"Conveying your intelligence on paper": How do three Year 12 learners negotiate the demands of writing for assessment at A Level?

Kim Bownas

Institute of Education, UCL

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctorate in Education (EdD)

I, Kim Bownas, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature: K. B. Bownas

Date: 24th June 2021

Word count (exclusive of the abstract, table of contents, statements, appendices and list of references but including figures and tables): 46,070

Acknowledgements:

My thanks to my family who have lived through this journey as much as I have. Also thanks to my supervisor, Cathie Wallace for her support and guidance.

Abstract

This exploratory case study, based in a socio-cultural view of literacy, centres on interviews with three Year 12 learners, who describe their writing for assessment at A Level. Entering a new arena of literacy practices, the learners understand that previously successful strategies for writing at GCSE need to be reconsidered due to different, more complex demands.   Claiming "no time" for reading and writing outside their studies, they concentrate on becoming experts in examination essays, a genre of writing in itself. Thematic analysis of interviews given at three separate points in their first year of A Level study illustrates the extent to which the development of a "writerly voice" depends on how confidently they negotiate the two requirements of their writing tasks. The first, incorporating an emphasis on writing as a product, encourages an approach I identify as "writing competently". The learners are placed in more passive "pupil"-like positions, in which adherence to structures and guidance established by school and examination boards is stressed. However, A Level essay mark schemes also reward the manipulation and evaluation of subject content, which favour a more process focussed view of writing. Identifying this as the second requirement, "writing critically", I draw on Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) model of writing as knowledge transforming. Seeing the generation of texts as problem-solving activities, learners consolidate and clarify their understanding in greater depth.   Regarding writing in this way also places increased responsibility on learners to develop more autonomous "student"-like approaches, in which greater individuality of response is evident. The research suggests that more reflective writers, who relate their written tasks to perspectives separate to examination criteria, are likely to develop greater agency in their writing and learning. This has significant pedagogical implications across disciplines and at an earlier stage than during the high-stakes examination years of secondary education.

Impact statement

The position of the EdD as a professional doctorate within the field of education centres my research in the day-to-day practice of teachers and learners in English schools. The first chapter of my thesis, which establishes the context and rationale of my study, indicates its basis in current concerns both within my immediate context and in the wider setting of writing for assessment.

Initial impact

I have shared my studies with relevant subject teachers as well as taken the opportunity to disseminate it through work with English as an Additional Language (EAL) practitioners through a series of "hub" meetings in the local area. Through providing training to beginner teachers in Essex, I have been able to indicate the importance of teaching discipline-specific language requirements, particularly for writing, to those at the start of their teaching career. Feedback from these sessions has remarked on how they appreciate the theoretical background I provide, which stems directly from my work in my doctorate.

I have disseminated my findings within the Institute of Education (IOE) through the Poster Conference and the Doctoral Conference.   I have also presented my work to the Post Graduate Research Literacy Special Interest Group, of which I am a coordinator, which was established at the IOE with the involvement of the International Literacy Centre. I shared my research at the National Association of Language Development In the Curriculum (NALDIC) conference in November 2020. I aim to extend my work within my own school and wider, by working in partnership with teachers at all levels, so that my research in writing for assessment can be placed in the context of specific disciplines and their discourse communities.

Wider impact

At the time of writing, education in England has been significantly affected by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. After months of school closures in 2020, GCSE and A Level results were awarded on the basis of teacher assessed grades. It has been well-documented in the media that there were concerns that this caused "grade inflation" leaving some candidates feeling their hard work leading up to their final terms of study had been devalued. The examinations of 2021 have been similarly reviewed, with learners now undergoing a series of internal examinations to

inform teachers' assessments of their standard in their subjects. The government proposal outlined that the strategy was designed to:

"indicate [the learners'] demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills"

This move away from a high-stakes final examination period may inform future discussions on the appropriateness of relying on single examination essay papers at the end of a two year course to determine the final grade awarded at GCSE and at A Level. My research can contribute to this debate, illustrating how learners must negotiate the demands of writing in such challenging circumstances whilst attempting to develop an individual voice in their texts.

Table of contents

page

List of tables **page**

<u>**Reflective statement**</u>

My connection to the Institute of Education began when I took a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education here in 1983, with a focus on teaching English. I came back to complete a part-time Masters in Education (MA Ed) in 1991 which was instrumental in my promotion to Second in the English Department at the school I have identified as Ingleby School in my thesis. Subsequently promoted to Head of English, I continued to develop my expertise in classroom practice and in innovative ideas in education, chairing the Teaching and Learning working party in the school, for example. A sideways move into leading the Multi-Ethnic Achievement Department presented me with new challenges. Although working with learners who were identified as having English as an Additional Language (EAL) had long been part of my teaching, due to the context of the school, this role gave me the opportunity to explore more learner-centred education, working with smaller groups, many at a very early stage of English acquisition. I was also expected to take on training responsibilities, both within the school and for external delegates, to support them in how best to teach EAL learners. Accordingly, I completed a year-long course, at a Master's level, which, with 12 months' further study, I could have upgraded to a Masters in EAL teaching with the University of Greenwich. Having been re-introduced to the rigor of study and debate with my peers, however, I decided to apply for a Doctorate in Education (EdD), and so returned to the Institute to take this qualification, beginning in 2012.

Year 1 – exploring the options

As it had been many years since the formal research element of my MA Ed, the first year of the EdD was a way of exploring the options available to me in my later work. My Foundations of Professionalism (FOP) essay was centred in my work as Head of the MEA Department, investigating the roles of the Community Mentors who work with the EAL learners in the school. These mentors were originally brought in to the school to work with individual or small groups of learners who were at risk of academic underachievement. From similar language, faith and cultural backgrounds to the learners, they provide advice and support through regular meetings with the learners, in which targets can be set and progress can be monitored. For some mentors, this role has now expanded to work alongside students in the classroom, especially those who are new to learning English. Taking the opportunity to reflect on an aspect of the day-to-day running of the department was valuable and allowed me to take a step back from my role as a

manager of these positions, to consider them more objectively. However, it confirmed for me that I did not want to focus on administration or policy aspects of working in a school in future research, which seemed distant from what might be happening in the classrooms themselves.

Consequently, my next modules, Methods of Enquiry (MOE) 1 and 2, were based in classroom observations and interviews with class and support teachers. Links can be seen with the FOP essay in that I based my work on the collaboration between an EAL specialist teacher and a Geography teacher in a Year 7 lesson. At this stage in my EdD "journey", my focus was still on the adults in the classroom, investigating their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the learning activities which took place. Classroom observation was in terms of what the teachers in the room did and how they interacted with each other and the learners. Interviews were only with the teachers. However, there were also aspects of this small-scale research that looked forward to my thesis, in the use of an exploratory case study framework and of semi-structured interviews to initiate discussion between the participants, which was then transcribed and searched for themes.

The IFS and the thesis – adding the learners

The Institution Focused Study (IFS) aspect of my doctorate dealt with ideas of transition from GCSE to A Level. Although I did not recognise it until after my IFS was complete, I returned to a key group of learners I had studied before – my MA Ed research investigated the reading habits of A Level learners of English Literature. My initial idea for the IFS was to examine if regular meetings between teachers and learners in the first year of A Level study would improve their understanding of the shifting nature of their roles and responsibilities. The high-stakes nature of GCSE examinations, particularly in English, developed, I suggested, a more passive, dependent view of studying by the learners, which I identified as a "pupil" stance. However, at A Level, teachers (and to some extent the learners themselves) expected more independence and autonomy from the learners, which I identified as a "student" stance. The meetings between learners and teachers were supplemented by meetings with just the teachers and the learners separately. In this way, I hoped to explore in more detail what might not have been said so freely in a joint meeting of the two sets of participants. Completing this research over the course of the first year of sixth form study (Year 12) enabled me to reflect on any alteration in the learners and teachers' views of their roles and responsibilities. However, as the AS examination in the May of Year

12 came closer, it became increasingly apparent that learners and teachers retreated into the roles and responsibilities they had used successfully at GCSE. Teachers began to run supplementary classes at lunch-times and in holidays, while learners became frustrated with what they perceived as their teachers' reluctance to mark "just one more" version of their coursework essay, so that they could find out how to obtain the A grade they felt they deserved. Although both sets of participants had the same aim of success in the AS examinations, there seemed to be a reduction in the cooperation and collaboration which had been illustrated in the joint meetings earlier in the course.

Further details of how the IFS influenced my research for the thesis are given in Chapter 1 of the thesis. The IFS itself can also be seen as a transition in my learning and in my research methods. Including the learners in my research for the first time in my doctoral studies enabled me to broaden the focus of my work. I further refined my ideas of what a case study approach could do, and how to use data generated by interviews more effectively. I also found that collecting data at separate points over the course of a year could be particularly illuminating in considering any shifts made by the participants in what they talked about and how they talked about it. This influenced my eventual research design for the thesis. Most importantly, the IFS generated further questions for me, regarding the way in which the learners in the research, who had been so confident in their discussion of English Literature did not achieve the grades in their AS examinations which they expected. Of the three Year 12 participants, only one continued with Literature into Year 13. The other two decided to cut their losses with an E grade each at AS Level and to continue to A2 Level with their other subjects, where their AS grades had been higher. Viewing their AS Level Literature examination scripts, although not part of my IFS, confirmed for me that the learners struggled to organise their ideas effectively to conform to the requirements of the examination criteria. This formed the basis of my proposal for my thesis research, leading to my focus on the learners themselves and how they described the writing they had to complete for assessment in examinations.

Building on the concepts identified in my IFS of a more passive "pupil" view of learning compared to a more autonomous "student" one, as well as taking a longitudinal approach to data collection from the same age-range of learners indicates the close links between my IFS and my thesis research. However, as described in the final chapter of the thesis, my work has significant implications for learners at all levels of education and across disciplines, as they attempt to

negotiate the twin demands of "writing competently" and "writing critically" in order to establish their own "writerly voice". The relevance of my work is indicated by an article written by Simon Gibbons, a lecturer in Kings College, London, in 2019. Entitled "Death by PEEL? The teaching of writing in the secondary English classroom in England", he notes how the acronym PEEL, standing for Point, Evidence, Explanation and Link (back to the question) is used extensively in teaching writing at all levels, even though it is viewed with some wariness as a factor in creating formulaic responses to written tasks. His article begins with a quotation from an email sent by a "doctoral student" asking him if he knew where the idea of PEE(L) came from, with his acknowledgement that although he could make some suggestions, he could not authoritatively state its origin. The email was sent by me, some months before, as I had previously known him as the borough's English advisor, and I thought he might remember, like me, a time when PEE(L) was not used at all. The ways in which scaffolding and support for writing are used by teachers and the ways in which these can be gradually withdrawn are key aspects for further consideration, as my final chapter of my thesis explores.

The richness of doctoral study

Living in London, I have been able to take advantage of opportunities provided by the Institute to increase my understanding, skills and experience during my period of study for the doctorate. For example, attending a reading group on Vygotsky not only gave me further insights into his work but also introduced me to the ways other doctoral students were applying his ideas in their own research in different fields. Short courses on philosophy and language, or on the use of different research methods have presented me with alternative ways of viewing research, encouraging me to see my own studies from different perspectives. I have also been able to take on the role of one of the coordinators of the Post Graduate Research Special Interest Group in Literacy at the IOE, through which I have been able to present my work to a wider audience. The most significant feature of my doctoral study has, however, been the sharing of ideas and expertise across the years of my study. The support I have found in working with and alongside other learners as well as experts in their disciplines has been a rich one, which has undoubtedly enhanced my understanding of myself as a practitioner in education and as a learner.

Chapter 1: Introduction, Context and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

> "when you're writing an essay, you're conveying like, your intelligence on paper …" (Hana Individual Interview 1)

Writing can have many purposes, including providing entertainment, supplying information and record-keeping. However, the type of writing which is required in schools is often of a particular kind, in which the writer is attempting to show what has been studied to a reader (a teacher or examiner) who is already aware of the likely content of the response and is reading it in order to make a judgement. This type of writing provides the focus for my research. For Hana, Tara and Xavi, the participants, who are all studying a range of subjects at A Level in Year 12, the requirements of their assessment essays are a way of establishing what has been learnt and what still needs to be acquired.

Hana's comment above, taken from the series of interviews which provide my data, shows an awareness that merely repeating the content learnt in class in an essay is inadequate, especially at A Level. Instead, the essay demands that the writer communicates a more personalised response to the learning. Through developing an argument, the writer selects and manipulates the discipline's content and concepts, increasing his or her intellectual engagement with them. This is illustrated by the following descriptions of top band A Level essays (All examples from AQA examination board):

> "A sophisticated and comprehensive essay, showing very good critical autonomy." (Media A Level Mark Scheme June 2017)

> "The answer will be fully analytical with a balanced argument and well substantiated judgement." (History A Level Mark Scheme June 2017)

> "The answer is clear, coherent and focused." (Psychology A Level Mark Scheme June 2017)

> "Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant." (Sociology A Level Mark Scheme June 2017)

> "… perceptive and assured work which shows confidence, sharpness of mind and sophistication in relation to the task." (English Literature A Level Mark Scheme June 2017)

These descriptions emphasise the writer's presentation of the content, stressing a sophisticated selection of material to provide an individual, critical response to the examination question.

My research examines how writers might develop this kind of response, exploring how three learners, Hana, Tara and Xavi, describe their experiences of writing for

assessment in the first year of their A Level studies. Using a qualitative, case study approach I consider the ways in which they negotiate the different demands of such writing and to what extent this has an impact on their views of themselves as learners, and as writers, over the course of the research period.

In this first chapter, I outline the context and rationale for the research.

1.2 Context : The setting for the research

The learners in this research are all in Year 12 of the sixth form of the school in which I have taught for more than thirty years. Placed in an eastern outer London borough, I will identify it as Ingleby School in this study. It is in a "young" area of London; a greater proportion of children and young people are aged under 19 years (27.6%) in the borough than in comparison to London as a whole (24.7%) and England (23.7%) (Redbridge JSNA 2017).

Historically an area with a higher than average Jewish population, the borough is now more populated by Muslim and Sikh families (40% and 7.1% respectively in 2011) (Redbridge Characterisation Study June 2014) mainly of Asian background. The same study notes that "GLA [Greater London Authority] Intelligence Borough Profiles indicate that [the borough] has the highest migrant population in London by country of birth" (ibid. p 34). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research in 2015 reports that the parents of children from immigrant families have expectations for future academic and career opportunities as high, or higher than those native to the country.   This is seen in the Year 12 participants in both my Institution Focused Study (IFS) and this thesis, all of whom expect to go on to university following their A Level studies and all of whom are the children of migrants or migrants themselves. According to Trust for London (trustforlondon.org.uk) only 25% of 19-year olds in the borough in 2016 did not have a Level 3 qualification (A Level or its equivalent) – the lowest rate in London – and a reduction from 28% in 2014. This low percentage suggests that education beyond GCSE is not only commonplace in this locality but almost seen as a natural progression before entering the spheres of work or higher education.

Ingleby School is a multi-cultural, comprehensive community school in the centre of the borough, with around 1300 students on roll. In 2016 (the year my research begins) 96.2% of pupils were from minority ethnic groups (National average: 28.2%) and 78.3% had their first language as not, or believed not to be English (National average: 15.7%) The majority of students (26.9%) were of Pakistani origin, followed by Indian (20.9%) and Bangladeshi (16%). (School's RAISEonline data). These

percentages, unusual nationally, were, however, not so different to surrounding schools in the borough, reflecting the way in which Ingleby School serves the community in which it is placed.

The school was given a grading of "Outstanding" in its last inspection by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) which took place in 2006. This, according to the Daily Telegraph (6th January 2017), made it one of only 106 schools in England not to have been inspected for over a decade. This is due to it being monitored through Ofsted's "risk assessment" process to determine if a previously outstanding provider has declined in performance. To do this, Ofsted analyses performance data including achievement rate data, value added scores, and GCSE English and Maths results. Although other indicators are also considered, including the results of parental surveys and the findings of monitoring visits, performance data drives the initial stage of deciding if a school in this category is due another inspection. (Ofsted 2019). As Ingleby School has performed consistently well in these areas over the past twelve years, no inspection has been triggered.

Ingleby School can therefore be characterised as a thriving school in a community where the opportunities for further and higher education are seen, in some respects, as a usual progression following GCSE qualifications. However, although GCSE results were consistently above national averages for Ingleby School for several years, there was awareness amongst staff for some years leading up to 2016-17 that this success was not replicated at A Level. This inconsistency forms part of my rationale for the thesis, which will be explored in the following section in this chapter.

1.3 Rationale

1.3.1 Disparity between GCSE and A Level results at Ingleby School

The following table illustrates that Ingleby School had better than average results at GCSE in 2016-17 according to different national measures.

Table 1: (All statistics from Gov.UK)

GCSE results at Ingleby School 2016-17		
Students achieving grade C or above for English & Maths	Ebacc	Progress 8

Ingleby School	61%	25%	0.6 "well above average"
National	39.6%	19.7%	

These results from the year in which I begin my research show that Ingleby School did better than average not only in the core subjects of English and Maths, but also in the Ebacc subjects. This measures the students who achieve a grade 5 or above in English and Maths as well as gaining above a grade C in Science, a language and either History or Geography. It can be used to show that the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. (Schools have now moved to new syllabuses which use the 1-9 system of grading at GCSE, with 9 the highest.) The Progress 8 score measures how pupils have progressed from their Keystage 2 results to their GCSE results, so how much progress has been made from age 11 to age 16. Ingleby School's score of 0.6 put it in the range applied to the top 12% of schools in the country.

However, this picture of examination success was not replicated at A Level.

Table 2: (All statistics from Gov.UK)

A Level results at Ingleby School 2016-17				
	Average grade for all A Levels	Average point score	AAB in facilitating subjects	Progress from KS4 to KS5
Ingleby School	C	29.41	5.2%	0.01 "average"
National	C+	32.39	15.7%	

Ingleby School's results at A Level were slightly lower than the national average when looking at all A Levels taken, perhaps not in itself a cause for concern, but raising questions when compared to the much higher than national average results

by the school at GCSE. The learners also made "average" progress (placing it in the same band of around 48% of the schools or colleges in England) of 0.01 in the measure of progress from Keystage 4 (GCSE) to Keystage 5 (A Level). Again, much higher rates of progress were seen in the school from Keystage 2 results to Keystage 4.

In another measure of A Level results, Ingleby School was much lower than the national average. This was in the percentage of those gaining at least AAB in "facilitating subjects". This measurement focuses on the subjects described by the government as those "that are commonly needed to gain entry to leading universities. They are: biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, further mathematics, geography, history, English literature and classical or modern languages". Recently, Russell group universities (examples of the type of "leading universities" the government identify in their description) have decided against a list of preferred A Level subjects, similar to those in the "facilitating subjects" list, saying that they can work against candidates from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Whittaker 2019). They have replaced them with a web-site suggesting A Level choices based on what candidates might want to go on to study at university. However, the government still reports on facilitating subjects as part of their comparisons of schools after A Level results have been published.

The "facilitating subjects" measure at A Level could be compared to the Ebacc measure at GCSE level, therefore revealing another aspect in which above average performance at GCSE diminishes at A Level at Ingleby School. The figures for A Level for progress and for the AAB grades held in facilitating subjects also seem to support concerns raised by the school that more able learners, who had gained high grades at GCSE, were not making the expected progress in their A Level studies.

It is important to note that although I have detailed results from 2016-17, these were not a "blip" but fitted into a pattern of a number of years where the school's success at GCSE had not been matched by equivalent success at A Level. The A Level results were not poor in themselves (they were "average") but were in stark contrast to the GCSE results that were "well above average". They raised questions about what was happening at A Level in the school – leading the Headteacher to comment in one staff meeting that it was like looking at data from "two different schools". A further concern was raised by internal examination of the data which reported that "Prior attainment figures suggest that students with GCSE average scores of Grade A are not doing as well as other groups of students". Staff were well aware that if

Ingleby School gained a reputation for poorer outcomes for more able students, not only would it no longer attract students from other schools, but that it would be less likely to keep more able students from Year 11 onward. This could have detrimental financial implications, at a time when school budgets were already under pressure.

However, disparity between GCSE and A Level results is something which has been highlighted nationally as well as by Ingleby School. In March 2017, Ofqual produced a report on progression from GCSE to A Level. This was in response to concerns raised by high profile scientific institutions that A Level standards were not aligned across subjects, which was having a detrimental effect on candidates' choices of subjects. Using Comparative Progression Analysis, the report considered progress from GCSE subjects to the same subjects at A Level, to determine whether progression rates are the same or different across subject areas. The report highlighted there are problems with the comparison of candidates' outcomes across different subjects, partly because there are disparities in the total numbers of those who take a subject at GCSE who continue with it to A Level, as well as differences in the prior attainment of those who choose to take the subject further. However, one of the questions raised by the report is particularly pertinent to my study: "What if the nature of progression in learning from GCSE to A Level is qualitatively very different across subject areas?" (ibid. p. 23)

The learners in my research are clear that there is a difference between the content and the way of learning which is expected at A Level compared to GCSE, a concept carried forward from my IFS to the thesis. My research also suggests that writing for assessment is different and more challenging for A Level learners when compared to what was expected at GCSE. Writing on more complex topics, in forms which often demand that the writers justify or evaluate a point of view, means that there has to be a skilful manipulation of the material at A Level. This is in contrast to the more common demands to "outline" or "describe" content at GCSE. I explore these differences in more detail in Chapter 2.

Since I collected my data, the school has put in place measures to focus on motivation, organisation and study skills in the sixth form, which have had some positive impacts. However, the challenges of writing for A Level assessment have not been explored by the school and my research will feed into the work being done to reduce the disparity between GCSE and A Level assessment. My interest in writing at A Level is a development of research in my IFS, which also looked at the

transition from GCSE to A Level study for Year 12 learners. This is detailed in the next section of this chapter.

1.3.2 Development from the IFS

My research for the thesis develops ideas generated by my IFS, in which I explore the ways teachers and learners negotiate the shift in their roles and responsibilities in the first year of an A Level English Literature course. My focus on this year (Year 12) was sharpened because, at that time, A Level examinations were taken in two parts. The first, the AS qualification, was examined in May of Year 12, so giving learners and teachers barely nine months to cover the content and prepare for the assessment necessary to make progress to the second part of the qualification, A2. This has now altered and A Levels are examined formally at the end of two years, a return to the structure they had when first introduced in the 1950s. This change increases the high-stakes nature of the final examination, consequently creating a greater focus on the production of effective examination essay answers from a very early stage in the course. I explore the implications of this further in Chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis.

However, there are still aspects of my IFS research that are pertinent to the current context. In my earlier study, I conclude that, although both staff and students wish to leave behind what I identify as the more dependent "pupil" identity of GCSEs and Year 11, to embrace a more autonomous "student" identity as a sixth former, there are difficulties in achieving this. The pressure to complete the course before the examinations in May coupled with concerns from all participants about reaching target grades causes them to revert to previous behaviours and strategies. For example, the three learners in the IFS become frustrated by what they perceive as teachers' refusals to read yet more drafts of coursework essays to push them over certain grade boundaries, while teachers again begin holding "intervention" classes at lunchtimes and in the Easter holidays to boost attainment, as they do for Year 11 GCSE learners.

In spite of this, the move back into the familiar methods of "getting the grades" is not successful for the learners in the IFS research. All three are optimistic at the end of Year 12 that they will continue with English Literature into Year 13 and the A2 qualification, but in the event all three gain E grades in their AS results. Subsequently, only one of the three decides to continue with Literature (Gurdev, whose original target grade for the subject had been a D) with the two girls (with targets of B and C respectively) choosing to focus on their other subjects for A2. It

could be said that as my IFS research design relied on semi-structured interviews with the participants and transcriptions of their meetings with staff in focus groups, that this simply illustrates that they have unrealistic perceptions of their abilities in the subject and do not achieve their grades due to lack of understanding or lack of hard work. However, this conclusion is not borne out by the ways in which they discuss the texts or by the comments which teachers make about them as learners over the course of the year. Making a request to see the students' examination papers (although this did not feature in my IFS research) showed me that their examination essays fell far short of the coherent and articulate way they had been able to express their ideas verbally to me and to others in discussion. In the "mode continuum" (Gibbons 2003) view of language-in-use, the learners did not make a secure move from the informal, concrete spoken language of the classroom to the more formal, abstract written language of an academic genre.

I therefore decided to continue to explore the move from GCSE to A Level in my thesis research, this time focussing on the way in which the learners negotiate the different demands of A Level writing for assessment in the first year of A Level study. Does the removal (for most of the participants) of the pressure of external examinations at the end of Year 12 allow them more time to develop their writing? Having come through a system of what some might typify as intensive support in order to achieve well at GCSE, how well do they cope with the more analytical and interpretative demands of essay writing in Year 12? To what extent are these demands related to the transition from what I term in the IFS a compliant "pupil" to a more risk-taking and, at times, experimental "student" view of themselves as learners? How are these linked to finding a "voice" in their writing in order to begin to present arguments and evaluations with some degree of confidence?

The period of A Level study can be seen as a time of transition for learners, bridging the move from school to university study. With all the participants in my IFS and thesis research intending to go on to higher education after the sixth form, my research considers the ways in which writing at A Level helps them to prepare for their future courses of study. Implications drawn from the research are valid to explore in more detail with younger learners too, as it is arguably far too late to leave the development of academic written expression to the final stage of secondary education. I consider these and other aspects of my research findings in the final chapter of this thesis.

1.4 Aims of the research and research question

My intention in this research is to explore the ways in which three Year 12 learners in Ingleby School describe their experiences of writing for assessment for A Level examinations.

My over-arching research question asks:

How do three Year 12 learners negotiate the demands of writing examination essays at A Level?

I incorporate three sub-questions within this:

- **How do the learners describe the writing that they have to do?**
- **What resources do they draw on to support their writing and how do they make use of them?**
- **Do their views of themselves as writers and as learners alter during the first year of study and, if so, how?**

In responding to these questions, my research explores to what extent the learners have a clear understanding about the kind of writing they have to do and how to approach it. I also investigate the degree to which they are able to articulate a "voice" in their writing, to give them the confidence to "convey their intelligence on paper" by showing their understanding of the material they have studied through its selection, manipulation and evaluation.

1.5 Map of the thesis

My thesis is divided into six chapters, the first of which outlines the context and rationale of my research. I next consider the literature which has informed the conceptual framework for my research. The third chapter details my methodology and research methods, while my fourth chapter describes my analysis of my data. In the fifth chapter I discuss my findings, with detailed and relevant extracts from the data. I conclude the thesis with a chapter on its implications and some final thoughts.

1.6 Overview of Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I outline the context and the rationale for my research, detailing the disparity between GCSE success at Ingleby School and relatively less positive results at A Level. I describe how the thesis builds on aspects of my IFS and introduce the research questions which direct the aims and purpose of my study.

In the following chapter, I consider the literature which has developed my research's conceptual framework

Chapter 2: Research on Writing: The Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

> "For me writing has become more difficult especially um for me I'm like doing er all essay-based subject so I have to work more harder this year than previous" (Xavi, Group Interview 1)

Having established the context and rationale for my research, together with an outline of its aims and the research question, this chapter reviews the literature which has helped to shape my study. Xavi's comment above (he is studying Media Studies, Psychology and Sociology at A Level) shows that some students feel that writing for assessment is now more challenging than their previous experiences. The comment is made in the first group interview in Year 12, showing that this is an early concern, but it is one which recurs throughout the year-long research period for Xavi as well as for Tara and Hana (the other research participants), to different degrees.

All three of them had gained at least a B grade in their GCSE English examinations and so passed the threshold required by Ingleby School to begin their chosen A level courses. However, A level study moves them into a new arena of literacy practices, involving increased attention to abstract concepts and demands to justify a position in an extended piece of writing. As all the learners in my thesis say that they want to go on to higher education after A Level, their sixth form studies are an important transition period in which they are expected to become increasingly secure in using the forms of writing they will be expected to generate at university. This view of writing as a set of socially and culturally constructed practices, an "ideological" rather than "autonomous" model (Street 1984), allows one to speak of "literacies" in the plural. Literature which centres on the New Literacy Studies tradition (Heath 1983, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000, Gee 1996, 2004) provides a basis for my understanding of the learners' new context at A Level and gives me a foundation from which to explore other aspects of the literature on writing.

My view of writing as socially situated, involving an understanding of the way texts are generated for a particular audience and context, leads me to begin with concepts of genres in writing, specifically the genre of academic writing. I explore how writers can be both supported and constrained by the expectations of the genre and reflect on the positioning of the A Level examination essay, which can be considered a genre of writing in itself with its own conventions and assumed audience. It is impossible to separate this form of writing from its high-stakes

assessment context, which the learners are aware can make the difference between them progressing to higher education or not.

As my study is school based, I consider two ways learners are supported to generate examination essays:

- Focussing on writing as a product, concentrating on the final text through the use of templates and models

- Focussing on writing as a process, generating texts through methods such as brainstorming, drafting and revising. (Paran and Wallace 2016).

In product orientated views of writing, the completion of the text and its evaluation (through a grade or mark) are the significant features. To support the learners in their understanding of how the text will be judged, learning the assessment criteria becomes an important part of their studies, almost on a par with learning about the subject itself. Additional support by the use of writing frames and other structures, linked to the assessment criteria, fosters a view of writing which is uniform, configured to carefully designed formats. I argue that this position on writing encourages the learners to focus on "writing competently" in which meeting standards and following guidance can create a passive attitude towards their learning. I identify this attitude as taking on a "pupil"-like role as a learner, carrying on many of the less mature approaches to writing established at GCSE level.

In the next section, I explore a process orientated view of writing, in which the writer takes a more active role in generating the text. I highlight in particular the work of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) and their two models of writing: knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming. Although both models are centred in planning and revising writing, knowledge-transforming provides more opportunities for learners to manipulate and evaluate the content of their subjects, so leading to advances in their understanding and increased confidence in their studies. I identify this as a focus on "writing critically" through which, by taking a problem-solving approach to the task of writing a text, the learner builds independence and self-motivation. I identify this stance as one in which learners take on more autonomous "student"-like roles, which potentially prepare them more effectively for the complexities of study in higher education.

My final section seeks to illustrate how the requirements of "writing competently" and "writing critically" jointly have an impact on the learners in their first year of A

Level study. I argue that, as both writing approaches are necessary for the production of a high quality A Level examination essay, the learners are engaged in a process of negotiation between the two. I suggest that this is achieved through the development of a stance towards the material, a "writerly voice". It is through fostering their views of themselves as learners and writers in their subjects that the learners can begin to see themselves as members of an academic "discourse community" (Swales 1990), a necessary step in their progress into higher education.

The first section of this chapter, then, focusses on genre, a key principle in my view of literacy as socially and culturally based.

2.2 Writing within a genre

From its original use as a way to discuss literary forms, the definition of genre broadened in the twentieth century, becoming a way of analysing a range of texts. In my research, I use the term genre to mean: 'a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers [or writers] engage as members of our culture' (Martin 1984 p. 25) and "how things get done when language is used to accomplish them." (Martin 1985 p. 250)

These definitions firmly tie the idea of genre to the historic, social and cultural systems in which texts are produced. As such, they have a "world-ordering function" so that learning the conventions of a genre represents:

> "the child's socialization into appropriate and accepted modes of organising knowledge, of knowing, and the modes of representing perceptions and knowledge to others." (Kress 1982 p. 124).

Through these descriptions it can be seen that the concept of genres is not a neutral one, but has ideological, cultural and social implications for those who use them and for those who act as assessors or boundary-keepers of them.   If the sorts of non-fiction writing taught in schools, such as writing to persuade, to explain, to report and to discuss are, as described by Wray: "powerful forms of language that we use to get things done" (2004a p. 5), then all learners need equal access to opportunities to become proficient users of them. This was a focus for the National Curriculum for English from 1988 onward, which used Genre Theory as a key element of its programmes of study, leading to the structured teaching of genres in both primary and secondary schools.

However, the extent to which the social and cultural implications of different genres are made explicit to learners in school is unclear. Frow, summarising a range of

resources aimed at schools, which claim to support understanding and writing in certain genres, notes that in them genre has been understood "taxonomically, as a classification device with relatively fixed features" (2007 p. 1627).

It can be argued that, rather than consider "genre" in the richer sense, schools have been more at ease with exploring "text-types", such as recounts, descriptions, procedures, and so on. These text-types may be present in more than one genre (Paltridge 1996). For example, both a police report and a newspaper article could be described as examples of the text-type of recounts. However, they would be written very differently and would be read by different audiences in different contexts. If texts are not investigated in terms of their "register", including concepts of "field, tenor and mode" (Halliday 1978), they can become isolated from their social context and purpose. With the acknowledgement of context and purpose, the text can be examined as a strategic response to the situation in which it is placed, considering not only what has been written but perhaps also what has been omitted and why.

This approach to exploring the notion of genre opens it up, so it can be described as a "constellation of recognisable forms" (Jamieson and Campbell 1982). It allows, as Frow (2007) comments, flexibility in appreciating that different genres assign different importance to different components of their forms, while still maintaining certain characteristic elements. Frow links this to ideas of "schema" through which knowledge is organised into particular patterns of meaning. In this interpretation, genres are "clusters of metadata – information about how to use information" (Frow p. 1631).

This definition is particularly apt for the learners in my study, who, through their writing for A Level, are being inducted into the ways their subject knowledge is presented in the genre of "academic writing".

2.2.1 The genre of academic writing.

Swales, looking at writing in academic contexts, defines genre as:

> "A class of communicative events, the members of which share some sort of communicative purpose [which is] **recognized by expert members of the parent community** and thereby constitute[s] the rationale for the genre." (1990 p. 58) (my emphasis).

This is pertinent for the learners in my study. The "experts" (teachers and examiners) provide the "rationale" for their writing (assessed examination essays)

which is designed to illustrate their understanding of the topics they have studied. In this genre, use of academic language is expected, that is: a "set of words, grammar and discourse strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher order thinking processes and abstract concepts." (Zwiers 2014 p. 22).

Cummins' (1979) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) for EAL learners highlights that, whilst everyday "social" language skills which are "context-embedded" may produce fluent communication, academic or "context-reduced" demands will be more challenging due to their linguistic requirements coupled with their lack of supportive cues. This is also a useful distinction for the learners in my study, who, moving into a different arena of literacy practices in their A Level writing, may find speaking about the increasingly abstract concepts easier than writing about them. Indeed, for some, writing in this way may be like learning another language, divorced as it is from their usual way of conveying their thoughts and ideas.

The teaching of appropriate academic language in schools is often restricted to a focus on vocabulary, particularly subject specific terms, in the sense of "keywords" with distinctive definitions which can be learned and tested. Academic language is often characterised by words derived from Greek and Latin (often through Old French derivations). Words derived from Germanic languages are more frequently used in everyday situations. This is somewhat explained by historic circumstances, but Latin and Greek root words are also more suited to the addition of prefixes and suffixes, increasing the versatility of expression. This facility also increases the ease of creating structures such as nominalization, through which the lexical density of the text is increased by using a noun to refer to a process instead of a verb. As identified by Halliday (1994), this is the difference between children's and adults' writing. Christie and Derewianka (2008) strengthen this claim by asserting that control over such a structure is central to success in secondary schooling. This is because it enables writers to develop arguments through compacting, emphasising and minimising information as necessary, and to construct items into abstract, logically developed terms.

Other frequently used structures, such as the phrases "to shed light on" or "to read between the lines" are metaphorical uses of language which describe abstract concepts through more concrete images (Zwiers 2014) and have been described by

Kress (1990 p. 72) as "a necessary strategy … to step from the known to the unknown, from the well-established to the new and hypothetical."

Similarly, academic language is often characterised by the use of modal verbs to convey nuances of meaning. Arguments are subject to qualifiers or hedges which allow the author to show an awareness of the limitations of knowledge in the discipline, as well as creating a detached position, seemingly impartially presenting evidence for the reader to evaluate as to its validity. This "stance" or "position" of the academic writer I will return to later in this chapter when considering the ways that the learners in my study have to develop their "writerly voice" in their specific subjects. (Section 2.5)

These examples of academic vocabulary and structures are mainly literary in their use, so they are found far more in print than in any other context. A 1988 study by Hayes and Ahrens finds that even children's books contain 50% more rare words than either adult prime-time television or the conversations of university graduates; popular magazines have three times as many rare words as television and informal conversation. This implies that learners who have a rich reading experience in their education and at home will be more exposed to this sort of language.

Indeed, it seems that reading widely for pleasure (Stotsky 1983; Krashen 1982, 2004) and growing up in an environment in which literacy practices mirror those encountered at school (Brice Heath 1983) have a greater impact on learners' reading and writing than instructional activities such as comprehension questions related to texts. As reading and writing are both "meaning-making activities" (Langer and Flihan 2000), they require the same strategies of organising, remembering and presenting ideas. Therefore, reading a wide range of genres develops an understanding in the reader that ideas can be presented in different ways for different purposes and audiences. As Meek Spencer (1988) comments: "The most important single lesson that children learn from texts is *the nature and variety of written discourse.*" (p. 21 Italics in original).

One way of addressing a perceived deficit in being able to express ideas in an academic form has been the creation of an "Academic Word List" such as that produced by Coxhead (2000) to provide primarily EAL university students with words frequently encountered in academic texts, to aid them in their comprehension. This makes the learner aware of a more generalised form of academic vocabulary that needs to be understood as much as subject specific terms. However, decontextualized presentation of such words and phrases has

come in for criticism. The use of an Academic Word List is hampered by the contextually specific ways in which words are used in different disciplines (Hyland and Tse (2007). Polysemic words such as "field" vary in meaning in different contexts, and collocations add another layer of complexity. This means that introducing students to such lists is of limited use to some learners and might even confuse them unnecessarily.   Furthermore, Corson (1997) suggests that terms only become used actively rather than recognised passively if learners engage with them in discussion, opportunities for which diminish as learners progress in their schooling: "knowing the meaning of an academic word is knowing how to use it within an appropriate meaning system" (p. 700).

Learners without a supportive background of literacy practices in the home or at school may be helped by explicit teaching of generalised academic language features, within the context of their studies. A distinction between "subject obligatory" and "subject compatible" language (Snow, Met and Genesee 1989) is one way to address this. "Subject obligatory" language comprises those vocabulary items and structures which are specific to a discipline (a word such as "cytoplasm" which is used in one discipline and has one meaning). This is the area of academic language teaching which, in my experience, most teachers are comfortable with, and which can be found in "glossary" sections of text books, for example. "Subject compatible" language comprises items which, while not required for the mastery of the content of the topic, help with comprehension and may also be found across disciplines (such as conditional statements like "If ….then"). These items, when taught explicitly within the context of the discipline, can be transferred by the learner to other contexts, as appropriate. This idea has echoes of Bernstein's (1964) concept of "elaborated" language, allowing the learner to have a wider language repertoire to choose from in order to create a text, so increasing its conformity to the style of writing expected in academic contexts. However, there is more to this than just exchanging one set of words and structures for another. Rather, the "specialized language, both oral and written, of academic settings …facilitates communication and thinking about disciplinary content" (Nagy et al 2012 p. 92) and is therefore an important "tool" which both the producer and the receiver of the academic text use to increase understanding.

These aspects of academic writing, "communication" and "thinking about" the topics which have been studied are arguably the reasons that the A Level examination essay is used as a means of assessment. Learners in my study spend a lot of time, with the support of their teachers, completing this form of writing and working on

ways to improve it. Such essays also have their own conventions and expectations, which make it possible to speak of this type of text as a sub-genre of academic writing itself.

2.2.2 The examination essay as a genre

A Level examination essay answers are a particular type of writing with few parallels in any contexts outside education.   The topic and type of writing are set by the teacher and the examination board. Rather than communicating fresh information, both the reader and the writer are familiar with the content. The writer is expected to show a detached, objective stance towards the content and to marshal acceptable evidence to support points raised. The content needs to be arranged into a clear line of argument, often concluding by agreeing or disagreeing with a statement which acts as a prompt to the written response. Different questions focus on different Assessment Objectives (AOs) in the syllabus, which demand that the writer concentrates on particular aspects in the essay (for example, the context in which a literary text is written, in an English Literature essay). The writing is evaluated by set criteria, known to both the reader and the writer and then placed on a numerical scale, often translated into a grade.

Andrews (2003) notes that despite the word "essay" having its etymological roots in the French word "essai" meaning an attempt, that it has come to mean a completed piece of writing which "represents the state of a student's understanding and is assessed accordingly" (p. 117).

Using this form of writing, in which ideas can be set out, supported by evidence and linked in meaningful sequences, the writer can engage the reader in a persuasive discourse, in which explicitness is a key characteristic. Although considering a range of forms of academic writing rather than essay writing per se, Olsen (2016) comments on qualities which are features of such writing: that words and sentences have precise meanings from which logical implications may be drawn, and that a single line of argument may be developed and examined for coherency and validity over a length of discourse that would be impossible to manage without writing it down. Together, these attributes create a form which is easily assessable, allowing teachers and examiners to gauge the learners' understanding as well as discriminate between them through close reading of their texts.

English (2011) views the assessed essay as having "affordances", creating a closed context in which a student writer can reflect on certain relevant sections of the "body

of knowledge" of the discipline. This frames knowledge as a "thing" with certain boundaries and frameworks through which the "right" disciplinary material can be selected to justify claims made in the essay. In this way, the writer can be positioned as a "novice" or "apprentice" in the genre of academic writing, who, through successfully negotiating the essay writing process, can become increasingly expert.

In this type of writing, "knowing" the information or content of the subject is not enough; also important is the way in which it is presented. Cameron (2003) finds in her research of EAL writing in Keystage 4 and post-16 that the requirement to write in specific ways for examinations can cause confusion about the purpose and audience of the writing and how to address them. For example, in responses to Religious Studies examinations (ibid. p. 18-19), candidates are asked to respond to questions regarding Christianity and Islam. Those identified as Muslims, from their names and language backgrounds, have a wealth of information to present about Islam. However, this is not always presented in a way compatible to a GCSE paper. The researchers note that the writers' "stance" is one of familiarity with Islam, which leads to some using first-person pronouns (Muslims fast because of "our phrophet [sic]") while others mention, but do not explain in detail, key terms required in the response (such as the Five Pillars of Islam). One example is given of a candidate who responds more as if writing a religious text than in the response of an examination answer (Muslims keep Ramadan because:

> "we as muslims must follow his path of goodness, and be praise that Allah who created us to honour him and celebrate his festivals").

This takes the stance of a believer rather than the stance of an examination candidate. Fewer errors such as these are seen in the responses to questions about Christianity, which the same candidates are able to view in a more distanced way, not being members of that faith community. They are therefore able to produce responses more suited to the form of "examination answer" for a topic less connected with their own experiences, suggesting that it is an issue of "how" to answer such a question, not "what" is known.

Learners therefore have to become expert in understanding the expectations of this type of writing, which create the boundaries of the genre. As my research uses a model of writing as a socially situated act, it is the "discourse community" (Swales 1990) of the genre who monitor the preferred ways of creating and communicating knowledge. The community's broadly agreed set of common public goals define

the genre's patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. Examples of the genre provide information and feedback for the community's members to influence and constrain the subsequent texts which are produced. Repeated exposure to and use of the forms expected create an "intertextuality" (Halliday and Hasan 1989) where the context of the situation (and the culture) in which the text is produced links with texts which have been produced before in similar circumstances, and those which will be produced in the future. Expectations and assumptions can allow writers to produce more effective texts, through having an accurate picture of what type of writing is anticipated. Also, readers will find navigating the text easier if it is presented in a customary form or structure. (Halliday and Hasan 1989, Hyland 2004, Collins and Michael 2006).

Furthermore, it can be claimed that those with skills in the types of writing fostered in school have a certain attitude towards language, which enhances their "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1977, 1991) and contributes to the perceived value and status of the individuals using it. Freebody (2008) suggests that this can become a culturally and economically reductive process by which "material and cultural gifts are systematically mistaken for academic and intellectual gifts" (p. 111-112), leading to those with less access to or experience of the discourse community's conventions being disadvantaged. Norton (2000) develops the "capital" metaphor to one of "investment" when discussing students in her study who were using their learning of English as a vehicle to improve their employment and other prospects. Their studying was not merely of a utilitarian value, but also involved a complex positioning of their ideas of identity and social history. Similarly, the learners in my study are aware of the importance of gaining the right grades in their A Levels as a means of progressing to higher education, giving the grading or marking of their essays an importance which provides a high level of motivation in their approach to their work. This involves them learning not only the content of their subjects but also the methods of assessment and other criteria set by the examination boards. It can be argued that the learners, despite speaking wryly of how a reduction in the number of subjects from GCSE to A Level has not lead to a reduction in the amount to be learnt, see this as a justifiable "investment" of time and effort in order to increase the likelihood of their success.

However, casting a genre as immutable and fixed, with features which have to be learnt to be used correctly, has certain disadvantages. Establishing certain forms and conventions as "legitimate" necessitates others being constructed as somehow "illegitimate" and outside the bounds of the discourse community. Kress warns that

too rigid a view of genre can come to "dominate" an unreflecting composer: "The genre will construct the world for its proficient user." (1982 p. 125)

Communication may be improved between members of the community, as expectations regarding the style and structure of the text are met. However, if alternatives are deemed irregular, the opportunities for writing to act as a vehicle to enhance thinking about a topic may be reduced. This may be of particular concern for A Level learners who, on the one hand are being told in the mark scheme that "originality" and "independence" of thought are rewarded, while at the same time being given a particular format in which to express it.

As certain views of the world are privileged and others are marginalised through the application of the genre's boundaries, the friendly sounding "community" aspect of the discourse community becomes a closed, self-referential structure in which those who are challenged by or inexperienced in such writing are positioned as "other" (Preece 2009, 2010). Learners can then find themselves placed in a "remedial" position, which devalues their responses as well as debilitates academic English programmes in which "we have nothing to teach but that which should have been learnt before." (Swales 1990 p. 1).

In her own study, Preece finds that learners recommended for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at universities may feel either resentful that their written expression is being stigmatised, or frustrated that the skills that enabled them to "pass" GCSE English are not seen to be sufficient in the new context of Higher Education. In this example, I find resonances of the way in which the learners in my IFS and my thesis research find an important part of their transition from GCSE to A Level studies bound up with the way that they are placed in a new set of literacy practices, demanding reconfigurations of their literacy skills and approaches to writing.

2.2.3 Writing in a genre in my research

For the learners in my study, their writing which was at least "good enough" at GCSE level to gain access to beginning A Level studies at Ingleby School, is now in a new social and cultural context, demanding different ways to communicate more complex concepts. Although they are aware that A level demands that they "step up", there seems little explicit work in lessons on what the genre of academic writing involves, apart from work on subject-specific key terms. Citing "lack of time" the learners in my study also rarely read or write anything independently which could

support their understanding of the style, grammar and vocabulary of academic writing. They do, however, read a lot of assessed examination essays, to review where marks can be gained or lost by candidates. This emphasis on the final test of a piece of writing, its mark or grade, leads to a focus on writing as a product, which is the next section of my chapter.

2.3 Writing as a product

An emphasis on the completed text by both learners and teachers creates a view of writing as a product. Aware that A Level learners are unlikely to be regularly exposed "in everyday life" (Derewianka 1996) to the forms of writing required in A Level examination essays, there are two main ways schools address the challenges of such writing. One is the detailed exploration of the criteria used to assess the examination answers. The second is the use of "frames" as supports for writing, both for whole texts and for paragraphs within them. I will develop my examination of these two strategies in the following sections.

2.3.1 Knowing the criteria

The drive to share assessment criteria with learners can be traced to the work of Black and Wiliam (1998) on formative assessment. In order to develop more engagement by learners over their own classroom practices, the authors recommend, amongst other methods, self and peer assessment. Rather than being passive receivers of instruction, learners are encouraged to be actively involved in their own progress, able to discuss with their teachers the feedback given to them and to work together on closing any gaps in knowledge and understanding. This necessitates the learners having a clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to achieve. Explaining and re-wording the assessment criteria becomes an important tool in this methodology and "apprenticing" learners into the expertise of teachers gives them a shared language for discussing quality work. This "making explicit what is normally implicit" (Black et al. 2007 p. 66) increases the learners' autonomy and develops their agency in the classroom.

However, this intention of transparency may not be so easy to achieve. Halliday (2010) notes three levels where interpretation of the requirements of an assignment are significant: firstly, the way the writer interprets the task; secondly, the way the writer's answer is interpreted by the assessor and thirdly the way the results of the assessment are interpreted by those who receive them. Criteria therefore need to be clear and comprehensible, but achieving both of these may be difficult. Attempts

to write the criteria in simpler forms to increase clarity may lead to increasingly long lists of desirable attributes, which are nevertheless still open to interpretation. Also, learners are, by definition, those who lack expertise in the skills being assessed. So, attempts to make the criteria easier for learners to comprehend may distort or trivialise the learning, which becomes removed from the terms experienced practitioners would recognise.

Examples of this are provided by Andrews (2003), who comments that hand-outs on "what makes a good essay" can vary in content, from advice on surface features, such as effective proof-reading, to vague descriptions, such as "structuring your ideas". He cites criteria which include cautious distinctions: "work will *typically* demonstrate *the majority* of the following characteristics *where applicable* …" (Italics in original p. 5). There is also an element of interpretation in such criteria: for example, what is "sustained" comment to one assessor may not be to another.

Despite these potential pitfalls, for the learners in my study, a thorough understanding of the assessment criteria was seen as almost on a par with knowing the content of the subjects themselves. The methods used to do this by the learners and their teachers will be explored in further detail in Chapter 5. I now turn to the second strategy used in this approach to writing as a product, that of supporting a learner's writing with frames and other structures.

2.3.2 Frames and structures

The use of frames to support writing is linked with the idea of "scaffolding" (Bruner 1975) in which an expert limits the "degrees of freedom" in the task so that a child can focus on particular aspects to master, rather than trying to master all of it at once. The provision of a writing frame, to "bridge the gap between teacher demonstration and pupil independence" (Wray 2004b p. 22), allows learners to see how a particular text (in a particular genre) might be arranged and organised. Frames usually provide key connective phrases, as topic sentence starters for paragraphs within the text (Lewis and Wray 1998a, 1998b). These may include, as an introduction to a persuasive piece of writing, "Although not everyone would agree, I want to argue that" followed by linked points in favour of the argument, such as, "My first reason is …. A further reason is …. Additionally, …." An opposing view is acknowledged in a penultimate paragraph: "However, others might argue.…" and the piece ends with a summary, perhaps beginning "In conclusion, …." Here, the frames are not only supporting the learner with organising ideas, but also with the

sort of language features that the text requires, such as the use of the present tense to suggest generalised meanings rather than specifics.

Whilst a writing frame supports the construction of a whole text, further assistance is found in the use of the PEE structure, which helps writers to shape paragraphs within the text. These initials represent Point (the point to be made in the paragraph, or the topic sentence) Evidence (the supporting information, from a text or from the content of the subject which related to the point) and Explanation (a comment explaining how the evidence strengthened the point initially made). This PEE structure is sometimes adapted (PEA – Point, Evidence, Analysis; PEEL – Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link back to the question; PEER – Point, Evidence, Explanation, Relevance) but essentially remains the same and is, in my experience, taught to and reinforced with all learners from primary school up to and including A Level.

Despite its widespread use, I have found it hard to track down when and why the PEE structure and its variants were introduced. Speaking with other teachers in Ingleby School and outside it, no-one can remember, although they all use it. In email correspondence with two former borough English advisors, they do not remember either. One links it to the work of genre theorists in Australia in the late 20th century, which was then developed through the use of writing frames by Lewis and Wray.

Yandell, who notes (2014) the influence of writing frames on the National Literacy Strategy, tracks a reference to PEE for me in a document for Year 8 in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. The section titled "develop and signpost arguments" suggests a teacher approach of modelling the writing of paragraphs

> "which begin with a clear topic sentence making clear what the paragraph will be about (main point), followed by evidence which is explained (PEE)." (2002 p.57)

It does appear that the concept of using such structures as "scaffolding" is linked closely to Vygotsky's identification (1987) of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the gap between the actual developmental level of the child (seen in what can be accomplished unaided) and the level of potential development (seen in problem solving with a more expert other's guidance). Vygotsky suggests that "productive instruction" can only be aimed between the lower threshold of the development cycle, which has already occurred, and the upper threshold of

development: "the teacher must orient his work not only on yesterday's development in the child, but on tomorrow's" (Vygotsky 1987 p. 211).

It is not only a teacher who can undertake this role and it does not have to take a written format. Gibbons (2002) suggests that more able peers, in collaborative learning, can provide scaffolding conversations around a task, leading to a clearer understanding in the group as a whole of what is required and how to go about it.

Moll (2013) notes that an important point about the ZPD is that it reflects Vygotsky's emphasis on the social genesis of learning and development and that learning is always through the mediation of others. This mediation might be in the form of social interactions, such as class discussions, or cultural artefacts, such as books and stories, or the appropriation of language in either a formal or informal learning situation. In this sense, the provision of a writing frame can act as a way of deliberately creating new circumstances where the writer is supported to change from a more "spontaneous" (or "everyday") concept of articulating ideas to more "scientific" (or "schooled") forms of discourse. This shift has two outcomes. Firstly, the scientific concepts, as more systematic ways of organising information, become more open to analysis and reflection, leading to possible further development of new understanding. Secondly, if "Education is always a cultural process" (Moll 2013 p. 154) it can be argued that it is through education that younger members of a society acquire its accumulated cultural artefacts and practices. The relationship between "spontaneous" and "scientific" concepts is reciprocal and continued exposure to the "schooled" methods of organising written texts facilitates their growth into the domain of the "everyday". In this way, relations between the group and the social context of its culture are supported and maintained. Writing frames and other structures are, therefore, serving a more significant purpose. By revealing how writers compose "powerful" texts which "get things done" in Wray's words (2004a p. 5), learners gain entry to these forms of discourse.

However, in an echo of the way in which it could be claimed that Genre Theory has been misappropriated by schools to create inflexible formats for writing, so there are reservations about the ubiquitous use of writing frames and other structures to support learners' writing. One of the ex-advisors I contacted wrote of the PEE structure as having spread

> "like a malevolent rash – reaching parts it should never have reached. A bit like writing frames: useful if targeted at a specific pupil or a specific issue but never to be used as a general teaching strategy" (Hickman 2017).

In an article titled "Death by PEEL?" S. Gibbons (2019) discusses the "seemingly omnipresent use of PEE" which is no longer a "support system" but "often the purpose of a lesson or particular activity." This resonates with my research for my IFS in which one teacher directly linked the use of writing frames to the learners' lack of confidence and reluctance to experiment with writing, saying regretfully, "There's a writing frame for everything." (Bownas 2015 p. 35)

The concern with the overuse of such frames and structures lies in their tendency to suggest that there is only one correct way to complete a text, and that they become schematic templates to be filled in, with the description of what is preferred transformed into a prescription of what has to be reproduced (English 2011). The "reification" of such structures, treating them as concrete objects or immutable presences, by both teachers and learners, leads to them being used uncritically and becoming a "general teaching strategy". This has two outcomes.

Firstly, frameworks such as these can be presented to learners as a "one-way" process where the scaffolder (teacher) creates the scaffold alone (Daniels 2001), bestowing it on the learner, whether it meets the needs of the learner or not. As early as 1984, Searle asks questions of the uses of scaffolding, and his query "Who's building whose building?" highlights the learners' loss of agency. The provision of an undifferentiated writing frame for a group of learners does not take into account their different requirements for support nor how they may use it.

Secondly, the use of the "scaffold" metaphor implies that it is a temporary structure which is taken away when it is no longer needed. Langer and Applebee (1987) find that scaffolding can be helpful in supporting writing but note that,

> "It is a peculiar kind of scaffold we mean – one that self-destructs as the child internalises its features, allowing the student to complete similar tasks without further help … In our instructional practices, we too often forget to let the scaffolding self-destruct." (p. 144).

The publishing of this over thirty years ago shows that this is not a new concern.

Returning to the concept of the ZPD, which initiated this discussion of frames and structures, Moll (2013) notes that the processes and outcomes of the zone should not be considered as pre-determined or pre-specified, but rather as emerging from the relations that form such zones. The zone offers through its mediations a range of possibilities for learning and the formation of new understanding for learners and teachers. As such, the outcomes emerge from the social relations and forms of discourse brought to the task. The mechanistic use of rigid frames and structures

seems to be incompatible with this. Without the contextual emphasis of Vygotsky's proposed concept of the ZPD, it is in danger of becoming a less efficient tool for mediating learning, and it could be argued that the broad and diverse interpretation of the ZPD in education (Wells 1999) has diluted the original concept.

2.3.3 Writing as a product in my research: "writing competently"

It can be argued, then, that Vygotsky's concepts of the ZPD and scaffolding have been, to an extent, misrepresented in school-based practice. Applied in undifferentiated forms, they serve to confine the ways learners write, rather than support them. Similarly, the emphasis on understanding the assessment criteria has moved from empowering learners by making assessment more transparent to producing further constraints whereby the learners' writing is not described but prescribed.

However, for both learners and teachers, these strategies have advantages. For less confident writers, the use of frames provides a starting point and can also be useful in implicitly modelling some of the aspects of academic writing (style, grammar, and so on) that are otherwise underexplored in A Level learning. Careful analysis of the criteria gives teachers and learners a shared language to discuss and evaluate responses to examination questions. Frequent exposure to these forms of writing increases learners' familiarity with what is expected and what is outside the boundaries. I identify this attitude towards writing at A Level as "writing competently". The learners in my study are aware from the very beginning of their course what their target grades at A Level are (generated by their prior attainment at GCSE). They all aspire to continue their studies at university level and therefore are content to accept what they define as advice and guidance on how to write in a proficient way which will satisfy the examination boards.

I also see this as a continuation of their learning role as "pupils", carried over from their GCSE studies. This maintains a more passive approach to their learning, through which what is provided in school by the teachers is enough to "get through" the course. Yet, the higher grades at A Level, and certainly degree level studies, demand a more autonomous attitude to study, in which originality and independence of thought are rewarded. The strategies outlined above have fewer benefits for the learners in this context, who need to illustrate their understanding of the material by re-configuring it. The manipulation of content to answer discursive essay questions which demand justification and evaluation requires a more active approach to the writing task. To develop such an approach, it may be more

constructive for A Level learners to consider writing as a process rather than a product, which forms the next section of this chapter.

2.4 Writing as a process

The generation of a written text can be viewed, at its simplest, as a linear model:

1. Choose a topic

2. Write an outline (plan)

3. Develop the outline

4. Proof-read and edit

This model assumes that writing is sequential and proceeds logically. It can be seen in some pedagogical techniques and, as discussed in the previous section, the provision of a framework or structure can aid the writer, particularly in the second, "planning" stage. When writing under time constraints, as examination candidates are, having a model for the outline of the essay already in mind can reduce stress as well as save time. Writers may not reach the final stage of proof-reading and editing, but the essay is "on the page" and the product is complete.

An alternative model for generating a written text is one which sees writing as a "dynamic and unpredictable process", (Tribble 1996 p. 39) where the writer can make several starts, proof-reads and edits as the text progresses and treats the outline or plan as a sketch of possibilities rather than a definitive structure. This recursive development of the text, in which the writing itself can trigger new ideas which are incorporated or omitted, requires the writer to be more reflective regarding how the content of the text is organised and expressed. The focus is on the process of writing the text and not solely the product. White and Arndt (1991) differentiate process writing from product writing by emphasising its creative aspect. The writer is continually engaged in re-writing or "re-visioning" the text, evaluating it at every stage of its generation.

One example of such a view of writing is illustrated by Hayes and Flower's model (1980, 1983), in which there are three major components. First is the task environment, which includes social factors, such as the set writing assignment and physical ones such as the text written so far. For the learners in my study, a key social factor is writing in examination conditions, with accompanying time-pressure and potential high-stakes assessment aspects. Secondly comes the cognitive

processes involved in writing which include planning (deciding what to say and how to say it), translating (turning plans into written text) and revision (improving existing text). The third component is the writer's long-term memory, which includes knowledge of topic, audience and genre.

In a review of this model, (Hayes 2000), the cognitive process section is re-organised with revision being replaced by text interpretation, planning subsumed into a more general category of reflection and translation incorporated into a more general text production process. There is also a far greater emphasis on the impact of long-term memory as well as the writer's motivation for completing the text. Hayes states that writing is not possible if writers do not have effective long-term memories in which to store their knowledge of what type of text is expected. This involves knowledge of the goals of the writing task, processes to be used in completing it, the sequence of the processes and criteria to evaluate its success or otherwise. Knowledge of the audience for the text and the impact of extended practice on the writer's long-term memory are also incorporated in the model.

The elaboration of the "planning" category into one termed "reflection" in the later model allows for the inclusion of problem solving, decision making and inferences. Hayes notes that many difficult writing tasks require writers to do a substantial amount of problem solving and decision making. Writers must decide whether a text is clear for the intended reader, whether the tone is appropriate, whether certain points should be emphasised or diminished, and so on. Closely linked to these is the way writers make inferences about the knowledge and interests of their readers.

Some aspects in Hayes' model refer back to ideas discussed in the earlier part of this chapter focussing on genre (Section 2). Writers are more easily able to make inferences about their audience if they are confident of the type of writing, its content and its style, which is acceptable in the required social and cultural context. Feedback from the audience or "discourse community" together with frequent practice of the forms of writing privileged in the genre provide the structure on which the writer hangs his or her ideas. Additionally, the recursive and problem-solving nature of Hayes' model also return attention to the use of the genre of academic writing to facilitate "thinking about disciplinary content" (Nagy et al 2012 p. 92). This suggests that writing about a topic in this genre, especially the kind of discursive writing demanded in A Level essays, provides opportunities for increasing comprehension or interpretation of concepts or views.

Writing can, in Vygotsky's terms, become a "tool" which brings "awareness, abstraction and control" (1986 p. 179) to speech and thought. Through schooling, a child can become conscious of his or her own mental processes, leading to control and planning: "deliberate structuring of the web of meaning" (1986 p. 182). Olson (2016) argues that writing and reading create a system of metarepresentational concepts, creating a consciousness of language. This "language about language" enables learners to lift words out of their context and to consider them as objects. When applied to "content-rich fields" learners can become more systematic in their use of language, using analysis and reflection to increase critical thinking.

> "Literate adults capable of thinking about language have learned a metalanguage that allows them to beware of unacknowledged assumptions, hidden premises and invalid inferences." (Olsen 2016 p. 242).

The use of question forms in A Level discursive essays, such as "Discuss …" or "To what extent do you agree that …" highlight that such evaluative and reasoned written texts are expected from the candidates.

Therefore, the problem-solving, planned and reflective model proposed by considering writing as a process seems to have much to offer to A Level examination entrants. My research, based in the transition from GCSE to A Level expectations of writing in Year 12, also requires a sense of the way learners develop these skills, moving from one set of literacy practices to another. Here, I find Bereiter and Scardamalia's research on writing helpful, and their concepts of knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming in the process of generating a text.

2.4.1 Knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming

Bereiter and Scardamalia's two models of writing composition (1987), knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming, establish a difference between less and more mature writers, examining writing from elementary school learners to graduates. However, the authors note that the difference between the two models is not simply one of age or experience; rather it concerns how the task of writing is approached. It is also claimed that the second model, of knowledge-transforming, can lead to cognitive advances in the writer as the creation of the text forces him or her to reconsider material and adapt it to the demands of the written piece.

In the knowledge-telling model, the less mature writer begins by identifying the topic and type of writing activity. These then provide prompts for the generation of content and the way in which it should be written. The text already written also

provides cues for further writing if appropriate. The process is described by one twelve-year old in Bereiter and Scardamalia's research:

> "I have a whole bunch of ideas and write them down until my supply of ideas is exhausted. Then I might try to think of more ideas up to the point when you can't get any more ideas that are worth putting down on paper and then I would end it." (p9)

This "natural and efficient solution" to generating texts is one which can work well for many contexts. Bereiter and Scardamalia state:

> "Virtually all of the procedures that are claimed to boost the quality of student writing may be understood as ways to achieve better results through the knowledge-telling process" (p. 29)

However, it does have limitations, particularly in terms of elaborating ideas or finding connections and relationships between them. It also seems that the writer in such models tends to write with the writer rather than the reader in mind. Such writing does not tend to make explicit the line of argument or train of thought needed to follow the points being made. If any revisions are made, they tend to be of surface features, such as corrections of spelling or grammar, not revisions of concepts or adaptations of style or expression. Indeed, younger writers may show little difference between their plan for writing, their draft and their finished text.

In the knowledge-transforming model, a more mature writer generates text through a problem-solving process. Goals for writing are used to aid the process, with evaluation and diagnosis used to amend it at deeper levels of content, expression and organisation. The writing can be said to provide a space for the development of knowledge to take place. This is because the writer is able to take into account a wider range of mental representations of information and can therefore actively re-work the ways in which they connect. Bereiter and Scardamalia state that in this model, in a discursive text, the writer needs to keep in mind four different elements of the text simultaneously: the thesis, the antithesis and the two sets of supporting evidence for each. It is through creating a synthesis of these four elements that the writer is able to develop relationships between them, so that the activity re-orders the relevant content or material. The needs of the reader are also acknowledged, with the writer making attempts to clarify, explain and develop points in order to allow the reader to follow the argument being presented. This action further clarifies the thought processes of the writer, so writing becomes a space for developing cognition. The previous method, knowledge-telling, is not discarded, but is incorporated into the knowledge-transforming model.

Bereiter and Scardamalia describe the knowledge-telling model as sitting within a "psychology of the natural" (p. 28) making maximum use of natural aspects of human language and of the skills learnt through ordinary human experience. These, however, also provide the model's limitations. Although some writers may never move beyond the knowledge-telling version of writing, the knowledge-transforming model, sitting within a "psychology of the problematic" (p. 28) enables the writer to engage with concepts in a way which is only usually provided by social interaction, namely reprocessing knowledge. In Vygotskyan terms, this could be seen as "internalising" the knowledge, to make a move from the learner's "spontaneous" to "scientific" concepts and developing his or her understanding of the topic.

Therefore, the two models are not separate but incremental. Knowledge-telling is embedded in knowledge-transforming as it is part of the problem-solving process which knowledge-transforming requires. Goal setting and problem analysis by the writer link to the writer's knowledge of the content and the discourse required for the text. If the writer only uses the knowledge-telling model, then the writing is limited because the content is generated only by prompts related to topic or to structure. A move to the knowledge-transforming model, which is continually engaged in formulating and tackling problems, allows the writer to analyse how to represent in the written text both the way in which the subject is understood and the writer's engagement with it, through the appropriate discourse. This is described by Bereiter and Scardamalia as:

> "intentional writing … [involving] the setting of goals to be achieved through the composing process and the purposeful pursuit of those goals." (1987 p. 361).

Towards the end of their 1987 work, Bereiter and Scardamalia suggest certain elements that should be present in supporting writing instruction in school, which they feel will develop the knowledge-transforming approach to writing. Both learners and teachers need to be aware of the complexities of the writing process, particularly that it does not simply involve "putting words on paper" but consists of setting goals, formulating problems, evaluating decisions and then planning in the light of prior goals and decisions. Teachers can model the problem-solving and planning processes that learners might be unaware of, while simplified routines and external supports can be used to help learners through the initial stages. However, learners should also "experience the struggles that are part of the knowledge-transforming process in writing" (p. 363)

Therefore they must pursue challenging goals and not always write what is most prominent in their minds, or the easiest to do well.

2.4.2 Writing as a process in my research: "writing critically"

As my research is based in classroom practices and experience, it is the developmental aspect of Bereiter and Scardamalia's research into the processes of writing that I find resonates with my study. Practices which may have been sufficient in GCSE examinations are found to be inadequate at A Level.   It is through the "deliberate, strategic control" (1987 p. 6) of the content that the writer develops a deeper understanding of ideas and concepts in the subject. I suggest that this positions the writer as a more active, autonomous learner, one who, through "struggles" to manipulate the material, is able to gain a deeper understanding of it, increasing the ability to select, evaluate and re-order knowledge to fit the appropriate written response. I identify this as a more independent "student"-like role, contrasting with a more passive "pupil"-like one, as proposed in my IFS (Bownas 2015) when examining the transition made by learners in their first year of A Level study. Echoing Bereiter and Scardamalia's two models of the writing process for "less mature" and "more mature" writers, I suggest that the learners in my research are transitioning between the two, partly compelled to do so by the difference between GCSE and A Level examination questions. Xavi, Tara and Hana were asked in their GCSEs to "describe" or "explain" but at A Level are required to give evaluative and substantiated arguments to "discuss" or to explore "to what extent [they] agree" with a given statement.

Such a model also requires a recursive attitude to writing, in which the written text is open to analysis, criticism and revision. It is through the "manipulation" of information to respond to a writing task that the writer considers

> "distinctions between beliefs, claims and theories and the evidence that supports them [which is] the beginning of **critical thought**." (my emphasis Olsen 2016 p. 151).

Although such distinctions may be expressed verbally as well as in writing, it is the latter which allows for time to consider how well the message has been received, together with opportunities to revise and reorganise if necessary. The analytical and reflective use of language in writing brings into focus the needs or expectations of the reader as well as those of the writer, leading to possible further revisions for the sake of clarity or to link ideas into a logical chain of argument. Citing the work of Turner and Thomas (2011), Olsen (2016) notes that a form of writing they term

"Classic Prose" (used for scientific, literary, bureaucratic and academic purposes) hides the presence of the writer, directing the shared "gaze" of the reader and writer outward to a jointly held view of reality. Hiding the author gives objectivity to the account, which nonetheless is the ultimate responsibility of the writer, through the marshalling of well-selected evidence, presented in explicit and logical language. The text is a fixed object, which can be open to rereading, reinterpretation, rewriting and revision over distance and time. This openness to criticism is a key aspect which allows concepts within the text, if abstracted from the immediate context and speaker, still to convey a meaning from which logical implications may be drawn. The opportunities presented for such a text to be examined for coherence and validity also creates the development of critical concepts such as "contradiction, argument, inference, proof" and others, which Olsen defines as "the language of critical thinking, the language of rationality." (2016 p. 145).

For the learners in my research "writing critically" is a development of their writing and an important part of its assessment at A Level. As seen in the first chapter, writing which shows "critical autonomy" or "a balanced argument and well substantiated judgement" (AQA Mark Schemes 2017) is given the top bands in Media and History respectively.

However, it is not the case that the participants in my study have to reject a focus on "writing competently" to take on "writing critically" in its place. In the same way that for Bereiter and Scardamalia knowledge-telling is embedded in knowledge-transforming, A Level learners have to be both "competent" writers who know the type of writing expected and how it will be assessed and "critical" writers who can, through problematizing the process of writing a text, manipulate and re-order their knowledge of the subject. I suggest that the learners in my study are involved in a process of negotiation between these two aspects of their writing. Just as academic writing should encompass both "**communication** and **thinking about** disciplinary content" (Nagy et al. 2012 my emphasis), so A level essay writing, at its best, can be orientated to fulfilling the requirements of the genre (writing competently) and developing deeper understanding of the material through challenging or re-configuring it (writing critically).

I find this dual perspective on A Level writing helpful in my analysis of the data in my research, enabling me to explore the move into new literacy practices that the learners must make. Yet, there is a further layer of complexity in that the learners are also expected, in their discursive writing, to come to some sort of conclusion

with regard to the question which has been asked of them. As has been discussed, many A Level essay questions take the form of posing a statement with which the candidate is meant to agree or disagree, having selected the appropriate supporting evidence. This development of a "stance" towards the material implies greater agency from the learners, who can, within the limits of the recognised academic discourse, express individual opinions and ideas. This leads me to consider how writing at A level in my research can incorporate concepts of authorship, which begin to centre the participants more consistently within a more "student"-like, autonomous relationship with learning. The acknowledgement of increased responsibility for the use, selection and evaluation of the content of their subjects has wider implications apart from simply how they write their essays, producing a longer term influence on their views of themselves as learners

2.5 Writing with agency

Gee (1996) argues that an essayist literacy is focussed on the idea of

> "people transcending their social and cultural differences to communicate 'logically, 'rationally' and 'dispassionately' … in a thoroughly explicit and decontextualized way" (p. 156)

However, this ignores the circumstances under which such texts are written. A Level candidates are well aware of the high-stakes nature of their assessments and therefore cannot afford to take many risks in their written tasks. The view of the relationship between the learner and the academic community in terms of an "apprentice" and a "master" is problematic (Preece 2010). As discussed by English (2011), such a metaphor is associated with vocation and continuity. In a usual "apprenticeship" model, the novice follows exactly and unquestioningly particular procedures which have been modelled by the master, in order to create a final product which is of the exact quality of the master's. However, if a learner wrote an essay in exactly the same way as a peer-reviewed academic article, or as a lecturer presented a lecture, there would be an inversion of the expected institutional relationship. The learner would be presenting a form of authorship as equal to those who have the position and power to judge the text.

Nevertheless, I suggest that it is by making discoursal choices in their A Level writing that the participants in my research are able to initiate a form of agency in their texts. This can be linked to their views of themselves as learners, including identifying themselves as legitimate writers of texts in the context of A Level study.

2.5.1 Writing and identity

People's identities are conveyed to others by what they do and the action of writing is particularly significant, given its deliberate, possibly permanent nature as well as the way it is used as evidence for social purposes, such as judging academic achievement.   For Ivanic, the act of writing is "an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood" (1998 p. 32).

Ivanic says there is no such thing as "impersonal" writing, as writers create an impression of themselves through the discourse choices they make as they write. These choices are bound by the position of the writer within the social and cultural context in which the act of writing occurs.

Drawing on Goffman's (1981) extended metaphor of everyday behaviour as a theatrical performance, Ivanic identifies four interrelated elements of a writerly identity, which is socially constructed and socially constrained. The first is the writer's "autobiographical self" or the "writer-as-performer": the person who sets about the process of producing the text, whose writing is shaped by prior social and discoursal history. The second "discoursal self" is a fleeting identity which may be tied to the construction of a particular text, consciously or unconsciously conveyed by the use of certain discoursal characteristics in the writing. This can be seen as the "writer-as-character": the identity which the "writer-as-performer" portrays. It can be described as the persona that the writer takes on due to expectations of what the reader expects from the text and it is concerned with the way the writer wants to "sound" to his or her audience. It is in the third element, "self-as-author" that the writer begins to claim authority to a greater or lesser extent in the text, therefore establishing a sense of the writer's position, opinions and beliefs. Ivanic notes that in academic writing there is considerable variation in how far writers establish an authorial presence in their writing and how far they rely on external authorities to support their claims. The fourth element is more abstract and concerned with "possibilities for self-hood in the socio-cultural and institutional context". Moving away from ideas related to individual writers and individual texts, this element is concerned with the way contexts and circumstances both construct and constrain writing. Although there are multiple possibilities and positions, some are privileged over others and a writer may be positioned more firmly into one identity by adapting to the particular "discoursal self" which seems most appropriate and beneficial.

There is, therefore, no fixed or "essential" real self which is revealed in the texts produced by academic writers. There may be multiple positions which an academic context might support, including those of gender, politics, roles in the academic community or affiliations to particular disciplines. It is through engaging with the context in which the writing is placed that the writer is able to construct a "self", both in terms of groups which one belongs to and ones which one does not. The "self" presented in the text is constrained by the authority of historical repetition, granting legitimacy to certain expressions of identity over others (Hyland 2012).

There are aspects of Ivanic's analysis of writing that I find appropriate for my research as I too am focussing on writers who have to engage with a new set of literacy practices (for my learners, A Level; for Ivanic, higher education), who find that the discourses and practices in the new context support identities which may differ from those they bring with them. It is also appropriate that Ivanic highlights the importance of the reader-writer relationship to the construction of the discoursal self. In this model, writers have to consider the power relationship between them and their readers, either accommodating or resisting the pressure to conform to readers' expectations. In A Level examination essays, the reader is almost always the teacher or the examiner. How the writing "sounds" for this reader is bound up with the giving or withholding of marks, conferring a grade and being able to evaluate definitively how "well" the essay has been written.

However, for my participants there is a further complication, in that they have to write in more than one discipline, exposed to differing subject-specific conventions and expectations. Although there may be overlapping features, a scientific report may not be exactly the same as a report in the field of Geography, whilst an essay evaluating sources in History may not value the same approaches as an essay on a literary text in the discipline of English Literature. The vagueness of the terms "essay" and "report", used as labels rather than explicit descriptions of the writing expected (Swales 1990, Hyland 2004) can hamper the learners' understanding of what is required in each subject they study. A more helpful framework is one which allows a variety of "academic literacies" (Lea 2008) in which different academic disciplines privilege different responses. This approach allows for a more nuanced view in which learners begin to differentiate how a particular discipline conveys its content, incorporating not only what is legitimately included in the "body" of knowledge but how both reader and writer are positioned in the discourse. Acquiring a way of communicating in these contexts involves developing a "voice" in writing, through which meaning is expressed.

2.5.2 Writing and "voice"

Taking aspects of Ivanic's "fleeting" identity of the "discoursal self", I prefer to use the term "voice" when discussing the learners in my research and their writing. Any individual may have access to several "identities", such as professional, personal, familial and social. Referencing Vygotsky (1978), Hyland (2012) views identity as not belonging within an individual person, but between processes and within social relations. Identity is therefore not a state of being but a process which is assembled and changed over time through interactions with others.

Moving from the conventions of one discipline to another necessitates flexibility in the learners' writing. It is through exposure to the ways in which historians, sociologists and others organise and develop their material that learners can begin to take on features of these texts. This model of academic writing places such texts in their contexts, part of a dialogic system in which all texts are produced in relation to previous texts (Bakhtin 1981) even if the presence of such texts is not explicitly acknowledged. Writers are supported by the social and cultural circumstances in which the writing takes place, appropriating or transforming previous examples. In this sense there is a process of "becoming" through which writers develop awareness of their tacit choices and their habits of communication within different contexts. The explicit analysis of the repertoire of "voices" which is available can create valuable discussions of how best to express ideas, removed from more restrictive debates over what to write to get the most marks from the mark scheme.

One powerful claim which can be usefully explored with learners is that all academic texts are persuasive, through which writers attempt to win the support of their readers to their arguments (Hyland 2015). Methods to achieve this include choosing what material to present, expressing collegiality and resolving any difficulties. These are all accomplished in ways which fit the discourse community's assumptions, systems and knowledge. In this model, genres of writing are "community resources" which conform to certain norms and practices. These are not constructed rationally but constant exposure to the discourse leads the writer to work out what the group prefers.

Therefore, writers operate successfully in the academic writing genre through the construction of a "stance" (Hyland 2005) or a textual "voice" or community recognised personality. Hyland identifies "stance" as the way writers stamp their personal authority on to their argument, or step back to disguise their involvement, according to the expectations of the discourse community. Rather than a series of

simple rules to follow, there are different techniques which can be uncovered through examination of and exposure to multiple examples. Hedges, boosters and self-mention may be present to a greater or lesser extent according to the field in which the text is placed.

Similarly, Hyland claims, academic texts position the reader through techniques of "engagement". Through these, writers acknowledge or connect to their readers, focussing their attention on what is important, including them as participants in the discourse and guiding them towards suitable interpretations. References may be made to shared knowledge, implying an assumed equality of understanding of the material and its significance. Although Hyland notes that there may be overlap with the techniques identified as working towards the "stance" of the writer, "engagement" is also enhanced by the use of direct address, questions and directives.

For example, a text based in scientific disciplines tends to have fewer references to the individuals who undertook the research. Conversely, a writer of a text from the humanities tradition may be more explicit about a personal point of view towards the subject being addressed. Hyland suggests that in more "hard" areas of scientific knowledge where succinctness is prized, there is a greater generalization of previous, contextual knowledge. A linear, problem-solving approach to the topic allows readers to home in on aspects which are most relevant to them, such as methods and findings. Here, the stance of the writer minimises personal involvement and engagement is supported by ensuring the reader is directed quickly to key aspects of the text, sometimes through directives. In more "soft" disciplines, there is a greater range of interpretation and writers are more likely to use devices to draw the reader in, so as to emphasise "a set of mutual, discipline-identifying understandings linking writer and reader" (2005 p. 188).

The stance of the writer is more apparent, perhaps through use of personal pronouns. The reader's engagement is aided by structures which recast shared knowledge and construct persuasive arguments through appeals to new ways of viewing the evidence.

In my experience of teaching, both at A Level and with younger learners, these different approaches to creating texts which can be recognised as legitimate by the relevant discourse community are rarely, if ever, taught. This leaves the participants in my research with an underdeveloped understanding of what is seen as "good" writing in their disciplines, leaving them often falling back on descriptions from

examination mark schemes to guide them. However, their awareness that they need to do more in their A Level essays than they did for GCSE does lead them to consider some ways of modifying their writing, leading to attempts to create a "writerly voice".

2.5.3 A "writerly voice" in my research

For the writers in my research, each examination essay has potentially a high-stakes profile, with little opportunity to contest or challenge the expected conventions of the text, promoting a more passive "pupil"-like approach to the task. This context is most likely to emphasise a focus on writing as a product and a desire to "write competently". At the same time, the construction of A Level questions and the mark schemes themselves reward most highly those candidates who develop their own ideas, encouraging them to move into a more autonomous "student"-like position. Here, learners are helped to engage with the writing task by "writing critically", seeing writing as a process. For the learners in my study, negotiating these two aspects of the challenge of writing at A Level, involves them making choices about their "writerly voice" in the texts that they write. Although placed in a seemingly powerless position by the assignments they need to complete, becoming more explicit about the different ways they can present their material can, I argue, develop a stronger sense of agency in the learners, increasing their confidence in participating in these new literacy practices. It is through the discovery of and the confident use of the "writerly voice" that the learners can place themselves in appropriate positions towards their studies, taking on more independent views of themselves as learners.

2.6 Overview of Chapter 2

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature that helps shape my research. The view that writing is a socially and culturally embedded act underpins my understanding of the way writing is approached in schools and particularly at A Level. Through exploring aspects of genre, I consider the conventions and expectations of academic writing and how the examination essay can be viewed as a genre in itself. Situating my research in school-based practice, I examine approaches to generate such writing through viewing writing as a product and writing as a process. I identify these as "writing competently" and "writing critically", linking these to more dependent "pupil"-like and more autonomous "student"-like identities as proposed in my IFS. I suggest that the continued process of negotiation between these two approaches to writing and the demands of the genre

of the examination essay means that learners are engaged in constructing a "writerly voice". The development of this during their first year of A Level studies informs my analysis of my data, collected through the methodology and methods outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

> "… this was my first assessment that I've done … it links to a lot to what we did in GCSE Language … where you do those like micro analysis and pick up er key words … I just thought it was right or wrong but apparently that's what you're supposed to do" (Tara individual interview 1)

Having reviewed the literature which shapes my framework for exploring writing in general and A Level writing in particular, this chapter focuses on the methodology and research methods which are employed in my research design and its implementation. My research aims to explore the ways the learners themselves describe the transition between GCSE and A Level writing for assessment. I therefore begin each chapter of the thesis with a quotation from my data, indicating the centrality of the learners' descriptions of their experiences as writers at A Level to my study.

Tara's description above, describes one difference between studying at GCSE and at A Level and how she is beginning to adapt to this. It illustrates how Year 12 can be seen as a transition period between literacy practices which operate successfully at GCSE and newer, more demanding ones which have to be employed to achieve well at A Level. The quotation comes from her description of an essay she completes for History in which she has to evaluate source material. This is in the first term of Year 12, in which Tara is still describing her A Level learning in terms of her experiences of GCSE studies. A use of "micro analysis" or close textual analysis which focuses on "key words" would have been taught to Tara as a way to develop her use of quotations in her English Language GCSE work, helping her to explore the ways the writer was using language to affect the reader. A similar focus on these aspects for her History essay seems to work for Tara, but the use of the word "apparently" suggests that this has not been explicitly recommended in her A Level class as a suitable strategy, perhaps indicating a lack of precision, at this stage, as to what is required. The extent to which the learners understand the new demands of writing at A Level and how they negotiate them during their first year of study is the basis of my research.

Building on my IFS study and my reading of the relevant literature, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, my over-arching research question is:

How do three Year 12 learners negotiate the demands of writing examination essays at A Level?

This incorporates three sub-questions:

- **How do the learners describe the writing that they have to do?**
- **What resources do they draw on to support their writing and how do they make use of them?**
- **Do their views of themselves as writers and as learners alter during the first year of study and, if so, how?**

My intention to place the learners at the centre of my research, exploring their descriptions of their experiences, positions my study in qualitative research, taking a case study approach, which I consider in more detail in the next section of this chapter. I describe my research design and the selection of the research participants, with brief portrayals of them as individuals and as learners. I elaborate on my methods of data collection and their iterative nature, including some of the limitations which my research in particular encountered. I consider the ethical implications in this study, concluding with the limitations of my chosen methods and methodology and how I seek to minimise these in my thesis.

3.2 Qualitative research

A qualitative methods framework enables the participants in my research to articulate their own experiences and to create a picture of their own understanding of the move from studying GCSEs in Year 11 to A Levels in Year 12. Typical features of qualitative research include the need to understand phenomena in their setting and the view that the social world is seen as a creation of the people involved (Robson 2011). I agree that social meaning is constructed and interpreted by participants in social actions, and that the task of the researcher is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge. (Robson 2011 p. 24). Knowledge therefore is not a product but a process, as Law (2004) notes "Realities are not secure but instead they have to be practised." (p. 15)

Basing my research in this epistemology is also appropriate considering my view of literacy as a series of practices which are socially, historically and culturally embedded (Heath 1983, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000, Gee 1996, 2004) enabling one to speak of "literacies" in the plural. This suits my position that writing is a set of social and constructed practices (Street 1984) and that the learners in my research are negotiating a change in the contexts in which they write. Such a change impacts not only on their writing for assessment but also on their views of themselves as learners.

At the same time as acknowledging the uniqueness of the learner, this stance in my research also places individuals within their own contexts, exploring how their circumstances might impact on them. These methodological points of ontology and epistemology have led me to use a case study approach in my research.

3.3 Case study

Yin (2009) describes case studies as empirical enquiries that "investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". (p. 13). I aim to explore how the learners in my school negotiate the demands of writing for assessment at A Level. Although this research might not be easy to generalise into other contexts, it can be considered as "illuminative" (Wellington 2000), so throwing light on the research question. Consequently, my initial choice of participants is opportunistic and the learners in my research are not selected to represent any particular groupings of students at Ingleby School in Year 12. Through an instrumental case study (Stake 1995), I focus on one aspect of the issue (writing for assessment at A Level), with the opportunity to carry out a longitudinal exploration of the case, by interviewing the learners at three different points in their first year of A Level study. This generates an iterative approach of "cycles of deliberation" (Piantanida and Garman 1999), creating greater depth for the research.

It also permits me to develop a greater understanding of the contexts in which the learners are placed, not just in terms of Ingleby School, but socially, culturally and temporally, therefore increasing opportunities for "thick description" (Geertz 1973). By this, I mean that I can elaborate my account of the research, so making explicit the "significant detail" (Dawson 2010) of the learners' descriptions. The three data collection points do not simply increase the quantity of data I can explore, but enable me to explore the participants' descriptions of negotiating possible different views of themselves as learners over time.

My research is small-scale and, although sparked by the perceived anomalous performance in A Level examinations at Ingleby School compared to the GCSE performance, does not offer specific solutions to the problems already detailed in Chapter 1. However, it can create a "more sophisticated understanding or a resonance for others" (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2013 p. 62) who are engaged in similar contexts and who are able to utilise the richness of the participants' descriptions to reflect on their own experiences.

These methodological considerations are incorporated into my research design.

3.4. Overview of research design

I designed my research to enable me to work with selected Year 12 learners at three separate times in their first year of A Level study. Beginning my study in September 2016, I first gave a questionnaire to the participants. This acted as an introduction for them to the areas I would be interested to discuss in future and provided me with some of their first thoughts about the type of writing they were asked to do. The following month, I held a group interview with all the participants, taking a semi-structured format and building on ideas generated by responses to the questionnaire. This group interview was followed by individual interviews with each participant in turn. Again taking a semi-structured format, the individual interview re-visited points raised in the questionnaire and in the group interview. Additionally, each participant was asked to bring to the individual interview two pieces of writing, one which they thought was "good" and one which they thought could be improved. The writing was discussed and gave opportunities for them to explain why they chose the texts. These interviews were complete by the end of October 2016.

The group and individual interviews were repeated in February 2017 and June 2017. They took the same semi-structured format and pieces of writing selected by the participants were again discussed in each individual interview. All the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed as they were completed, so that previous comments and discussions informed my next set of interviews in each instance. In this way, the participants and I were able to revisit points raised in subsequent meetings.

Although six Year 12 learners contributed to my research at the start of the study, for reasons which I shall give in more detail later in this chapter, I focus on three participants and their responses for the thesis. They are anonymised but I have given them pseudonyms for ease of reference. Xavi, Tara and Hana are described in detail in section 3.6 of this chapter.

The following sections of this chapter provide a more detailed examination of the process of my research.

3.5 Selection of participants

I began my research in the autumn term of 2016, selecting the original six participants opportunistically rather than seeking out a representative sample. My current role in the school is the Head of the Multi-Ethnic Achievement Department,

working with learners at a relatively early stage of English acquisition. Consequently, I have little contact through my teaching role with A Level learners. This shaped my methods of selecting the participants for my study.

My first selection was from the three Year 12 members of my form. At Ingleby School at that time, tutor groups, or forms, were arranged through the vertical tutoring system, with learners from Years 7 to 13 members of each one. All three of the Year 12s in my form agreed to participate. Having the participants in my form gave me easy, regular contact with them. This opportunity was important to me as it meant that arrangements to meet with them at three different points in the year were more straightforward.

The second group selected from was of Year 12s recommended to me by members of the English Department as "good writers" (in the sense that they had been good at writing in their English GCSE lessons). I have little direct contact in my role at Ingleby School with the best writers in Year 11 and my colleagues nominated a number of Year 12s whom they thought would fit this description. It was important for my study that the participants were not those who struggled with their writing at GCSE. Firstly, I wanted to consider the way in which writing at A Level is different to writing at GCSE and I anticipated that those who had been less confident writers in Year 11 would probably continue to find writing more challenging in Year 12. Secondly, one of the issues for Ingleby School when considering the relatively weaker performance at A Level compared to GCSE was that a significant proportion of the learners with the highest grades at GCSE did not then progress to the highest grades at A Level (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1). Having participants who were successful in their writing at GCSE in my research provided an opportunity to explore this apparent inconsistency in more detail.

I therefore began my research with six participants, four girls and two boys. Three of them (two girls and a boy) were in my form and three others (two girls and a boy) were recommended to me by colleagues in the English department. All attended Ingleby School in previous years except one. The students studied a range of subjects and all achieved at least a B grade in their English GCSE exams in the 2016 GCSE results.

Having gained consent from the participants and their parents (see section 3.8), I issued and collected questionnaires from all six participants. They also all attended the first group interview. However, for various reasons which I shall detail in a later

section (3.7.2), not all of the six learners participated fully in the subsequent rounds of interviews.

Therefore, an early decision in my data analysis was which of the original six participants to focus on. Using a case study approach, I was keen to find examples of learners in Year 12 who would "resonate" with readers of my research, particularly teachers of Year 12. I therefore focused on Xavi, Tara and Hana, not as "representative" of Year 12 learners, but as "illuminative" examples, who readers may recognise as similar to the learners they experience in their own contexts. The following profiles of the three participants give details so that readers may identify some attributes characteristic of Year 12 learners as well as helping to distinguish them as individuals.

3.6 Participants' profiles.

3.6.1 Xavi

In many ways, Xavi is a contrast to the other two participants in my study. A member of my form, Xavi came to Ingleby School at the beginning of Year 12 from a secondary school outside the borough, unlike the others who had been at Ingleby School since Year 7. His previous school has no sixth form and it is not unusual for Ingleby School to take on these "external" students for A Level study. I and the other participants in the research consequently knew Xavi less well than the others in the study and this may explain some of his reticence in his responses to interview questions in both group and individual interviews.

Less of a "high-flyer" academically than the other two when comparing GCSE results, he nevertheless achieved a grade B in his English GCSE, which allowed him to select his chosen A Level courses of Psychology, Sociology and Media Studies. Xavi was from the Philippines and spoke Tagalog. He said he started to learn English when he moved to the UK, in 2005 (which would have been when he was about 5). He intended to go to university after A Levels and spoke about wanting to take a journalism course.

Unlike the other two learners in my research, Xavi did not speak about having close members of his family who had been or are at university. His only comments about his family and education were that they "support" his intention of going to university after A Levels. Also, unlike the other two, Xavi did not seem to have written much outside of school when he was younger. Whilst Tara and Hana spoke about diaries

and stories they wrote, Xavi only briefly mentioned a "blog" he wrote which, connected to a family holiday, seemed a one-off occurrence.

At the beginning of Year 13, Xavi did not return to Ingleby School. This was unexpected, as he had not spoken of this to anyone in the school. When contacted, Xavi said that he had decided to go to a sixth form college closer to home to complete his A Level studies. Consequently, I am unable to say what Xavi ultimately decided to study at university or where he applied.

3.6.2 Tara

Tara had been a student at Ingleby School from Year 7 and was in my form. She was also identified by the English Department as a good writer in GCSE English and gained an A in the examination. She was studying Spanish, History, Maths and Further Maths at A Level and so was different to the others in only having one subject for study (History) which is essay based. She is, however, also working on her assignment for her Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which was equivalent in points to half an A Level. The completed task can take different forms but Tara (and Hana who also took this qualification) chose to complete an extended essay of around 5,000 words. The topic of the project can be chosen by the candidate and research is completed alone, with some support provided by the school and remotely by input from the University of Southampton (in the case of Ingleby School). Tara chose to write an extended essay on why women are not as successful in the study of mathematics as men.

From an Iranian background, Tara's home language was Farsi but she said in her questionnaire response that she learnt English "once born". She also was entered for Persian at A Level and was predicted an A* grade, telling me that she learnt it "alongside" English from when she was a baby. She had no tutor for the examination and so relied on her family to support her learning in this language.

Tara was identified as a high-flyer by the school and was successful in her application to become Deputy Head Girl in the middle of Year 12. A lively character, she was also involved in many school initiatives and this meant that she was often engaged in extra school activities, in addition to her work tutoring others undertaken outside of school. As her sixth form studies progressed, she often complained to me, as her form tutor, about feeling tired and under pressure because of having taken on too much. In Year 13, Tara dropped History, which she had taken as an AS Level and applied to Oxford and three Russell group universities to study Mathematics.

3.6.3 Hana

Hana had been a student at Ingleby School since Year 7. I had taught her in her English class then and remembered her as a very shy girl who was an able reader and writer. She gained an A* in her English GCSE and was identified by the English Department as an example of a very good writer. She was of Kashmiri Pakistani origin and seems to have had a relatively sheltered upbringing compared to her peers (only getting a mobile phone in Year 12, for example). She had spent a lot of her time reading when younger.

Hana was the oldest of four daughters and her father studied English Literature at Westminster University followed by a post-graduate qualification in Psychology at UCL. He was described as a "role-model" by Hana and contrasted with her grand-parents who did not go to school. He worked in hospital administration. Her mother was a teacher at the mosque.

Like Tara, Hana worked on an extended essay for her Extended Project Qualification, writing about public health. Also seen as a high-flyer at Ingleby School, Hana missed one of the arranged group interviews as she was at a residential course run by Villiers Park Educational Trust, a charity which aims to develop academic skills for less socially advantaged learners with the potential to gain an A or an A* at A Level.

At the start of the research, Hana was taking four A Levels but by the time of the first individual interview she had dropped Psychology. Her subjects were English Literature, History and Biology. In her first interview she talked about studying anthropology at university, and in Year 13, applied to Cambridge and three London Russell group universities to study Human, Social and Political Sciences.

3.7 Methods of data collection

As detailed above, there are three aspects to my data collection in my research design: an initial questionnaire; group interviews and individual interviews. The initial round of data collection was completed in October 2016 and then the group and individual interviews were repeated in February 2017 and June 2017.

3.7.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix C) was used to find out factual information (such as the subjects they studied for A Level, whether they could speak another language apart from English) as well as asking some more open-ended questions (such as

what they found challenging about writing, and to describe a time they enjoyed writing). There are always concerns regarding responses from questionnaires for a qualitative researcher; research has found that responders can be affected by the order in which the questions are asked, their understanding of why they are being asked these questions and the possible mismatch between what responders answer that they do and what they really do in everyday life (Foddy 1993). However, the intention of this questionnaire was to formulate some questions for the first group interview and so I used a semi-structured format. This gave me some comparative information (such as their grades for English GCSE) as well as some information which I explored in more depth in the interviews (such as their views on their writing).

The questionnaires were given out to individuals as they returned their and their parents' consent forms, giving me another opportunity to explain the reasons for the research, what it involved and that they had the opportunity to leave the research at any time. It was also clearly noted on the questionnaire that they did not have to answer any question which they did not want to. The participants took the questionnaires away and therefore completed them individually. This gave them increased opportunity to respond to the more open-ended questions in the ways that suited them best. It also created some unexpected results, such as Xavi choosing to describe a piece of writing (in German) he had completed for his German GCSE examination as a time when "writing had gone well".

3.7.2 The group interview

I used group and individual interviews to provide most of my data. Both of these were audio recorded and then transcribed. The process of transcription is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Through using a group interview, I was able to see how individuals were encountering similarities and differences in their experiences as Year 12 learners with relation to their writing. It could be described as a "focus group" if following Morgan's definition as:

> "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. In essence it is the researcher's interest that provides the focus, whereas the data themselves come from the group interaction." (1997 p. 6)

When planning my research design, I anticipated that the divergent interests and experiences of the group would add depth and provide a wider range of data to

explore. This was a successful tactic in the IFS when I used group meetings with students, with teachers and with both combined to explore their experiences in Year 12 studies in A Level English Literature.

However, as the research period continued, it became difficult to find a time when all six participants could meet together. Lunch-times were too short for a meaningful discussion to develop and time after school was difficult to organise as some had study leave in the afternoon and so went home. It can also be argued that the diversity of the group contributed to the falling away of participants as the research period progressed. With little in common, apart from them all being in Year 12 at Ingleby School, they, unlike the participants in my IFS study, initially saw little benefit to themselves in discussing their experiences of writing for assessment and so, for some, their engagement with the interviews became increasingly sporadic. Indeed, the final group interview was in fact a paired interview with Xavi and Hana, the others unable or unwilling to attend (particularly with end of Year 12 examinations looming).

Consequently, my focus in this study is on the three learners, Xavi, Tara and Hana. They attended the most regularly, but the focus on them also allows me to consider learners taking different subjects at A level, who discuss different attitudes towards their writing. Hana and Tara's descriptions of writing at A Level were different to those of Xavi and my analysis explores the extent to which previous literacy experiences and home backgrounds might contribute to this. I could therefore explore a broader spectrum of concepts than would be the case with a more tightly selected group, which adds "complex specificness" (Geertz 1973 p. 20) to my account of the research.

I used a semi-structured format for both the group and the individual interviews which follow them. I had a set of likely questions which I covered during the interviews (Appendix D) which were prompted first by the responses from the individual questionnaires (for the first group interview) and then by the responses from the previous interview, both group and individual. In this way I ensured that I picked up on points which had been made earlier, to gauge if there was any change in how writing is being described by the learners in the research period. I was also able to keep the discussion close to the areas of consideration for the research question, an important aspect when some interviews had to be squeezed into relatively short periods of time. However, I was able to keep some flexibility in the interviews, to allow the responses at the time to be developed and expanded upon if

relevant. This means that the learners could lead the discussion to a certain extent and I was able to uncover some aspects of their views of writing at A level that were more unexpected.

3.7.3 The individual interview

The group interview was followed by an individual interview with each participant. These individual interviews were also semi-structured. In the initial individual interview, I used items of interest from the questionnaire as well as points which came up in the first group interview. Returning to comments made in other settings (the questionnaire and the group interviews) gave the research an iterative quality which helped to increase the credibility of the study, through the "convergence of evidence" (Yin 2009 p. 1). It also allowed me to probe more deeply into some of the comments which had already been made to gain clarity or to allow participants the opportunity to develop their initial thoughts.

For more practical reasons, I also wanted to see the participants individually because I asked them to bring two samples of their writing, one they were pleased with and one they thought they could improve. I did not want the participants to be put in the position of discussing a "failed" piece of writing in a more public forum, particularly when, as I have said, there was no bond of friendship or other unifying elements in the group which might increase trust in each other.

It was important for the research that the participants discussed actual examples of their own writing. I wanted to explore their descriptions of how writing at A Level was different or more challenging compared to the writing they had done before, as well as how they coped with this. How they described the positive and negative aspects of the particular examples helped to show how they identified a piece of writing as "good" or not. It also allowed them the opportunity to reflect on these descriptions and how they did or did not change as the year progressed.

The writing samples were self-selected, as I wished to discuss with the participants why they chose them. The criteria were therefore deliberately left vague, and were interpreted by most participants, particularly as the research progressed, as signified by the grades the pieces of writing were given by their teachers. However, Hana brought as her first example of "good" writing a creative piece she had written in Year 9 and, as her other example, an assignment she had completed for RE in Year 8. This was unexpected, but led to a productive discussion regarding writing creatively and how her view of "good" writing changed over the years.

3.8 Ethical concerns

As an insider researcher, I am aware that my research has ethical implications for the participants and for myself. It is important not to abuse any position of authority I may have as a teacher in the institution to put any pressure on the participants and that their interests take precedent over the interests of the research and of me as the researcher. (Murray and Lawrence 2000). I was careful to explain exactly the purpose of the research and to gain informed consent from both the participants and their parents before I began. (Appendices A and B). Participants were aware that they could drop out of the research at any time and, as some of them did, I have confidence that they understood that was possible. Meetings were held when the students were available, which was usually lunch-time and after school, although some individual meetings took place during their free periods and my non-contact time. Through this, I hoped to avoid the interviews taking up time which they may have been using for their studies or other activities. I also made sure that the questions were focused on their writing and students were aware from the beginning with the initial questionnaire that they could refuse to answer any questions. The writing samples were selected by the learners themselves and provided discussion points for us in the individual interviews. I did not refer to them at any other points and did not compare them to any predicted or target grades in their subjects. This was to avoid them feeling that they were being given an assessment by me additional to the one given by their teachers. It also was not appropriate for my research, which explores the learners' descriptions of writing at A Level.

I anonymised the participants by giving them alternative names (the choice of which was shared with them) and I do not include any details about them which would make them easy to identify. I balance this with my desire to present a fully detailed picture of the participants and their experiences in the first year of A Level study. As I met with them at different times during the course of Year 12 and part of each interview referred back to what had been discussed previously, the learners were given the opportunity at each interview to change, amend, develop or withdraw what had already been discussed. This enabled generalised discussions regarding how well they thought their writing was progressing during the course of the year, as well as specific opportunities to review what they previously said. For example, in her second individual interview, Hana spoke of using a particular technique to organise her thoughts in preparation for writing an essay: putting ideas on scraps of paper in her pocket as they came to her and then looking at them again before she began

writing. In her third individual interview, however, she said that this was not a typical way of collecting her ideas and that she would more normally plan her writing just before starting to write in a more linear way.

At the completion of the data-collection period, an opportunity was given to change anything they said and I also showed them initial outlines of the analysis I made in preparation for the IOE Poster Conference in March 2018. I was also careful not to identify any members of staff they may have alluded to in their interviews when sharing transcripts of the data with others, such as my supervisor.

The data has been collected on my PC which is password protected and on an encrypted USB. I will ensure that it is not kept for longer than two years after the completion of my thesis and it complies with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). I have read the IOE guidance regarding the use of data in research (Institute of Education 2021) and I am confident that my thesis complies with this.

I followed the BERA ethical guidelines (2011) when collecting my data and have since revisited the guidelines after their expansion, revision and updating in June 2018 to check that my research was still compliant with these. I was not working with vulnerable individuals or discussing particularly sensitive or confidential issues with them and they were all over sixteen years of age.

3.9 Limitations of the research methods and methodology

I have already indicated, in section 3.7 of this chapter, some limitations to my research methods, such as the way in which not all six initial participants continued with the research. In this section, I consider other limitations of my chosen methodology.

3.9.1 Limitations of qualitative research and case studies

In qualitative research, the generation, selection and analysis of data are organised and interpreted by the researcher. Such research may occur under specific conditions of which both the participants and the researchers are unaware and may not be of their own choosing: the researcher's reality is a "construct" (Charmaz 2014)

Similarly, a case study approach can also be seen as limiting by some critics. Yin (2009) states:

> "Too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and of the conclusions." (p. 14)

Dowling and Brown (2010) claim there is no such thing as a case study approach "other than as constituted by the curricularising of research methods." (p. 196). Instead, they say the term "case" is probably best interpreted as simply a way of describing one's sampling procedures.

However, Dowling and Brown also acknowledge that any method of making one's own experience explicit necessarily entails its "transformation". Wolcott (1994) goes further, claiming that it is impossible to provide pure "description", as a human observer will, in the process of describing, "taint" data with implicit analytical or interpretive casts. The centrality of the researcher to the research (Bailey 2007) demands clarity about how one's own status, characteristics, values and history have affected the research, including choices made during the research process itself.

In response to this, I have ensured that my research has theoretical and organising principles behind it, which are explicit in the different chapters of my thesis. Through a thorough analysis of the data and a coherency between data, theory and findings, I aim to show that my interpretation is credible and creates a "resonance" (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2013) with practitioners in the same area of education. Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) writing more generally about qualitative research, suggest that the criteria for evaluating the research lies more with the reader than the writer. It is through making explicit the stages of the research, the epistemological stance of the researcher, the methodologies and the methods that were used, that the writer will win over the judgement of the reader that this research is of value. In this chapter, I have sought to do this, by working through each of these in turn.

3.9.2 Insider research

Murray and Lawrence (2000) highlight ways "insider research" may be critiqued, including concerns that the practitioner/researcher may be misled into believing that anecdote, intuition, spontaneous classroom behaviour, habit and subjective preference can be presented as evidence of prevailing conditions in the classroom.

However, although a member of the school for many years, my role does not now involve me in A Level teaching. In this context, I was therefore placed more in the role of a "reflective practitioner" (Schon 1991) who was reflecting-on-action rather

than reflecting-in-action. As I wrote earlier in this chapter, my present role in the school does not include any A Level teaching at the moment, nor do I have regular teaching contact with A Level learners. This allows me to have a good understanding of the context in which the experiences are taking place whilst being at the same time distanced from it, so that I can approach it more objectively. Also, the participants in my research are studying subjects I have not taught, under specifications that have changed since I was an A level teacher, increasing my detachment from the setting.

3.10 Overview of Chapter 3

In this chapter I identify the epistemological basis for my research design and the methods I use to carry it out. I am explicit about the way in which the research is designed to be "illuminative" rather than representative, to provide a "resonance" for practitioners working in similar contexts. I outline the methods used to collect the data and give brief portrayals of the participants in my study both as learners and as individuals. I consider the ethical aspects of this research and reflect on its limitations. My aim in this research is to use the learners' descriptions of writing for assessment in the first year of A level study to explore how they negotiate the different challenges presented to them. Through providing "thick descriptions" of the context, the learners and the data collection methods, I increase the credibility of my analysis of the data. I look in detail at my analysis of the transcribed interviews in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

4.1 Introduction

> "in GCSE if you like waffle you may still get a mark, but you have to be really concise and specific in A levels" (Xavi Individual interview 1)

In the previous chapter outlining my methodology and research methods, I explain my choice of an exploratory case study within a qualitative research methods framework. The participants who are at the centre of my research design must also be at the centre of my data analysis. I aim to explore the ways that they negotiate the demands of writing examination essays at A Level and Xavi's comments above show that he can articulate one difference between writing at GCSE and writing at A level at an early stage in his Year 12 studies. This is a "substantive" statement (Gillham 2007) as it is one of the key areas my research is designed to explore. Through my analysis of their responses in the interviews, I form an "elaborated description" (Dowling and Brown 2010) which informs Chapter 5: Findings and discussion.

This chapter begins with an account of my choice of analytical method, that of thematic analysis. I describe the six stages of the analysis in detail, (Braun and Clarke 2006, Nowell et al. 2017), aiming to increase readers' confidence in the credibility of my study through explicit recounting of the process by which I explore my data.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, described by Boyatzis as "a way of seeing" (1998 p. 1), moves the researcher through three stages of enquiry: recognising an important moment; encoding; interpretation. Collecting the data at three separate points in the year means that a significant part of my analysis was considering how items which were identified (or "recognised") early in the research period might alter, develop or become redundant as the time progressed. I was also aware of the need to be open to fresh ideas that may be added to the data in later interviews. This recursive analysis of the data (with each data collection point being informed by consideration of what has been collected previously) enabled me to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). It is also a suitable analytical method for small scale research (Joffe and Yardley 2004) which my exploratory case-study approach entails.

Additionally, thematic analysis suits my qualitative research framework as it enables "the informants' stories [to be] pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience." (Aronson 1994 p. 2).

The experiences and descriptions of the learners in my study are at the centre of my analysis, with the iterative nature of the research design providing opportunities to gain feedback from the participants. This increases my confidence that the themes that have been identified constitute a recognisable pattern. I give an example of this in the previous chapter (Section 3.8) where Hana, having described one way of planning her essays in one interview, says that this is not a typical example of planning her writing in a subsequent interview. In this way, I avoid one critique of thematic analysis (Joffe and Yardley 2004) that it organises material in the ways in which the researcher sees connections and relationships, rather than the ways in which the participants would connect them in their own world views.

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), I consider four criteria against which to measure my analysis to decide on its trustworthiness: **credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability**.

Credibility ensures that the research does in fact answer the research questions as set out in the research design and reflects the social reality of the participants. One strategy to address this is "prolonged engagement", which I achieve through interviewing the same participants at three different points in their first year as A Level learners.

Transferability relates to the ways in which the research findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings. I give a detailed description of the particular context in which my research takes place in the first chapter of the thesis. I use this "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the context to allow readers to judge whether the findings echo their own circumstances. In Chapter 3, I give detailed descriptions of the research design and the three participants in the research. I also employ apt and, occasionally, extended quotations from the participants in the next chapter to encourage readers to determine whether the individual participants and their comments "resonate" (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2013) with their own knowledge of similar learners and experiences.

Dependability is provided through a detailed description of the process, so that another researcher can repeat the work, although there is always the proviso that the findings may not be the same in different contexts and with different participants.

The methods used to collect the data are outlined in the previous chapter and I give details of my analysis in the next part of this chapter.

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher's interpretations are clearly derived from the data and that there are clear indications of how the interpretations have been reached. The research design gave me opportunities to reflect on the data whilst it was being collected and to consider early indicators of patterns or of redundancies. Reading the relevant literature on writing was concurrent with the period of data collection and so my analysis was an on-going process during this time. Adaptations to parts of the research (such as including or omitting certain questions in subsequent interviews) were therefore more easily incorporated into my study. I further increase the confirmability of my research by the explicit description of how my analysis developed, which comprises the next section of this chapter.

4.3 Analysis in six stages

Although an iterative and recursive process, the way in which I analyse the data can be described in six different stages (Braun and Clarke 2006, Nowell et al. 2017): familiarising oneself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report. My method of transcribing the interviews is included in the first of these stages, as this is arguably the first step in the analytical process.

4.3.1 Familiarising myself with the data

As described in my methods sections of the previous chapter (Section 3.7), my research took place at three different points during the course of the year and so reading and reflecting on each section of interviews was built in to the design. Therefore, each stage of the process allowed an opportunity to consider what had been presented in the interviews and facilitated my familiarity with what had gone before. I was thus able to make useful comparisons across the interviews as the year progressed, not only of individual learners with each other but also how individuals described their experiences separately from one collection point to another.

I was in this way simultaneously involved in data collection and analysis, using comparisons at each stage of analysis and writing memos to elaborate categories. (Charmaz 2014). Although not using grounded theory in an orthodox way, I drew on

some of its principles, seeking to generate theory from my data and engaging in repeated comparisons of the data to help identify codes and then themes. (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

However, I did not approach the data without some pre-suppositions, drawn from my epistemological stance, my experience as a teacher in secondary education and my reading of the relevant literature. My IFS research, as explained in Chapter 1, was an important factor in choosing this area to research. The selection of the research participants also did not come from a theoretical basis, but was opportunistic, designed to be "illuminative" (Wellington 2000) rather than "representational". In these ways, my research does not follow the principles of grounded theory.

A further factor in supporting my immersion in the data is that I also transcribed each discussion before the next round of interviews, helping me to make my first steps in my analysis. Through transcribing the interviews, I not only became very familiar with the words of the participants (the raw material of my data) but also had to make decisions early on about what I found significant in their descriptions of A Level writing. Transcription is theory laden (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999): the choices that researchers make about transcription enact the theories they hold and constrain the interpretations they can draw. Such selection is a practical and theoretical necessity (Davidson 2009) but as such, needs to be acknowledged and explained in relation to the goals of the study, rather than taken to be unremarkable. Oliver et al. describe it as a "powerful act of representation" (2005 p. 1287) in which the researcher's decisions can have far-reaching implications for the cohesion of the research design as well as for participants' confidentiality. Suggesting a continuum between naturalism at one end (where speech is presented with as much detail as possible) and de-naturalism at the other (where such idiosyncratic elements such as stutters are omitted) it is suggested that these correspond to certain views about representations of language, which correspond to views of the world.

In my study, reflecting on how best to represent the data, I took a stance which was more concerned with the content of what was said rather than the way in which it was said. So, for example, I did not include every pause with timings, as might be seen in transcripts which are based in "naturalism". However, I still wished to give an account which included rich detail of the learners in their own words, enabling my readers to find resonances with their own possible experiences of study, of writing and of transition. My view that the participants in the research create the "social

world" they describe (Robson 2011) led to me including, where appropriate, such features as false starts to comments, repeated words and places where there is a pause. In this way, I was able to illustrate something of what they understood about the topic being discussed.

For example, when Xavi in his first individual interview was asked if he thought reading would help him with his Media Studies work, I transcribe it as below:

> *"Er, not really. But reading, looking at magazines might help because it's related to it a lot and there's stuff online which where other people, other students analyse, uh, videos, clips, which and they're quite good at it (KB: Yeah) and just watching them analyse a piece of work might help me, y'know, a few ideas, yeah."*

Here, I feel that although Xavi is seemingly stating that he does not think reading will help with his studies, he does acknowledge that resources added to those provided in school might help and he mentions the use of video clips showing him how others might analyse a media text. This use of alternative resources is a useful concept for analysing how the participants speak about support for their writing for assessment, when beginning to find codes for analysing the data. How he speaks about it, however, also suggests to me that he is not definite that this is a way forward (use of the modal "*might*" suggesting he had not used this method so far; hesitations, represented by commas, suggesting he is recalling something that he has not explored fully; uncertainty in the change from "*people*" to "*students*" who are doing the analysing in the clips). I therefore can compare this helpfully to the way he spoke about an online resource he had used and found helpful in his second interview, speaking about a resource he used for Psychology:

> *"Umm for Psychology there's a website that has um essay questions like 16 markers like that and then they show us explicitly which one's AO1 points and AO3 points and I understood it from there."*

Here Xavi speaks in a more direct way, suggesting to me that he has used the website and found it helpful in specific ways to make progress in his studies. He is clear about which parts of the assessments (the Assessment Objectives or AOs) the resource will help him with and identifies which questions ("16 markers") the resource is aimed at. This more (although not wholly) "de-naturalised" approach to transcribing helps me to retain greater detail (Richards 2015) from the transcriptions, therefore increasing the dependability of my analysis.

4.3.2 Generating initial codes

One important aspect of my analysis is that it took place across the research period because I transcribed and began searching for initial codes as I collected each set of data, at three points in the year. This was concurrent with my reading of the literature relevant to writing and assessment. The recursive process informed each stage of my collection and analysis of the data. For example, identifying the purposes for writing initially seemed a key area to explore, but as the learners focus on writing for assessment, saying that they have no time for anything else, this quickly became redundant. They dismissed writing on social media as not "proper" writing and so not worth discussing. Although there were references to writing which the learners completed when younger (diaries and blogs) in the interviews, these are considered in my analysis through the lens of how they may impact, or not, on the ways the learners describe the writing they have to complete for their subjects. Consequently, my research focus is narrowed to their descriptions of writing for assessment at A Level.

The interviews were transcribed into Excel spreadsheets which helped me to collate the data and also allowed for systematic searches as patterns were identified (Appendix E). Selections of data were also printed out to compare and to create notes which supported me for the next stage.   NVivo or other software packages were not used, as I found I did not get a clear enough grasp of all the data from looking at sections on a screen. Although NVivo is a useful tool for storing data, it can lead to a linear examination of what is produced (Maher et al. 2018). At this point in the process, I found a more interactive engagement, such as the use of colour-coding, sticky notes and physically moving selections around increased attention and focus when beginning to look for initial codes.

I began with considering "substantive" statements (Gillham 2007): that is, ones which make a key point. My research questions were helpful here, but I was also aware of the need to keep my ideas open at this stage so that the data could be "interrogated" (Richards 2015), enabling my thinking on the points which are uncovered to develop further. As the data was "opened up" (Richards 2015), I began to explore possible links between parts of the data and elaborated on what was being identified.

As statements were collected, I thought about how to bring them together to be reviewed in more detail. This provided me with initial codes, generated through exploring patterns in the data. Boyatiz recommends the analyst should ensure the code "captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon" (1998 p.31).

I therefore used participants' words where possible, adding explanatory detail if necessary to make sure there was clarity for other readers. For example, one early code concerned the way the learners described a key difference between A Level and GCSE essay writing: that at A Level one has to be more "specific". Xavi says his writing has to be "specific" in terms of the question he is answering, so that he does not "waffle"; Tara speaks about being "specific" in her content of her essays, including using other historians' views; Hana speaks about being "specific" in balancing her ideas, so that her essay is not one-sided or "biased". This description of their writing is closely linked to another term: "precise". Together, these two qualities are discussed in positive ways, so collecting them together moves me into the next stage of analysis, that of finding themes across the data.

4.3.3 Searching for themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as "something important" that represents "a pattern" in the data. I reviewed the initial codes and through processes of "abstraction" and "reflection" (Richards 2015) similar ideas were placed together. For example, the codes which described A Level writing as "specific" and "precise" could be collected with other codes such as "knowing the content"; "follows a structure"; "uses technical language" and getting "the grade". Together, these formed the theme of "meeting the examination criteria"; a consideration which occured in all the interviews with all the participants. This is unsurprising as the writing discussed is almost exclusively that of writing examination essay answers, with the participants claiming they have "no time" to write anything else.

Further examination of the data revealed other themes appearing. One, for example, related to the way writing could support learning, in the way it can show "both sides" of an argument or gets "behind the truth". Another theme related to how writing could be used to articulate individual ideas, as it could be "personalised" or could "develop you as a person". These themes indicate a less restricted view of writing and its purposes, separate to the attitudes emphasised by examination boards' criteria.

4.3.4 Reviewing themes

In this part of the process, themes are reviewed at two levels: firstly, at the level of the coded data to ensure that all the data conforms to an identified pattern; secondly at the level of the themes, to ensure that the relationships between them reflect the meaning of the data as a whole.

However, it must be noted here that my analysis was not conducted in isolation from other influences, one of which was the way that my thesis built on the research completed for the IFS. Also, at the same time as analysing the data, I planned for and collected the next set of data from the next round of interviews. During this period, I read the literature relevant to writing from my chosen research position of viewing it as a socio-cultural phenomenon. All of these had an impact on my final analysis and illustrate another way in which my research, although drawing on aspects of grounded theory, is not fixed in this method of analysis.

This explains the structure of Chapter 2 of this thesis, which follows closely the themes which I identify in my data. My reading influenced my analysis as much as my analysis had an impact on my understanding of the literature. The close connections between them will be seen in the following section.

4.3.5 Defining and naming themes

In this stage, researchers are encouraged to determine what aspect of data each theme captures and the "overall story they tell" about the data (Braun and Clarke 2006, Nowell et al. 2017, Maher et al, 2018). It should also be possible to give clear definitions for each theme to increase the credibility of their use to identify the patterns in the data, so increasing the rigour of the analysis.

Returning to my over-arching research question, it is the notion of "negotiation" which appears most significant. The learners know they have to do things differently at A Level compared to GCSE, but they are not starting afresh. Some of the strategies which they employed successfully before will also benefit them now (e.g. "know the content" or "follow the structure"). However, they are also expected to bring their own interpretation and "analysis" to their writing, which demands they "get behind the truth". Negotiating a path between these demands involves the learners developing a "writerly voice" with which they can express their position towards the material they select, evaluate and justify in their writing. I therefore define the four themes in my analysis as below:

1. **A different genre of writing**

This theme concentrates on the ways the learners describe the writing that they have to do. The sub-theme *Writing academically* is considered but set aside by the learners who are more focussed on the second sub-theme of *Writing for*

examinations. Their responses illustrate that their main focus is on the conventions and boundaries of the A Level assessed examination essay as a genre.

2. Writing competently

This theme is centred on aspects of writing as a product, in which the end-point (the grade) is of most significance. One way of ensuring success is through the first sub-theme of *Knowing the criteria*. This creates expertise in understanding how the essay will be graded. A second way is explored through the sub-theme of *Following a structure* which gives support to writers who may lack confidence in organising their ideas. Developing ideas from my IFS, I see this as remaining in a more "pupil"-like view of oneself as a learner, passively accepting guidance from teaching staff and examination boards.

3. Writing critically

This theme focusses on writing as a process through which learners can develop increased understanding of their material. The sub-theme of *Reviewing and reflecting on writing* encourages a more creative and active approach to the task of completing a text. The second sub-theme, *Writing from different perspectives,* fosters the selection and manipulation of material, promoting a more problem-solving attitude towards completing a text. This assists the participants to move into a more "student"-like view of themselves as learners, taking more individual responsibility for their studies.

4. Developing a "writerly voice"

Concentrating on each learner individually, I explore how their negotiation of the two demands of writing at A Level ("writing competently" and "writing critically") impact on their views of themselves as writers and as learners during the research period. The extent to which they favour particular approaches influences their development of a confident "voice" in their writing. It also, I argue, leads to opportunities to reflect on their understanding of what a successful learner is like, with implications for their future academic progress.

Xavi: Writing for the examiner

Hana: Writing for learning

Tara: Writing as experimenting

These four themes in my analysis are further elaborated in Chapter 5.

4.3.6 Producing the report

This stage is presented in the following chapter of my thesis. The selection of well-chosen, valid and vivid extracts from the data increase the validity of my analysis. I am aware of the "epistemological paradox" (Dowling & Brown 2010) that the act of making experiences explicit necessarily entails their transformation, through selection and organisation. However, continuing to place the learners at the centre of my study, I use their words extensively to define and illustrate key aspects of the two ways of approaching writing. These are embedded within an "analytic narrative" (Braun and Clarke 2006) which aims to do more than just describe the data, but provides a concise, coherent and interesting account of the story the data tells. In this way, my analysis can support my response to my research question so that the reader is more likely to be convinced of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. (Lincoln and Guba 1985)

4.4 Dissemination of the report

Arguably, the production of the report is not the completion of the research, as its dissemination is a significant requirement. My research is firmly based in the context of Ingleby School, so the local area has provided me with opportunities to present my study as it has progressed, to practitioners working in similar situations. I have introduced my findings to fellow researchers in my role as a coordinator of the Literacy Special Interest Group attached to the International Literacy Centre.

Perhaps the most effective dissemination is, however, the opportunity to work alongside subject-specialist teachers at A Level. The investigation of the language demands of their subjects alongside the teaching of the content, to create a shared understanding of the way writing and learning are linked will benefit teachers and learners alike. I aim to explore the possibilities of this further in the future.

4.5 Overview of chapter 4

In this chapter, I detail the analysis applied to my data, keeping in mind my research's aim to explore how learners describe their experiences of writing for assessment at A Level in the first year of their studies. This leads me to look for patterns in the data, so making thematic analysis an appropriate method to encode what has been collected. My explicit description of the processes used to analyse

the data in six stages increases confidence in my analysis, which I report in my next chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

5.1 Introduction

> "we did understand that you know we can't get the best grades right away, it's like, we have to make progress to make like the best work" (Hana Individual interview 1)

As Hana's quotation shows, the learners are aware that the change from GCSE to A Level means they are in a new arena of literacy practices, where strategies which worked well before may not now be so successful. In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis of my data with discussion of how this relates to my research questions and the theoretical foundations of my views of writing.

My over-arching research question asks:

How do three Year 12 learners negotiate the demands of writing examination essays at A Level?

I incorporate three sub-questions within this:

- **How do the learners describe the writing that they have to do?**

- **What resources do they draw on to support their writing and how do they make use of them?**

- **Do their views of themselves as writers and as learners alter during the first year of study and, if so, how?**

To respond to these questions, I begin by showing how the learners have an underdeveloped understanding of the expectations of the genre of academic writing. Their descriptions of writing are narrowed to ones focussed on the examination essay, which is almost the only form of writing they complete and almost the only one which they, at this point in their studies, value.

I then explore the resources they draw on to support them in their writing. I begin with the ones which focus on "writing competently" with an emphasis on the text as a completed product. Detailed knowledge of the examination criteria is seen as a core component, together with applying suggested frameworks and structures for writing. These practices consolidate many of the strategies which were used successfully at GCSE and, I argue, position the learners in a more dependent "pupil"-like view of themselves as learners. Next, I discuss the assistance which supports them in "writing critically", firstly looking at their ways of describing their

reflection on and revision of their writing, including considering the recursive and iterative aspects of the process. I then consider their accounts of writing from different perspectives, involving a more analytical and evaluative stance towards the material they have studied. Such approaches place the learners in more autonomous, "student"-like stances towards their learning, arguably assisting their progression into higher education.

However, my data shows that the learners are continually negotiating between the two demands of writing at A Level and therefore have to compromise between them in order to develop their "writerly voice". The extent to which one approach is favoured more than another has a significant impact on their views of themselves as writers and as learners. I focus on each learner individually, beginning with Xavi who concentrates almost exclusively on writing for the examiner. I then examine Hana's views of how writing can develop a view of oneself as a learner and conclude with Tara's accounts of her experiments with writing for assessment.

I use relevant and detailed extracts from the interviews, using the learners' words to present their descriptions of writing as A Level learners as accurately as possible, given the provisos outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Through this, I seek to capture their experiences of writing at A Level, particularly during this transitional stage of Year 12 studies.

I begin with considering how the learners describe the type of writing which they have to complete: the genre of academic writing and of assessed essay writing in particular.

5.2 A different genre of writing: "A big jump from GCSEs" (Xavi Group Interview 3)

Xavi's metaphor of a "jump" to get from GCSE to A Level is frequently used by teachers and learners, in my experience. The suggestion of a sudden, quick movement also implies the possibility of a fall, perhaps with accompanying damage. It might seem an unhelpful use of language, ignoring the reality that Year 12 learners are the same people who were successful at GCSE only weeks before and that most of them have months to reach a suitable level of expertise, before the final examinations in Year 13.

However, taking an "ideological" view of literacy (Street 1984), both learners and teachers at A Level are placed in a distinct series of literacy practices. The social

and cultural contexts have shifted between GCSE and A level so that what was effective writing in Year 11 needs reconsideration in Year 12. The subjects studied now demand mastery of more complex, abstract content along with the ability to communicate it in forms which meet the expectations of the "expert members of the parent community" (Swales 1990).   The genre of academic writing is the preferred means for this, with its particular vocabulary, grammar and discourse strategies (Zwiers 2014).

5.2.1 Writing academically: "I would definitely in university … but um in A Level, I think it would be less likely" (Hana Individual Interview 2)

When the learners in my research are asked directly about writing academically, an initial response is the one given above by Hana above and repeated by Xavi in his second individual interview: that it is something that can wait, perhaps until they get to university. More significantly, there is also a lack of understanding as to what "academic" writing might be. Xavi, in his same interview, admits that he is "not sure yet" what such writing would look like. When speaking in more general terms about writing, the learners say it should be more "formal" at A level but this is defined as not using "slang" and can be confused with appearing rude, or writing in the way they would talk to their friends.

One reason for this lack of focus on writing academically can be explained by the learners' pre-occupation with feeling secure in the amount of content they have to cover in their studies. All the learners are struck by the quantity of work that A Level study requires: indeed there are wry comments in the very first group interview that the decrease in the number of subjects taken at A Level has not led to a decrease in the amount of work expected. The amount of content is described as "heavy" and one result of this is a focus by some on learning what to write, with less attention on how to write it. Tara claims in her second individual interview that she has to know "the full thing" before she can start essay writing, which seems an unlikely situation when she is only in February of Year 12.

In fact, Xavi, when pressed to come up with a definition of more "academic" writing in his second individual interview, says that it would need to show "knowing the content off by heart confidently". His comments and Tara's suggest that there is a focus by them at this stage on what is known and can be remembered, rather than the application of the material to respond to the examination question.

Taken on their own, these comments suggest that the learners are being left unprepared for the writing they have to do, putting them at a disadvantage when it comes to completing A Level essays. It appears that they are neither introduced to the expectations of different academic forms of writing in their lessons nor given explicit instruction on how to achieve them in their own texts. When asked for examples of writing instruction which she finds unhelpful, Hana says in her first individual interview:

> "sometimes teachers emphasise things like um punctuation or spelling when um we already are old enough to know that kind of thing"

A focus on surface features such as punctuation may be appropriate for some, but it runs the risk of positioning learners in a "remedial" position, (Swales 1990, Preece 2009) and does not, in any case, address the core issue of how writing may need to change to be acceptable at A Level compared to GCSE. The learners' lack of a meta-language to describe academic writing suggests that this is an under-explored topic for both learners and teachers. For example, Hana talks in her third individual interview of avoiding "wishy-washy" language, but this is so that marks will not be lost. This suggests a sense that a more academic style is one in which technical terms are used to get ideas across more quickly, rather than an understanding that academic writing also includes grammatical and syntactical considerations.

However, the learners have more to say when asked what makes a "good" essay, interpreting this as a "good examination answer". These include naming features such as "technical language", "precise", "no waffle", "analytic", "specific" and "coherent" which can be traced back to language used in examination boards' mark schemes. Indeed, in the first group interview, one participant baldly states that it is "the grade" that identifies if an essay is good or not. Rather than the genre of "academic writing", it is the genre of the "examination essay" which they are more confident in describing.

5.2.2 Writing for examinations: "you're straight into the exam zone" (Tara Individual Interview 3)

Tara's description of being "straight into" writing for examinations, illustrates how soon she feels she has to write to certain assessment criteria. Tara adds that this contrasts to her experiences at GCSE, where she feels there was more of a "build up" before being expected to write to the required standard. All of the learners in the research aim to go on to higher education after A levels, all know what their

target grades are for their individual subjects and consequently all feel the pressure of writing to examination requirements from early in the course.

Other types of writing are either not considered as "proper" writing (such as writing on social media in the initial group interview) or are dismissed as being something they have "no time" for now. Tara and Hana speak about diaries that they completed when younger, Xavi speaks of a blog he wrote describing a family holiday, but these activities are not pursued during their sixth form studies. Instead, they discuss the extra hours they complete after school to supplement their lessons. Tara says she has built this up since Year 10 to being able to do "four to five hours' worth of work" in Year 12, Xavi says he goes to the library after school every day to "read the content … answer questions on it" and Hana advises that you have to have "discipline" to go to the library for maybe "two hours" instead of relying on feeling "motivated".

This "investment" (Norton 2000) of their time and effort is a rational response to their understanding of the increased demands that A Level study places upon them. It is important, in my view, to recognise that the twin demands of learning new content and writing for assessment are significant features of their studies during the entire research period for all the learners. They are discussed by all of them and they recur in their interviews at every stage of Year 12.

However, there is a danger that the dominance of writing examination essays to the exclusion of other types of writing may cause this genre, in Kress's terms (1982) to "construct the world" for its user. Studying a subject may be reduced to memorising what is likely to be tested, and writing it in forms which are acceptable to the context. The limitations of an almost exclusive focus on content and on the examination essay cause the learners to have an impoverished vocabulary to discuss their writing, which is always described through the lens of assessment.

This narrow view of writing and, I suggest, of the purposes of studying the subject itself, can sometimes become frustrating, as Tara notes in her second group interview:

> "I don't feel like our teachers offer a lot of support for how to answer the questions because we mainly focus on the content so… that's how I feel like I'm still at the same level 'cos I don't, like I don't get a direction of where to go and how to improve it"

Tara suggests here that such strategies are in fact hampering her progress, not supporting her, as she has "no direction" for improving her writing. Her comments

reveal that some learners understand that there may be more to writing, even for examination purposes, than a focus on content. As a more reflective and in many ways more independent learner than the other participants, Tara comes up with her own solutions to this problem, which will be explored in a later section of this chapter.

Overall, the interviews in my research highlight that both teachers and learners feel under time constraints to get through the material required as well as become proficient at writing for assessment. Therefore, strategies are devised to create quicker and simpler ways to develop the learners' abilities in "writing competently". This involves a focus on writing as a product and the end-point of the writing, its grade, is brought to the fore.

5.3 Writing competently: "mainly essays are focussed on what the examiner wants" (Hana Individual Interview 1)

The focus for the learners in their descriptions of "writing competently" is based in an awareness that each essay will be graded and marked to an established set of criteria. Hana's comment above establishes that, from an early stage in her A Level studies, she is writing for a reader who will make a judgement on her work. Writing is therefore often described by the learners in terms of how far it does or does not meet the criteria. This has two main effects. Firstly, the learners have to become experts themselves in the ways their writing will be evaluated. This involves taking time learning details of the mark scheme, such as which Assessment Objectives are relevant for which essays, and how the marks are awarded. Secondly, the learners focus on following structures and guidelines which are presented to them by teachers and other authorities as being the best ways to organise their writing. These, of course, also take time to learn and to apply effectively to their writing.

5.3.1 Knowing the criteria: "I lost marks from that 'cos I overdone the AO1 but I haven't done enough for AO3" (Xavi Individual Interview 2)

For the learners in my study, it is apparent to them that they have to become proficient not only in the content of the subjects they are studying, but also in their knowledge of the criteria by which they will be assessed. After only a few months of their courses, they develop a sort of abbreviated description of the writing they have to do, identified by the number of marks awarded for the essay ("15 markers"; "10 markers") or by the amount of time they have to complete them in ("20 markers should be 30 minutes").

Knowing the number of marks allocated is linked to understanding the criteria for assessment. A similar shorthand description is developed by the learners, as in Xavi's comment above, to discuss this, speaking about "AOs" or Assessment Objectives. These are set by Ofqual and relate to specific expectations, such as comparing resources, using subject specific terminology and so on. All the Objectives will be covered in the course of the subject's assessment, but particular ones can be set for individual questions. Learning how to interpret the objectives and which ones are pertinent to the question being answered arguably gives the learners more "content" that they have to learn in order to be successful in their writing.

Examination boards often write in their reports that there is no need to "teach" the criteria and that if candidates answer the question fully, responding in detail to the command words, for example, they will be able to achieve well. Tara points out in the second group interview that this also needs to be made explicit:

> "if you just go in like head first without knowing it … then evaluate and consider are like two different words but then you think they'll be the same thing"

In my experience and as discussed in my IFS (Bownas 2015), although key words in the question are taught explicitly in lessons, a lot of time is also spent on analysing the AOs and trying to make explicit what each of them demands. This can create its own difficulties as learners try to work out nuances of meaning in the criteria with, particularly early in the course, little experience of what such descriptions of writing might actually look like (Halliday 2010). Hana, in her second individual interview, says that she looks at mark schemes to see how to "structure" her writing but that she finds them difficult to interpret sometimes because they are so "general", leaving her with "the gist of what the examiner's looking for".

In contrast, Xavi seems more comfortable with using a mark scheme to support his writing. He explains in his first individual interview that his Psychology teacher has asked the class to write their own mark scheme before completing an essay:

> "if you know the mark scheme, how it's marked you would probably know how to answer the question properly … you know step by step what to write in each ss, paragraph"

Xavi seems here to use the scheme as a kind of template to structure his writing, but the value of the activity so early in the course (this is in October of Year 12) seems diminished when considering how unfamiliar the learners will be with not only

the content of their subject but also the official mark scheme to which their writing must conform.

One method described by Tara to make AOs explicit in their writing is the use of colour-coding. This allocates a particular colour to each of the AOs relevant to the question and sections of the answer are highlighted in the corresponding colour. She brings to the second individual interview a History essay which her teacher has coded in this way as part of his marking and feedback. She seems unsure about its usefulness:

> "I dunno I feel like sometimes it does help sometimes, actually no it does help 'cos it makes me know 'cos for instance I'll I would perceive this as, pink, for being judgemental but it's actually blue 'cos I'm just reciting it. So it does help, but I think when you first get it it's really just in your face all the colours, so you just, yeah that's how I feel at first"

Tara acknowledges that the method does make clear through visual representation the difference between what she has done ("just reciting") and what she thought she had done ("being judgemental"). However, she seems to have reservations ("sometimes it does help") and these may be due to the way it has been presented. If it is "just in your face all the colours", it suggests there has been little discussion regarding how these colours are applied. It is unclear what would happen if a sentence began to "recite" but became more "judgemental" as it went on, or vice versa. It is also unclear if there are opportunities for Tara and others to analyse the difference between "judging" and "reciting" and what needs to change in their writing to make such differences apparent to both reader and writer. Tara's comments here again suggest that there is a lack of explicit language teaching related to her subject except that which is applicable to writing an examination essay.

Another example of this lack of a meta-language can be seen in Xavi's comments regarding his use of "connectives" in his writing. Xavi knows that he must use "subject obligatory" language (Snow, Met and Genesee 1989) in his writing saying, for example, in his initial individual interview that he could have improved his Media Studies essay if he had used "Media language". He also refers to "subject compatible" language giving examples of words to show his line of argument, such as "however" or "this is illustrated" with which he can begin his paragraphs.

However, it is not clear during the research period how well Xavi understands the use of these phrases. Although he says in his first individual interview that without connectives "the whole essay just doesn't flow … doesn't work" he goes on to add:

> "If you want to write a new point, writing, writing connectives such as in addition furthermore another interpretation and stuff like that it's kind of helpful because indicates to the reader that you're talking about different points"

There seems to be no recognition in this comment that there are differences in the meaning of these words, instead there is a sense that they are just ways of separating out "new" or "different" points. This is reinforced in Xavi's second individual interview where he explains that he can make his writing more "formal" by "adding more connectives", again not seeming to differentiate between which ones would be appropriate and why.

By his final individual interview, Xavi shows more clarity about when he might use particular phrases, but again these are linked to concerns with increasing marks, not with making sense. The purpose of connectives is to "link" but also:

> "They indicate which assessment objectives you're writing about. So, if you are saying, 'This is reinforced by a sociologist,' that's like a AO2 mark. And 'therefore', stuff like that, that's AO, you're trying to evaluate, that's AO3, stuff like that. And comparing as well. 'On the other hand', that's AO2 marks as well."

These words and phrases are being used as "signposts" to the examiner that a specific AO is being addressed in a particular section of the essay. The mechanistic employment of language suggests at best a superficial understanding of how to construct a text which develops an argument. It also raises questions regarding the detail of Xavi's comprehension of the purpose of the AOs and exactly how they apply to his writing. This is significant, as Xavi, as part of the extra hours he completes outside lessons, writes "practice" examination answers to check his understanding of the content he has read. He says that his teacher does not have time to mark these, and he dismisses peer marking as too inaccurate, so he marks them himself. Working in isolation, with an insecure grasp of how to write effectively, apart from adding certain "connectives" to start points he is keen for the examiner to spot, it seems unlikely that Xavi will be able to make much progress. However, he also makes use of another support provided by school, that of following a suggested structure for paragraphs and in some cases for whole texts. These frameworks are also linked to mark schemes and Assessment Objectives, giving Xavi and other learners a way of organising ideas to answer a question whilst trying to ensure that relevant AOs are covered. The use of such structures is the next section of this chapter.

5.3.2 Following a structure: "we use a structure called PEER" (Xavi Individual Interview 3)

The use of models and frameworks, linked to concepts of "scaffolding" (Bruner 1975) are described by Xavi as valuable ways of organising his writing. He introduces the PEER structure in his first individual interview, speaks about it in his subsequent interviews and credits it with improving his marks in his final individual interview, as seen above. Xavi, in his final individual interview, explains PEER stands for: "Point Evidence Explanation and Relate it back to the question".

A similar structure is created by his Sociology teacher in response to a particular examination question:

> "This is a application question. And our teacher made up a structure called IKEA. I stands for item, we have to, state um, from the material, state clearly what the quote says. Then knowledge, K is for knowledge, and you have to um explain quickly what the um item states. Like explain what it means … And then E um er is evidence, same as the PEER one. For evidence, you need to give examples and, yeah, evidence and sociologist who says backs this point, and stuff like that … And A is analysis. This is like where you get your AO3 marks, and stuff like that."

This format is for the entire answer, which Xavi says he only has 15 minutes to complete in an examination. Having this pre-learnt structure reassures Xavi that if he follows it, he can cover the relevant criteria for the answer ("AO3 marks" for example) as well as organise his ideas so that he does not "waffle" which is a worry he states in other interviews. He also expresses concerns that he finds it hard to complete answers in the time allowed, so the structure helps him to focus on what is necessary to write, excluding irrelevancies or duplication.

However, it is uncertain whether this use of the "scaffold" does much to develop Xavi's understanding of how he can write well. There is a lack of clarity in the difference between the "item" ("state what the quote says") and "knowledge" ("explain quickly what the item states"). It also seems to give equal weight to each of the four elements of the answer, where arguably it is the "Analysis" part which is the most demanding and may present learners with more difficulties in articulating ideas clearly and succinctly. Saying that this part is where you "get" AO3 marks suggests a superficial understanding of what needs to be done to write analytically.

Nevertheless, Xavi relies on structures like PEER and IKEA throughout the research period, comparing his writing at the beginning of Year 12 to the end in his final individual interview:

> "Like the start of Year 12, when she gave us a 20 marker, I got like 3 out of something, 20, or like that, because I didn't know how to structure my answer.

So, I just like copied the textbook words and just write it down without adding the right connectives and the right structure to do it."

In the same interview, he describes successful writing as that which follows the structure which the teacher has given:

"to know it's a good um essay that I've written, I should have should have planned, used the structure like she gave me, so that's what I would know if it's good or bad"

Of course, learning the structures adds to the amount of "content" that Xavi has to "memorise" in his subject, but he suggests that this is worth it, in order to increase his marks. His use of "the structure like she gave me" positions him in a "pupil"-like, more passive acceptance of how to write for assessment, indicating that Xavi feels following the suggested framework is the way to write successfully.

Hana, in contrast, seems to have a less rigid view of what makes the structure of a good essay. In her first individual interview, she is able to give a general outline:

"we first write an introduction which explains why we're writing and em what the writing's going to be about and we generally have to outline a few of our points in a introduction so it's kind of like a plan in the introduction and then for the em main body of the essay we write three or four paragraphs about the factors and we have to link them together so it's more an academic essay rather than just individual points and then in the conclusion we join it all together and sum up why we think, why we came to our argument and what we learned from the sources and re and the er things we were given in class"

This organises the writing into a commonly used pattern of introduction, main body and conclusion, but Hana is also able to give some detail to the individual parts. The introduction "explains" what the essay is going to be about and, through giving some "points" can also act as a reminder to the writer about the direction the writing should go, "like a plan in the introduction". The main body has "three or four" paragraphs "and we have to link them together", giving a simple notion of a line of argument. Interestingly, this is described as "academic" in style and contrasted to "individual points", which may illustrate Hana's understanding that this type of writing should be presenting a particular viewpoint. In the conclusion, "we join it all together and sum up what we think", so closing the essay with a recapitulation as well as a personal response to the question. This ending also includes justification "why we came to our argument" and references to evidence "the sources … things we were given in class". Hana's description contrasts with Xavi's primarily because it is a different sort of extended answer. Hana is describing an essay in which she is responding to a whole text in a Literature examination, whereas Xavi is describing a response to an extract which is designed to elicit how different theories in

Sociology can be applied. However, Hana is able to give more detail to what each component of her essay contains and has a more coherent approach to how the parts link to create the whole text, rather than a focus on the marks that can be awarded.

Hana's outline is similar to ones produced by Lewis and Wray (1998a, 1998b) for "argument" or discursive essays and provides a suitable starting point for Hana's move into A Level writing. By the time of her final individual interview, she is more confident about the specific type of plan she can use for her English Literature essays, crediting her English teacher with helping her with this:

> "she gave us like um a generalised sort of essay plan so she said that if you have a statement in the essay er they have to argue for and against, you always argue for the em the statement at the beginning then you set a transition point to um transition from the er for point to the against point and you end on the most ah you end on the most strong point that you have"

This structure is a more sophisticated way to organise her material, and not just because of the terms which Hana uses to describe it, such as "transition point". Hana is aware that she is being required to "argue" against or for a statement provided in the question, and is deliberately planning the most effective way in which to present her material "you end on the most strong point you have". Having a "stance" or a point of view towards the material is integral to the writing, as she shows her understanding that not all "points" are equal, or have the same impact in an argument.

Hana goes on to explain why she finds this structure so helpful:

> "… before I erm understood that that's the way my teacher wanted us to plan it I already had the sort of gist of that in my head but I'd never been able to erm express it so when Ms G. told us how it should be then I realised that that's how I usually write it so I, I realised that's how I should usually write my essays"

Hana's comments here show a reflective approach towards her writing and she finds the structure helpful, partly because it has been validated by her teacher, but also because she has used something similar before, although she could not "express" it. It is "generalised", so she knows that is open to adaptation, depending on the question to which it is applied. Coming, as it does, at the end of the research period, her description shows a development in her understanding of how "following" a structure can provide support for her writing as well as increasing her confidence in using her own ideas. Arguably, this is a good example of how "scaffolding" a learner's writing should work, providing a temporary, stable frame to

aid the construction of the writer's own text (Langer and Applebee 1987). It allows Hana to be supported in her ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) (Vygotsky 1987) in her writing and shows the timeliness of the teacher's intervention. Hana is able to apply this structure to her planning because she recognises something in her own writing that meshes with it. This is arguably more effective writing instruction than a uniform framework such as PEER or IKEA which is employed somewhat indiscriminately almost as a checklist of what has to be present in the answer, regardless of how it is expressed.

Together, the practices of focussing on the examination criteria and following recommended structures or frameworks, described by the learners, support them in "writing competently". They allow them to concentrate on the assessment element of their writing, and to produce writing which can successfully meet the criteria by which it will be judged. Taking this approach can also fulfil one part of the definition of academic writing given by Nagy et al (2012): that it "facilitates communication" of disciplinary content. However, it seems that this product focussed view of writing does not support the second part of the definition, that academic writing should also enable "thinking about" the same material. It leaves underdeveloped such aspects as "critical autonomy" and "sophisticated responses" seen in the highest mark bands of A Level examinations (Chapter 1 of this thesis). The learners are aware that part of the "jump" from GCSE to A Level study is that there is an expectation that they will become more independent in their thinking, requiring more analytical and evaluative answers in the examination. This aspect of their writing, which I have identified as "writing critically", and their descriptions of it are the next section of this chapter.

5.4 Writing critically: "I think it means to er be, er to get behind the truth of the matter … that's what critical writing is" (Hana Individual Interview 2)

Hana's description of critical writing, that it gets "behind the truth", illustrates a more independent engagement with the material which is being studied, suggesting that there may be more to ideas presented as "the truth" that will justify deeper exploration. I argue that for this to happen, learners have to do more in their writing than keep to criteria and structures outlined by teachers and examination boards. Taking more evaluative and analytical positions towards the content means learners make the "distinctions between beliefs, claims and theories and the evidence that supports them [which is] the beginning of critical thought." (Olsen 2016 p. 151).

Described by Hana and Tara as being "open" to different ideas, this aspect in their writing encourages more creativity and deeper engagement with the subject.

One method which supports this is how the learners describe reflecting on and evaluating their texts for themselves, so the activity becomes "knowledge-transforming" (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). Viewing writing as a problem solving activity incorporates a focus on writing as a process, not a product, deepening comprehension in the way that social interaction between a learner and a more competent other may do. This approach is explored in the next section of this chapter.

5.4.1 Reviewing and reflecting on writing: "I read it to myself and [if] I don't stop half way and say 'because what', or 'why' that's when I know that certain chunk is good" (Tara Individual Interview 1)

All the learners comment that they have "no time" to re-write or even to edit their writing before it is handed in, but further investigation reveals that there are periods of reflection and revision in their writing processes. At its simplest, this may be illustrated by Tara's comment above on reading her work as she writes. It is not clear if this is aloud, but in this recursive reflective process, Tara vocalises the position of the reader of her text. The use of the questions "because what" and "why" show that she is aware of the dangers mentioned earlier in this chapter of simply "reciting" information, rather than "judging" or evaluating her material. Through reading her text, she is able to highlight places where she might need to make her text clearer or her arguments more explicit. This awareness of a reader is one of the signs Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) note as indicating a "more mature" writer.

It could be argued that this process of deliberation over how to use the content of the subject to answer the essay begins earlier, in the planning stage of writing. Here I am not discussing the use of pre-learnt plans and structures, as explored in section 5.3.2, but instead the ways in which the learners generate their own ideas for the organisation of their writing. The need to write "critically" at A Level entails the manipulation of their material, requiring the learners to consider which parts to select, which to develop and which to omit. The consequent shaping of their knowledge and understanding to generate a suitable response to the essay question demands more complex thinking around the topics which have been learnt.

All three of the learners in my study use what they call "mind maps" to begin to organise their writing, although these seem to be more like "brainstorms", where ideas are initially collected before the writing begins. Having been introduced to this method in their GCSE studies, the learners carry it over into their A Level courses as a suitable way to prompt their memories of what to write. In this sense, they appear to be operating in the "knowledge telling" model of organising their writing (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). Xavi describes his use of them for examination answers in his final individual interview:

> "I try to like mind map quick points on what to write in each paragraph, but it's not really ideal. Mind map just like little words and stuff like that, just to remind."

This use of the map as an aid to memory helps Xavi to retrieve ideas, but he seems to give little consideration to organising the material once it has been collected, apart from an "introduction" then "five main points" then a "conclusion". As already discussed, Xavi is happier when he has a particular structure to follow and although he can develop his explanation, for example, that the introduction has a "definition" (which "gives you AO1 marks as well"), he does not seem to have an idea of organising his points into a more coherent text. The "conclusion" he describes as:

> "summarising in like in like a quick sentence quick sentences of what you wrote in each paragraph. You, you don't add anything new to it. And you write, I think you write your like own opinion and stuff like that, 'I agree' or 'disagree' with stuff."

There is an element of evaluation here ("your own opinion") which Xavi refers to as "AO3" but because he often does not reach the conclusion in timed conditions, he also evaluates "in each paragraph as well anyway". In his description of how he writes an examination answer, it seems that Xavi has an underdeveloped idea of what he is writing for and how it can be shaped to respond more directly to the question. Repeating what has been written in the essay in the conclusion without adding "anything new to it" seems redundant and to agree or disagree with "stuff", although giving a personal response, does not seem to be related to any manipulation of the material in the essay which has already been written. It is striking that Xavi is speaking in this interview towards the end of Year 12, when he is getting ready to prepare for internal examinations. He does not seem at this point to be in a suitable position to reflect on his writing apart from a superficial understanding of how it may address some of the Assessment Objectives that he will be marked against.

Hana also uses "mind maps" to aid her memory, but her description of this comes in her first individual interview, rather than her last one. For her, especially if the essay question is "confusing", it helps to:

> "write it out on a piece of paper all my ideas so I don't get lost and then I write it down better if I've made a good plan before I've written the essay"

This plan is provisional:

> "sometimes when I'm actually writing the essay I realise that I said something in my plan that's a bit wrong … I actually I add to the plan and, in my head, and then um just write out what I was thinking instead of completely following the plan"

This suggests that Hana is reviewing her ideas as she goes along, so that points which have been made can generate new points which she can then incorporate in the final text.

By the time of her second individual interview, Hana develops the "map" idea, describing a method I have not come across before:

> "I might be like thinking about the essay question at a specific time of the day so I write an idea down and I put it in my pocket and then I might have a different idea and put it in my pocket and then I go home and I look at all of them and then move them round and then write the essay"

The physical movement of different points into particular arrangements illustrates an understanding that there are various ways of organising material to fulfil a response to an examination question. Hana adds:

> "it's important to break up the essay into like small bits so like you might do a small part after it's set like one closer to the deadline and then like you can piece it all together at the end"

Here the writing is being considered over a period of time and its components can be pieced together, like a puzzle. Although Hana says in her next individual interview that this is not a method by which she "usually" plans her writing, it nevertheless recalls Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) definition of "knowledge transforming" writing, through which the process becomes a problem-solving activity. Through such "intentional writing" the learner can develop a deeper understanding of the material, finding links and connections in a way that is more usually achieved by discussion with a more able other. Hana's descriptions of using her own ways of organising her material show progression in her thinking about writing and greater sophistication in her reflections on her writing than Xavi is able to express.

Tara similarly explains her use of "mind maps" to organise her answers, in her first individual interview:

> "I'll put the question at the centre, I'll highlight the keywords, I'll highlight the actions which I'm supposed to do, like explain, convince that. I, and then I just do the points I need and just write notes on it like note form, yeah, that'll be the plan"

Her ideas are collected around her close reading of the examination question, which incorporates some analysis of the kind of writing which is expected ("explain, convince that"). This incorporates a further aspect of the "knowledge telling" model, in which the type or genre of writing which is expected also informs the collection of ideas which will form the text itself.

This method is detailed further by the time of her second individual interview, when Tara elaborates:

> "I'll mind map it first, so write down all the factors in certain sections and then I'll draw links upon them. That helps a lot, 'cos in your essay by linking factors you get, a higher mark so it's useful"

Here, there is development in her use of the maps and the way in which she understands their support. She is beginning to organise her ideas "in certain sections", so sorting them into potentially helpful categories from the start. The subsequent "linking" illustrates Tara's understanding of how to create a line of argument in her writing, although the idea is filtered through the concept of gaining a "higher mark", again showing the ever-present concern with assessment.

By the time of her final interview, Tara has developed a structure of her own, which she is able to apply to the writing demands in her History AS examination.

> "I think a good piece of writing, um so for instance you say your view right at the beginning, like you hones – not like your conclusion at the start but in some ways making your intro sound like your conclusion, say this is your point, this is what you're talking about and then in your essay just explaining it instead of building it up. I really don't like the building up essays and then doing the conclusion I like the point to be made and then they just give the reasons because it makes it a bit more, you know, show that the writer's really confident about their um like research so you should be confident in them as well, so I find that really useful and strong"

Tara's description shows a clear understanding of what she is trying to do with her writing ("saying your view right at the beginning") and how she will continue it ("I like the point to be made and then develop it"). Unlike an alternative structure in which there is "building up and then doing the conclusion", Tara's version has an immediacy about it as well as probably avoiding the repetition and redundancies of

something like Xavi's version in which nothing new is added to the conclusion. Tara's account of her writing shows an appreciation of how it can be received by the reader ("show the writer's really confident") and the benefits of writing in this way (it is "really useful and strong"). This "knowledge transforming" approach positions Tara as a more autonomous writer, able to make her own decisions about selecting material and manipulating it to suit her purposes. This sense of agency over her writing came "late", Tara explains, just before her AS examinations, but a line of development in her writing can therefore be traced from her first interview to her last one.

Linked to concepts of being able to manipulate the subject's material to respond to an examination question, is an attitude of what Tara describes as openness towards the subject. This is the view that there are different perspectives involved in fully understanding a subject and that there is not necessarily a "right" answer to be uncovered. This is the next section of this chapter.

5.4.2 Writing from different perspectives: "having a critical view is just really open" (Tara Individual Interview 2)

For the learners who are moving to a more "critical" stance in their writing, one feature is to be aware that their learning is partial and that there may be other interpretations of the topic. Tara's definition of "critical" writing which provides the heading for this section continues with her further explanation:

> "you wouldn't have a closed response to it saying it's definitely this, it'd be really looking really in depth into it and what other factors contributed or what other stuff stopped it so just having a broad opinion"

This is helped by the learners taking a reflective stance towards the material and viewing it in a wider perspective. For example, Hana is able to discuss the links between her three subjects, English Literature, History and Biology, in her first individual interview, where she also explains the way in which writing can help develop her understanding:

> "I think exploring perspectives other than my own is a really good way to become a better writer because you have to understand that you're not the only person who has a view on the world other people have lots of different perspectives and if you can open your mind to that then like it's like the way to enlightenment kind of"

Hana shows an awareness of how writing for her is a way of exploring ideas and is therefore not a fixed product. Her use of the word "enlightenment" indicates this

does not simply relate to examination boards' criteria but is at a different level of understanding, implying a sense of personal growth. She also says:

> "I think usually because essays are based on something you don't know about you, er if you take the time to research and to plan then the essay will help you to get more of an insight into the other person's perspective than just your own so like you er like ah get more open mindedness and can develop your own self through ah essay writing"

This "transformatory" view of writing, as a way of becoming more insightful and perceptive, as well as a way of increasing one's knowledge about a subject due to the research needed to complete it, seems a markedly different view of learning compared to writing to hit certain Assessment Objectives. Hana is the only learner in my study to discuss the power of writing in such terms, and she only does it in her first individual interview.

One reason for not returning to this topic in subsequent interviews may be because of the particular circumstances of the first individual interview, in which she and I spend some time discussing an imaginative response which she brings in, from when she was in Year 9. This was her example of a "good essay", an unexpected outcome of my lack of precision when asking the learners to bring such an item to their individual interviews. She also speaks about having "passion" in one's writing:

> "I think I read a quote once that said that um if you don't put passion in your writing you shouldn't write at all."

Hana continues that she therefore tries to do this by including her beliefs and opinions, even if these don't "rest" with what others might think. It may appear that she is referring to writing fiction here, but she does end her comment by relating this to her study of History, where you have to "explore you know both sides of the argument". Although she goes on to qualify how much this can be done when she has to keep in mind that she is writing for the examiner, Hana ends this part of the interview with a comment describing what a weaker essay would be: "it doesn't explore a lot of ideas it's very limited it has a narrow view of things".

Another interpretation of Hana not returning to her comments in her first interview concerning the power of writing could be that, as the first year of her A Level studies continues, she moves further away from the sort of writing in which "passion", "open-mindedness" and the development of "enlightenment" are not valued as much as the ability to fulfil the examination boards' requirements in the mark schemes. It can be argued that Hana is illustrating how, as an A Level writer, she has to negotiate between the demands of the assessment and her personal reaction to a

topic or a source she has read. One such requirement is to write in a "balanced" way, which illustrates an understanding of other perspectives on the content of her writing.

In her second individual interview, Hana gives an example of how she tries to show alternative views in her writing, discussing her English essay based on "A Streetcar Named Desire":

> "we had the essay there which is 'Blanche is degenerate and promiscuous and we don't have sympathy for her'. Um and you, you might have you know one opinion in your head but sometimes to make the argument more like, because your own, your personal opinion might not have enough points or it might not be coherent enough to put on, … so you might have to write a different perspective in order to make the essay better than how you would write it yourself"

This suggests Hana is moving from a personal response to a text she has read, with an individual reaction to a character, to understanding a need for more balanced observations in her essay writing. Linked to ideas that she must respond to "all aspects of the argument", Hana shows an awareness that she must consider opposing points of view in order to write effectively.

By the time of her third group interview, Hana is able to reflect on this idea more fully:

> "I would always talk about like a specific side of the argument and neglect the other side. But now I'm like, I kind of understand both sides of the argument better than I used to"

Here Hana explores a view of writing through which alternative views can be explored and investigated. This indicates a more detached and impartial view of the material, through which a more "open" or "broad" analysis of the different strengths of an argument may be examined.

In contrast, Xavi does not speak either so eloquently or so convincingly about his writing being "open" or "broad". He does say that he can be "creative" and "think outside the box" in his Media Studies lessons, and when asked to explain this term says:

> "You had to really think very deeply to define, information and meanings that people might not really see, like not the typical answers you would say but more the unique answers"

Xavi gives as an example how a character might be dressed in a particular way to signify some traits, but seems to lack confidence in expressing these "meanings",

speaking in his final interview about how his Media Studies teacher can support him in picking out things he has not noticed:

> "he gives his own ideas as well what it shows, so we can try copy his style of how to spot things"

Although it is not the aim of this research to explore this hesitancy in detail, it suggests that Xavi, rather than being "creative" in his interpretations, is reluctant to commit to any that are not based in the authority of his teacher's comments. Looking to his teacher as a model to "copy" does not suggest any adaptation or what Xavi might bring to this viewing of a media text himself. In this sense, he can be said to be sticking to the more passive, "pupil"-like view of himself as a learner. He may see this as a safer course, ensuring that he keeps within the requirements of his assessments, but at best it fails to develop the sort of qualities that will be important in his move into higher education, while at worst it is hampering his development as an A Level learner. Alternatively, Hana and Tara talk about their learning in more confident and personalised ways, illustrating more autonomous "student"-like features in their views of learning.

Having explored the ways the learners discuss "writing competently" and "writing critically" in their assessed essays, I now look at how these two aspects are negotiated by the learners as they develop a "writerly voice" in the texts they generate. All of them understand there is a need for both qualities in their writing, but, by focussing on each participant separately, I explore in more detail how one aspect may predominate at a particular time, having an impact on the individual's view of him or herself as a learner at A Level.

5.5 Developing a "writerly voice": "you want to show your ideas so by writing, it does help because as I say it will be personalised to you" (Tara Individual Interview 2)

In this section, I consider each learner individually to explore how their "voice" in their writing is influenced by the need to write both "competently" and "critically" at A Level. I argue that it is through negotiating both these aspects that the learners develop not only a "personalised" form of writing but also an individualised stance towards their learning, impacting on their views of themselves as participants in the "community of discourse" to which the texts give them entry. This potentially increases their sense of agency and encourages more independence in their attitudes towards their studies: a more "student"-like approach.

I begin with Xavi, whose writing is most heavily influenced by the requirements of assessment and knowing the content "by heart".

5.5.1 Xavi and writing for the examiner: "I need to know my content to be like, for my essays to look more A* and stuff like that" (Individual Interview 2)

Of the three learners in the research, Xavi is the most cautious in his writing. His preference for following a structure has been discussed and he speaks frequently of how he traces his improvements in his writing by "knowing" the content and by doing what his teachers have set out for him to do.

Consequently, Xavi appreciates exemplars of examination answers which he is given, crediting them with improving his writing:

> "one of my teachers showed us an example of like, how precise it was, how precise an answer could be, and that helped me change it 'cos I just looked at it and … said to myself that's how the stuff I'm writing is kinda pointless, like, and, just like do what the example answer says"

It is uncertain what made Xavi rate his writing as "pointless" although it might be linked to his concerns about "waffling" or repeating points which do not contribute to the marks he wants. His comments, however, indicate that he is not using the contrast between his own writing and an exemplar answer to explore what could be taken from his own response. Rather, as it is seemingly valueless, he decides to abandon any individual or "personalised" response in favour of replicating the model answer.

Xavi describes his pattern of working in his third group interview:

> "Like for Psychology I bring my laptop to the library and I go over the website and if I like don't get it I answer some, the, read the content memorise it and answer some exam questions about it"

Although making substantial effort in his studies, Xavi essentially sees writing as an activity carried out in isolation and for the purpose of gaining (or losing) marks in an assessment. The repetition of "read" the content, "memorise" and then "answer some exam questions" appears to be a closed circuit, where Xavi checks his understanding only in terms of whether he can answer an examination question on the topic. He may be encouraged in this method by the experience he relates in his second individual interview, in which the same question he had practised beforehand came up in the mock examinations, but this lucky event is unlikely to reoccur. He also explains that he usually marks the examination answers he writes himself, saying his teachers have no time to do it and disparaging the idea of peer

marking as other learners may just give "random ticks" with no secure knowledge of the mark scheme. His own ability to mark as an examiner or a teacher would is left unexplored. He does not speak of his family providing any practical support for his studies, only stating that they are "supportive" of his decision to go to university. He says that he did not have any tutoring to reinforce his studies at GCSE and when speaking about his current studies mentions only a "friend" who introduces him to a web-site for Psychology. He seems, as a learner, to be more attuned to using online resources, also speaking in his first individual interview about a site he has found for Media Studies:

> "there's stuff online which where other people, other students analyse, uh, videos, clips, which and they're quite good at it … just watching them analyse a piece of work might help me"

This resource may be useful but again positions Xavi in a passive, observer's place. He does not have a more able other to discuss ideas with and therefore relies on the authority provided by his teachers and the examination boards.

His reluctance to take risks is seen in the extra reading which he completes for his studies. This is used primarily to "plug the gaps" in his knowledge which he feels his texts books do not do, providing extra points. He recommends, in his second individual interview, the online resources he finds which provide more information about how to achieve certain Assessment Objectives:

> "for Psychology there's a website that has um essay questions like 16 markers like that and then they show us explicitly which one's AO1 points and AO3 points and I understood it from there … one of my friends told me about it … And, if there's stuff missing from the text book er and it's kinda useful from the website I take some stuff from the website. And that's it."

A further advantage is that the online book is set out in bullet points, so is easier to navigate, while the textbook is "just like big chunks of paragraphs again". Although the layout may make it more accessible, it is unlikely that the format of this resource provides Xavi with a model of the kind of academic discourse he needs to be becoming more familiar with to make progress in his studies.

Another way to supplement his knowledge is provided in the "packs" which his Sociology teacher provides:

> "because there's not much evaluation points in our textbooks, um our teacher gives us like minipacks of her own. She does the research for us as well. … she gives us like little booklets for extra evaluation points … 'Cos er the textbook um, they're like quite vague and they don't um expand er points in much detail."

When asked if his teacher ever provides him with articles or anything similar to read for himself, Xavi says she has "never" done that. Xavi, again, appreciates this work being done for him to help him deal with the amount that he has to learn. However, the provision of "extra evaluation points" from the teacher's own "research" cuts Xavi off from the discourse community of academic writing, as well as reducing any opportunities he may have to articulate his own evaluations of the topics he is studying.

Xavi finds greater security in keeping to the structures and frameworks authorised by the examination boards and his teachers. He can be described as being still in the "pupil"-like relationship to his studies, with little risk-taking or experimentation in his writing. He appears happier to write with the "voice" of an "examination candidate" than of a "peripheral participant" (English 2011) of the academic discourse community. Xavi works hard, but his isolation from other resources such as discussion of the subject with more able others, reduces his confidence in personalising his knowledge. As such, he feels his writing is most successful when he follows the guidance given by his teachers and focusses on how to maximise the marks awarded in the examination. This, coupled with his focus on learning the content "by heart" leaves him little time to explore alternative interpretations or broaden his understanding of ways of writing through suitable reading experiences. He is most concerned with covering the content effectively, learning it thoroughly and re-producing it in examination answers which are targeted towards maximising the available marks. Such approaches may be encouraged by teachers who are looking for quicker and more easily "teachable" ways of completing the course, but it is unlikely that these practices develop either Xavi's abilities as a confident writer or his view of himself as an independent learner.

5.5.2 Hana and writing for learning: "it's about how it resonates in the world we live in now" (Individual Interview 1)

Throughout the research period, Hana shows she can be both reflective and articulate when discussing her writing. She frequently speaks of the ways in which writing can be developmental, both for herself and for others. In her quotation above, she is speaking about her study of Orwell's novel "1984" which she contrasts to her study of texts at GCSE:

> "we're not exploring just the plot and the characters we're exploring what Orwell meant um to say in his writing like it's it's not just about the fictional world he made it's about how it resonates in the world we live in now"

Throughout her first individual interview, she describes writing as way of exploring new ideas, about the world and about herself. It seems that she already has a strong sense of her "voice" as a writer, explaining:

> "I read a quote once that said that um if you don't put passion in your writing you shouldn't write at all. Yeah, so I try to do that, I try to incorporate my own opinions beliefs into my own writing and er sometimes that might not rest in with other people because they might have different opinions"

The discussion at this point is based around her example of a "good" piece of writing which she brought to the interview which is, unexpectedly, a response she wrote in Year 9 to a text she was studying in her English lesson, "The Hunger Games" (Collins 2008). This is an accomplished piece in which she shows an assured style, writing as a character in a story she obviously knows well. Further discussion reveals that Hana has a rich reading background from when she was younger (although reading for pleasure is something her studies prevent her from doing now):

> "I didn't know a lot of authors so I just read whatever I found, what I liked the book cover of … I used to go to the library like almost every day, get books and then finish them really quickly and return them and get new ones … I liked mostly thrillers and horror stories they were really nice … I also liked ermm, like things like 'The Hunger Games' 'Mazerunner' and um there was er there were also comic books like Asterix and Obelix, Tintin, I loved those … I read an account of er an African slave, I think it was called … I read er Edgar Allen Poe a little bit, I like his horror stories so his books were really nice … Franz Kafka was uh another one … I tried to read um it wasn't really successful but I tried to read um I think it was called Leo Tolstoy. It was, I think, 'War and Peace'"

This list suggests a voracious and a confident reader, who is able to pick up a range of books from different genres, different times and different cultures. Although it may seem she has an indiscriminate approach, getting "what I liked the book cover of", it seems rather that she has a belief that there might be something worthwhile in any book. As she is going to the library "almost every day", if a book does not appeal to her, there is no time or money lost, and she can just get a different one on the next occasion. If some texts are not "really successful" like "War and Peace", Hana can go on to the next, perhaps returning to it later:

> "I didn't really have like all the patience to read it all then I think if I did try now I would be able to if I had free time"

Unlike Tara, who describes herself as a more reluctant reader, Hana explicitly links her reading and her writing, saying that through exploring "other perspectives" in what she reads, she can become a "better writer".

Her reading experiences have given her access to what Meek describes (1995) as a "storehouse" of the ways of presenting the world that texts provide. At a surface level, her reading provides her with some knowledge of the conventions of certain types of literature. Her reading of dystopian young adult fiction stands her in good stead when studying "1984" for example. At a more significant level, her positive engagement with reading echoes Meek's description of reading for younger children as "enjoyment and a kind of deep play", enabling them to access "metaphors for ways of thinking and feeling before these can be deliberately explored." (1995 p. 8)

Similarly, Hana's study of "1984", now that she is studying at A level, is not concerned just with "characters" and "plot" but with how the ideas in the text "resonate" with the world "we live in now". It can be argued that the study of Literature lends itself to investigating abstract concepts and the richness of lived experiences, so Hana, as the only learner in my study taking English Literature for A Level, is positioned differently to the other learners in this respect. However, Xavi, who is studying disciplines which equally examine social and cultural concepts (Media Studies, Psychology and Sociology), never speaks about his learning in the same terms.

By the time of her third individual interview, Hana can develop her ideas further:

> "when you read the news or like you hear the news you see it in a different light like you see that there's always an agenda behind it rather than just like it's an empty-headed news report it's actually and you know it has an agenda, and people behind it are pushing that agenda … I have an example, like um the other day my Dad was driving me to school and er I think Radio 4 was on and erm there was talking about a genomic revolution and they was saying to implement this revolution there's going to be there's going to need to be like a lot of database of everyone's genes but that the problem with that is when you when you put everybody's personal information and genes specifically in a database you can start to anticipate how they'll act what diseases they'll have and they can manipulate you know erm consumer sort of erm consumer interests and and materialism"

For Hana, this report linked to her study in Biology of genetics and her study in English Literature of dystopias. Hana's integration of her learning with "the world we live in now" shows a development of a critical stance towards a variety of experiences, including a radio news item heard by chance. Her awareness that there are "people" who author such items and that they have an "agenda" (which in this instance may not be wholly beneficial to society) reveals the analytical approach of a critical reader, which she describes as seeing ideas "in a different light".

In another contrast to Xavi, who works mainly in isolation from his peers, Hana speaks warmly about the support that her fellow learners can provide and seems to prefer their examples rather than those provided by the examination boards. Describing in her second individual interview how a teacher had copied and distributed an essay written by a classmate, she explains it

> "motivated us even more because we were looking at somebody in our own class and um like it was more personal"

A more immediate and familiar example is more meaningful for her and she later elaborates that it gives her "inspiration to do better in my own work". This could be because she can understand more readily the way an essay has been shaped by another person who has received the same teaching and materials that she has. Hana consistently sets herself high standards, but this approach also, I suggest, shows a willingness to reflect on her own writing in ways which, although connected to the eventual mark which is given, pushes her further to consider the way material can be manipulated to address the question set for response.

This seems to echo the way that Hana regards her father as a role model, whom she wants emulate. Described as "clever", Hana says she wants to "be like him" in her first individual interview. Having studied for two degrees, one in English Literature and one in Psychology, he is an easily accessible representative of higher education for her. He also provides more immediate, practical support. In her second individual interview, Hana explains how he gave her advice in one aspect of her writing for her Extended Project Qualification (EPQ):

> "I was writing a lot about ecology and public health so umm my Dad … he just looked over it for me and gave me some ideas and concepts in academic theory that might be useful … my Dad was telling me to emphasise the point about er parent responsibility because he said that was very important in all of the er the statistics and um the books that he's read on the subject"

Given that the EPQ is relatively unsupported by Ingleby School, it is of great benefit to Hana to have someone with experience of the type of writing that she has to produce in her home. This is not only at the level of providing ideas of what to include, but also covers stylistic matters:

> "I think once I used the words 'the Western' and my Dad thought that might be too, um like controversial, not controversial but like people have different viewpoints on what 'Western' actually means so he said you should use words like simply defined words that um which everyone can understand"

The availability of a more able other, with whom Hana can discuss her work at home, provides her with opportunities to articulate her ideas, acting as a Zone of

Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1987) leading to an "internalisation" of her learning. In her access to such a role-model in the home, her positive engagement with exemplar material and the impact of her reading on her writing, Hana has much in common with Tara. However, Tara, perhaps due to the shorter time-scale she is working under, with an end-of-course examination to be taken at the end of Year 12, takes more innovative steps towards improving her writing, which are considered in the next section.

5.5.3 Tara and writing as experimenting: "I'm trying to do a new thing" (Individual Interview 2)

As discussed in an earlier section, Tara experienced some frustrations with her teacher's marking of her History essays, finding that it did not help her make progress.   Focus on content in her lessons left her, she felt without a clear "direction" to follow in her writing. Tara's initial response to this was through her use of exemplar material. Saying in her first individual interview that she found exemplar material "really useful" because she could use it to "evaluate" her writing, she explained it helped:

> "to get the structure in my mind of what it's supposed to be and then I can just, well not memorise it, just know "it's best to talk about this half" and not just leave it"

This is in contrast to Xavi's idea to "just do what the example answer says". Tara instead, at this early stage of the course, already understands that she can use it as a "structure" but not as a template, leaving her with decisions to make about what is "best" to go in which parts of the answer. Crucially, it is not enough to "memorise" the answer, but instead to compare her essay to what the example has done, looking at her own answer's strengths and weaknesses.

By the time of her second individual interview, Tara has developed this strategy further:

> "I'm trying to do a new thing where I take a good long time on one certain essay and try and, instead of timing myself try and make that close to full marks, and from there hopefully, by having one exemplar for myself which I would understand 'cos normally, the ones on the sites on the website they're really, everyone's essays are personalised to themselves so by me having an exemplar which I would understand, would be better for me to follow instead of following someone else's, the way they've structured it"

This method seems centred on her concept that everyone's writing is "personalised" which means that the exemplars provided by the examination board are of limited

use. Through writing her own "full marks" essay, which she has taken as long as is necessary to create, she has a text which she can "understand" and is "better" for her to follow. This customising of her writing to the demands of the examination board as well as to the way that she feels confident to write is thus a blend of the two demands to write "competently" and to write "critically".

By the time of her third individual interview, Tara has made a further development in her writing, coming up with her own version of a suitable essay structure, as discussed earlier in this chapter (5.4.2). She acknowledges that there are risks in moving away from a framework authorised by teachers or examination boards ("it came to me really late") but is willing to take the chance ("but I'm happy it did"). Tara may feel more pressure than the other learners to develop a personalised response to an examination question because she is the only one who is taking a formal, external examination at the end of Year 12, as her History qualification is AS. Unlike the other two, who have another year to work on their essays before the terminal examination, Tara may feel that she has to take action for herself, as the examination date nears and as she feels her teacher is not giving her the support she wants. However, there are other influences on Tara.

Firstly, Tara, by the end of the research period, has become a reader of other historians' works. She has been introduced to these with the help of her older sister, who is studying History at university and has recommended writers for Tara to read ("there's 'The Russian Revolution' by Orlando Figes" she explains in her first individual interview). Tara herself seems surprised by the impact this has on her writing, explaining in her first individual interview:

> "I wasn't really into reading no, but I'm star - I really wanna become one now 'cos my family's always told me to read, really read but I just didn't - pleasure, I just didn't find it interesting, but my sister always said it's a habit so you need to train, not train yourself but force yourself to sit for the hour or a couple of days and then you'll get used to it like it'll be fine"

The practice to "force" or to "train" oneself to read does not sound appealing, but Tara has a pragmatic approach to her studies and, with the example of family members encouraging her, tries it for herself (although she does add that she does not see the point in reading "fiction" which is not related to her studies). Tara acknowledges that it is through reading the works of historians that it helps her writing to be more "critical":

> "to be 'oh this event could be seen like this, however it can also be seen like this'"

By the time of her final individual interview, Tara's reading gives her increasing confidence in describing the "academic discourse" of historians. Echoing Hyland's view (2015) that all academic writing is persuasive, she comments:

> "every historian has a different view and they obviously have their own writing style to show that view and the historian's aim is to make their view really believable like my one's right. And obviously with every book I read when they write they make it really persuasive, they make it really certain that oh this is really important, this event's really important however this event not so important whereas other textbooks they make the other event seem important. And it's just the words they use and how they phrase it which really helped me with my essays to try and pr - especially with the source question ones where we had to prioritise and have actually used their techniques to try and prioritise my, um which source was better so it was really useful."

In this lengthy quotation, Tara identifies three different ways in which reading other historians helped with her own writing. Firstly, she notes that there are different ways of interpreting events in History, showing her "open" view of the subject she is studying. She is also aware that historians are attempting to write their version as "really persuasive", understanding that she, as the reader, is being asked to accept their views through the articulacy of their arguments. Her appreciation of this "persuasive" purpose enables her to identify certain phrases and, perhaps more importantly, "their techniques" which organise their material to support their ideas. The final stage is for Tara herself to use these techniques, particularly when responding to the "source" question, to evaluate the relevance or effectiveness of each source. This is more sophisticated than just following a model answer or lifting academic phrases from a text. Tara has arrived at her own way of writing, using her own "voice", through joining the demands of the genre of the examination answer with elements of the genre of academic writing.

A second, perhaps more substantial, influence over Tara's writing, comes from experiences which she has outside school. Cooke and Wallace (2004) consider the ways learners bring their "outside" knowledge of the world into play in their interpretations of the text and the task in the classroom, drawing on their "linguistic, cultural and intellectual resources". In her first individual interview, Tara discusses her role as a Maths tutor in her family's tuition business. Children from primary to secondary age attend and Tara's role seems to include making resources for the sessions as well as running them. In her third individual interview, Tara explicitly links her work as a tutor with her approaches to learning in her A Level courses. Responding to my question which suggests that Maths is different to her studies in History, with only one "right" answer, Tara disagrees. She goes on to explain that

her experience of working with Maths problems has taught her that you can approach them

> "using this method, using that method … because like each person is going to be different and they prefer a different technique".

The choice of method should not affect the answer reached at the end,

> "whereas for history you can approach it in different ways and then you'll get a different answer as well so different reasons why this is important, that important. So, for history there isn't really a correct answer"

This does not cause her a loss of confidence, however, because Tara continues by showing how she has understood the way the History essay will be marked:

> "obviously the grading is based on how well you write not about oh this one has to be right, this source is the best, if they write this other source then they're getting the marks it's not like that, it's more like how your writing shows that you think this source is the best"

This developed response from Tara indicates to me that her reflection on her work as a Maths tutor has led to greater clarity in her understanding of how an essay can be written. There is an appreciation that, although there is no "correct" answer ("it's not like that") it is "how well you write … how your writing shows that you think this source is best". This acknowledgement of the partial and contingent aspects of the material which she uses in History leads to an understanding that it is the skill with which the arguments are marshalled that will create a successful piece of writing. It also shows a more advanced recognition of the complexity of learning itself, in which many methods can lead to the same end result.

It is therefore by drawing on resources and experiences from outside her studies, such as her family, her reading and her reflections on her work as a tutor, that Tara increases her confidence in her writing, finding an agency which spurs her on to experiment with it. Looking back over Year 12 in her final individual interview, Tara says: "I did have to play a lot with my writing".

This suggests a view of writing, even for assessment, as one in which mistakes can be made, experiments can be tried and successes built on further. Viewing writing in this investigatory way creates greater independence and autonomy in the learner, which can then influence not only their writing in the subject, but their approach to learning as a whole.   Although Tara decides to drop History after taking the AS Level, she carries through to her Year 13 studies experiences in learning which

have been successful and will support her in the future. For example, she continues with her reading, although this time focussing on Maths:

> "I've read A Mathematician's Apology that was really good. I don't agree with some of its views but it was okay, it was a good read. It was really honest … and I read Alex Through the Looking Glass who's another mathematician and it just explained how the maths we do in school it really doesn't apply to everyday life and how they've used it from, how methods from like the Greek and the Roman periods are still applicable today so it was good, it was a really good read"

Tara's evaluative comments indicate her ability to appreciate a "good read" even if she does not "agree" with the views expressed, and appear to be distant from her opinions in her first individual interview that she has to "train" or "force" herself to read. Her experience of the benefits of engaging with historians' texts while studying for her AS level seem to have bolstered her appreciation of the "*nature and variety of written discourse"* (Meek Spencer 1988) which she can profitably extend in her studies in higher education.

5.6 Overview of Chapter 5: revisiting the research questions

Through my reading of the literature, based in concepts of literacy as socially, culturally and historically embedded, I have placed the views and experiences of the learners at the centre of my study. Through detailed analysis of their descriptions of the writing they complete I have sought to answer the over-arching research question:

How do three Year 12 learners negotiate the demands of writing examination essays at A Level?

This type of writing is the only type the learners say they currently have time for and which they value. Moving into a different set of literacy practices, they are aware that their writing has to be different to that completed for GCSE assessments. This therefore has lead me to my first sub-question:

- **How do the learners describe the writing that they have to do?**

Stating they have "no time" for reading and writing outside their studies, the learners become experts in the conventions and expectations of the examination essay which can be identified as a genre in itself. Their descriptions are closely tied to terms lifted from mark schemes and examination criteria, indicating an underdeveloped sense of what makes "good" writing outside of these requirements. A consistent pre-occupation in all the learners with "getting the grade" promotes a

restricted view of writing as a product. However, there are examples of Hana and Tara acknowledging that there can be broader opportunities provided by the view of writing as a process, through which ideas can be analysed, manipulated and interpreted to explore different "perspectives" on the subjects' content.

My second sub-question concerns the support the learners draw on to assist them in their essay writing:

- **What resources do they draw on to support their writing and how do they make use of them?**

The learners are well-served within school with resources which support the model of writing as a product, in which the end result, the assessment, of the writing is emphasised. This leads to a focus on "writing competently" and a more passive "pupil"-like view of oneself as a learner. At the same time, A Level studies demand more abstract thinking about more complex material, in which evaluation and interpretation are valued. Viewing writing as a process is beneficial here, allowing learners to reflect on their writing and manipulate the content in response to the question. This encourages the learners to utilise writing as a way of exploring different perspectives, highlighting aspects of "writing critically" through which the more autonomous and "student"-like learner takes increasing individual responsibility for his or her studies. In my analysis, this is less well supported by school resources and it is arguably through applying experiences and assistance external to school that Tara and Hana become more independent in their writing and learning.

This then links to the third sub-question in my research:

- **Do their views of themselves as writers and as learners alter during the first year of study and, if so, how?**

In this stage of my analysis, I explore the learners' approaches towards their writing, taking each participant in turn. In the same way that in Bereiter and Scardamalia's model (1987), "knowledge telling" is not separate to but is embedded in "knowledge transforming", so "writing competently" cannot be ignored by A Level learners, but must be incorporated into "writing critically" in order for them to achieve success in their essay writing. The extent to which the learners are able to negotiate between these two demands influences the development of a "writerly voice".

Xavi finds confidence and security in organising his writing mainly in terms of a response to the examination question. His voice in his writing is limited to that of an "examination candidate". He draws almost entirely on resources provided by school and appears to view writing as a solitary task in which following the structure overrides a more individualised response. He relies most on "writing competently", through following pre-learnt structures and using the assessment criteria to guide his writing.

Hana, building on her rich reading background, has an established view of herself as a writer early in the research period, linked to her understanding of how writing facilitates responses to the world around her. Although her A Level essays do not provide her with opportunities to exhibit her "passion" in her writing, she continues to reflect on the connections between her studies and her life experiences throughout the research period. She speaks eloquently about transformative approaches to her writing tasks, but this seems to be mainly confined to interviews early in Year 12. This may be incidental or could indicate a greater concern with "writing competently" rather than "writing critically" as her A Level studies progress.

Tara, through experimenting with her writing and reflecting on her experiences as a tutor, finds a voice in her examination answers through which she can negotiate the demands of both "writing competently" to fulfil examination requirements and "writing critically" incorporating a "personalised" response to her studies. Her own reading of academic texts reinforces her awareness of the need to consider the reader and to "persuade" her audience of the authenticity of her response.

Returning to my over-arching research question, it is through the negotiation of the demands of "writing competently" and "writing critically" at A Level that the learners in my study begin to explore an increased agency in their writing, assisting their development of a "writerly voice". In my research, Tara and Hana are more successful in moving towards a more autonomous "student"-like position, while Xavi seems less able to relinquish his more "pupil"-like approach to writing and to learning. The implications of these findings are explored in the next chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 6: Final thoughts: what does this research contribute to the study of writing and what are its implications?

6.1 Hana's final thoughts

> "Essay writing is … the teacher can see your progress and your understanding of the subject … when you're writing the essay you like accumulate all of the information you planned and you put it in one place so you in your writing you can look back at the essay and understand what you've learned from your own words." (Hana Individual Interview 3)

In this quotation from Hana, at the end of the research period, she brings together aspects of essay writing which I have sought to explore in this thesis. Hana describes the A Level essay as having an essential part to play in her assessment. It is by reading the learner's essay that the teacher can see "progress and your understanding", illustrating how such writing gives learners opportunities to illustrate their comprehension of their subjects' content ("Conveying your intelligence on paper" as Hana puts it in her first individual interview). This can encourage an emphasis on "writing competently" in which a detailed knowledge of the examination criteria and the structure to follow for the written response is as important as knowing the content of the subject. Hana goes on to describe that the essay provides "one place" for her to collect "the information you planned", suggesting a more reflective and selective approach to the material, one which I have identified as "writing critically", a process through which different perspectives are possible. I view as significant that in this part of her comment there is a shift from the eyes of the teacher seeing the learner's writing, making a judgement on what has been generated, to the learner's own view of the text, to "look back at the essay".   Hana's consideration of her writing then enables her to "understand what you've learned from your own words". Hana's comprehension is deepened through the transformative approach she takes to her writing and is intertwined with the development of her "writerly voice" through which ideas are expressed with increasing independence.

6.2 What does this research contribute to the study of writing and how can it be developed?

My analysis uncovers the problematic nature of the development of writing at A Level. It could be said that the entire problem is that there is no understanding that writing is a skill which still requires development at A Level. All the learners in my research had acquired at least a B at GCSE English Language, a key qualification to ensure entry to A Level study. This may lead to a belief, from learners and

teachers alike, that there is no need for further instruction in how to write well. Instead, the focus becomes how to write to fulfil examination criteria, explaining why understanding these becomes another aspect of the discipline which has to be learnt and applied.

There seems to be less research interest in the development of writing in older children, compared to other aspects of the field. Early writing development, writing while learning a new language or the writing of students in higher education were topics which I found readily accessible when beginning my reading for this study, but work on the writing development of older teenagers was not so prevalent. Therefore, my research contributes to this gap, based in my view that in entering A Level study, learners become engaged in a new range of literacy practices which demand equally explicit consideration as those in other educational contexts.

One way in which my research could be built on would be to extend it into Year 13 and beyond that into the first year of undergraduate study, which all my participants expected to form the next step in their education. As my research links the journey from GCSE to A Level writing though exploring the transition period of Year 12, so research centred on slightly older writers could investigate the writing strategies learners carry forward into degree level study and what influence they have on their understanding of effective writing. Exploring in more detail the "jump" which has to be made into new arenas of literacy practices, with a focus on the descriptions and experiences of the learners themselves, would be fruitful for educators in both secondary and higher education.

Two further possible areas of research are linked more closely to the implications of my study. The first is to explore in detail the writing demands of specific subjects at A Level. The lack of an effective language with which to describe "good" writing on the part of both learners and teachers aside from that derived from examination syllabuses and mark schemes is discussed in section 6.4 of this chapter. The second area is linked to the implications of my finding that learners seem to have a restricted view of writing, namely as product. They appear rarely supported through classroom practices to see it as a process, perhaps due to such a view of writing incorporating "dynamic and unpredictable" qualities (Tribble 1996). This is discussed further in section 6.5 of this chapter. It could be argued that such approaches to writing have been considered in earlier research and so do not need to be repeated. James Britton's assertion that writing floats on a "sea of talk" in the 1970s is still relevant today. However, my study suggests that the changes which

schools have seen, culturally and politically, in recent years, justify revisiting such work and applying it to the vastly different educational contexts of the early 21st century.

I begin my consideration of the implications of my research, however, with revisiting aspects of genre and in particular the genre of A Level essays.

6.3 Implications of the research: the efficacy of the A Level essay

As discussed in chapter 2, the A level essay is a form of writing which is rarely encountered outside an educational context. However, within this context, the essay provides particular communication possibilities in a given set of circumstances. Learners, teachers and examiners need to know how much progress has been made in studying the topic, what has been understood and how the knowledge can be applied in fresh situations. In this sense, the writing fits the definition of a genre as a typified social action, associated with a recurrent situation (Miller 1984).

Indeed, the A Level Assessment Objectives which the learners in my study spend considerable time and effort familiarising themselves with, show a focus on writing to articulate key aspects of the relevant discipline. AO1 in the History A Level specification (AQA 2017) requires that candidates

> "Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance."

In English Literature (AQA 2017), AO1 states the writing must:

> "Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression."

These descriptions illustrate the boards' assumptions that this form of writing can allow examination candidates to display their knowledge through well-chosen examples and supported arguments. In this sense, the A Level essay echoes Olsen's portrayal of academic writing (2016) in which the precise use of language allows logical implications to be drawn over the course of a developed and coherent line of argument.

It is not a coincidence, I feel, that Olsen's description includes the words used by the learners in my study to typify a "good" essay: that it is "precise", "coherent" and

"develops ideas". The essay has "affordances" (English 2011) which mediate between the idea and the production of that idea as an "utterance" (Bahktin 1981). Practice and experience support the expectations of the producers and the receivers of the text, which is generated in a specific social and cultural context. It can be argued that A Level learners write A Level essays because that is the writing that A Level learners do. This helps to clarify why the participants in my study said they had "no time" to write anything other than essays for their studies and did not identify other writing as "proper" writing.

The A level essay then, can be viewed as an identifiable genre of writing, with specific features. Models and frameworks can be generated because there are obvious qualities which can be isolated in the text, so that, for example, Tara's essay can be "colour-coded" for the different Assessment Objectives (page 88 of this thesis).

However, this "container model" of genre (Devitt 2004) separates form from content, so that the genre is the form into which the content is placed. Writing is then identified as an A Level essay because it has certain features associated with this form, but this is a circular argument: the writing matches the features of the genre because the features can be identified but the features have been identified because the writing has been classified as a particular genre. Such an approach carries the risk of seeing a genre as stable and unchanging, leading to a "product" focussed approach to writing.

Consequently, explicit teaching of the form of an A Level essay, divorced from consideration of its communicative potential, does not have the empowering effect that some might expect. However, if genre is seen as a dynamic response to a set of circumstances, communication becomes the central focus. The identifiable features of the genre become efficient transmitters of responses in the recognised social and cultural setting. Learners are given access to efficient methods of delivering their knowledge and understanding in an educational discourse which values the expression of their ideas. Devitt (2004) suggests a pedagogical approach of teaching "genre awareness", encompassing how genres develop and why they are used. This encourages a more flexible definition of the type of writing which is expected, as a form which is shaped by those who use it, not only those who assess it.

The A Level essay, then, has advantages for teachers and learners, as an assessment tool and as a way of communicating increasingly articulate responses

to more complex academic concepts. However, my research suggests that within A Level classes, it is the assessment aspect which is emphasised, an approach which I have identified as "writing competently".

6.4 Implications of the research: writing competently and learning to write

All the learners in my research are focussed on grades and assessments of their writing. Tara, for example, speaks of being quickly "in the exam zone" in her studies, which she contrasts to the slower "build-up" to examinations in her GCSE studies. As discussed earlier in the thesis, there is a willingness from learners to understand the complexities of their assessment and a willingness from teachers to devote class time to analysing the Assessment Objectives and the details of the mark schemes to give candidates their best chance in the examinations. Although based in good intentions on both sides, this emphasis on the end-point of the writing creates a view of writing as a product, in which the features of a "good" essay are reduced to where marks can be awarded or lost.

My IFS identified that A Level teachers whom I interviewed wanted to move away from the reductive position in which there is "a writing frame for everything" (Bownas 2015) but an event which occurred in my research for my thesis illustrates that teachers may feel constrained to keep teaching the structures and practices which centre on "writing competently".

To try to find out where the acronym PEE (or PEA or PEAL, and so on) had come from, I contacted someone I had known when he was an English Advisor in the borough in which I work, asking him if he knew the derivation of these terms. I wrote that I had been teaching long enough to remember that it had not always been used in schools, but that I could not say when and why it had become so prevalent. He responded by email that he did not know himself, but thought it could have been originally linked to the work of Australian genre theorists. I later came across an article he wrote entitled: "Death by PEEL?" (Simon Gibbons 2019).   In this, he referenced my email as a starting point for exploring the influence of such structures to support writing in classrooms. Now working as a teacher educator at Kings College, London, he completed a small-scale piece of research: a questionnaire given to 20 PGCE trainee teachers of English, followed by a group interview with three of the cohort. The questionnaire found "analytical writing" was the most frequently undertaken genre with the use of PEE or similar structures used by all except two of the respondents. The interview prompted some positive

comments regarding the value of such structures to support writers to "know what they're doing".

The interviewees added that the overriding reason for the use of PEE and its variants was the focus, from the earliest years of secondary education, on the demands of the GCSE examination and the related pressures on teachers. Indeed, with external assessments also occurring at primary level, it can be said that there are few year groups in the English education system which are not preparing for examinations. A memorable acronym such as PEE arguably provides a useful structure for writing in various disciplines, especially for less confident writers. Its prevalence can be seen as evidence of its utility in a range of written responses and, it might be claimed, is therefore a valuable method of teaching learners how to write.

It may also be that the framework provides a reassurance for less confident teachers. In Simon Gibbons' research (2019), two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they themselves had been taught to write using PEE at school. In the same way that the learners in my study lacked a language with which to describe good writing apart from the descriptions of a good examination essay, so teachers may also feel unsure of what constitutes "good" writing in their disciplines. In such circumstances frameworks initially designed as helpful supports become reified into expected formats, while the careful analysis of mark schemes, intended to give greater transparency of assessment for learners is transformed into rigid writing templates.

Interestingly, Simon Gibbons' interviewees, just beginning their teaching careers, echoed the views of more experienced teachers in my IFS in describing the drawbacks of using PEE. The trainee teachers said the structures were over-used, that they meant that learners wrote uniform responses and, more worryingly, that they made the learners "sick of" writing in such a way, with one saying bluntly "they don't like English". However, they did not seem able to articulate any alternatives.

This raises significant pedagogical implications across disciplines and at an earlier stage in education than during the high-stakes examination years of secondary school. My research does not investigate to what extent teachers themselves lack the confidence or the knowledge to identify effective writing skills in their own subjects. However, my analysis does indicate that a learner like Xavi, reliant almost completely on school-based resources for his writing, is more reluctant to relinquish the more passive "pupil"- like approach to his studies. His descriptions of "good"

writing appear firmly based in the language of the mark schemes he spends so much time considering. Although he wants to write in ways which are "precise" and "coherent", these appear to be terms he has not fully understood. He therefore uses what he terms "connectives" to signpost to the examiner which Assessment Objectives certain parts of his writing are addressing, apparently disregarding how they might help his writing develop a line of argument (page 88 of this thesis). How far, therefore, the concepts of "precise" and "coherent" writing have been taught in his lessons seems problematic.

One way in which schools could support learners such as Xavi could be a focus on "language for writing" to give learners and teachers a shared vocabulary with which to explore the explicit varieties of "academic literacies" (Lea 2008). Pauline Gibbons (2009) uses a metaphor of a window to illustrate the use of language in academic contexts. More skilful users of language can see through "clear glass" and so access the content without obstruction. For those with less developed language skills, it is like looking through "frosted glass" so that the content is "hazy and unclear". It is the teacher's responsibility to:

> "hold language up to the light, to look *at* it, not *through* it … Every teacher in every subject needs to think of themselves as a teacher of language." (p. 46 Italics in original)

Such a cross-curricular approach to the explicit teaching of writing has significant implications for teacher training and for classroom practice. This apparent gap in teachers' experience and confidence is an area for further research, as I indicated earlier in this chapter. It is unclear how many teachers would be secure in their own understanding of "good" writing to clarify what is required in their disciplines and some may need support to teach this to others. Some may also express reluctance to shift from a focus on content to a focus on expression, citing the shortage of time they feel they have to complete the teaching of the whole syllabus before the examinations. Previous attempts to foster "Knowledge About Language" and "Language Awareness" have not met with particular success in British schools (English and Marr 2015). However, Pauline Gibbons' metaphor illustrates that it is only through language that the content can be expressed.   Explicit teaching of language in the classroom is not an additional burden; when taught **alongside** content, it has a profound effect on learners' comprehension **of** the content. In this sense, learning to write also has an impact on learning to learn.

6.5 Implications of the research: writing critically and learning to learn

As discussed earlier, approaching writing as a problem-solving activity can increase the learner's comprehension of the content (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). Through a process of "intentional writing", in which the learner "struggles" to generate a text, the learner engages in a more meaningful "knowledge transforming" expression of the material. This can reproduce some of the beneficial effects that a collaborative discussion with a more experienced other provides, embedding and internalising the learner's understanding. Such practices are, however, necessarily more time-consuming than the application of pre-learnt structures such as PEE and other acronyms. Teachers and learners consistently state that there is not enough time in A Level lessons to cover everything that needs to be done.

One strategy for teachers, therefore, could be to reduce the number of examination essays they ask the learners to complete. Experimentation with writing, addressed to audiences apart from the teacher/examiner, could provide learners with chances to select and manipulate the material of their subjects away from the anxiety of "getting the grade". There may, however, be resistance to spend time on such tasks, as they do not feed into the kind of writing learners will ultimately have to complete.

A more productive alteration in classroom practices could be the use of focussed discussion before any writing is attempted. The learners in my study did not mention this as a usual preliminary activity, although Tara suggested how discussion could help learners prepare for writing: "because debates will just be a verbal essay in a way and it's just a bit more fun". (Tara Individual interview 3)

Exercises which encourage learners to rehearse verbally the critical concepts of "contradiction, argument, inference and proof" (Olsen 2016) without the need to attach an examination grade to them could fundamentally alter the way learners approach their subjects. Drawing on Moffett (1968/1983) and the description of discourse as ""somebody-talking-with-somebody-else-about-something" (Andrews 2010), dialogic activities become "composing as an act of mind" (Burgess et al. 2010) through which cognitive development can be enriched. The learners move between concrete detail and rational abstraction of the material they are considering, alongside more personal engagement with the content.

Opening up classroom practices in this way may also reduce the "compartmentalization" of "school knowledge" and "cultural knowledge" (Brady 2013), so empowering learners to bring experiences from outside school into their

learning. Hana's reflection on her personal reading and Tara's linking of her Maths tutor experience to writing her History essays are unlikely to have been discussed in their A Level lessons, but in the interviews are confidently connected to their views of themselves as learners. Integrating different aspects of the writers' experiences ("bringing the outside in" (Cooke and Wallace 2004)) which are then placed in more investigative and problem-solving classroom scenarios positions teachers and learners in a "collaborative making of meaning" (Yandell 2014).

Perhaps most significantly, however, such verbal rehearsal of academic discourse embeds it in a social context, increasing its familiarity for the learners. Instead of being taught pre-constructed strategies through which language can be fitted into the correct "frame" to respond to an examination question, language becomes a tool, which the learner employs independently to express both knowledge and understanding. Increased exposure to and use of "subject-obligatory" terms embedded in suitable "subject-compatible" expressions (Snow, Met and Genesee 1989) in discussion emphasises the communicative purpose of subsequent writing. Such opportunities may encourage more independent approaches from the learners to their studies, fostering their "writerly voice".

6.6 Implications of the research: a writerly voice and learning independence

Writing can be described as a "highly consequential social activity" (Lillis 2013) through which people gain or are denied access to a range of social resources, such as education. A Level essay writers are engaged in generating texts which can have far-reaching consequences regarding their next steps after their examinations. In such circumstances, learners and teachers may feel justified in accepting without question strategies and practices for writing which are driven by assessment and mark schemes. Within the regulated context of an A Level essay, compliance is as much an active choice as resistance. Xavi believes that a good piece of writing means he has "used the structure like she [the teacher] gave me" and his improved marks over the course of Year 12 seem to vindicate his decision to follow her advice. Learners who feel less secure in their writing abilities, perhaps because they are also trying to manipulate complex content which they are not familiar with, may appreciate the start that recognisable frames and structures give to their writing.

However, my research suggests that, in order to achieve satisfactory texts at A Level standard, the learners in my study must engage in a process of negotiating the demands of writing competently and writing critically. As discussed earlier in

this thesis, examination criteria reward candidates who can express both informed and evaluative responses. This entails the development of a "writerly voice" through which the learners articulate their understanding of their subjects. Essayist literacy may privilege certain specific forms of language ("formal") or aesthetic values ("rational, logical") (Lillis 2011) but as discussed earlier in this chapter, the genre does not simply constrain the writer. Although the A Level essay can be described as a closely regulated arena of literacy practices, highlighting the communicative possibilities of the genre opens it up to more individualised responses by the writer. The sharing of models of good essays is already a feature of most A Level classes, but Hana uses them as "inspiration" rather than as templates to follow. Tara goes further and creates her own model essay which she describes as "personalised" to her own understanding of a top-grade essay. She then builds on this through "play" and experimentation, coming to the same conclusion as Hyland (2015) that academic writing is "persuasive". This focus on communication between writer and reader separated by distance and time releases teachers and learners from reductive approaches to writing, allowing knowledge and understanding to be conveyed in a more independent, efficient and quantifiable way.

6.7 My final thoughts

Throughout my research, I have had the experiences and views of the learners at A Level at the centre of my study. Their accounts have given me a better understanding of the processes that occur during A Level courses, by which GCSE "pupils" can become more independent "students" taking increasing responsibility for their learning. This incorporates understanding the negotiation of the demands of "writing competently" and "writing critically" in achieving success in examination essays, incorporating the development of a "writerly voice".

When I have been struggling with my writing of this thesis, I have been struck with how I too have to write both "competently" and "critically". I cannot forget that my writing needs to fulfil certain criteria which range from the number of words allowed to showing that I have made a "distinct contribution" to my field of study and that this writing will be assessed by experts. I have also found that labouring over how to construct the writing has extended my understanding of the concepts I explore, so that the text becomes a place to position, compare and link ideas, deepening my insight. As a doctoral level learner, I have had to find a suitable "writerly voice" through which I can show that I am both "competent" and "critical in my text, in order

to establish my independent stance towards the material I have selected as my evidence.

Revisiting Hana's descriptions of writing, attempts to "convey your intelligence on paper" have made me collect information in "one place" to "understand what you've learned from your own words". What I have found through my research and in the writing of this thesis is that learning how to write is as valuable as learning what to write and is crucial to becoming academically confident at all levels of education.

References

Andrews, R. (2003) The End of the Essay? *Teaching in Higher Education 8* (1) 117-128

Andrews, R. (2010) Moffett and Rhetoric *Changing English 17* (3) 251-260, doi:10.1080/135868X.2010.505439 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

AQA Examination Board: Mark schemes for A Level Subjects 2017

English Literature Online at: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/sample-papers-and-mark-schemes/2017/june/AQA-77121-W-MS-JUN17.PDF [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

History Online at: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/sample-papers-and-mark-schemes/2017/june/AQA-70421C-W-MS-JUN17.PDF [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Media Studies Online at: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/sample-papers-and-mark-schemes/2017/june/AQA-MEST3-W-MS-JUN17.PDF [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Psychology Online at: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/sample-papers-and-mark-schemes/2017/june/AQA-71821-W-MS-JUN17.PDF [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Sociology Online at: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/sample-papers-and-mark-schemes/2017/june/AQA-71922-W-MS-JUN17.PDF [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Aronson, J. (1995) A Pragmatic View of Thematic Analysis *The Qualitative Report* 2 (1) 1-3. doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/1995.2069 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Bakhtin, M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays* Austin Texas: University of Texas Press

Bailey, C. (2007) *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research* California: Pine Forge Press

Barton, D., Hamilton, M. and Ivanic, R. (eds) (2000) *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* London: Routledge

Bereiter, C. and Scardamalia, M. (1987) *The Psychology of Written Composition* New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

Bernstein, B. (1964). Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences. *American Anthropologist*, 66 (6) 55-69. Last retrieved March 27, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/668161

Black, P., Wiliam, D. and King's College London School of Education (1998) *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment* Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. London: King's College.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2007) *Assessment for Learning.* Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Bownas, K. (2015*) "Taking the stabilisers off." An exploratory case study of how selected students and staff of an AS English Literature course view their roles and responsibilities as learners and teachers.* Unpublished IFS Institute of Education, UCL.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) The economies of linguistic exchanges *Social Science Information 16* (6) 645-68

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power* Cambridge: Polity Press

Boyatzis, R. (1998) *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Brady, M. (2013) No Quick Fixes: Problems in the Development of A-level Students' Writing (and Learning), *Changing English 20* (1) 68-78, doi:10.1080/1358684X.2012.757062 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3* (2) 77-101. doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* Retrieved online at https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf?noredirect=1 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Bruner, J. (1975) The ontogenesis of speech acts *Journal of Child Language 2* (1) 1-19.

Burgess, T., Ellis, V. and Roberts, S. (2010) How one learns to discourse: Writing and abstraction in the work of James Moffett and James Britton *Changing English 17* (3) 261-274 doi:10.1080/1358684X.2010.505443 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Caelli, K., Ray, L. and Mill, J. (2003) 'Clear as Mud': Toward Greater Clarity in Generic Qualitative Research *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 2* (2) 1-13

Cameron, L. (2003) *Writing in English as an Additional Language at Keystage 4 and post-16* School of Education, University of Leeds: Ofsted

Charmaz, K. (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd edition) London: Sage

Christie, F. and Derewianka, B. (2008) *School Discourse: Learning to write across the years of schooling* London: Continuum International Publishing Group

Collins, J. and Michaels, S. (2006) Speaking and writing: discourse strategies and the acquisition of literacy In J. Cook-Gumperz (Ed.)*The Social Construction of Literacy* 2nd edition (pp 245-250) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Collins, S. (2008) *The Hunger Games* New York: Scholastic Press

Cooke, M. and Wallace, C. (2004) Case study four Inside out/outside in: A study of reading in ESOL classrooms In C. Roberts, M. Baynham, P. Shrubshall, D. Barton, P. Chopra, M. Cooke, R. Hodge, K. Pitt, P. Schellekens, C. Wallace and S. Whitfield (Eds.) *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) Case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources* (pp 94-113) London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory 3rd edition* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Corson, D. (1997) The Learning and Use of Academic English Words *Language Learning 47* (4) 671–718

Coxhead, A. (2000). A New Academic Word List *TESOL Quarterly 34* 2 213-238

Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism 19* 121-129

Daily Telegraph (2017 6th January) Schools not inspected for over a decade https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/01/06/1200-schools-have-not-received-ofsted-inspection-seven-years/ [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Daniels, H. (2001) *Vygotsky and Pedagogy* London: RoutledgeFalmer

Davidson, C. (2009) Transcription: Imperatives for Qualitative Research *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 8,* (2) 35-52

Dawson, J. (2010) Thick description In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos and E. Wiebe (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of case study research* (pp 943-944) Thousand Oaks, CA Sage Publications, Inc.

Department of Education and Science (2002) *Key Stage 3 national strategy: Key Objectives Bank: Year 8* Retrieved from https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7575/ [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Derewianka, B. (1996) *Exploring the Writing of Genres* Royston, Herts: United Kingdom Reading Association

Devitt, A. J. (2004) *Writing Genres* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press

Dowling, P. and Brown, A. (2010) (2nd edition) *Doing Research, Reading Research: Re-Interrogating Education* Abingdon: Routledge

English, F. (2011) *Student Writing and Genre: Reconfiguring academic knowledge* London: Bloomsbury Academic

English, F. and Marr, T. (2015) *Why do Linguistics? Reflective Linguistics and the Study of Language* London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucl/detail.action?docID=6213080 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Foddy, W. (1993) *Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires: Theory and Practice in Social Research* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Freebody, P. (2008) Critical literacy education: On living with 'Innocent Language' In B. Street and N. Hornberger (Eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Language and Education Volume 2: Literacy* (pp 107-118) New York: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

Frow, J. (2007). "Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need": Genre Theory Today. *PMLA 122*(5) 1626-1634. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/25501811 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Gee (1996) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (2nd edn) London: Taylor and Francis

Gee, J. P. (2004) *Situated Language and Learning: A critique of traditional schooling* New York: Routledge

Geertz, C. (1973) Thick Description in C. Geertz (ed.) *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp3-30) New York: Basic Books

Gibbons, P. (2002) *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* Portsmouth NH: Heinemann

Gibbons, P. (2003). Mediating Language Learning: Teacher Interactions with ESL Students in a Content-Based Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 37* (2), 247-273. doi:10.2307/358850 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Gibbons, P. (2009*) English learners, academic literacy, and thinking: learning in the challenge zone* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Gibbons, S. (2019) "Death by PEEL?" The teaching of writing in the secondary English classroom in England *English in Educatio*n, *53* (1) 36-45 doi:10.1080/04250494.2019.1568832 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Gillham, B. (2007) *Developing a Questionnaire* (2nd edition) London: Continuum International Publishing Group

Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of Talk* Oxford: Blackwell

Halliday, J. (2010) Educational assessment in R. Bailey, R. Barrow and D. Carr *The Sage Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (pp 369-384) London: Sage Publications Ltd

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978) *Language as Social Semiotic.* London: Arnold

Halliday, MAK and Hasan, R. (1989) *Language, context and text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective* (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press

Halliday, M.A.K. (1994) *Introduction to Functional Grammar* London: Edward Arnold

Hamilton, L. and Corbett-Whittier, C. (2013) *Using Case Study in Education Research* London: Sage

Hayes, D. P. and Ahrens, M. (1988) Vocabulary simplification for children: A special case of 'motherese'? *Journal of Child Language 15* (2) 395–410

Hayes, J. (2000) A new framework for understanding cognition and affect in writing In R. Indrisano and J. Squire (Eds.) *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory and Practice* (pp 6-40) Delaware: International Reading Association

Hayes, J. and Flower, L. (1980) Identifying the organisation of writing processes: An interdisciplinary approach In L. Gregg and E. Steinberg (Eds.) *Cognitive Processes in Writing* (pp 3-30) Hillsdale NJ: Laurence Earlbaum

Hayes, J. and Flower, L. (1983) Uncovering cognitive processes in writing: an introduction to protocol analysis in P. Mosenthol, L. Tamor and S. Walmsley (Eds.) *Research on Writing: Principles and Methods* (pp 207-219) New York: Longman

Heath, S. B. (1983) *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hickman, J. (2017, July 03) Email to K. Bownas

Hyland, K. (2004) *Genre and Second Language Writing* Michigan: University of Michigan Press

Hyland, K. (2005) Stance and engagement: a model of interaction in academic discourse *Discourse Studies 7* (2) 173-192

Hyland, K. (2012) *Disciplinary Identities: Individuality and community in academic discourse* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hyland, K. (2015) Genre, discipline and identity *Journal of English for Academic Purposes 19* 32-43

Hyland, K. and Tse, P. (2007) Is there an 'Academic Vocabulary'? *TESOL Quarterly 41* (2) 235-53

Institute of Education (2021) *Data Protection Guidance for Staff, Students and Researchers* Retrieved online at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/data-protection/guidance-staff-students-and-researchers/research/data-protection-guidance-researchers [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Ivanic, R. (1998) *Writing and Identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing* Amsterdam: John Benjamins

Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Karlyn Campbell. (1982) Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusions of Generic Elements *Quarterly Journal of Speech 68* 146-57.

Joffe, H. and Yardey, L. (2004) Content and Thematic Analysis In Marks, D. and Yardley, L. (Eds.) *Research Methods for Clinical and Health Psychology* (pp 56-68) London: Sage

Krashen, S. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* Oxford: Pergamon Press

Krashen, S. (2004) *The Power of Reading* (2nd edition) Portsmouth NH: Heinemann

Kress, G. (1990) *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice* (2nd impression) Oxford: Oxford University Press

Kress, G. (1982) *Learning to Write* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Langer, J. and Applebee, A. (1987) *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A study of teaching and Learning* National Council of Teachers of English

Langer, J. A. and Flihan, S. (2000) Writing and reading relationships: constructive tasks In R. Indrisano and J. Squire (Eds.) *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory and Practice* (pp112-139) Delaware: International Reading Association

Lapadat, J. and Lindsay, A. (1999) Transcription in Research and Practice: From Standardization of Technique to Interpretive Positionings *Qualitative Enquiry 5* (1) 64-86

Law, J. (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* Oxford: Routledge

Lea, M. R. (2008) Academic Literacies in Theory and Practice In B. Street and N. Hornberger (Eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Language Volume 2: Literacy (*pp 227-238) New York: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

Lewis, M. and Wray, D. (1998a) *Writing Across the Curriculum: Frames to Support Learning* University of Reading, Reading and Language Information Centre

Lewis, M. and Wray, D. (1998b) *Writing Frames* University of Reading, Reading and Language Information Centre

Lillis, T. (2011), 'Legitimising dialogue as textual and ideological goal in academic writing for assessment and publication', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, *10: 4,* 401–32.

Lillis, T. (2013). *The Sociolinguistics of Writing.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Retrieved online from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b4j8 [Last retrieved June 18, 2021]

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry* Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M. and de Eyto, A. (2018) Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Data Analysis: A Design Research Approach to Coding Combining NVivo With Traditional Material Methods *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 17* 1–13

Martin, J. R. 1984. Language, register and genre in F. Christie (ed.) *Language Studies: Children's Writing*: *Reader.* (pp 21-30) Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Martin, J. R. (1985) Process and texts: two aspects of human semiosis In J. Benson and W Greaves (Eds.) *Systemic perspectives on discourses Vol 1* (pp 248-274) Norwood, NJ: Ablex

Meek Spencer, M (1988) *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* Stroud: Thimble Press

Meek, M. (1995). The critical challenge of the world in books for children. *Child Literacy Education 26,* 5–23 doi.org/10.1007/BF02360338 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Miller, C. R. (1984) Genre as Social Action *Quarterly Journal of Speech 70,* 151-67 DOI: 10.1080/00335638409383686 [Last retrieved June 18 2021]

Moffet, J. (1968/1983) *Teaching the Universe of Discourse.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Moll, L. (2013) *Vygotsky and Education* New York: Routledge

Morgan, D. (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* California: Sage

Murray, L. and Lawrence, B. (2000) *Practitioner-Based Enquiry: Principles for post-graduate research* London: Falmer Press

Nagy, W., Townsend, D., Lesaux, N. and Schmitt, N. (2012) Words as tools: Learning academic vocabulary as language acquisition *Reading Research Quarterly 47* (1) 91-108 at www.jstor.org/stable/41330887 [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Newton, P., He, Q. and Black, B. (2017) *Progression from GCSE to A Level: Comparative Progression Analysis as a new approach to investigating inter-subject comparability* OFQUAL Retrieved online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/610077/Progression_from_GCSE_to_A_level_-_Comparative_Progression_Analysis_as_a_new_approach_to_investigating_inter-subject_comparability.pdf [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Norton, B. (2000) *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change* Harlow: Pearson

Norton, B. (2013) *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Bristol, England: MultilingualMatters.

Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D. and Moules, N. (2017) Thematic Analysis: Striving to meet the Trustworthiness Criteria *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 16* 1–13

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (27th September 2019) *Risk assessment methodology: Good and outstanding maintained schools and academies* [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Oliver, D., Serovich, J. and Mason, T. (2005) Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative research *Social Forces 8* (2) 1273-1289

Olson, D. (2016) *The Mind on Paper: Reading, consciousness and rationality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2015) *Helping Immigrant Students to Succeed at School – And Beyond* at https://www.oecd.org/education/Helping-immigrant-students-to-succeed-at-school-and-beyond.pdf [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Paltridge, B. (1996) Genre, text type, and the language learning classroom *ELT Journal 50* (3) 237-243

Paran, A. and Wallace, C. (2016) In Hall, G. (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching* (pp 441-455) Abingdon and New York: Routledge

Piantanida, M. and Garman, N. (1999) *The Qualitative Dissertation* California: Corwin Press Inc

Preece, S. (2009) *Posh Talk: Language and identity in Higher Education* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Preece, S. (2010) The positioning of learners and educators in discourses associated with academic literacy In G Blue (Ed.) *Developing Academic Literacy* (pp 25-39) Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers

Redbridge Characterisation Study (June 2014) https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/media/2304/redbridge-characterisation-study-june-14-part1.pdf Online [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Redbridge Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2017) https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/media/3496/jsna-in-breif.pdf Online [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Richards, L. (2015) *Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide* London: Sage

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research* (3rd edition) Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Schon, D. (1991) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* London: Basic Books Inc.

Searle, D. (1984) Scaffolding: Who's Building Whose Building? *Language Arts 61* (5) 480-83

Snow, M., Met, M. and Genesee, F. (1989) A Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Language and Content in Second/Foreign Language Instruction *TESOL Quarterly 23* (2) 201-217

Stake, R. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Street, B. (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Stotsky, S. (1983) Research on reading/writing relationships: A synthesis and suggested directions in *Language Arts 60* (5) 627-642

Swales, J. (1990) *Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tribble, C. (1996) *Writing* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Trust for London (2021) https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/redbridge-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/ [Last retrieved March 27 2021]

Turner, M. and Thomas, F.-N. (2011) *Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing about Prose* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)

Vygotsky, L. (1986) *Thought and Language* (A. Kozulin Ed.) Cambridge MA: MIT Press

Vygotsky, L. (1987) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky Volume 1 Problems of General Psychology* (R. Rieber and A. Carton Eds.) New York: Plenum Press

Wellington, J. (2000) *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches* London: Continuum

Wells, G (1999) *Dialogic Inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education* New York: Cambridge University Press

White, R. and Arndt, V. (1991) *Process Writing* Hong Kong: Longman Group (FE) Ltd

Whittaker, F. (2019 23rd May) No more facilitating subjects *Schoolsweek* Retrieved from https://schoolsweek.co.uk/russell-group-ditches-facilitating-subjects-a-level-list/ [Last retrieved March 27 2021)

Wolcott, H. (1994) *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis and Interpretation* California: sage

Wray, D. (2004a) Introduction to Volume III In D. Wray (Ed.) *Literacy: Major Themes in Education Volume III* (pp 1-5) Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer

Wray, D. (2004b) *Critical Literacy* Reading: National Centre for Language and Literacy

Yandell, J. (2014) *The Social Construction of Meaning: Reading Literature in urban English classrooms* Abingdon: Routledge

Yin, R. (2009) *Case Study Research, Design and Methods* (4th edition) California: Sage

Zwiers, J. (2014) *Building Academic Language* (2nd edition) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Appendix A: Consent form for participants

Study of how Year 12 A Level students develop as writers during the course of the year

Informed Consent form for participants

This research is part of a doctoral study at UCL, the Institute of Education, London. I am interested in how Year 12 A Level students describe their development as writers during the course of the year and how these might change over time.

I would like to collect information on this in these ways:

1. A questionnaire in which you give some views about writing and yourself as a writer.
2. A group interview to discuss ideas raised by the questionnaires.
3. A collection of samples of your writing, examples you are pleased with and ones you would like to improve.
4. Individual interviews to discuss the writing you have shown me.

I will ask you to participate in the research at 3 points during the year, to explore any changes in your writing and in your views about writing.

From this information, I intend to produce a report which will be shared with members of the school Leadership group (such as the Head, Deputies, etc).   It may be used to improve the ways in which writing is taught in the future at XXXXXX School. The report may also be used in sharing best practice with other teachers in the borough. It may be used in part or as a whole for a research journal article, for example for NALDIC.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be able to withdraw your consent at any time during the process. You will not be named in the report or in the transcripts of the interviews and all comments not directly concerned with the research will be kept confidential.

The recordings of the interviews and the conversations will be kept for two years after the production of the report and then deleted. They will not be used for any purpose other than those listed above.

Statement of consent:

I have read the above information and discussed the project with Ms Bownas. I agree to take part in this research.

Name:

Signed: Date:

Appendix B: Consent form for parents

Dear Parents/carers

Study of how Year 12 A Level students develop as writers during the course of the year

As the Head of the MEA Department at XXXXXX School, I am interested in how Year 12 A Level students describe their development as writers during the course of the year and how these descriptions might change over time. As part of my doctoral thesis at the UCL, Institute of Education, I would like your child to participate in a research project to investigate this further.

I aim to collect information in these ways:

5. A questionnaire in which students give some views about writing and themselves as a writer.
6. A group interview to discuss ideas raised by the questionnaires.
7. A collection of samples of their writing, examples they are pleased with and ones they would like to improve.
8. Individual interviews to discuss the writing which has been shown to me.

The students will be asked to participate in the research at 3 points during the year, to explore any changes in their writing and in their views about writing.

From this information, I intend to produce a report which will be shared with members of the school Leadership group (such as the Head, Deputies, etc). It may be used to improve the ways in which writing is taught in the future at XXXXXX School. The report may also be used in sharing best practice with other teachers in the borough. It may be used in part or as a whole for a teachers' journal, for example.

If you agree for your child to participate in this research, you will be able to withdraw your consent at any time during the process. The students will not be named in the report or in the transcripts of the interviews and all comments not directly concerned with the research will be kept confidential.

The recordings of the interviews and the conversations will be kept for two years after the production of the report and then deleted. They will not be used for any purpose other than those listed above.

If you agree for your child to participate in this research, please complete the form below and return it to me. Please feel free to contact me at XXXXXX School if you have any questions regarding the research (email address)

Ms. K. B. Bownas

Head of Multi-Ethnic Achievement

Consent agreement:

I have read the above information and give consent for my child
_____(name) to take part in this research.

Parents/carers name:

Signed: Date:

Appendix C: Research Questionnaire

You may omit any question on the questionnaire if you wish	
Name	
Form	
A level subjects	
GCSE English Grade	
Do you speak another language at home? If yes, which one? If yes, when did you start to learn English?	
Any qualifications in other languages? If yes, which language(s)? If yes, when did you take the exam, what level and grade?	
Please list all the types of writing you do in school	
Please list all the types of writing you do out of school	

What type of writing do you enjoy? Why?	
What type of writing do you find challenging? Why?	
What do you think would help improve your writing in your A level subjects? Why?	
Please write a brief description of a time when writing went well for you. When? Where? What? Why? Who? How?	

Thank you

<u>Appendix D: Sample interview prompts (Hana Individual Interview 1)</u>

<u>Follow up from questionnaire</u>

Contrast between stories and essays. What is the difference to you? Why?

"Put passion into writing" – what does this mean?

"Open mind" – explain? How?

Reading widely will improve writing – how? Do you do this? Examples?

<u>Follow up from group interview</u>

Diary writing – when? Still? How? Why?

Creative writing - when? Still? How? Why?

What do you do to improve writing?

What do teachers do to help you improve writing? Does it work for you? Why?

<u>Looking at writing examples</u>

Why did you choose this? How do you describe it?

How do you know it is good/could be improved?

How did you start?

What helped you write it?

Peer feedback? Teacher feedback?

<u>Final questions</u>

What do you think your writing will be like by February?

What will help you in the long-term?

What will be the challenges?

Anything else?

Appendix E: Sample transcript (Tara Individual interview 2)

1	KB	Introduces. Anything to add about what is going well at the moment?
2	T	Um we haven't been practising a lot of essay writing lately because because my class is a two year course and we focused on content a lot more but um I remember last lesson he set us an essay question to do (discussion interrrupted)
3	KB	Sorry, carry on
4	T	We haven't been practising a lot of essay questions because there's uh mainly focused on content but he's given us a our teacher's given us a question to do for the two week break. So from there and from there I want to do extra essays because I'll be sitting the AS exam so my exam's gonna be coming up soon so I want to do loads of practice essays and give them in so over those two weeks I'll do in those
5	KB	Cos I remember you said in the group interview that you felt um a little bit frustrated 'cos you weren't (T: Yeah) given any feedback so is that different now or?
6	T	Um it's still the same because he's not really, I gave him essays outside of class but he doesn't seem to mark them in time so, just, and I don't wanna pester him the whole time so I just leave it until he's actually done it to give to me.
7	KB	OK. Do you feel more confident in the content now, 'cos you were saying about that
8	T	Content yeah. I've done yes I feel definitely more confident with the content um I read extra books outside so, that helps a lot for me to be able to organise everything in my, all the thoughts in my head, about the, time.
9	KB	So what types of things are you reading?
10	T	Uh there's "The Russian Revolution" by Orlando Figes it helps to read from historians' point of view because you get different interpretations which would be useful for a essay, and um. My writing style isn't great right now so by reading other people's writing styles it'll help me, um not write like them but just, gain some knowledge from them (KB: Mmm I think) that'll be useful
11	KB	I think that's an interesting idea 'cos can you think of anything where you've read something and you think "That's a good way to put it" or
12	T	Yeah for instance, the sources there's mainly sources in the actual text book if you read them it's just the, a a historian's point of view of a certain events since the Bolshevik July days so they, one historian might view it as a success the way the other might view it as a failure so, it's really good to see how different views are, how they viewed different events and how they articulated it, it's really good

13	KB	Would you ever, not copy, but would you ever lift any of those phrases (T: Yeah) or vocabulary and put them in? Can you think of any examples?
14	T	Er put on the spot! Er I've noticed not directly quo but the words they use so, dunno, it's really simple words but do help, so, instead of, I've used some here [looking at essay] but I don't remember. So instead of using "show" you can use "convey" or "what I gather from this" or, um but from. I can't name some some right now but I have noticed what I used and I've used some of it