lump, which was benign, discovered after I first got married. I laughed a little to ease the tension (they looked glum!) and told them that I felt vulnerable at that time, during the honeymoon period and wondered if my husband would still love me if I had one breast 'chopped off!'

They laughed. I shared about the doctor who treated me…He was very concerned and caring. He asked all the right questions and made me feel comfortable.
Then they were curious. They asked me to explain more. I drew a diagram on the board to show what type of procedure was involved. I asked them if they knew how to check for lumps and many said they did not. Even boys need to do it, I said. The boys laughed. One boy asked…what did the lump look like?

6.2.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

The incident above was based on a teaching session where I started the class by explaining about a breast lump scare I had when I first got married. I felt the need to share this because I wanted to tie in something personal with the topic of the lesson which centred on paraphrasing health based sentences and a paragraph from their textbook. Paraphrasing techniques were taught to the students earlier and although they knew the steps they were still finding it difficult to work on.

Language used in the story

The language I used for communicating with them was personal and informal. I wanted to create a comfortable atmosphere where they could openly ask me questions without feeling shy. When the boy asked me 'what did the lump look like', I knew I had them engaged.

Culture and context of the story

The content of my teaching was based on bone deficiency and how that can affect women's health. The students were expected to paraphrase a few sentences and a paragraph on it, which was part of an exercise in their textbook. I thought that by going into the lesson straight, it would be quite dry for students to follow and thought of bringing in something personal but related to health to start the discussion rolling. Moreover, I also wanted to break the barriers of sharing something that could be embarrassing, to be discussed especially in a cultural context like mine, where the discussion of female body parts can be deemed as inappropriate for Muslim students.

6.2.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements from the story

In hindsight, I did not expect a female Muslim student to share her story about how she had a lump too, and then decided to go to the university doctor, whom she felt made her uncomfortable with his examination method and comments. Although she laughed about it, as it was some time since it had happened, I was happy to have been able to advise her to make a complaint about the doctor as well as seek a second opinion about her condition. From what I gathered, the doctor, in subsequent months, was no longer employed and she did eventually move on to seek treatment elsewhere.

I felt proud of my student, because it is often difficult for a Muslim female student to voice her experience bravely, due to cultural inhibitions, and yet by sharing that knowledge she was able to push boundaries that could inhibit learning. What I learnt is that, as teachers, many things that happen in the classroom are unplanned and impromptu and therefore we need to learn how to create teachable moments through these stories. We need to be able to develop the right skills to help students use their own narratives to understand their journeys in life and translate their stories into opportunities for language and learning.

The class appeared more ready to tackle the paraphrasing questions after the Muslim student opened up. There seemed to be a more serious attempt in trying to grasp paraphrasing as a concept and they actually tried all the exercises that followed without many complaints. It was also useful, in my view, to have started the discussion on a health note because they were all Bioscience students. The second thing learnt is that familiarity with their discipline, by connecting the topic with some medical knowledge, was an important strategy so that the topic was relevant to what they were learning. Applying this knowledge in an academic writing context afterwards would then make the experience more meaningful. It also showed development from a cultural level at first into a more operational and critical level, as I explained earlier in this chapter about how literacy levels do not necessarily move according to hierarchical stages but rather, according to social experience (Green 1988).

What the incident shows is that the classroom is not an island that is disconnected from the world. Disciplines are connected to real lives and real people, and my role is to help students make this connection. The third point that can be learnt from this story is that socio-cultural conditions need to be deeply understood, so that relationships are formed between the teacher and learner to assist with the learning process in academic writing. This ties in neatly with my discussion of Brian Street's (1984) critical model of literacy in Chapter 2, which foregrounds how literacy is achieved through social connections and relationships.

A fourth area of learning suggests that it is time for ESL teachers to acknowledge that English is no longer exclusively British or American, or what Kachru defines as the inner circle countries (1994). In other words, the teaching and learning of English should not just celebrate native speaking ideals or contexts. The outer (India, Singapore) and expanding circles (Vietnam, Russia) continue to have widespread influence in shaping the way English is being taught and learnt, which suggests that teachers need to know and use this knowledge to assist them with their teaching and learning activities. It has crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries to include a more global understanding of what counts as English (Doan 2014). Such discussions raise the question of whose knowledge, whose English counts? In my context, I started with a Western textbook that celebrated 'privileged' inner circle native speakers in teaching academic writing, but I needed to incorporate local knowledge of social relations and history into my teaching so that the experiences were authentic and real to the students' present lives, for them to make meaning. Thus Kumaravadivelu's pedagogy of particularity (2001) can be seen in operation here, as it is classroom culture at the time that lends itself to further learning. The third story below is provided to lend further insight on that issue.

6.3 Socio-cultural Story 3

April 1st 2010 – Oral presentation (response to question asked after oral presentation, recorded in my diary)

"The Chinese believe that a corpse buried without its body parts can cause its spirit to roam unhappily without its parts"

6.3.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

The above remark was uttered by a student, Lim, in response to a question asked by another student in class during oral presentations based on Lim's research topic. Lim and three other members in his group were all standing in front of the class, after their presentation and they were fielding questions from classmates. The topic was organ donation and the aim of their study was to find out if the Malaysian students on campus were in favour of organ donation. These were Semester Three students who seemed to have grasped the basics of academic writing and were now about to write a research paper based on a topic agreed upon by the group and negotiated with me in terms of the scope it should cover. The research topic was to be written after the following procedures were completed: coming up with suitable research questions, developing and distributing a peer-reviewed and approved questionnaire, analysing feedback received from respondents, presenting findings orally and writing up the final research report. All these activities were done as a group, except for the report writing.

Language of the story

The annotation used above has a strong cultural connotation which is hard to ignore. It was spoken with a firm and proud tone and as a teacher I felt compelled to listen. Lim was making a strong statement about his people's beliefs. He seemed to want his listeners or classmates to understand the way people thought about organ donation and how culturally the idea is thought of differently by different ethnic groups.

Context and culture of the story

From what I gathered at the time, organ donation was still a sensitive topic which many Malaysians find difficult to discuss, because of the cultural taboos associated with sacrificing body parts. Through casual discussions with students, friends, family and colleagues, I found that many Malaysian people choose to ignore it, as a way to avoid dealing with this issue. However, in recent years efforts by the Health Ministry to promote awareness about its necessity have at least piqued the interest of educated individuals and young adults. The explanation provided by Lim was something Malay and Indian students appeared to be interested in. Malay students said that in their culture it was not an issue and Indians also felt the same way. However, they also said that their parents may not have thought about this issue in the same way. They were interested in the idea of 'roaming spirits' and said that specific prayers were normally conducted after deaths to appease the spirits in their own respective cultures.

6.3.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements in the story

In hindsight, what ultimately emerged from my analysis is that the discussions held in class were largely controlled by the students. My involvement was minimal, and this was a deliberate attempt to keep it that way. I personally struggled with the idea of organ donation, as it was not discussed in my own family, and I had not thought about it seriously until I was asked about it by my students. I shared that knowledge with the class and I think that vulnerability made them look at me differently afterwards. I was no longer a teacher holding power over them; I was a participant like them, sharing my thoughts and feelings openly. The students also sought answers for types of organs commonly harvested in Malaysia. The presenting group provided the answers and did an excellent job overall, presenting a widely-researched topic which not only engaged the students but provided useful information and provided relevant and informed answers.

The presentation impacted many students as they openly revealed that they had learnt so many things they never knew and wanted to donate their organs in future to help people.

The sharing of religious practices and customs related to death were insightful for the students as they came from different cultural backgrounds. The second point I wish to make is that over time, understanding different cultural perspectives appeared to assist the presenting group to formulate their own arguments in a more academic manner, as they learnt how to negotiate different views without being judgemental. The presenting group had to justify the way they thought out their presentation and the answers provided by them showed how much preparation they had undertaken to fully understand their topic.

Their findings also revealed a more robust outlook on organ donation, especially among the young students in the university, as there was greater awareness about the benefits. This whole process enabled me to see how the three dimensions of literacy (Green 1988) worked from operational through critical dimensions and in what areas the groups were struggling. It also helped me think of ways to help them, which then made me think of how effective my teaching principles were. Again, I saw my third teaching principle in action, ensuring relevant social and cultural contexts (Kumaravadivelu 1994) to activate the socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm (Lea & Street 1998). The context which was meaningful to the group ensured their full commitment to engage with their topic and present it with enthusiasm. They not only engaged with the topic but also the larger community, making it both a learning and social endeavour.

Over time, I had the opportunity to talk to Lim and get to know him better. Since he did not like to be interviewed, we had casual conversations inside and out of class and I recorded what I thought was important. For Lim, who was timid in nature and came from a conservative Chinese background, the topic was difficult to address as he had to think beyond his own cultural practices. He also had to learn to appreciate the views of other modern Chinese, Malay and Indian students within and beyond his group about this issue. He had to make sense of his own understanding about this topic and then try and make sense of it within and beyond his community, before merging his thoughts with other members of the larger community and presenting his logic and reasoning, all in a respectful and academic manner. Learning for Lim became more meaningful when he

saw that he had to make a transition from old beliefs to new ones, as a result of change brought on by his own and other people's awareness through education.

It helped him build confidence to stick with positive change, especially when there was rallying support from a new community of learners around him. In addition to developing a beginner understanding of the topic, Lim had to also negotiate cultural discussions about the issue when asked about ethnic views on organ donation. He also made some critical and bold comments at the end of his presentation when he argued that old practices should be phased out in favour of helping people who need healthy body parts, to continue to live. Lim therefore had to go through several thought processes and self-identity exploration before changing some of his views in order to reach a critical understanding. What I am suggesting therefore as my fourth point is that by going through the stages to achieve higher forms of literacy dimension, one cannot help but undergo a soul-searching process which ultimately produces some shifts in identity.

Currently, the debates about English as an international language focus on who has the right to dictate what the target culture for English speakers should be (Graddol 2000; McKay 2002; Doan 2014). English should really be used by all who attempt to use it and not just native speakers who sometimes think they own it (Widdowson 1994). In the case of Lim, he struggled initially to learn how to navigate the use of academic writing skills while also working out his own prejudices and beliefs before making progress with English language usage. Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 22) talks about how language and culture, although connected, are not 'irrevocably linked'. Doan (2014) expands this further by saying that the language can then be adapted to suit local and current needs of the culture of the speaker in order to be creative and effective. Lim was not a native speaker but in the end, through hard work, he managed to convey his thoughts in a fairly clear and concise manner, all the while focusing on elements of his culture which he felt needed to be grasped by the audience to have an overarching view about different ethnic perspectives to organ donation. Lim was a mediator between language and culture.

Unfortunately, Lim did not finish this programme and left the course mid-way. However, his group mate, June, was inspired by the discussion in class following Lim's presentation and went on to produce an argumentative essay (see appendix G), which she

sent to me. Finally, she also produced one of the best reports (see Appendix F, an example of one of her drafts) on Organ Donation and had the highest score for English in her class (see report checklist, appendix E). Another example of a report checklist and a final report is also provided from Badrul, the student from Story 3 in the knowledge chapter, who did not know what classification essay was. However, he was able to move on to produce a research report (see appendix E, report checklist).

June worked on her report meticulously using input gained from the group presentation. At the end of semester, in an email interview below, she shared that she was 'more confident' when 'asked to write either process, classification, cause and effect, compare contrast and argumentative essays.' She also described the whole learning process throughout the three semesters:

1. Which of the following do you think has affected your writing during all three semesterss?

a. Knowledge from within and outside university
b. Attitude
c. Friends
d. Religion
e. Family
f. Nottingham university
g. English Language Unit
h. Teachers
i. Exams
j. Interest
k. Health
l. Motivation
m. Social events and news

You may pick more than one from the list above. Please give examples of how these have affected you.

June's response was:

> I feel that all the options above had played a part in my writing, particularly the exams, teachers and friends. Exams had helped me to improve my writing through various comments made by my lecturer. I have learned to write better by concentrating on my mistakes and not repeating them besides trying out different methods on tackling essays and writing. This also leads to the role played by the lecturers involved, who besides gave constructive comments on my writing but who had also guided me throughout the semester teaching and learning new experiences together. The atmosphere created by the lecturer was also a great help in conducting the lessons, as the class becomes alive with laughter but also with a sense of professionalism in the lessons. Finally, I feel that the support from friends and the cooperation we shared in completing English assignments and works had help me to look at English writing in a different perspective. This is evident especially in the recent report writing and presentations.

What this shows is that learning is really about the student, whether non-native or native, making meaning for himself or herself and others (Lantolf 2006) before transferring that understanding into the writing context.

6.4 Socio-cultural Story 4

Personal Diary entry – April 2009

> *"How do we know what's best for the culture of this place if we don't take in local views"?*

6.4.a Contemporaneous analysis phase

Background to the story

This question was entered in my diary after I made an appointment to see a senior member of the administrative team at the university where I taught, to discuss power and socio-cultural

conditions in the university. I wanted to know what the senior academic administrator, who is British, thought about some of my views and how he would try and resolve some issues at work in the department where I taught. This meeting was a follow-up to an email I sent to the administrator which, in my view, highlighted some of the bullying tactics that were employed by the then manager to have me comply with some teaching duties which I felt were unfair, considering I was part-time and I had only a certain number of hours to teach. This view was supported by the administrator who also felt that I was unfairly treated.

The background to that email was that one of the staff members had fallen ill and a few people were told to try and cover for this person. For the purpose of this discussion, I will call this person James. The buzz around the staff room was that James 'always fell ill' and that it was unfair for people to keep covering his classes for him. No one, however, was brave enough to say that to the manager. The manager, whom I will call Marcus, decided to 'tell' me to take the class without any prior notice, not asking me first if I would consider helping out. I replied that I could not, because I had so many other classes to manage, and that I was not obliged to do it if it clashed with my other commitments, especially since I was part-time. I proceeded to confirm this with the Human Resources manager who also said I was not obliged to do anything other than what was stipulated in my contract.

Marcus then suggested I combine the classes which would then take the number up to 45, which I said was too big for an ESL class and would hinder the plans I had already made for my class, which happened to coincide with some of my research and teaching strategies. Besides, James' class had not reached the same stage or level that my class had covered, according to the weekly goals to be achieved in the course structure. In my view, it would only cause problems if the two groups were mixed together, especially since I had already prepared my class for the next lesson's objectives.

What I then suggested to Marcus was for James to just replace the classes when he got back, which most of the local staff did. I also asked Marcus to help out with replacements as, from the master timetable for teaching; it was evident that he had the least number of teaching hours. My perception at the time was that Marcus got angry and proceeded to send me an email calling into question my sense of professionalism and commitment, by referring to my past leadership roles and qualifications.

Language of the story

The language of the story above suggests my frustration at not being heard. It came out as a result of all the stress endured through the emails which were going back and forth between the manager and me and how I felt about local staff not being treated in the same way as the British staff. By the time this view was expressed to the senior administrator, I had already calmed down. Prior to this however there was resentment and confusion, which only added to my identity crisis at the time. Work became difficult as the email words kept going back and forth in my mind, while I was preparing to teach. And, whenever I saw the manager and James, I found it difficult to communicate with them.

Context and culture of the story

The culture and context of the department was such that, in my view, there appeared to be a division between how local views and British views were considered. The senior administrator also confirmed that there was a divide and rule policy which he attributed to the original trappings of the department formed in the UK. The administrator was quick to point out that not all departments worked in the same way. It was only this particular department which he felt appeared to have some strong managerial personalities who did not know how to manage fairly, as a result of control and power issues. I then suggested to the administrator:

Maybe you should get all the heads of the various departments to learn about the local ethos so that what you envisioned for the future of this campus can come true.

When I uttered this remark, I was letting my frustrations known. I had the feeling that my frustrations could be picked up by the senior administrator. The senior administrator agreed with what I had suggested. He said he would mention what I had hinted at for the next senior staff meeting about the importance of a compromise: to consider the views and thoughts of the local staff as well as the foreign staff. I left the room feeling hopeful. I felt as though a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders. I felt as though I could peacefully go back to my teaching, knowing that I was able to voice my concerns.

When I started teaching at this unit, I did not want to do anything beyond my required duties as a part-time teacher. I often heard complaints from the local staff and thought if it did not concern me, I would not get involved. I remember one of the local staff (Pat) sharing about

the same manager and she gave me permission to quote the following reply when he told her to do something:

I'm tired of your high-handedness.... if you had already decided, what's the big idea of you coming and telling me?

At the time, I thought my colleague was getting personal about her issues. Little did I realise that I would feel the same way and that made me sit up and take notice of similar incidents. At that point, realisation struck and I knew then that as part of the teaching and learning community, a teacher cannot be immune to what is happening to her colleagues, especially if they are close and share many issues together.

6.4.b Hindsight analysis phase

Reflecting on unexpected elements from the story

Upon deeper reflection, whether or not something came out of it from my discussion with the senior administrator was immaterial, as the main issue was resolved. This incident or story enabled me to exorcise the colonial ghost from my past, because I challenged my own insecurities and slowly developed confidence to come to terms with the current situation. My understandings about power relations, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions therefore helped me develop a more open and flexible approach to teaching. I became more confident with my own style and my own identity.

Since childhood, from the time I grew up in a rubber plantation managed by the colonial masters, in this case the British for whom my father worked, I was taught to believe that the British were superior in their language and cultural practices. This belief was exacerbated by British programmes on TV, which I watched with my family, and by listening to convent school nuns who espoused the qualities of speaking and writing in good British English while at school. Although I aspired to emulate all things British, thinking it was best, I also realised that I could be just as good, if not better than native speakers, so long as I was grammatically correct and logically coherent in my speech and writing. This major shift in thinking only came about once I realised the potential I had as an individual to create or make change, in reaching adulthood following my education in university, some interactions with work

colleagues and, more specifically, the experience I had with the difficult white boss I wrote about in my opening chapter.

If not for this action research study and its continuous reflective cycles, I would not have been able to muster the courage to make an appointment to see the administrator. Through the questions I asked about the human activity system in my context (Engestrom 1987; Popova 2015), as I was challenged at personal, professional and political levels in this action research study (Noffke 1997), I developed an inner strength to seek answers, not only for myself but to understand the working dimensions of the department which I could not relate to.

I was also mindful of the fact that the administrator might take things further and confront Marcus and James, all of which meant that the context would change to accommodate the evolving nature of the administrative culture in the unit and in the university as a whole. Had I not read about power in the classroom (French & Raven 1959) and beyond, or in general (Weber 1978, Foucault 1979) and linked it to power as part of the socio-cultural within the AL framework, I would not have had the capacity to make sense of what was going on at the time. The ESL teacher needs to combine theory with practice to have a more robust understanding of teaching and learning conditions.

I began to reflect more on Engestrom's (1987) human activity system, which I briefly touched in Chapter 2. I used Popova's questions (2015) to theoretically make a link to my context, where the roles of players and tools of the teaching and learning community are clearly demarcated by the analytic use of this system. The goal was for the administrator to try and educate foreign heads who held positions to be sensitive to local cultures and views, and to respect them as equals. It was also about finding a way to compromise between the good of the British culture with the good of the Malaysian culture in helping teachers and students appropriate what is best for their learning needs.

I became more aware of the need for managers to be culturally responsive and understanding towards their staff for effective teaching. When the atmosphere at work becomes tense because of bullying tactics, the teaching staff's morale diminishes greatly and this can affect the quality of teaching. I also began to think about my identity, as through the course of the interview I had with the senior administrator, he said:

I don't see you as a local...but one of us

At first I did not know how to react to this statement. One part of me was happy that I could fit in with his culture but the other left me wondering if the other cultural elements inherited from my Malaysian upbringing and everyday experiences was somehow inadequate. While I know that he meant it as a compliment, I felt as though I was cut-off from my actual roots of identity, a betrayal of emotional, cultural and historical connections to my past. The burning questions were:

- Was it not good enough to be local?
- Do locals have to be 'British' in order to be accepted? What made them see that I was different?
- How could I make him see that all locals are to be valued and seen as equals?

Probing further in a subsequent chat, I found out why he viewed me differently. One of the reasons he cited was that I could hold a conversation with him unabashedly with reasonable arguments. He said I was vocal and articulate but I argued that such opportunities are rarely possible for the locals, who are always busy working, or who may be afraid of speaking up for fear of repercussions such as losing their jobs, especially in a hierarchical setting. If their managers are anything like mine, who would want to speak up? I also explained to him that my motivation for speaking up was strongly guided by this action research and my desire to bring about change to improve teaching and learning conditions.

I realised then I did have a role to play which could help change the way things worked. I learnt that negotiated interaction with the senior administrator enabled me to envision the part I could play in becoming an agent of change. For ESL teachers, this knowledge is significant if it can be used to the advantage of the teacher, to improve teaching and learning conditions. I felt compelled to make a difference. I needed to be a more culturally responsive and transformative teacher (Gay 2000). I explained to the administrator that, if not for this research, I may not have even wanted to see him. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to voice my concerns with him, but whether or not it made a difference to the organisation was another matter altogether. He was kind and considerate enough to listen and I am aware that not many senior administrators do that. I know that he did make some attempts to try and mention some of what was discussed at managerial meetings, and I sensed a shift in the way my manager dealt with me and the other staff as well. However, the extent of change towards the way things were run generally was still far from what I expected it to be. That's when I

realised that change by one person alone cannot unhinge the inbuilt hierarchical systems of the university, unless support is rallied from all quarters, about the importance of local sentiments in making collective decisions about teaching and learning. Indeed, it often takes years for such change to take place. As Ferguson remarks:

> *Changes in adult ESL literacy will not come by one person's action at one time; changes will come when we address the needs for advocacy outside our classrooms as often as we address the needs inside, over and over again (2012, p. 14).*

It was a time for me to reconcile with the demons of the past and rightfully put forward my knowledge and strengths as a local female Malaysian Indian teacher, who recognised both the evolving socio-cultural conditions which impacted on the daily lives of students and my own life, and how that meant teaching in a way that was sensitive to student needs. My constant reading of relevant literature and my writing about my research enabled me to think beyond my normal horizon of teaching, and explore some of the emotional and psychological changes going through my mind.

Eventually, through this action research study, I was slowly able to reflect and shift my thinking about my teaching role, from having absolute power to a more democratic compromise of enabling students to have opportunities to make decisions about their own learning. It taught me how to accept students and know them really well in order to deeply understand their writing and related language issues.

Finally, the shift in my thinking changed the way I thought and taught in the future; it also enabled me to recognise the need for students to embrace their evolving identities as they grappled with so many social and cultural issues within and beyond the classroom. I was able to sympathise with their needs as time went by, because they had to shift their thinking and change their identities from being a Malaysian educated system-based student in local schools to international or British-based higher education system students – quite a daunting and challenging experience for many of them.

6.5 Conclusion

In summary, the analysis of the stories in this chapter shows that scaffolding and mediation played a significant role in shaping the ways students learn and teachers teach. To answer the research question, scaffolding and mediation worked side by side as my embedded teaching

principles, alongside my third teaching principle, ensuring relevance to social and cultural contexts through cultural awareness. Teachers need to be more aware of the process of cultural mediation. They may not be aware at the time that they 'mediate' certain notions through specific contexts, but they can operationalise mediation through the use of scaffolding, to make it easier for the students and the teacher to make sense of the academic writing experience. Such understanding could help students move from an operational dimension to a more critical dimension of literacy (Green 1988).

This chapter has demonstrated how a teacher can analyse specific socio-cultural conditions and use scaffolding to promote certain learning skills and develop new or reworked concepts. Three scaffolding types were evident: interactional, inscriptional and indexical scaffolding (as described in Chapter 2) seen through my 1) story-telling, 2) tasks that followed in stages, and 3) symbolic facial expressions and gestures used in the interactions that ensued. The mediating elements were me, the students, interactional exchanges between us and the tools we used, in addition to language used for teaching that enabled scaffolding activities to develop. I was leaning towards the pedagogy of practicality (Kumaravadivelu 2001) in using the tools around me to help me engage learners. My attempt at understanding the socio-cultural make-up of the students allowed me to connect with them better. My knowledge of their cultural experiences enabled me to plan my lessons better. Therefore, it is imperative for ESL teachers to exercise their right to decide which cultural aspects suit their learners' needs, in order (Kumaravadivelu 1994) to make the learning experience for the students more meaningful. By understanding the socio-cultural make-up of the students, I was granted the resources to think on my feet, to use my teacher insights to improvise when opportunity presented itself in the form of narratives from student lives.

The stories demonstrate how students democratised the classroom with their lived experiences, encouraging me to make way for new practices or practice architectures (Kemmis 2007). My own fears and assumptions were challenged when my vulnerability was exposed, and that was when I learnt how to collaborate with my students, while building on my own knowledge about teaching strategies. Once I knew how the human activity system in my organisation worked, I became more aware of my role as an advocate for change in this hierarchical institution, and I was more determined to take the necessary steps to be heard in whatever way possible. At the end of Cycle 5, I was not afraid of repercussions anymore with management, as I was ready to face whatever challenges may have come my way. It was

indeed a turning point for me as an action researcher, to know that if I did not do this, probably no other teacher would. As Ferguson (2014) posits:

> *The task of advocacy for adult ESL comes to us, as ESL practitioners, by default. The task is not ours because of our expertise or our preference. Advocacy is ours simply because there is no one else to do it (p. 14).*

The ESL teacher needs to put aside his or her fears, whether it stems from past prejudices, current obstacles or future uncertainties, to take steps to do what is right, according to his or her own professional judgements about issues related to power within a socio-cultural structure of hierarchy. The ESL teacher also needs to embrace relevant social and cultural contexts suited to teaching and learning to engage learners. Both these necessities arise because it is the teacher's responsibility to help students and other teachers in the profession to make progress in the area of teaching and learning academic writing. Since the ESL teacher has the opportunity to have insider access to many issues within his or her organisation, they have the advantage to try and make a difference simply because they can. By adopting such a stance, teachers can empower themselves to create practice architectures (Kemmis 2008) that can move or challenge difficult hierarchical systems.

Chapter 7: Pedagogical possibilities for improving teaching and learning academic literacies

7.0 Introduction

The adoption of Kumaravadivelu's (1994) post method pedagogy (PMP) as my teaching principles to activate principles of the academic literacies tradition has enabled this thesis to document aspects of the lived experience of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in a British Malaysian university. This study began with a teacher-researcher's notion of how to address students' academic writing and English language problems. However, those notions changed along the course of this action research study, to accommodate more complex and subtle ways in which power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions played out in the classroom, within a post-colonial setting.

Both teacher and students were incited to consider their own post-colonial expectations, assumptions and habits of teaching and learning. This scenario was unavoidable as the post-colonial heritage influenced the Malaysian education system, politically and historically, channelling various aspects into school and universities. Throughout this action-research journey, student participants in this study contributed thoughts influenced by local knowledge, making it essential for the researcher to weave a thesis narrative, which endeavoured to capture something of the complexities of their experience. The students' struggle to make sense of their own learning experience through academic writing, amidst a global expansion of the English Language (Graddol 2000), incited me as their teacher to understand and explore teaching practice, informed by AL and PMP traditions. An emerging goal for the study was to add to the literacy debates by providing a current and practical demonstration of how theory and practice in these post-colonial circumstances could be merged in practice, paving the way for other ESL teachers to think about their practices in the similar ways. It was also an attempt to explore Kumaravadivelu's (1994) post-method teaching principles in an academic writing classroom, to see how well the selected principles worked with the AL conditions proposed by Lea and Street (1998, 2000, 2006).

The action research process over six cycles helped me as teacher-researcher advance understanding of both theoretical and practical dimensions of the teaching and learning of

academic English. Reflections on practice throughout this action research study (but more so throughout the hindsight analytic phase) contribute to findings and implications that will be discussed here across four broad areas: a) addressing the research questions, b) the contribution to theoretical and practical knowledge, c) reflections on action research methodology, and d) future areas for research, for both practitioner and theoretically oriented scholarship. These discussions are woven together with implications for the ESL or EAP teacher, TESOL scholars and me as a teacher-researcher. In thinking about how these findings helped me, I can now also anticipate to some extent the contexts of other ESL or EAP teachers, who may benefit from this research, and how that understanding could be shared and compared with other TESOL debates in the field, and the EAP and TESOL wider community.

As an action research study, the initial questions were very broad, emphasizing the territory in which the study was located: the interest in improving the teaching of Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998), and the need to explore pedagogical means for doing so, using Kumaravadivelu's (1994, 2003) principles and suggested strategies. These initial research questions were framed as follows:

1. To what extent can a broad understanding of teaching academic writing, using the Academic Literacies tradition emphasis on power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions, help focus the teaching and learning of academic writing in a Malaysian university?

2. In what ways, do selected Post Method Pedagogies teaching strategies translate the three AL conditions into effective action?

While each cycle of action and reflection over the six semesters of the study focused on reflection on the previous semester's changes, the focus questions for this thesis were more specifically organized around the Academic Literacies foci on power (Chapter 4), knowledge (Chapter 5) and socio-cultural conditions (Chapter 6), as a way to draw together and extend the learnings from different stages or cycles in the overall study.

7.1 Addressing the research questions

In addressing the three main conditions that Lea and Street outlined, I attempt to answer the research questions for this study. In doing so, I unpack ways in which ESL teachers can

improve their teaching and students' learning of English and academic writing. For Chapter 4, the research question was:

To what extent does power play out in the academic writing classroom and how does negotiated interaction as a teaching principle minimise the power imbalances?

Analysis of the selected power stories revealed that power dynamics exist and need to be recognised for what they truly expose or represent. These stories reveal how useful AL is for teachers to think about power in their classrooms because they are already paving the way for change, especially in post-colonial settings. By thinking about power, the teachers have no choice but to ask what types of power (French & Raven 1959) they need to be aware of in order to manage their classrooms more effectively. In naming different power types, teachers become aware of what their students need, and establish a more democratic approach to teaching and learning. Distinguishing these power types can be culturally challenging, because the teacher and the institution is open to scrutiny and may need to negotiate difficult scenarios, as a result (refer to stories regarding line manager and senior management). However, in order to meet the global challenges that come with the learning of English and academic writing, the timing is right for such change to occur. The other implication is that while AL, as a theory for power, is flexible enough for developing the teacher's theoretical knowledge, the practical input from PMP through negotiated interaction (Kumaravadivelu 1994) is crucial for power mismatches to be practically minimised. AL is therefore considerably strengthened when paired with PMP and this is something ESL teachers could consider for their teaching.

In addition to addressing power conditions, I needed to activate knowledge conditions, another working dimension of learning and teaching, in the original research question of this study. That was further defined in Chapter 5, with the following question:

How do different types of knowledge conditions in a higher learning institution, activated by the promotion of learner autonomy, assist students with the learning of English and academic writing?

Promoting learner autonomy, as a teaching principle, was used to help the students progress from the lowest to the highest typology within the knowledge conditions that were examined under the AL framework. This principle was selected because it helped me elicit different

knowledge typologies in different spaces and at different times. The knowledge typologies (Perry 1968) reveal the stages of development in students and the stages of autonomy that develop alongside those knowledge conditions.

> *Knowledge generated and learned within the context of everyday life structures how students think about themselves, their world and experiences (Sleeter & Grant 1991, p.52).*

When EAL or EAP teachers become aware of these knowledge types and begin to observe students taking the initiative to develop their own understanding of what counts as knowledge, these teachers also become aware of how complex it is for students to learn and in what circumstances they thrive. Therefore, AL as a theory opens up opportunities for teachers to expand their understandings of what knowledge is. Once the highest level of knowledge typology is reached, the student is able to make critical judgements about learning, and this ties in closely with what Green (1988) suggests about developing critical learning skills, and which are deemed crucial for students when they go out to work. For critical levels of learning to happen, language was crucial to facilitate discussion and knowledge development in my classroom. There were however other mediating tools in the form of social media, internet usage and semiotic signs within and beyond the university, which also assisted their learning process. And yet the most common and effective mediating artefact (from all these tools that communicated messages successfully) was language. For example, Mary was always talking with John, Salim was interacting with me and other students about plagiarism and writing, while Badrul and Marissa were using visuals and having discussions. Daim used the internet to understand more about Chernobyl, after class discussion, to write. All stories about knowledge, therefore, exhibited language use, which then facilitated knowledge development. What this adds to the literacy debates is that teaching is indeed a social practice (Lea & Street 1998) and academic writing benefits from social discussions among students. Once students become more confident in their understandings about the topic they are researching, they will become more autonomous.

One of the criteria for learner autonomy developed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) is about helping students do things independently. This relates to the notion of scaffolding and the development of ZPD (Vygotsky 1968, 1972) by emphasizing the need for learners to achieve their true potential with assistance through the use of tools to guide them. It follows for TESOL teachers that it is important to use the promoting of learner autonomy from PMP to

avoid rote learning, which is quite common in Asian classroom settings such as Hong Kong, Singapore and China (Yelland 2012). The promotion of learner autonomy will also help students have more control over what and when they want to learn.

This study also found that the higher the level of knowledge typology level achieved by the student, the higher the critical level of literacy achieved. Students had to pursue different types of knowledge to experience growth, and in some cases were able to express critical literacy levels through their arguments and written work. In some instances, critical literacy was first targeted in teaching to help students see the bigger picture before I divided the teaching into sections that highlighted operational or cultural literacy levels, as shown in the Chernobyl lesson. For the learners with difficulties, I used scaffolding to assist their learning, usually whole-class focused. I was mindful about staying true to the original conceptualisation of scaffolding by Bruner (1972), as ESL teachers have been criticised for using scaffolding as a quick fix approach and not fully building upon Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and the associated psychological dimensions of learning involved.

What was discovered was that ideally, one-to-one interaction is needed for scaffolding in the way Bruner and his colleagues (1972) conceptualised it. However, in most ESL settings, the nature of the ESL classroom is that all students are lumped together, irrespective of their learning needs. The teacher then has to decide how best to scaffold a large number of students in order to help students achieve higher forms of literacy. Although there is a need to take a step-by-step approach to building their knowledge and understanding, which requires time and effort to reach higher levels of autonomy; teachers also need to be aware that each student operates differently, according to the circumstances presented to them. Not all learners learn in the same way, or at the same rate.

ESL teachers can benefit from this finding because they use scaffolding as a set of planned teaching strategies that cater for the greater good. It is a type of directed teaching that is aimed to help the majority of students build on their autonomous skills; but they may not be autonomous in their thinking at all. The teachers need to estimate what students can do on their own and what they might be able to achieve in the end. The autonomous thinking only comes at a later level of higher-order thinking and language skills built over time, which is also a direct development of their own informational power.

Therefore, to answer this research question about knowledge being activated by promoting learner autonomy, this study found that the issue lies with what the learner thinks is important to learn. It worked for Mary, Badrul and Daim but not for Cal, who questioned me about what he was learning. The ESL teacher then needs to engage the learner with the right teaching content/material. Engaging also needs to be tied in with scaffolding to make the learning process more manageable for students who have difficulty. If the learners do not perceive the task as important and useful, they may not commit to learning. Moreover, I also found that some students appear to be more motivated than others in learning. The level of commitment in learning increases when they are motivated and that enhances their autonomous levels. Their literacy levels also increase from the operational to the critical (Green 1988), once they are fully committed to learning (Perry 1968). While promoting learner autonomy is an ideal principle, it not always easy to achieve. The ESL teacher requires time and needs patience to see results. The results were evident but not always significant in that for some students, their progress was slow. Therefore, the implication from this analysis is that while AL's knowledge conditions, when explored according to Perry's knowledge typology (1968) and Green's literacy levels (1988), are useful for students, they also need to be explored with the use of scaffolding and students' motivation levels to learn. This then brings into question the importance of creating a motivating atmosphere, which can be closely linked to the third AL condition.

Besides power and knowledge, I needed to explore the socio-cultural condition within the AL paradigm. This final condition was put forward as a stand-alone research question that was further defined and examined in Chapter 6, with some assistance from PMP's guiding teaching principle, ensuring relevance and raising cultural awareness in socio-cultural contexts. The question was:

To what extent did PMP's ensuring of relevance to socio-cultural contexts as a teaching principle, have an impact on promoting socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm?

The stories chosen for Chapter 6 arere meant to highlight how important it is to consider local beliefs and customs when teaching English and academic writing. It suggests that the ESL teacher needs to become more open to the idea of embracing local culture so that students can be engaged. The implication here is that the ESL / academic writing teacher has to develop favourable socio-cultural conditions to promote learner engagement.

One way is to have a comprehensive analysis of the complexities that surround her classroom. If teachers are aware of the Vygotskian idea of mediation (Vygotsky 1978; Daniels 2001, 2008) they can use that knowledge to their advantage when teaching to help the local students appropriate the textual material with their own life experiences in keeping with historical, cultural and political shifts within the country. Such a strategy also paves the way for local teachers to lend their identity and voice in discovering what really matters in actual teaching and learning settings. Teachers may begin to question what is presented as foreign texts and voice their concerns about what is suitable for the local learner. To further reiterate this point, Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004, p.7) elaborate:

> *The colonial empires established Western models of education although often distorted and impoverished models-all over the globe.... despite the expansion of formal education, advances in print and electronic communication, the Internet, the global knowledge economy and information overload, a Western-style curriculum tends to ignore the basic context of today's reality.*

In my case, I had to help students from diverse cultures and backgrounds – Malay, Chinese and Indian learners – make sense of a largely Western notion of learning academic writing in way that could help them make sense of the 'other' in relation to their own local identities and knowledge. I also had to equip them with skills needed for the future global workforce, which is another daunting prospect for these students.

What helped me significantly is my knowledge of the different types of mediation around me. Such theoretical knowledge helped me plan my scaffolding activities in a way that would be able to help learners make progress, because I paid attention to the way the meditational elements worked in the specific setting. By comparing the works of previous second language researchers in the area of scaffolding and mediation with the works of Bruner (1972) and Vygotsky (1978), which are more psychological in nature, I realised the need to approach my teaching not just as a set of teaching strategies, which most second language researchers loosely refer to in ESL teaching, isolated from the psychological domains of teaching. When teaching is viewed as a social practice, it demands that we take the responsibility to break away and teach beyond just the skills level, and embrace a deep understanding of teaching that enhances our ability to create meaning in our students' lives.

All these stories that were described in class were mediating tools which were readily available once discussions started. Although control over circulating mediating artefacts was

limited, I could seize an opportune moment to make use of them when I realised the potential for improving my teaching and my students' learning became more meaningful. For Teoh, the bucket story helped him feel important enough to contribute to discussions which then paved the way for him to think and write. Scaffolding and mediation, when embedded with promoting learner autonomy and ensuring relevant socio-cultural conditions respectively, the two PMP teaching principles, makes learning more meaningful. The two bridging principles, when tied in with the main teaching principles helped learners progress from operational to critical levels of literacy (Green 1988). Perhaps, this is also something for the ESL or EAP teacher to consider. The breast lump story encouraged students to open up and share their own scary or traumatic experiences, which then helped them think about more difficult paraphrasing activities. Finally, the organ donation story prompted discussions about health, ethnic practices and beliefs around the dead, which also resulted in more writing. While the written pieces were not always correct in grammar and structure, at least there was an attempt to understand and produce tasks, as required by the teacher.

What this finding suggests is that while the teacher needs to create conditions that are favourable, she must also know her students well enough to choose the right material or tool to stimulate their learning interests. Being aware of mediation is therefore important for ESL teachers. It helps strengthen their teaching repertoire. To add to the literacy debates, perhaps the AL tradition needs to be aware of mediation, making it visible through teaching techniques like scaffolding, as an element to ensure socio-cultural conditions are relevant to help teachers understand how best to activate desirable learning.

The merging of AL and PMP traditions through a teacher's practical lens adds credibility to literacy debates. The third PMP teaching principle, ensuring relevant socio-cultural contexts and raising cultural awareness when used to activate AL's socio-cultural conditions, appear to help the ESL teacher teach more effectively. Therefore, to answer the refined research question in Chapter 6; there seems to be more potential for students to learn when there is cultural and social relevance, but that cannot happen unless teachers' pay attention to mediation. Thus ESL and EAP teachers may benefit from having to consider mediation when thinking about their teaching, so they are aware of being able to choose the right tool or input to motivate their students. This is what ESL teachers need: concrete ideas to help with teaching, especially in difficult oppressive circumstances. And if evidence based research shows that these two theories can work together, then teachers may be willing to implement

some of these principles in their own practice. By sharing what worked or did not work in my context, it is hoped that teachers will seek different alternatives to improve their teaching.

In the next section, reflections on the action research methodology used for this study are presented to gauge how effective this methodology was for this research. In doing so, ESL teachers could learn from the limitations and benefits of using action research in relation to their own teaching settings.

7.2 Reflections on action research methodology

Action research was suited to this study because of the cyclical nature of the programme that I taught and the emic perspective used when analysing data. This action research study however was restricted in terms of the short timespan I had with each cohort, the student attrition rates between semesters to other programmes, and the difficulty in following up with the students' developments once they completed the programme.

However, there was enough evidence in their work, test scores, interviews, letters and my diaries to show improvement across semesters, as compared to previous cohorts, especially in terms of their understanding about teaching and learning, while navigating knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions. As the practitioner, documenting each stage of the research, I was only aware of what was going on in my context. There was no further opportunity to explore in an Australian context, to see if the same principles would work there. While a range of validity aspects were explored for this study (Kemmis et al. 2004), what stood out was catalytic validity (Andersen & Herr 1999), captured through the changes the students underwent as they progressed from operational to critical dimensions of literacy (Green 1988). Catalytic validity was evident when I was able to relinquish my power and control over the students (French & Raven 1959) through negotiated interactions (Kumaravadivelu 1994).

Other validity types became apparent. Outcome validity was observed when findings from data analysis indicated how students progressed as a result of using teaching principles from PMP that activated the three theoretical conditions of AL. Process validity was evident through rigorous data management for the study. Dialogic validity was more difficult to achieve as it mainly relied on my own personal endeavour to go out and present my findings at research conferences, which was not always possible due to time constraints and limited

funding. There was not much opportunity to discuss my findings with my colleagues, as they feared my findings could point to some hierarchical cracks in the system. Democratic validity however was achieved when students were able to discuss some of their life experiences, as in Teoh's bucket story and Lim's organ donation story, which then fed into their understanding of what to write for their academic tasks.

Despite having multiple cycles of action research documented, only critical incidents selected in relation to their capacity to illuminate the AL theoretical perspectives on teaching academic writing and the PMP strategies were highlighted. Some data, as a result, were left behind, although used during the course of the teaching semesters as the basis for reflection and further action, as outlined in Chapter 3. Although multiple action research cycles were completed and then collected and data analysed from an exhaustive list of interviews, diaries and letters, only critical incidents were highlighted.

Each semester's class was relatively small (about 15-20 students). This was not a multi-perspectival study but rather one that was filtered through me and my practice, with a focus given to my students. As a part-time teacher, there was little control over the classes allocated to me for teaching, resulting in cycles with different students for short periods of time. Thus, it was not possible to study the long-term impact on each participant cohort. The longest impact study for a cohort was across two semesters. It was difficult to do an in-depth study to understand knowledge and socio-cultural conditions compared to what Moll (2014) undertook with his research on the 'funds of knowledge approach', in appropriating what students know from their household community knowledge into their formal classroom settings.

Narratives were constructed as critically as possible to understand how participants' thoughts were shaped; but again the interpretation is still individually done by the researcher. Multiple reflections through contemporary and hindsight analyses plus the use of literature and consultation with students were aimed at reducing the weightage of the self-reflective stance for this study.

Also, policy makers within the institution controlled the nature of how the students' futures were shaped in relation to political and socio-economic factors, often overriding suggestions by language teachers about what may be important or needed for the students from an ESL perspective. Discipline-based managers often dictate how ESL classes are run and there is

tension between ESL teachers and discipline-based staff as to what suits the needs of students. To understand power and institutional dynamics in English language teaching, further research needs to be explored in this domain.

The hierarchical nature of this study's researcher workplace also sometimes inhibited how much could be explored or written publicly. This was because power relations could hinder progress in professional and personal growth, especially when my students and I have been taught from childhood to obey and respect authority. The researcher's struggle in coming to terms with post-colonial encounters, which challenged the core of my value systems as a Malaysian Indian, coupled with colonial influences in the past, made the narrative journey confronting and difficult at times. The limitation here was not having the freedom to write without fear of persecution from higher authorities and finding a way to present the stories as truthfully as possible, without omitting crucial details.

The other limitation for this study is that only three instead of 10 macro strategies from Kumaravadivelu's PMP (1994, 2003) were used to activate the three AL conditions. I combined all ten into three for pedagogical purposes. *Negotiated interaction* was selected to translate power conditions into action, *promoting learner autonomy* was selected to translate knowledge conditions into action and *ensuring relevant socio-cultural contexts* was selected to translate socio-cultural conditions into action.

The use of action research as a methodology for this study enabled me to examine all three dimensions, as outlined by Noffke: the political, the professional and the personal dimensions (1997). As I explain these three dimensions and why they helped define the dimensions of my action research, I also explore the dilemmas that resulted in exploring them (Humphreys, 2012). The political dimension, for instance, is revealed through examining of power conditions in a hierarchical setting, especially when the trajectory of colonial influences shapes the way the society functions. Analysis in this frame also enabled me as the teacher-researcher to gain insight into the way the establishment or institution is run, which can be quite political. The power exploration, discussed in Chapter 4, allowed me to understand the divisions of labour at work (Engestrom 1987) within the human activity system in my context, and the way the action research study was carried out enabled unearthing of sensitive issues related to hierarchical situations. Yet, I also understood the dilemma this dimension presented. The study had the potential to 'crystallize and convey conflicts among

stakeholders in the university and community' (Humphreys, 2012, p.572) and that caused concern about what was ultimately going to be revealed, and whether the stakeholders would be happy with that knowledge.

Everyone in the participatory context of my study had a role to play and I came to know each person's role well. The roles of the teacher, the student and colleague were all compartmentalised initially but these roles inadvertently changed for some of the participants within this activity system (Engestrom 1987). I knew the boundaries and the extent to which I could push them. Learning how to deal with power relations between colleagues at work and between teachers and students in the classroom can help the ESL teacher prepare in advance materials needed for class, or just know how to handle tricky situations, because there are strategies such as negotiated interaction that can minimise perceptual mismatches between the teacher and the learner (Kumaravadivelu 1994). The different stories of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions presented in the analysis section illustrate how, through my teaching principles, I could elicit some favourable responses and actions from my students and colleagues. And further, how I could change as a result of those responses, even when it did not work out according to plan. I was ready with contingency plans because of the theoretical knowledge I had about my supporting principles, scaffolding and mediation, which also helped me greatly with my teaching and my students' learning. This discovery is hugely significant in assisting teachers within EAP pedagogy to find ways to penetrate hierarchical systems.

The professional dimension was possible when I expanded my teacher knowledge through research and teaching. Experimenting with theories and strategies to get a deeper understanding of how to improve my teaching and my students' learning improved my confidence and teaching repertoire; this is something really useful for ESL teachers to explore. I began to use the same ideas in other areas of teaching. When I observed power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions occurring at other teaching sites, I could recognize the types of power, knowledge and power typologies and how best to translate these conditions into action and to what extent the activating of these conditions using these teaching strategies worked or did not work. It also enabled me to present my research and share my findings with other researchers. For example, I was able to contribute my findings at conferences and in journals (Abraham 2014, see Appendix D) and AQR (Abraham 2015, see Appendix C) which developed my confidence in developing scholarly attributes.

Publications in journals gave me recognition from other researchers and my own colleagues. My publications also helped with employment, because I wrote about my teaching and research experience which were related to my PhD study. I was able to talk about what I did for my research in job interviews and this helped me secure a couple of teaching appointments when I first moved to Australia. However, there was a dilemma in the way my roles 'converged and collided' (Humphreys 2012, p. 572). I could write freely through articles in journals, but not necessarily talk openly about my findings in person to my colleagues or even my students, as I did not want to engage in discussion that would jeopardise participants' anonymity.

Discussions in the staffroom were carefully phrased to make general statements of my findings, because I was mindful of the hierarchical culture of the place I worked in. The difficulty in maintaining a professional stance at work, while doing research, also encroached on the personal dimension. I was struggling with the ethical dilemma in presenting the final outcome from my qualitative data because the stories are being revisited and retold as I continue to reflect over time. The participants and my colleagues who were also included in the diary jottings and observations, would never know the full and final version of their stories collected, as considerable time had passed since the last time I had heard from them. There is also the issue of whether they will be happy with the findings, even though they have given their consent. As Humphreys (2012, p. 583) remarks:

> *Some stakeholders disclose difficulties to an insider researcher in order that these may be conveyed to managers – here, insider researchers have a vested interest in promoting positive changes in the institution and preserving their research project, but one or both of these goals can be blocked if managers start to construe the researcher and their project as the source of the problem. Some colleagues expect to see tangible fruits from a homespun project – here, insider researchers may want to share their developing hypotheses, but they cannot afford to deconstruct common-sense and thereby disrupt collegiality to the point that they are no longer entrusted with the information and interactions which are vital to the further development of those hypotheses. So the double-consciousness of the insider who is now a researcher can be mirrored in the double-consciousness of other insiders who may wonder whether they are now objects of study for the researcher or even objects of scrutiny for other stakeholders.*

Thus, the exploring of the dimensions is extremely complex, because it is a soul-searching experience for the insider researcher or action researcher to unearth sensitive issues – and then attempt to act on them.

Furthermore, on a personal level, this study enabled me to confront issues that haunted me from my colonial past. In other words, the action research study enabled me to grow professionally into understanding the complexities of human relationships, and how they can affect teaching and work in general. For example, it was not just enough to write about the power issues but to learn from them, and to recognise that I am involved in power relations and can change them within the limits of the institution. I could, for example, have perceived the power relational incident between the manager and me differently, and not have been offended or upset with her tone. Although I knew power imbalances were occurring, I was at first confused because I could not name the power types. This was because I did not understand the situation well enough. Having prejudiced notions about colonial ways of being, as a result, past experiences that have shaped me affected the way I perceived things in my teaching and my students' learning.

I was blinded by my ignorance about post-colonialism and its effects on teaching and learning in an ESL setting until I embarked on this research. I read a lot and realised there is a way to fight oppression and there is a reason why certain things are likely to occur. Understanding the history of post-colonialism and how it is different for each colonised country, and finding out how to combat difficulties in teaching only increased my confidence to become better at what I do. It motivated me to continuously reflect and improve on my teaching and help with my students' learning.

It was also an opportunity to discover myself through this process and make sense of the journey, as my identity evolved through the course of events. I learnt to exorcise colonial ghosts from my past and to understand how each human is different, and therefore working with different people can result in power mismatches. I also learnt to appreciate the changes that my students underwent as their knowledge, culture and participation in power progressed. The personal dimension also meant that I could get close and really understand my learners more deeply. Auerbach (1993, p.43) posits:

> *The teacher's job at the beginning of each cycle is to set the tone, creating contexts for issues to emerge. The starting point has to be the building of trust through non-*

threatening activities that allow students to share something of their lives in a format that is familiar and comfortable.

Through adopting particular teaching and learning principles, I was able to establish rapport with the students which in turn encouraged them to open up about their own feelings and perceptions about learning, my teaching and the institution. As a result, this action research study allowed me to have an insider perspective and gain access to some really confronting data that most outside researchers are not privy to, because of the way the institution has been set up. The close relationship I forged with the students enabled them to speak and share some of the most sensitive topics based on culture and body issues in class, because they were brave and comfortable enough to do so.

The above findings and discussion can be of interest to ESL teachers, especially since they give focus and guidance as to how to deal with power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions in difficult situations. Secondly, the findings and discussion are meant to stimulate interest on the teacher's part to engage in action research and reflect on their own practices while attempting to become agents of change. Finally, the findings and discussion are an attempt to also inform ESL teachers that there are ways to change practice. Thus, action research methodology could benefit ESL or EAP teachers because it allows for growth in political, professional and personal dimensions (Noffke 1997).

In the next section, the contributions to theoretical and practical knowledge in this study are significant because ESL teachers can consider embracing AL and PMP as effective theories to improve their teaching repertoire.

7.3 Contributions to theoretical and practical knowledge

The action research processes over six cycles helped advance my understanding of both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the teaching and learning of Academic English. Through reflection and in practice throughout the action research cycles and in hindsight, the project contributes to findings and implications that add to future AL and PMP debates.

In merging the two traditions of AL and PMP, I discovered some aspects which contribute to ongoing literacy debates. This contribution to knowledge is broadly categorised into three areas: a) the creating of learning spaces for discipline-related English literacy, b) the building of identity in the classroom, and c) the significance of the theories used for this study. The

goal is to help ESL, EAP and TESOL teachers widen their understanding of what could work for their students.

In thinking about how these findings and how they helped my teaching practice, it was also possible to anticipate to some extent the contexts of other ESL or EAP teachers, who may benefit from this research, and how that understanding could be shared and compared with other TESOL debates in the field. Sometimes, the implications for ESL, EAP and TESOL as individual groups that constitute an integral part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) need to be viewed as an entity. An action taken by the researcher in this study, for example, with a view to improved practice cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather as a part of ongoing theoretical and practical discussions that could benefit the ESL, EAP and TESOL wider community.

7.3.a. Creating learning spaces for discipline-related English language literacy

The first knowledge contribution from this study is that the merging of AL and PMP theories points to the need for ESL teachers to create a wider range of learning spaces for discipline-related English language literacy. Since ESL teachers like me often struggle with time issues and completion of syllabus requirements, there is not much opportunity to create sufficient learning spaces or dialogue sessions with students. However, there are several ways in which teachers can create learning spaces, as discussed below.

In this study, it was found that while skills can be aggregated over time, interaction is required to elevate these skills into stronger dimensions of critical literacy, as Green (1988) suggests. Interaction with students becomes minimal when teaching is largely skills-based. Thus as long as ESL teachers choose to do that, higher-order knowledge and literacies will not develop. For example, in the course structure used for this study, the teaching plan laid out focused on a comprehensive understanding and usage of skills within the academic writing framework. Grammar and discipline-related tasks were meant to be incorporated into the larger scheme of essay writing and research-based writing tasks, in line with the idea of embedding or encompassing grammar into the AL model for teaching academic writing, as proposed by Lea and Street (1998). However, in practice the whole endeavour still seemed to emphasise a skills-based approach in the first few cycles of my action research. It was only when a significant amount of group and pair work was introduced, to discuss the planning and writing of essays together, that I developed a more comprehensive understanding of how

skills could be incorporated within an interaction-infused learning environment. In turn, this created a rich environment suitable for students to develop their higher-order thinking skills.

This knowledge or understanding was used to build on classroom interactions and beyond. It is possible for a student to build his or her own knowledge levels once they develop self-confidence. The engagement in practices gained through the mediating elements around students can elevate them into higher dimensions of literacy. For computing students who were technology savvy, it appeared they could grasp critical dimensions of literacy more quickly than other students when social media or internet usage became a relevant and effective mediating tool that aided their learning; the use of computers was part of their cultural discipline. These students needed to achieve cultural literacy before they could attain critical literacy (Green 1988). The knowledge gained and the higher-order literacy level achieved could give students the motivation and confidence to finally decide on what is important for their English learning.

From a practical point of view, one of my teaching principles, *ensuring relevance to social and cultural conditions,* helped to translate AL's socio-cultural conditions into action. It was found that the more the teacher attempted to translate this principle into practice, the more engaged students became with learning. This reiterates the need for teachers to embrace teaching as a social activity and create suitable learning spaces. English and academic writing is not just about a set of rules learnt in the classroom, but more about how it needs to be viewed as a part of everyday cultural, historical and social contexts that makes learning sensible and outcomes desirable, as could be seen in the breast lump story which in turn equipped students with the knowledge to engage in paraphrasing work. Wozniak states (2014, p.1):

> *Every day we are bombarded with teasers and provocative questions to lure students into learning...As students begin to develop awareness of the world around them, they cultivate a passion for fairness, social issues and their rights. We can leverage this passion using many of the same teasers and news reports to draw students in connecting hot issues and trending news to what we are doing in the classroom.*

The ESL or EAP teacher has to make use of contemporary issues that are readily available, find ways to encourage the students to think about what is going on around them, use their own identity and voices to make sense of that experience and relate it to the work in EAP learning. This idea was illustrated through the bucket story in Chapter 6: water shortage was

a crisis affecting the world at the time, and it made sense to draw the students into a relevant and current debate, which had spin-offs in terms of what they could eventually produce as academic writing.

The students' interest in knowing more about my carefully selected theme for discussion in class and the work that ensued made them want to finish tasks. It also helped them to find a resonating chord with cultural elements they were familiar with, making it meaningful for their learning. Their appropriation of 'funds of knowledge' or knowledge gained from their everyday activity or lived experiences (Moll 2004) into formal concepts taught in the classroom, made the learning experience more meaningful and useful for everyone.

The implication here is that the English language and academic writing and teaching courses present a unique opportunity for TESOL teachers to change the otherwise mundane way in which English is all too often taught (Kumaravadivelu 2006b, 2008). The syllabus or course structure which also is a part of the cultural mediation of the society from which it originates, makes it important for the teacher to be actively involved in deciding what is best for his or her students, by also taking into account their needs and cultural contexts. Since, in some institutions, the syllabus is fixed and teachers are required to deliver a set number of objectives for learning, the teacher can appropriate what is given in the syllabus and find ways to incorporate the promotion of learner autonomy into the syllabus. For example, I learnt how and when to apply negotiated interaction to reduce perceptual mismatches in power relational conditions and this slowly allowed the students to develop their own sense of autonomy, as shown in the second power story in Chapter 4. It was the first time, as an ESL teacher, I became aware of how transformative it can be to realise that the teacher can release the urge to control situations if s/he has the appropriate knowledge and principles at hand in planning, design and teaching. It also suggests that, for the teacher, it was a way of creating a learning space for the students. Since 'knowledge is central to power' (Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p.50), by understanding knowledge conditions, the teacher can find ways to address power imbalances more explicitly.

Another important contribution to knowledge that ties in with the idea of creating learning spaces is that since teaching is a social activity; the teacher-researcher for this project had to find ways to maximise interactions in the classroom to enhance the learning experience. The value of the experience a leaner undergoes is largely determined by the continuing and

interactive nature of that experience, including and especially reflection (Dewey 1938). As an action research teacher, I had to know what when to use relevant teaching materials through reflection on my own knowledge, tacit assumptions, and through reflection with and about the students and their experiences.

It was important to create such interactive opportunities (Kumaravadivelu 1994) that were built around everyday occurrences which were deeply connected to the students' lives, and not to be missed. 'Knowledge of the importance of a group to a student at a particular time of life and within a particular social context' (Banks & Banks 2010, p.14) can help a teacher understand his or her student's behaviour and thus plan lessons accordingly. I was constantly aware of the mediational tools around me and continued to scaffold where necessary. All this did not happen instantly. The contemporaneous phases of analysis gave me the opportunity to reflect more and improve on my teaching skills as each teaching cycle was completed. I made mistakes along the way and also learnt from my students. Teaching and learning was indeed a co-constructed activity and that made the experience more democratic.

Reflection on teacher learning across the cycles implies that teaching is never a linear process. There are so many unexpected complexities involved in the teaching and learning of academic writing. The teacher can prepare a set of teaching materials and strategies to go with them, but she/he is never in control of the mediating elements around them or the students, so teaching plans need to be altered on the spot. Wallace (1998) describes it as follows:

> *Although critical literacy approaches may build on students' experiential knowledge and existing cultural and linguistic resources, these are then reshaped and re-evaluated in the light of closer scrutiny of texts in the classroom setting, sometimes in ways that take the both the teacher and students by surprise (p. 215).*

Elements of surprise can help the ESL or EAP teacher create some of the most teachable moments in class. The teacher then has to learn how to appropriate suitable contexts for learning purposes. Reflecting on the contexts and the participants in the classroom can actually assist in the ability to achieve set objectives, particularly for group work (Rance-Roney 2010). Contextualising can help the teacher-researcher to not only keep an objective distance from what is being researched but also create meaning for the participants being researched.

While the growth of knowledge levels in students move in a parallel fashion to the movement of literacy levels, power operates in a different manner. When a student reaches critical levels of literacy and achieves the highest knowledge typology, the power achieved is intrinsic (French & Raven 1959). At this point, his or her autonomy levels have also increased and they have the capacity to change the direction in which they want to go with their learning process, including at lower levels of thinking and literacy. When the teacher has such knowledge about the students, they can help create favourable learning spaces to enhance learning conditions. Green's model (1988) was useful in pointing to multiple layers of any literacy event, especially if teachers can build from one to the other, across operational, cultural and critical dimensions.

7.3.b Building on teacher and learner identities

A second contribution to knowledge is the merging of AL and PMP which enables the building of teacher and learner identities. When I began this project my role was that of teacher-researcher. I was not yet embracing the role of agent of change. I did not know to what extent my identity was developing. Yet, it is now quite important in the TESOL world to encourage agency as a way for teachers to bring about change in their local teaching contexts (Barnawi & Phan 2015). Thus, the merging of AL and PMP forced me to rethink my positioning as a teacher and researcher and that was my second broad contribution to knowledge. Although in the back of my mind, I knew that as an action researcher I had a noble endeavour to achieve and aspiring to be an agent of change was something I should strive for. However, I did not want to think about it at that time because it was too overwhelming for me to grasp. I was terrified of that title or role. Now, however, upon reflection, I realise that that my sense of agency began even before I undertook this project. The quote below from Emibayer and Mischa (1999) exemplifies how my sense of agency developed initially in relation to my own life experiences:

> *Agency is reflexive to the extent that it is informed by the past, oriented towards the future and flexible in the present as it combines past and future within the contingencies of the moment (p.239).*

My struggles in confronting colonial ghosts from the past and negotiating my own understanding and development as a teacher-researcher, as I was teaching, coupled with my desire to help my students to move forward with their writing, while acknowledging that they have also been shaped by the socio-political reforms within our shared Malaysian context,

made it almost impossible for me to not to react. I was subconsciously playing the role of agent as a form of duty, to help improve teaching and learning conditions, and that notion became more consolidated as I developed my teaching and research.

Action research therefore became a more existential experience for me because I was inquiring into my 'own being as a teacher' (Feldman 2007, p. 243). I began to rediscover myself while also reflecting on other people's stories. Davis (2004) claims that a deep understanding based on reflections can only happen if other people's views are also considered. By listening to other people's stories, I was able to critically evaluate my own prejudices which ultimately helped to free me from strangleholds of the past.

Although confronting, it was essential for me to make this transformative journey to come to terms with my past in order to reconcile my present and future. The goal was to understand the process in which my identity had been shaped over the years, and to understand the way students learn and how they themselves undergo identity transformations. This is what Winter and Badley (2007) classify as a noble endeavour for the action researcher. The intended outcome was for the common good of students and teachers, expressed by Kemmis as the goal of exploring 'practice architectures' (2009). My goal for this research was not only a 'reorientation of consciousness' but to work 'to cross the divide, to make connections between ourselves and others, and to look through other eyes' (Greene, 1997, p. 391). I made a conscious decision to reignite my squashed creativity as a result of my controlling boss and this was inspired after my reading of Kumaravadivelu's post-method ideology of not being constrained by any method (1994). I wanted to break free from traditional modes of teaching and decided to use my imagination to help me do that. Green (1988) suggests a key role for imagination in working on educational reform:

> *To tap into my imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or 'common-sensible' and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be; to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably is (p.174).*

In liberating my own understandings of how power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions can affect my teaching, I envisage my students being liberated from their own prejudices and assumptions about learning. For my students, their identities also slowly changed as their

perceptions about learning changed, from what they experienced in high school to what was required of them in this university. Their changes from what I observed were gradual in that they had to learn how to appropriate their knowledge in this new context, by divorcing some of what they had learnt from school previously. Ideas on plagiarism, referencing and structural essays in strict academic formats were new to them and they also had to use this knowledge in line with their own discipline-specific knowledge. Negotiating those complex terrains was difficult for my students and that helped shape their evolving identities, as they continued to participate in classroom discussion and engage in social interaction outside the classroom with their friends and communities. Some students embraced these changes while others struggled or rejected the academic culture, as shown in the stories presented. What is important for ESL and EAP teachers to realise is that every student is unique, and their past and present experiences need to be taken into account to help with the teaching and learning process.

The expected target language of Academic English may not be familiar to the students in terms of structure and grammar in relation to what the students know and understand of their own native languages. ESL teachers themselves may not be familiar with those structures and may have their own evolving identities to contend with. These identities may not match student identities shaped by the fluid nature of historical and social change within the country. There is ambiguity then, when working in the teaching world of English, if the teacher's or learner's identity does not quite correspond with that of the 'other' as referred to by Said (1978), a famous post-colonial theorist (cited in Ashcroft & Ahluawala 1999). The local teacher needs to reconcile past experiences with the present, as she may question the rationale of using something foreign to teach local students. For example, a teacher may have to think carefully about using a textbook with foreign ideas about learning English and academic writing, because it may not relate to the local learners' interests or culture. Teachers need to have a really deep understanding, both of the culture of the students and the culture of the language they aspire to. Tang (1999) suggests "language is already a culture" and therefore "it is a moot point to talk about the inclusion or exclusion of culture". She further suggests:

> *We might want to re-envisage the situation as a contrast between active and deliberate immersion of culture, and a non-deliberate exposure to it. (p. 1)*

The trick for the teacher is to find a balance between deliberate and non-deliberate action. What this implies for the EAP teacher is that they need to be aware that the students are already perceived to be part of the academic culture, once they set foot in the university (Tang, 1999). However, the teacher's role is to help students make the transition from what they could do in terms of English language and writing at high school into something more efficient at university level.

Therefore, to address teacher identity, I had to shift my thinking to accommodate the needs of the students. Thus I put aside personal post-colonial assumptions in order to address all three of Noffke's dimensions of action research (1997) and Kumaravadivelu's parameters of pedagogy (2003). I took on a more democratic understanding of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions. The changes I went through impacted on the way my teaching decisions played out in the classroom. This in turn influenced the way the students learnt because the choices I made about content and teaching tools ultimately affected what and how they wrote.

7.3.c Recognizing the importance of theory in action research

The final knowledge contribution to this study is recognising the need to use theories to strengthen action research. From this study, when used together, AL conditions and PMP principles complemented each other. The practical principles adapted from PMP were similar to the emphases on the conditions in AL which viewed teaching as a social practice. I found the link between the two theories helpful for my teaching as it helped me to plan, observe, reflect on and evaluate my teaching. The linked theoretical framework made the complexities of teaching and learning academic writing more comprehensible. It allowed the teacher-researcher to think and perceive teaching differently according to different circumstances that I was presented with, mindful of creative resources and suitable strategies I could employ both during and after each action research cycle.

The linking of theoretical conditions for AL with practical strategies from PMP helped me to answer the research questions posed. The three PMP helped to illustrate and exemplify the AL conditions. My contribution to research is that unless the desired conditions were enacted through the Post-Method Principles, none of the AL conditions would have developed in the classroom. As an ESL teacher in a hierarchical setting, the principles enabled me to unpack power typologies or conditions explicitly, by learning to name the power types, see them in

operation and make sense of the whole practice. In my context, there is no point in using negotiated interaction merely as a teaching strategy to reduce perceptual mismatches as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), unless those mismatches are clearly specified. As discussed in Chapter 4, Kumaravadivelu (1994) does not suggest using negotiated interaction to translate power conditions into action. However, I am arguing for negotiated interaction to be explicitly mentioned and linked to power conditions, as it helps teachers address power issues in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex power relational conditions within and beyond the language classroom. As Himley (1997.p.136) remarks:

> *We don't want to be naive about power relations in the classroom or silence those students who do not agree with us or privilege those who do or get locked into the position of appearing to enforce an agenda of political correctness.*

The implication for EAP pedagogy is that unless English Language and academic writing teachers help unpack these power relationships, in the classroom and the institution, both for themselves and their students, the teachers will not understand the importance of language as an essential mediating tool for enhancing the teaching and learning experience. A sound understanding of theoretical debates is essential in developing the teacher's knowledge in what can be developed in practical settings. What this also suggests is that the teachers will not understand what is at stake if theories are ignored, and will continue to treat English teaching as a series of skills or tasks that need to be accomplished without paying attention to culture and identity. When English is treated as a series of skills, there may be mismatches between what is expected of the learner from the teacher, because the teacher may not have given much thought to the cultural nuances of the students.

What is accepted as the writing norm in such institutions may culturally appear quite unreal and distant to the students. The tension between the familiarity of the local versus the unfamiliarity of the foreign, for both the local teacher and students, adds to the difficulty in accepting the post-colonial experience. This is because:

> *... post-colonial theory challenges Western knowledge construction, truth and representation and calls into question claims of academic knowledge and intellectual authority (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods, 2004, p.4).*

I argue that only the local ESL/EAP or EAL teacher can claim to have the authority or knowledge of what is best for his or her students in their native setting, as the teacher is an integral part of the historical and social journey which has shaped the way knowledge has

developed in the nation. However, the teacher needs to first understand how the theories of teaching and learning work in their own context and apply the correct teaching principles to pave the way for local teachers to arrest prejudiced notions that come with post-colonial hang-ups. For example, I had to learn how to disconnect from the 'prejudiced notions' I had about white people because of some past colonial experiences which affected me deeply. The theoretical understanding of power conditions (French & Raven, 1959) undertaken for this study however liberated me from post-colonial hang-ups. This refers to the need to 'move beyond negative patterns' (p.2) or thoughts following the aftermath of post-colonialism.

For challenging Western ideas, I draw inspiration from Auerbach (1993) who discusses who should be given the power to decide what constitutes knowledge, although the norm has been to accept native speaker expertise for English language matters. I argue that local ESL teachers should not be afraid to challenge the decision on how to teach language is closely connected to power; in many cases this still rests on Western ideas of what is desired for teaching and learning, even though the contexts are non-Western.

The other knowledge contribution that is useful for ESL teachers is that the merging of the two theories made it possible for me to hold the principles and conditions in my head while I was teaching and reflect immediately afterwards. Most teachers reflect in hindsight, but I was able to reflect contemporaneously while teaching and learning was going on. That can be done because not only was I living in the moment and was deeply engaged in the knowledge, power and socio-cultural conditions that were shaping my thoughts and experiences; I was also informed by the two theories, since I was constantly reading. I was also able to reflect in hindsight and make greater theoretical connections and practical contributions as my reading knowledge grew and my work progressed. Hindsight reflection is therefore necessary for teachers to weather the complexities of changing practice. The implication for the ESL teacher and for EAP pedagogy is that theoretical input enhances reflective ponderings which in turn helps improve pedagogy. Such knowledge should be embraced by ESL/EAP and EAL teachers. Moreover, TESOL scholars need to pay close attention to the effects theory has on practice. Most TESOL publications cover aspects of theory and practice but not necessarily together. Good or effective theories also have to be practical for the ESL teacher.

What teachers can also learn from this study is that theory was dialectically used with practice in this study, and this concurs with Korthagen et al (2001, p. xi) who stresses that:

> *Both practice on its own and theory alone are incomplete. I believe one can only really understand the former if one knows about the latter, and vice versa.*

Korthagen draws on Nussbaum (1986), suggesting that engaging in practice alone will not allow the individual teacher to develop further. From my field notes, I was able to demonstrate that I could do much reflection while teaching and that affected my teaching for the next day or the next cycle. For example, when the student in the power story from Chapter 4 called me at night to argue for a change in the oral presentation topic; instead of getting angry and being rigid about rules, I relented because I was by then thinking hard about theories of power and negotiated interaction as a teaching principle. I began to understand the dynamics of power relations as I was experiencing them and could make decisions, as I was going through the experience with the student. It was not only a teachable moment for the student but also for me. Wozniak (2014, p. 1) warns:

> *We need to move away from a bland diet of outdated textbooks, predictable writing prompts and standard examples.*

I had been following standard and safe teaching options because I was following the guidelines without considering what was best for the student; yet 'teachable moments' ought to help students 'think critically and consider other perspectives' (p.2) to help them achieve learning outcomes that they have control over.

The decision that I took may not have been a decision that is agreeable to all ESL teachers. For example, when I forwarded a paper I wrote, which included this same story about power published in the *Educational Action Research Journal* (Abraham 2014, see Appendix D), one of my many colleagues who read the paper disagreed with this decision, saying that it was a lapse of judgement on my part. Other colleagues however supported my position in the paper, saying there is no right or wrong decision to be made in this situation, especially if it was guided by my evolving sense of identity from a combination of being influenced by literature and the development of my personal, professional and political dimensions (Noffke 1997). Therefore, to answer the second research question which calls for me to pay attention to the working dimensions of AL; I needed to be closely aware of power relations in order to be effective and informed in my teaching choices and be supportive of my learners. Further research could be undertaken by TESOL scholars to write more about power relations in their classrooms to assist the way they plan to teach their students.

In another instance (explained in Chapter 5), the boy who challenged what was being taught in the citations class, because he felt it to be irrelevant and not related to discipline-based class, provided a teachable moment not only for me but also for him. It prompted me to find a way to help him and others. As a result, eventually the students were able to use their own discipline-specific referencing formats and not what the English Language Centre had decided for them. I took the opportunity to share with my colleagues, who also felt the same way but did not voice similar concerns, probably because they were afraid of changing something that was usually practised or taught within the department. The action researcher compelled me to take action. The same idea could also be applied to the story of the girl in Chapter 6 (or the socio-cultural chapter) with the breast lump story, which I could turn into a teachable moment by linking it with health issues and encouraging students to speak up for their rights. I started to pay more attention to social contexts I would have otherwise ignored as a result of the pressure to complete syllabus requirements. I started to pay closer attention to the power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions in a way that I normally would not have, had I not been theoretically informed. The combining of AL and PMP added an effective dimension to the teaching of TESOL/ TESL students, in particular, to STEM discipline-based students.

The combination of these two theories was tightened further when I read more about Engestrom's work (1987). His explanation of the division of labour within the human activity theory system was something I found useful in my understanding of socio-cultural conditions within my classroom and beyond, which also led to an understanding of how and why hierarchical structures operate in a certain way. It could be useful then for the ESL and academic writing teacher to understand the divisions of labour that exist in their own workplaces (Engestrom 1987). Knowing these divisions of labour can assist the ESL teacher to understand the complexities involved in the teaching and learning of ESL (Popova 2015) and academic writing within hierarchical settings and this helps answer the first research question in this study.

My contribution to research is the idea that the ESL or EAP teacher can use that knowledge to make clear distinctions about teacher, student and institutional roles to overcome ambiguity when dealing with the different identities and cultures of a multi-ethnic group in classrooms within a post-colonial setting, to create a learning situation that is balanced. There is no point in absorbing or learning the colonial master's language, if the locals are not quite

willing to teach or learn it. By understanding the clear demarcations of the system in which they operate in, the teacher can make sense of the complexities of teaching and learning, posed in the first research question. The teacher then knows when to apply the AL theory and PMP principles, once the demarcation of the systems is understood.

In conclusion, my study adds to the literature debates by expanding on Kumaravadivelu's PMP teaching strategies and analysing the effects of these strategies in activating power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions. It also adds to the debates around AL by exploring the extent to which the understanding of the three conditions mentioned above played a part in assisting with the teaching and learning of academic writing. The study also suggests that if teachers consider the effects of colonialism they can translate the three teaching principles to address the three conditions within the AL paradigm. This is important for English Language Teaching in oppressive or authoritarian societies which are struggling to move on from legacies left behind by their colonial masters.

Importantly, my study also builds on the idea that the role of the ESL and academic writing teacher extends beyond the local classroom to include the global, and that English is no longer exclusively 'owned' by native speakers; but rather it is shared by peoples across the world as a means to achieve functional literacy in order to survive in a competitive global world. Kumaravadivelu (2006b, p.1) further adds to this view by suggesting that ESL teachers have a transformative role to play:

> *The contemporary world is being inexorably restructured by the forces of globalization and empire, which together are shaping the global flows of interested knowledge, hegemonic power, and cultural capital. English, in its role as the global language, creates, reflects and spreads the import and the imagery of the global flows. The forces of globalization, empire and English are intricately interconnected. Operating at the intersection where the three meet, TESOL professionals, knowingly or unknowingly, play a role in the service of global corporations as well as imperial powers. What is required to mitigate the intended and unintended consequences of the dangerous liaison between globalization, empire and TESOL is no less than transformative restructuring of major aspects of TESOL.*

In other words, English teachers have to adopt a sense of agency to transform the way English is taught so that we can weather the effects of globalisation. This includes knowing the people, contexts, knowledge, power and socio-cultural and historical scenarios within the

teaching and learning community, and having a wide pedagogical understanding and repertoire of what is needed to help students learn.

In terms of practice, negotiated interaction as a teaching principle appears to be the most important principle that an ESL teacher can use in the classroom, and this is probably the most important of all my findings. When there is more social interaction in the classroom, there is a higher possibility of achieving higher forms of literacy and knowledge levels. Additionally, frequent interactional sessions also reduce the possibility of power based miscommunication. I argue further that without negotiated interaction to help regulate power conditions, there is no point in looking at translating knowledge conditions into action through the use of the teaching principle, learner autonomy or to translate socio-cultural conditions into action through the third principle, ensuring relevant socio-cultural contexts. I am arguing therefore that in order for transformative teaching and learning to take place, social interaction is pivotal to moving or shaping the way power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions are played out, and ESL teachers need to understand this clearly in order to work through the complexities of teaching and learning academic writing. By managing power relations between humans in an activity system (see Engestrom 1987), and in trying to make sense of the division of labour within an organisation, teachers can pave the way for students to achieve higher and critical forms of learning.

This appears somewhat different to what the proponents of AL suggest, which is to consider all conditions (power, knowledge and socio-cultural) together for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing. While that may be ideal in theory, in practice-based situations, the teacher needs to manage power conditions as part of making sense and acting out knowledge or socio-cultural conditions. Power relations take precedence over knowledge and socio-cultural conditions in this instance, and this finding to me changes the way teaching and learning is traditionally perceived by ESL and academic writing teachers. First, it forces ESL and academic writing teachers to acknowledge that power conditions exist and they need to be dealt with effectively, before or alongside attempts to deal with issues related to the other two conditions. Second, this also confirms mediation always exists and when the teacher and students recognise this concept, changes to teaching and learning are possible. Socially mediated artefacts can assist the teacher to negotiate the complexities of power conditions which in turn can affect students' knowledge or autonomy levels, and also socio-cultural conditions or their engagement levels. In conclusion, there is definitely the need to

consider each teaching situation as peculiar to its own context. Pedagogies need to be developed differently and it is interesting to see how they play out in different contexts. The next section is the final section for this concluding chapter, which focuses on possible future research.

7.4 Future areas for research

Teachers and scholars may be able to use this study as a stepping stone to further reveal what I have only managed to scratch on the surface, especially since dealing with power can be a sensitive issue. Power conditions in oppressive settings need to be constantly negotiated in order for knowledge and socio-cultural conditions of teaching and learning to be effectively pursued. And such moments in teaching need to be seized. By thinking about power, ESL teachers, in particular, can frame their pedagogical plans based on what they understand about how English for Academic Purposes pedagogy should be taught in relation to the fluid local and historical contexts of their teaching circumstances or learners. Kumaravadivelu (2012, p.2), in an interview about PMP, talks about how the teacher should actually shape his or her own teaching according to their 'ever-evolving professional and personal knowledge' which then suggests a fluid understanding of practice. To me, this suggests that change is inevitable once a teacher's fluid knowledge and professional understanding of practice affects the way they think and teach.

While I may have explicitly discussed notions of power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions within the AL paradigm as a socially-connected endeavour activated by post-method strategies for my own context; I believe teachers need to think about and build their own pedagogies by reflecting very carefully on their own practice architectures (Kemmis 2009) in order to identify those elements which can be changed. Changing practice can be highly complex and that is why hindsight is necessary for continuous reflection to improve future teaching plans. This hindsight must be also complemented by further research. In fact, practice-based research appears to be the main way to enact change. This is something that other ESL teachers may want to explore.

Further research could be undertaken to study the phenomenon of using post-method teaching principles (PMP) to activate AL conditions in Engineering or other science-based disciplines, since a language classroom project such as this conjures a different kind of understanding of teaching and learning conditions. Language and in particular ESL and academic writing, is

such a complex field to make sense of, and often also touches on raw emotions, cultural habits and ways of being. Perhaps more research could be done on the role emotion plays on the part of the learner or teacher in making informed decisions within the three AL conditions prescribed for the effective teaching and learning of academic writing. This was certainly found to be a contributing factor to influencing decisions made in relation to power and socio-cultural conditions. There is also the option for teachers to explore all the macro strategies for teaching proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), instead of my selected three teaching principles, in activating perhaps not only AL conditions but other conditions which are yet to be identified.

Next, further research could also explore these AL conditions in a longitudinal action research study. The purpose in doing such research would be to extrapolate more findings from the same group over a long period of time to increase research validity. It would also be interesting if ESL teachers could explore which types of critical incidents can result in an increase in specific language skills. For example, if specific links could be made to connect a certain type of incident with the development of a certain type of language skill, then teachers could plan their lessons that take into account the value of critical incidents in shaping teaching and learning outcomes.

Finally, I would have liked to explore different cultural habits of learners in one classroom and how they could work together to illuminate different learning and investments in disciplinary knowledge, and how that could also link with local knowledge. That would also mean investing more time in exploring the identities students take on, and how they navigate circumstances when alternating between language, disciplinary and local contexts.

AL is limiting if it just encompasses the three conditions in its original intended functional capacity. There is a need to draw on emotion, for example, and explicitly name power, knowledge and socio-cultural typologies. And further, the need to negotiate interaction to reduce power conditions as the main theoretical and practical connection to improving the teaching of academic writing to ESL students. This approach suggests that we need to think beyond technical approaches to Academic Literacy, and try to make sense of it in relation to the bigger global picture. In the same vein, PMP appears to be liberating as it encourages the teacher to explore the different strategies available for teaching, even if the selection is restricted to three principles. The challenge then is to ensure the selection of the best teaching

principles in accordance with the local context. My role as an action researcher-teacher, is to understand the complex nature of how language and academic writing is taught and learnt within a complex human activity system, which has certainly evolved and helped me to understand the way teaching and learning operates. With all the complex historical and social underpinnings, I cannot possibly explore and fully understand or make sense of everything that went on within my context, but I can say that I have initiated the way for a more transformative-based action inquiry practice to improve teaching and learning conditions.

To conclude, the findings that have been discussed in this chapter point to the need for ESL and EAP teachers to recognise that English and academic writing teaching poses difficult challenges that need to be addressed, especially in a post-colonial context. Action research, as a methodology, appears to be able to bridge theory and practice in this regard. It opens up avenues for teachers to explore power, knowledge and socio-cultural conditions from AL in ways that may have not been possible without the application of PMP principles. From a socio-cultural perspective, scaffolding and mediation forge the link between AL and PMP, affirming the view that teaching and learning is indeed a social practice. Such an understanding of theory and practice, through contemporaneous and hindsight analytic phases could assist the ESL and EAP teacher to explore and make sense of the wider implications of teaching and learning academic writing and English. There has never been a more urgent time to do so than now, under the evolving cultural, historical and political landscape of globalisation.

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Appendix A

School of Education – Research Ethics Approval Form

Name Alison Abraham
Main Supervisor Dr Monica McLean, Dr Rolf Wiesemes

Course of Study PhD
Title of Research Project Improving the academic writing skills of foundation students in Nottingham

Is this a resubmission? No

Date statement of research ethics received by PGR Office: 22 Feb 08

Research Ethics Coordinator Comments:

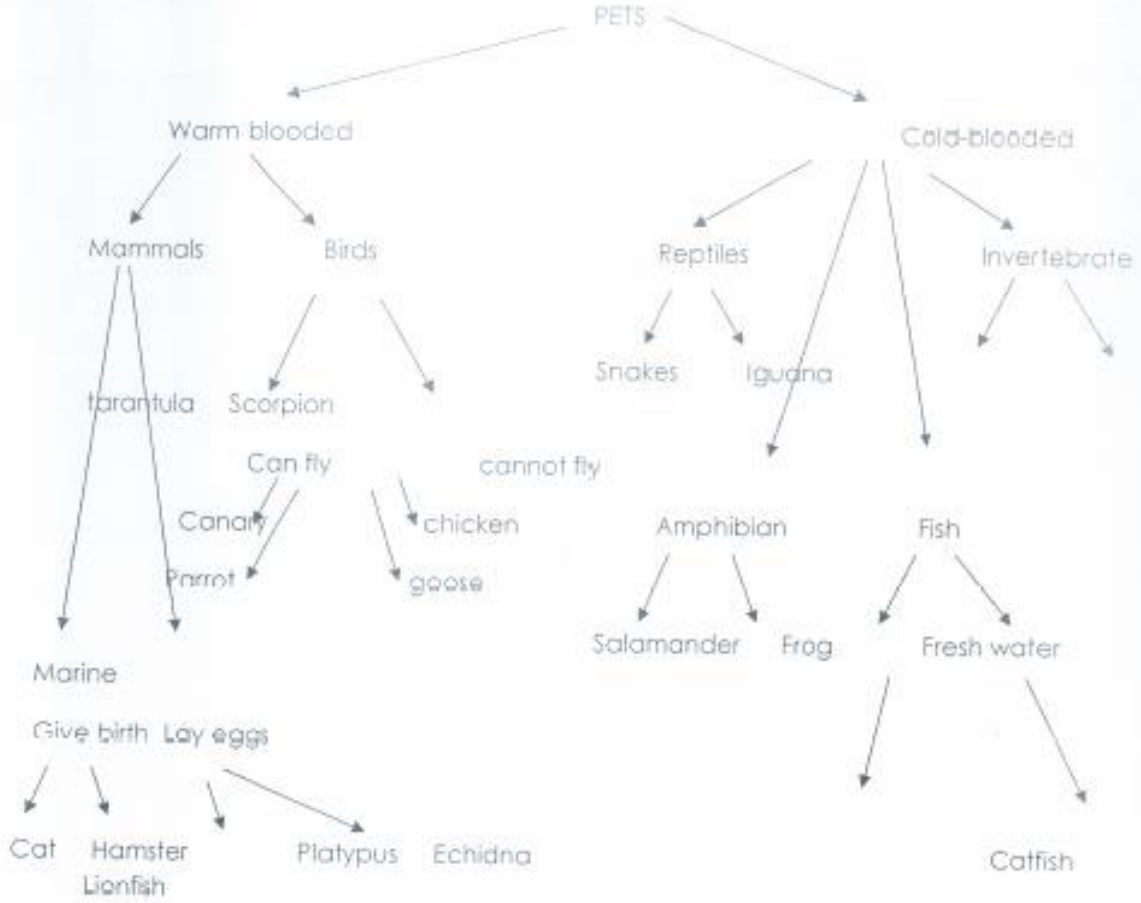
This ethics proposal appears to be sound. Given the power issues involved in teacher-student relationships, you might strengthen the point about the voluntary nature of their participation, stressing that declining the invitation is perfectly acceptable and would not be disadvantageous for them in any respect.

Otherwise your plans look to be fine and I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Outcome:
Approved ✓ Revise and Resubmit ☐

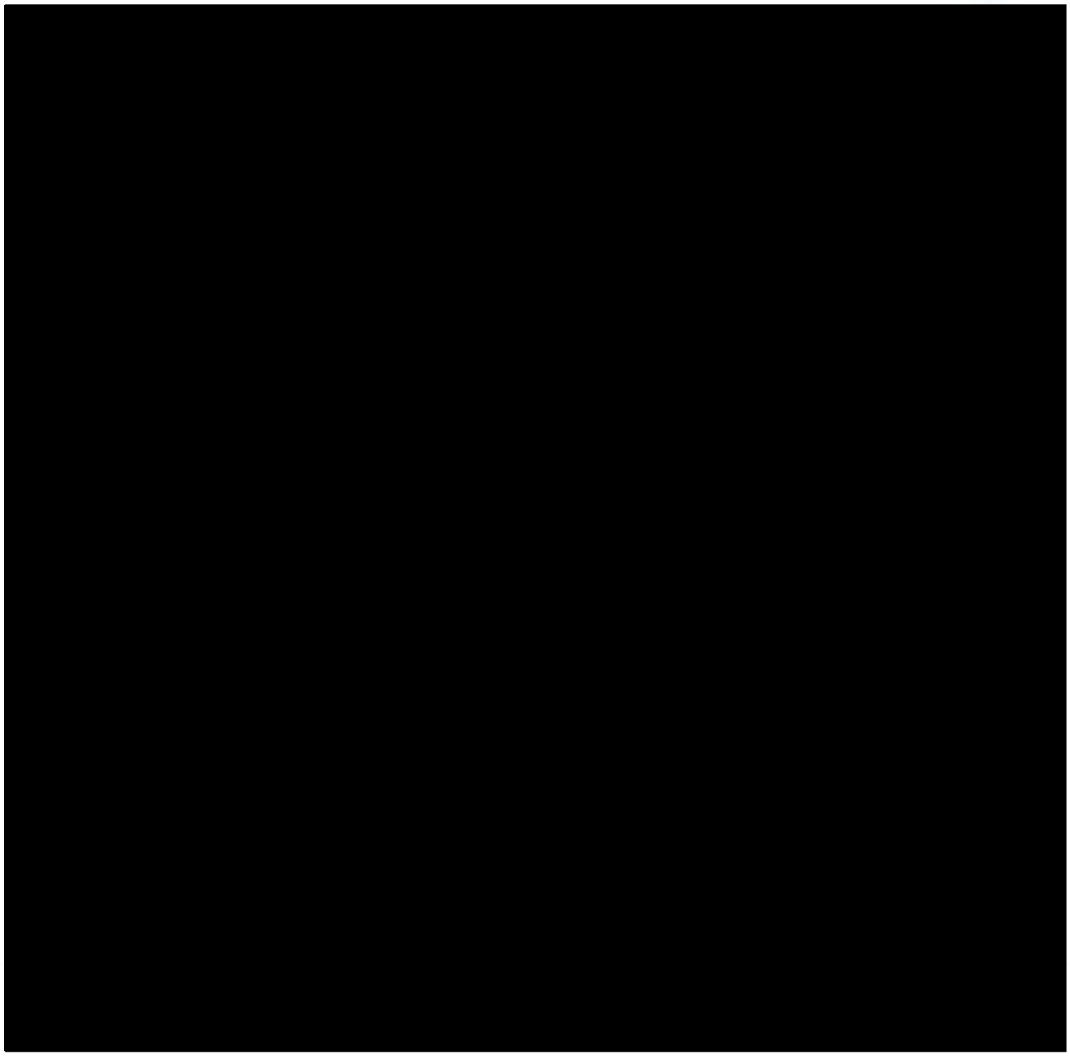
Signed: [redacted] Name: ANDY HOBSON Date: 03 March 2008
(Research Ethics Coordinator)

Appendix B



Pets are kept for various purposes like companionship, enjoyment or as household animal. They can be divided into two types, warm-blooded and cold-blooded. Mammals and birds are categorized in the warm-blooded type. Mammals are often in large size and walk on four legs. Furthermore, all mammals such as cat and hamster give birth. However, there two mammals which lay eggs such as platypus and echidna. Birds can be classified as flying and non-flying birds. Examples for flying birds are canary and parrots while for non-flying birds are chicken and goose. People always keep flying birds inside cages. Cold-blooded animals are grouped into four types which are reptiles, invertebrate, amphibian and fish. Reptiles like snakes and iguana are usually kept inside tanks similarly to invertebrate animals such as tarantula and scorpion. Amphibians like salamander and frog can live on land and in water. Fish can be sorted into fresh water and marine. Moreover, both amphibians and fishes can be kept in tanks containing water. In summary, people should consider the types of pets that they want before adopting one.

Appendix C



Action researching power in an ESL and academic writing classroom by A. Abraham was published in the peer review journal, *Qualitative Research Journal, 15/2, 155-165, 2015*.

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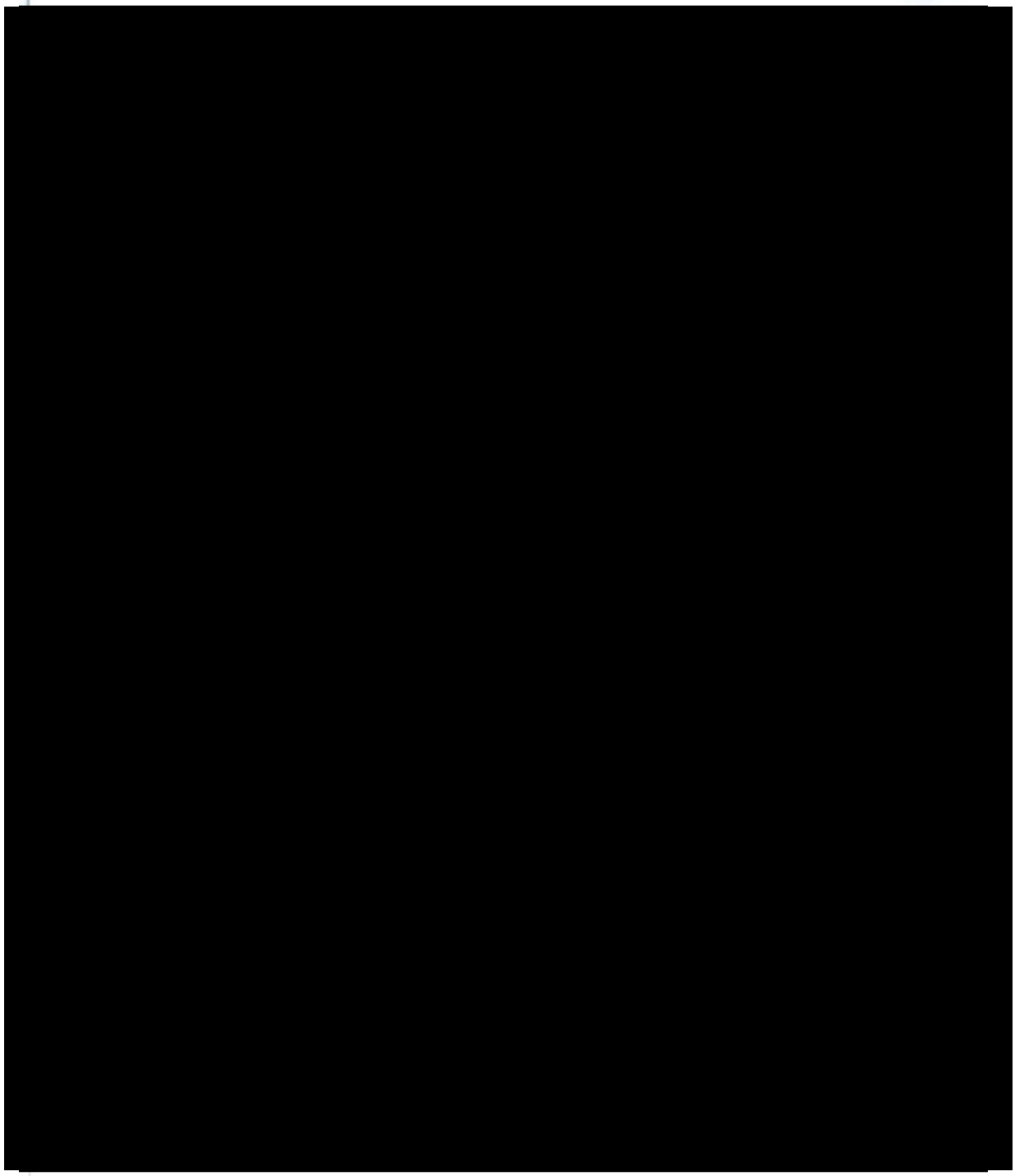
The article is available from the publisher at: https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2014-0068

Appendix D



Making sense of power relations in a Malaysian English-as-a-second-language academic writing classroom by A. Abraham was published in the peer review journal, *Educational Action Research, 22/4, 472-487, 2013*.

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The article is available from the publisher at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2014.942333

Appendix E

FOUNDATION YEAR ENGLISH
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND STUDY SKILLS B (ENO ELB)

Semester 2, 2009-10

Assessment 5: Report Checklist

Project Title : block

Name :

Group: D7 Bn Pc

Report Writing Process	Mark	Comments
Did the writer contribute sufficiently to the group project and cooperate with the other members throughout?	2 /2	Yes
Is there evidence of sufficient secondary research and reading around the topic?	2 /2	Yes
Total	(4) /4	Good

Format and Organisation	Mark	Comments
Does the document contain the main sections of a standard academic research report?	1 /1	
Are the sections of the report clearly signposted with the appropriate numbered headings (and sub-headings, if needed)?	1 /1	
Are the contents of the report organised sensibly and logically into the appropriate sections?	1 /1	Very
Total	(3) /3	Good

Content	Mark	Comments
Does the writer pose a clear and valid research question to be answered?	1 /1	Yes
Does the writer cover all major information required for the report?	1 /1	yes
Is there a strong overall sense of coherence with a clear line of reasoning from introduction to conclusion?	?? /1	intro ? x clear
Is there an effective use of tables/figures with accurate titles/captions to present the findings?	1 /1	yes

FOUNDATION YEAR ENGLISH
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND STUDY SKILLS B (ENO ELB)

Semester 2, 2009-10

Assessment 5: Report Checklist

Project Title :

Name : **Group:**

Report Writing Process	Mark	Comments
Did the writer contribute sufficiently to the group project and cooperate with the other members throughout?	2 /2	yes
Is there evidence of sufficient secondary research and reading around the topic?	2 /2	yes
Total	4 /4	

Format and Organisation	Mark	Comments
Does the document contain the main sections of a standard academic research report?	1 /1	ok
Are the sections of the report clearly signposted with the appropriate numbered headings (and sub-headings, if needed)?	½ /1	yes, but don't separate them (for appear)
Are the contents of the report organised sensibly and logically into the appropriate sections?	1 /1	
Total	2.5 /3	

Content	Mark	Comments
Does the writer pose a clear and valid research question to be answered?	1 yes /1	1 organise this 1
Does the writer cover all major information required for the report?	½ /1	ok
Is there a strong overall sense of coherence with a clear line of reasoning from introduction to conclusion?	½ /1	not bad
Is there an effective use of tables/figures with accurate titles/captions to present the findings?	1 /1	yes

Appendix F

ABSTRACT:

Recently organ donation has been gaining much attention in Malaysia, unfortunately little have been known about public attitudes towards organ donation, particularly among young adults. The aim of this study is to determine the opinions and contributions of Malaysian young adults, aged 16-23 with regards to the recent increase in the awareness of organ donation in Malaysia. To better document young adults perception on organ donation/ the attitudes of young adults towards organ donation was assessed using questionnaire, a structured questionnaire was developed, targeting a naturally representatives sample of 50 respondents. The questionnaire included variables touching on; personal information, donation awareness, willingness to donate and the importance of awareness on organ donation. We found that 52.5% of young adults have a favourable attitude towards organ donation, with 12.5% having negative attitudes and the remaining 35% are undecided about donating their organs. Willingness to donate was significantly associated with helping family or friends who needed organs, whereas the most predominant reason for refusal was largely due to inadequate knowledge on organ donation in Malaysia. We conclude that while most teenagers were supportive of organ donation, not many were enthusiastic about donating their organs. There has been a change in the acceptance of organ donation as a medical treatment in Malaysia especially among young adults and this may have contributed to the recent increase of organ donors and pledgers in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION:

Organ donation has developed to become one of the most progressive areas of medicine. The benefit it brings runs endless down the mile. In Malaysia; however, the term "Organ Donation- A Gift of Life", Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye believes is slowly but surely becoming more acceptable by most Malaysians. Although there may have been an increase acceptability on the practice of organ donation in Malaysia, little have been published on the views of young adults regarding the practice and the level of contribution they have and may have on the recent rise of organ donors and pledgers. Health Ministry Parliamentary Secretary, Lee Kah Choon (2004) quoted that young Malaysians aged 21 to 30 are the biggest group of organ donors in the country and noted that organ donation has increased tremendously in the past seven years. This shows that the Malaysian population is increasingly better informed about organ donation and transplantation, particularly among young adults in the country. The question is however, what are the opinions and attitudes of young adults aged 16 to 23 when it comes to organ donation? How much influence can they have on success of organ donation in Malaysia? Young adults at this age represent the future of the community and have a direct influence on family members and friends; therefore, determining their opinions on organ donation will be able to help in developing successful educational programmes or campaigns in Malaysia. Hence, this study hopes to bring forward the standpoint of these young adults by studying on their responses to the social changes in regards to organ donation in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Shortage for organs for donation and transplantation was reported to be largely due to the negative attitudes and perceptions of the public regarding its practice and practicality in the medical field (Evens.S, Farewell.V.T & Halloran.P.F, 1998). A majority of the public who refused to pledge their organs for donation have been associated with various factors including age, gender, level of education, knowledge and awareness regarding organ donation, mass media and the cultural diversity that existed within a community (Oniscu.G.C & Forsythe J.L.R, 2009) as well as the mindset and misconceived ideas about organ donation (Lee, 2010). However, those were the perceptions of the people back when organ donation was still new and premature in the medical world. These days, fresh and new views from the younger generations have brought about a change in the practice of organ donation in the community. In Malaysia, we have recently observed a change and increase in the magnitude of organ donation activity since year 2007. (National Transplant Resource Centre, *Pledger & Actual Donor*, 2010). As teenagers represent the future of the community, their opinions have direct influence on others (Perkins.K.A,1987; Reubsaet.A, Brug.J et.all, 2001). Therefore, teenagers who are in favour of organ donation becomes promoters of organ donation themselves. Thus, recognizing the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of young adults concerning organ donation is an important aspect on organ donation and procurement.

METHODOLOGY:

Data for this study were obtained by distribution of questionnaire to a sample of 50 young adults in Malaysia, aged 16 to 23, and both on-campus and off-campus for a period of seven days. A series or questions concerning organ donation were asked to respondents who agreed to participate in the study by signing a consent slip form before answering the questionnaire. Individuals were asked questions on four different areas, consisting of: (i) personal information, (ii) donation awareness, (iii) actions of respondents on organ donation and (iv) importance of awareness of organ donation. A pilot study was conducted on 16 students during English lesson for further assessment and repair of the questionnaire before distribution. Of 50 sheets of questionnaire distributed, 46 copies were collected, where six sheets were rejected due to some important questions left unanswered by respondents. This was also done to equalize the number of young adults aged 18 below and aged 18 to 23. The questionnaire collected from respondents, were checked manually and analyzed for its statistical figures using Microsoft Office Excel 2007 through various data coding.

Respondents were also asked which organs they would be willing to donate. Responses to this question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – Which Organs Would You Be Willing To Donate?

Organ(s)	Percentage (%)
Eyes	40
Cornea	40
Lung	47.5
Heart	57.5
Liver	52.5
Skin	35
Kidney	75
Blood	87.5
Bone	22.5
Pancreas	32.5

The largest percentage of respondents indicated that they would be willing to donate their blood (for tissue) and kidney (for organs). A possible explanation for this might be due to their familiarity with various blood donation drives carried out in Malaysia as well as with various cases of kidney transplantation in Malaysia. On the other hand, fewer individuals indicated that they would be willing to donate their bone and pancreas. A reason for this is perhaps that pancreas transplant donation is currently not practiced in Malaysia.

Appendix G

Earth

The earth is a special and holy planet. It is the third member of the solar system and complete revolves the sun for every 365.25 days. She provides us a comprehensive and favorable condition to live : water, land and foods. She had given a chance for human being to exist, live and develop. So, it is important to know process how the earth was formed in order to create appreciation in every human being.

In about 4.6 billion years ago, celestial bodies around the sun was starting to accumulate dusts and gases, subsequently forming countless of small planets. Then, these small planets tend to collide with each other and convene to form a former earth. Besides, scientist believed that the moon was formed due to a huge collision of a planet and the earth at that time.

Due to the gigantic collision of planets, surface of Earth was extremely hot as similar as molten state of lava. Between, the heavy matters in the lava sank to form the centrospheres. Evaporation of gases occurred and lead to formation of atmosphere. Next, the existence of atmosphere protects the earth from further collision. Hence, surface of the earth become cooler. The water vapors in the atmosphere down poured on the surface of the earth and formed ocean.

After that, scientists deduced that some species of plant such as algae started to exist in about 25 billion years ago. They respired and carried out photosynthesis to produce oxygen gas. In about 5.4 billion years, biological life existed. The species of plants, fishes, amphibian and land animal appeared accordingly. About 650 hundred thousand years ago, dinosaurs were formed as the earth become warmer. As the time past, the condition on earth was more favorable to live and human started to exist.

In brief, being a part of the earth, human being should appreciate our mother earth as she took such a long period to form. The process she underwent to appear herself as today was not simple, instead she had went through all sorts of crisis. Consequently, mankind should appreciate the mother earth as the process of earth formation was challenging.

Appendix H

Introduction

Stevia Rebaudiana, commonly known as sweetleaf, sugarleaf or simply stevia, is widely grown for its sweet leaves. The extracts of Stevia leaves known as stevioside have a high level of sugar which is substitute to sucrose. The extracts are 300 times sweeter than regular sugar. Furthermore, it has zero calories and carbohydrates. It also has other potential to become a medicine in treatment of diabetis mellitus. By using stevia as a sweetener, diabetic patient can taste the sweetness in foods and drinks without causing any bad effects to them . People should be aware of this plant because it has a high potential as a substitute sugar.

Literature Review

There are 6 articles that had been used as references for this research about the significance of Stevia Rebaudiana. Based on the articles, Ahuja, P. S., Kaul, Kumar, Megeji, Singh (2005) state that Stevia Rebaudiana is an herbaceous plant where the extract of the leaves called stevioside is used for sweetening foods as a substitute for synthetic sugar. They also state that Stevia Rebaudiana does not gives any side effects to people who consume it.

Next, Stevia Rebaudiana does not cause mutagenicity to the human's DNA and chromosomes as long as the extract of Stevia, called stevioside is used in low dose (Buddhasukh, Meevatee, Suttajit, Vinitketkaumnuen, 1993) yet, there are some researchers said that consuming stevia may cause mutations to the human reproductive system (Eckhert, Kobylewski, 2008). However, based on thie article written by Buddhasukh, (1993), an experiment had been conducted to show that Stevia Rebaudiana lacks of mutagenicity. The result of the experiment shows that Stevia does cause mutation to the human reproductive system.

Furthermore, an extract from Stevia Rebaudiana called Rebaudioside A serve a potential role to treat Diabetes Mellitus (Abudula, Hermansen, Jeppesen, Rolfsen, S, Xiao, 2004). Rebaudioside A can cure Diabetes Mellitus by stimulating insulin secretion to lower down the blood glucose level (Abudula, 2004). Some of the author of another articles state that Rebaudioside is a toxic to living organisms. However, there are no reports state that the animals which is used for the experiment to observe the potential of Rebaudioside A in stimulating insulin secretion died when Rebaudioside A is used on them.

Finally, Stevia Rebaudiana influenced blood sugar levels, insulin level, blood pressure, urine Sodium excretion, lipid profile and weight of a person but it does not affect them significantly (Savita, Shankar, Sheela, Sunanda, Ramakrishna, Sakey, 2004). It can lower down the blood sugr level, blood pressure, lipid profile and weight of a person in minimun amount only. Furthermore, it also can increase the insulin level and sodium excretion. Therefore, stevia gives good effects to a person's health.

Now I will focus on our research questions, there are three research questions for our research reports. Firstly, the first question is the awareness of people about Stevia Rebaudiana, the second question is the role of Stevia Rebaudiana as a substitute sugar, and the last question is the role of stevia Rebaudiana in treatment of Diabetes Mellitus.

Procedure

The questionnaires are distributed using several ways. Most of the questionnaires are administrated using the one-to-one administration. In this process, the questionnaires are distributed from representatives to the respondents by hand. This method have higher return rate and the quality of the questionnaires. The questionnaires then collected back immediately after the respondents have complete answering the questions. There are also people who have helped us distributing our questionnaire. Those people are Dr. Azhar and Dr. Norhariza. It is conducted inside the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Cyberjaya, and Kajang Hospital.

However, there are some limitations to administer the questionnaires. One of them is we had difficulties to find our target respondents. We had targeted diabetic patients in Kajang Hospital but most of them refuse to cooperate with us. Besides that, most of the questionnaires that were returned to us are defect and have obvious errors. Some of the questionnaires also had the same writing but we assume that the people who helped us in administrating our questionnaire were helping our target respondents to answer our questionnaires. We also had problem in transportation because none of our team members have transports to go meet our target respondents in different location. The last limitation is too many rejected questionnaires. There are total of 82 questionnaire papers but only 22 questionnaires papers that can be used for our research.

respondents said that stevia is a substitute sugar thus stating that majority of the respondents think stevia is a substitute sugar.

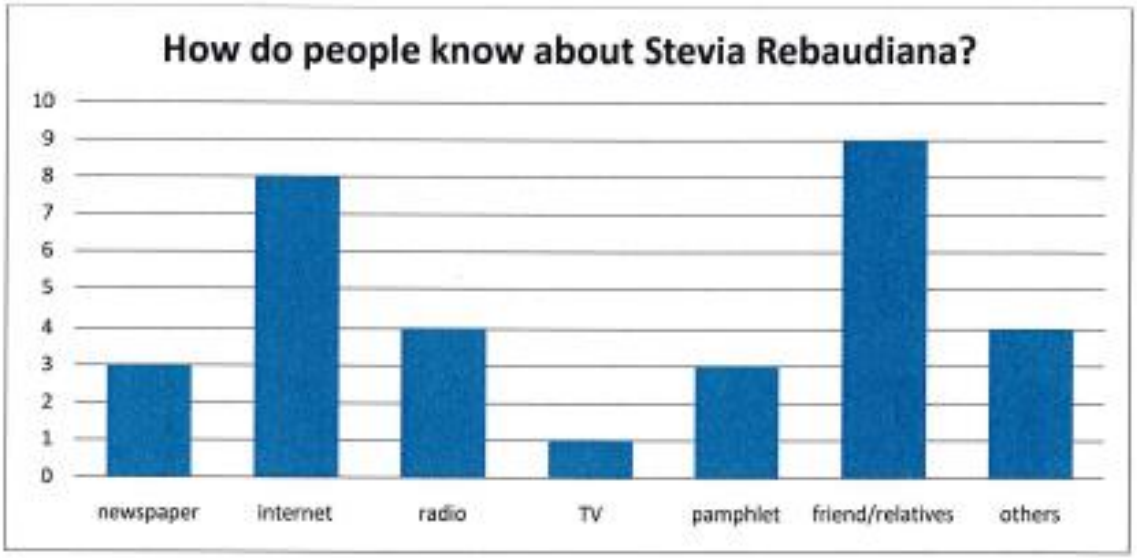


Figure 3

Question 13	Newspaper	Internet	Radio	Television	Pamphlet	Friends/ Relatives	Others
How did you get to know about Stevia Rebaudiana ?	3	8	4	1	3	9	4

The data we had collected from question 13 were used to create the figure above. Question 13 is also a multiple choice question where we provide the respondents with 7 choices of answers. In addition, they can choose more than one answer. 9 people said that they heard Stevia Rebaudiana from their relatives or friends and 8 people said that they know about Stevia Rebaudiana from the Internet. 3 people answered they know about Stevia Rebaudiana from pamphlet and newspaper. Next, only one person said that he/she heard

about Stevia Rebaudiana from television, 4 people answered the question that they know about stevia from the radio and the other 4 people heard about stevia from other materials.

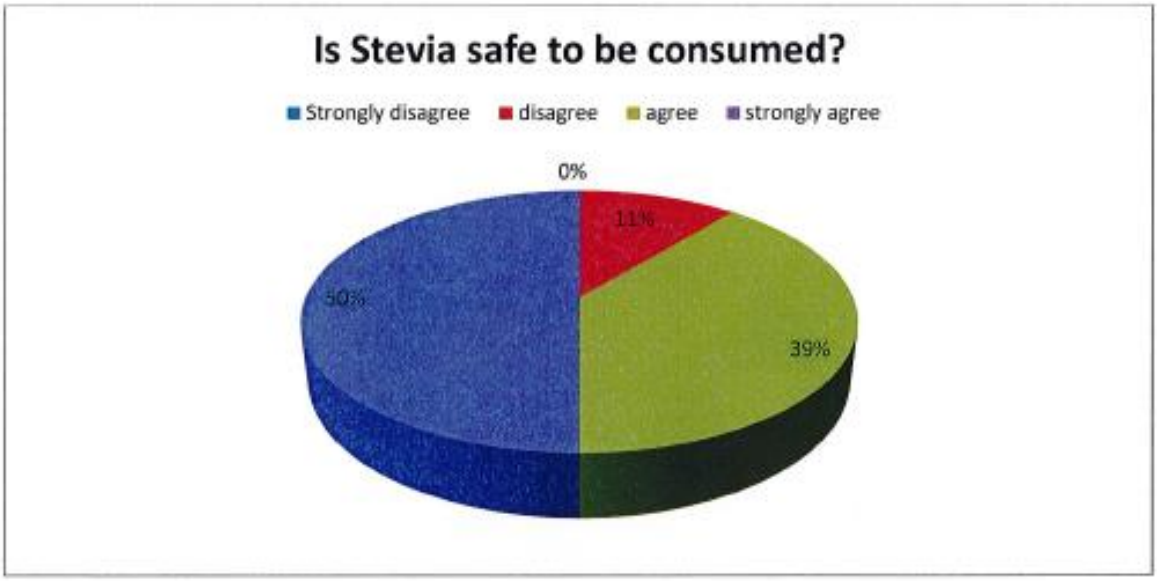


Figure 4

Question 27	Agree	Disagree
Stevia Rebaudiana is safe to be consumed	16	2

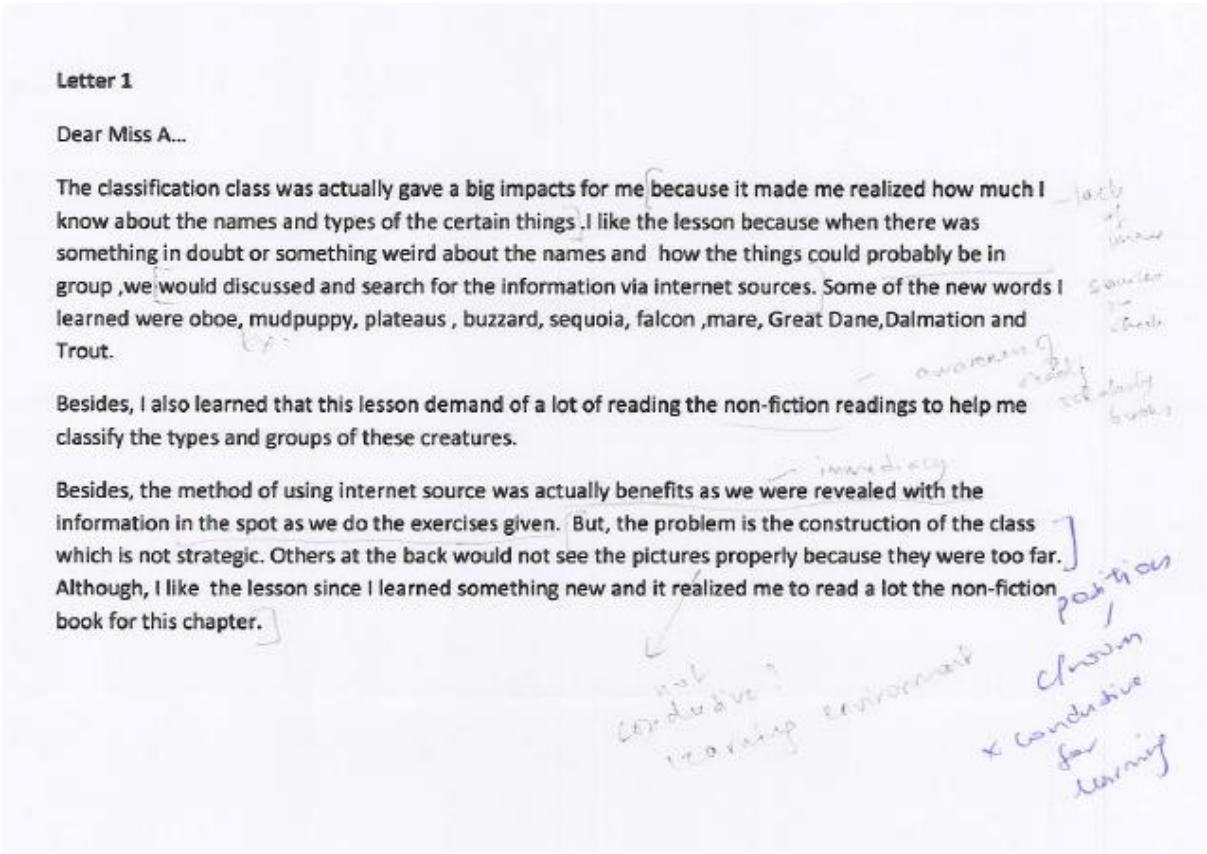
The pie chart above was created based on the data we had collected from question 27. This question is a scale type question. It is obvious that most of the respondents agree that Stevia is safe to be consumed as shown in figure 4. Interestingly, only 2 respondents disagree with the statement that Stevia is safe to be consumed. Overall, 89% of our respondents agree that Stevia is safe to be consumed only 11% disagree with it.

Conclusion

Stevia Rebaudiana is a natural herb with low calories which works as a substitute to sugar for it is 300 times sweeter than sugar. This herbal also has a potential to treat diabetes. Based on the findings, one of the implications is it creates awareness to the diabetes patients about the significance of stevia rebaudiana as a substitute sugar to the diabetes patients. They realized that they can taste the sweetness of food without having any bad effects on their illness. Finally, based on our research, we suggest three improvements in order to get better results; firstly we have to find more diabetes patients who used Stevia rebaudiana in treatment of diabetes mellitus as our target respondents. Finally, the most important is to avoid relying too much on other people to distribute the questionnaires. Sometimes, it is better to do it by ourselves.

Appendix I

Audit trail sample (letters from Bioscience students 2009)



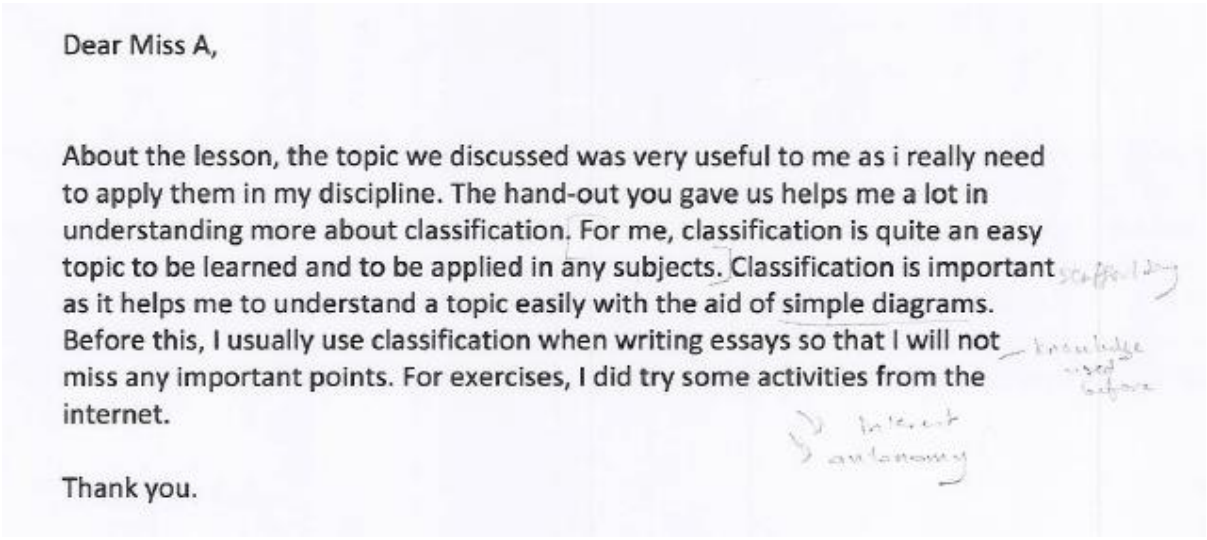
Letter 1

Dear Miss A...

The classification class was actually gave a big impacts for me because it made me realized how much I know about the names and types of the certain things .I like the lesson because when there was something in doubt or something weird about the names and how the things could probably be in group ,we would discussed and search for the information via internet sources. Some of the new words I learned were oboe, mudpuppy, plateaus , buzzard, sequoia, falcon ,mare, Great Dane,Dalmation and Trout.

Besides, I also learned that this lesson demand of a lot of reading the non-fiction readings to help me classify the types and groups of these creatures.

Besides, the method of using internet source was actually benefits as we were revealed with the information in the spot as we do the exercises given. But, the problem is the construction of the class which is not strategic. Others at the back would not see the pictures properly because they were too far. Although, I like the lesson since I learned something new and it realized me to read a lot the non-fiction book for this chapter.



Dear Miss A,

About the lesson, the topic we discussed was very useful to me as i really need to apply them in my discipline. The hand-out you gave us helps me a lot in understanding more about classification. For me, classification is quite an easy topic to be learned and to be applied in any subjects. Classification is important as it helps me to understand a topic easily with the aid of simple diagrams. Before this, I usually use classification when writing essays so that I will not miss any important points. For exercises, I did try some activities from the internet.

Thank you.

Dear Miss A,

This is the first letter that I write to you for semester 1 due to your research related matters. Since from the first lesson until our last lesson recently on Wednesday,14th of October 2009(classification lesson), I had learned a lot from you.

It seems that this semester will be harder for me than last semester because I need to put a lot of efforts in preparing for my oral presentation. I still remembered about your comments on the day that we had been given a topic by you to talk about in front. Each of your comments on that day is very useful in improving our weaknesses especially of our body language, which is the most common problem that had been faced by most of us. Besides, I think all the questions that you had provided as our guidelines to find which topic is suitable for the oral presentation is very useful. At least I had found one topic which I thought it is relevant and related to our discipline.

Furthermore, I would like to comment about our recently class lesson that we had been thought of classification essay. I would say that all your handouts that you had given to us on that day are very useful. In addition, I really enjoyed during the time that we are doing classification exercises in group. During that time, you had showed to us many pictures and information from the internet. It was very enjoyable because most of us are getting very excited and curious about some new words that had been found when doing the exercises. Besides, we also get to share more information and stories among of ourselves.

I hope that our incoming lesson would be enjoyable like as our exciting passed lessons.

Letter 2

Dear Miss A,

The chronological essay writing lesson was really amazing! I was interested in how the explosion of Chernobyl could possibly occur due to a small mistake. In addition, during the class, the lesson did use internet source in order to enhance the lesson and it automatically create an enjoyful study environment. It also used other examples of explosion such as the explosion happened in Vietnam and relate it with the main topic: Chernobyl. These factors were actually making the lesson more relax and it helped to reduce my nervous problem during English class.

Besides, the lesson taught on how to use sequences words which I weak very much. By this way, I could probably encourage myself to use all these words in my paragraph .Perhaps, these would assist me for my coming exam...

The Oshima book was also an important source of reading and the best guidance for those in the journey of improving English language.

Dear Miss alison,

This letter is about the lesson that we had learned in the computer lab which focus on the description essay. We already taught on how to write a process essay last week. First of all, we should follow the sequence by using the sequence markers. Next, we should use a relative pronoun to prevent avoid repeating a subject. After that, we also should write in a step by step in essay to ensure the coherent of the essay.

In the lab, we were taught by using the Oshima book and the internet resource. Firstly, we looked at the picture of the Chernobyl to feel the situation of the explosion. I looked at many pictures which show all the painful and suffer of the people on that area.

After we got to know the concept of writing, we started to write a chosen topic in a group. We searched the information by the internet. Next, we were conducted an outline of a process essay. This kind of learning was quite good but it should be trying as an individual work. If there are more exercise or practice for us, it will be better.