

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This case study on dialogue journal writing was driven by three specific questions which focused on its contextual dimensions, its socio-psychological dimensions as well as the nature of language use in the dialogue journal (DJ). To answer my three research questions, I begin by discussing and interpreting the insights that emerged in my analysis of the contextual dimensions. Then I describe the socio-psychological dimensions involved in this dialogue journal writing. Lastly, I analyse and discuss the nature of language use as manifested in this written interaction between Mazlan and me. In attempting to understand and draw implications for ESL teaching I will sketch a holistic picture of what emerged in order to provide useful insights to inform educational practice.

4.1 The Contextual Dimensions of Dialogue Journal Writing

As a written communication, the dialogue journal writing between Mazlan and me was context-embedded. The word 'context' is notoriously resistant to definition (Chin, 1994) and it is not always clear what context actually encompasses when we move beyond the parameters of the text. Piazza (1987) revealed that few attempts have been made to define what 'contexts of writing' mean and this situation creates dilemmas for researchers of writing. However, in this study I would like to confine context to two dimensions. The first dimension involved the physical context of the site as viewed from Mazlan's perspective. The second dimension involved the extended interaction between this Form Five ESL

student and his teacher that was located in spaces outside the formal setting of the classroom where the writing was done in private time and private spaces. Thus, by 'context' I refer to the physical context of the site which included the situation or milieu that the dialogue journal writing was nested in as well as to the nature of this type of interactive writing. It is important to focus on the contextual dimensions that framed this meaningful and natural form of writing as they played an influential role in shaping Mazlan's attitude and motivation for learning English as a second language. These contextual dimensions that impinged on the dialogue journal writing will be interpreted and qualitatively discussed below.

4.1.1 The Physical Context of the Site

In my discussion of the physical context of the site, my primary focus will be on Mazlan; first as a dislocated student and newcomer in relation to the site; second in relation to the hostility of the milieu; and third in relation to the rigidity of the school system.

4.1.1.1 Dislocated Context

As an ethnic Sabahan whose educational and social backgrounds differed in significant ways from the students in SMTK, Mazlan was a dislocated student who found it hard to adjust to his new school environment. He voiced his struggles and fears in the entry below.

Lan: I'm still new, "*Tiada kuasa bersuara*" [no power of voice]. I felt so helpless teacher. I felt I'm drowning slowly into the custom of this school. The students are so idle. I tried resisting but it's hard. I'm

resisting until the stage where I don't mixed with them. I don't have any 'real friends' in the school especially the boys. None. I seek companions from the girls and fortunately I found few.

Schlosser (1992) points out that students disengage or become alienated from school if they cannot identify with it. This may result in misbehaviours and poor academic achievements. But if teachers are able to build relationships with them and acknowledge their lived experiences, these students will have higher levels of engagement. Echoing this, Mazlan wrote that one of the reasons why he forced himself to continue coming to what he called a "terrible, rotten-cultured school" was because of the refreshing and funny dialogue journal writing that we engaged in (see Appendix N). According to him, dialogue journal writing not only helped him with his education but also helped ease his stress and promoted his mental and emotional well-being (see Appendix J).

4.1.1.2 Hostile School Milieu

In the monolingual school environment of SMTK, most of the students could not speak English. Being monolinguals, these students were hostile towards anyone who spoke English outside the classroom as they considered it unpatriotic to speak this 'foreign' language (see Appendix L). This environment therefore encouraged "subtractive bilingualism" (Cook, 1996, p. 99) where the learning of another language was perceived as a threatening act. However, Mazlan felt that the journal writing we engaged in provided an alternative and friendly medium for him to express himself in English. In other words, this interactive writing encouraged "additive bilingualism" (Cook, 1996, p. 99) because Mazlan acknowledged that the

act of dialoguing in writing enhanced his second language learning by adding something new to his skills and experience.

4.1.1.3 Rigidity of School System

Like most schools, our school system was rigid and conventional. Not surprisingly, examinations drove the curriculum and teaching in SMTK. They influenced what was taught and how it was taught in the classroom. Thus the school's goals and priorities for learning English accounted for the formal opportunities of language learning during English lessons. The transmissive teaching which I resorted to, not by choice but due to the prevailing circumstances of preparing students for their SPM examination, did not go well with Mazlan. He commented:

You're spooning every bit of information into the mouths of SE1. I don't really agree with such way of teaching because it'll cause a lot of problems in the long run. Most of them will learn to rely on you than do their own research to improve their language.

Needless to say, in this kind of learning context, students were seldom given opportunities to write under conditions similar to natural face-to-face communication where the writing was self-motivated and functional. But the private nature of dialogue journal writing, which was done outside the 40-minute English lesson, allowed Mazlan space, time and opportunity to come out of the 'oppressive confinement' of the classroom and to partake in the natural ecology of writing. He found this interactive writing meaningful as it provided him a space for communication - where the discussion was genuine, the topics relevant and the

writing received a real response from his teacher. As such, Mazlan opined, "DJ writing compensates for the class."

4.1.2 Dialogue Journal Writing as a Space for Communication

Dialogue journal writing not only opened up avenues for Mazlan to deal with the problems he encountered concerning dislocation, hostile milieu and rigidity of the school system but it also presented him a space for certain kinds of communication characterised by a sense of freedom as well as open sharing between the interlocutors. Below, I will illustrate how this sense of freedom and open sharing between us fed and sustained Mazlan's interest in writing.

4.1.2.1 Freedom in Dialogue Journal Writing

As the writing was done in the privacy of his room, Mazlan did not feel the usual classroom constraints of time limit and pressure to write according to a prescribed format. Also, with no rules and restrictions imposed on the writing, Mazlan found dialogue journalling to be more relaxing, motivating and interesting than classroom writing. He captured a facet of this freedom below:

Teenagers prefer life to be fancy free and not a ruled one. To give the power to choose the topics to teens to write on will be the key to open up their feeling bottled up within. With DJ writing this is no more a dream (see Appendix O).

Consonant with what Mazlan expressed, Haley-James (1982) reports that "assigning a topic dampens initiative and discourages thinking. Conversely, writing on topics students have chosen encourages thinking and a sense of

ownership (p. 727)." Similarly, Shuy (1988b) also discovered that students tend to write more and better when writing assignment involves real opinion exchange as well as tasks or desires which are genuine to them. Therefore, by allowing Mazlan space to write on topics that interested him, he was encouraged to invest in the effort necessary for writing.

4.1.2.2 Open Sharing in Dialogue Journal Writing

The private nature of dialogue journal writing encourages the sharing of personal experiences which would otherwise not be brought up for discussion. The following interview excerpt exemplifies this.

I: If it had not been in writing, would you have shared about your girlfriend with me?

Lan: I don't think so because the time is so stricken [limited]. There's less time. Teacher's also busy. It's like, having a girl friend is a big thing. I have to share it with somebody else. Talking about such thing is sissy, not worth to mention but when it comes to writing it becomes important.

Speech is ephemeral but writing crystallizes the message. Consequently, Mazlan felt that while speech tends to trivialise a topic, writing gives it permanence and significance. By extension, he was of the opinion that what was presented on paper was likely to receive attention and response from the teacher. Furthermore, while the formal contact time that teachers and students have in school is limited, dialogue journal writing is able to extend this contact time between teachers and students. Because the time spent writing or responding in the

journal was not at the expense of school time, it encouraged Mazlan to be more 'chatty' in his writing - to engage not only in phatic communion but also share significant happenings in his life as they were encountered. Writing therefore became a meaningful and dialogic activity rather than a dreaded task done at the behest of the teacher.

On the whole, the contextual dimensions involved in this dialogue journal writing had allowed Mazlan, a dislocated student, to become more engaged in schooling as well as encouraged him to invest in the effort necessary to become a proficient bilingual despite the unfavourable school milieu that he was located in. The nature of this interactive writing provided Mazlan a respite from the restrictive shackles of school as it gave him space, time and opportunity to communicate and write on topics that interested him. Clearly, this natural ecology of writing which Mazlan found to be motivating, interesting and relaxing was a bonus to his learning of English as a second language.

4.2 The Socio-Psychological Dimensions of Dialogue Journal Writing

The socio-psychological dimensions refer to the social and psychological forces that impinge on a person and, as a consequence, affect his or her learning process. Social others play a significant role in influencing a person's attitude and motivation for learning a second language. Additionally, they can also help to mediate that person's learning through their interactions. On the intrapersonal plane, a person also brings his or her own personal characteristics such as personality, motivation, capabilities, previous knowledge and experience to the language learning context (Spolsky, 1989). Thus there are a lot of external and

internal variables that shape what a person learns or derives from the social environment. In order to discuss the socio-psychological dimensions involved in this shared writing activity I begin by unpicking the intrapersonal factors that bore on the ESL student. Then I describe the interactions of the key participants and trace the relationship that evolved between this Form Five ESL student and his teacher, focusing particularly on the effects that these have on the ESL student.

4.2.1 Preference for Written Communication

Mazlan's dialogue journal writing with me was facilitated by the fact that he disliked face-to-face conversation as he claimed that he did not have the "gift of the gab" (see Appendix I). His taciturnity was captured by his classmate who wrote, "Most of the time I engage in conversation with him, he will just nod his head and doesn't try to be a part of the conversation (see Appendix F)." When probed about his reticence, Mazlan said that he felt shy to talk because talking could reveal his softness. Additionally, he felt that his spoken English was not good. Writing was therefore his preferred means of communication as it provided him a safe place to express his ideas and to receive feedback on them (Garmon, 1998). In the same vein, Jones (1991) explains that the privacy of the act and the absence of corrections makes dialogue journal writing a non-threatening activity. This kind of positive experience can help develop self-confidence in writing and encourage the learning of the second language. As explained by Krashen (1982), the 'affective filter', which is an imaginary barrier, is lowered when the ESL learner is relaxed and motivated, thereby allowing input to become intake. However, this

affective filter is raised when the ESL learner is stressed, self-conscious and unmotivated, thus screening out input and making it unavailable for acquisition.

4.2.2 Need for Communication

All of us have a need for phatic communion (Brown, 1994, citing Malinowski) where we can express ourselves and in the process receive acceptance from significant others. To Mazlan, dialogue journalling was not just a radical and new way of learning, it was also an exciting means of communication between student and teacher (see Appendix P). Being a dislocated student with few friends in the school, Mazlan's need for communication was indeed intense. In dialogue journal writing he discovered a viable means of communication which gave him an avenue to express himself as well as to connect with me, his teacher. With exuberance, he often voiced his appreciation for this means of communication:

Lan: You have been a joy to me since we first started dialoguing and god bless you for allowing me a window to express myself by introducing me to this DJ. God bless. God bless you teacher (see Appendix N).

Since English was used to mediate our written communication, Mazlan was therefore exposed to a wide variety of vocabulary and structures in the form of the teacher's input. At the same time, he himself was disposed to use English to fulfil a multitude of communicative functions. Thus this shared writing provided Mazlan an opportunity to come into contact with a wide repertoire of language as well as to use rich and varied language for genuine communicative purposes.

4.2.3 Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1991) explain that a learner has instrumental motivation if "the learner is motivated to learn an L2 (second language) for utilitarian purposes, such as furthering a career, improving social status or meeting an educational requirement (p.173)". In this respect, Mazlan displayed high instrumental motivation towards learning in general as well as towards the learning of English as a second language. His motivation stemmed from his ambition to pass his SPM examination with flying colours so that he could obtain a scholarship to pursue his education in an institution of higher learning (see Appendix I). Another factor which spurred him on in his learning was his desire to be successful so that he could help his family.

Lan: Everytime I "*balik kampung*" [go home] I realized that my father is growing weaker and weaker and his once energetic face slowly consumed with age. So I really need help from the teachers and I need help from you teacher to boost my quality in English, to the extent that I'll be able to write essays without being anxious of wrong grammars or dull sentences lacking interesting words. I wanted to be able to talk in English as fluent as the Englishmen themselves (see Appendix I).

The above excerpt shows that Mazlan viewed dialogue journaling with a utilitarian perspective. He saw it as a means to enhance his proficiency in the language because he was writing to a more proficient writer who could provide models of good writing to him. Mazlan explained to me that he considered the ability to master English an asset. It was something extra which he needs to

possess in order to stay competitive and have an edge over others. He added that being proficient in English would also be useful for his future career. Furthermore, he wanted to ensure that he could communicate in English with anyone who speaks to him in that language. Not less important too was his desire to be rich in words so that he could describe his appreciation of nature and put into words his feelings for people (see Appendix M). Thus, it is clear that Mazlan had positive attitude as well as extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to learn English and to participate in dialogue journal writing with me.

4.2.4 Authenticity

Significantly, in this natural ecology of writing, Mazlan and I were being ourselves and not 'doing' school. Authenticity was therefore the hallmark of our interaction. Mazlan commented that as an adult, I wrote like an adult and my writing had an adult tone. To a certain extent, this influenced the way he wrote.

Lan: So when I'm writing I try as much to sound more mature so that you wouldn't treat me childishly. But most of the time I write in my own tones, not masquerading (see Appendix Q).

I: Please feel free to be yourself when you write your DJ - there's no need for masquerades. Your writing is fine, your tone is also fine. It's your voice that I want to hear, not a clone of mine. I like this DJ writing because we can remove our masquerades and just be ourselves - to say what's on our minds. There is no need for pretences. We can discuss issues that bother or affect us. This is therapeutic as it allows us to give vent to pent-up emotions or

frustrations. In fact, on many occasions I've scolded or nagged you like an aunt. I can only do that because of the bond or rapport that I've established with you through this interactive writing.

When a teacher enters into a genuine relationship with a student without wearing a mask, the teacher becomes an accessible person instead of a faceless entity. Head and Taylor (1997) say that this is more likely to facilitate learning. The celebration of selves is characteristic of humanistic pedagogy (Rogers, 1983; Moskowitz, 1978) which seeks to help students to be themselves, to accept themselves and to be proud of themselves. Mazlan often reiterated that dialogue journal writing is a personal, meaningful and genuine interaction as the writing proceeds from the heart and involves the writer's emotions. In my interview with him, he would inhale deeply and be at a loss for words while emphasising the emotional aspect of DJ writing. As the topics of his writing usually focused on his own life or things related to him, he found this writing vastly different from classroom writing which was impersonal and detached. During the time that we engaged in journalling, the meaningfulness of the writing became so much a part of Mazlan's life that he felt something was missing whenever he did not have the opportunity to write in the journal. He confessed, "I really miss DJing with you teacher but I'm not sure if I'm going to school tomorrow." In another entry he scribed, " I miss DJ writing with you and I sure need it these days but I don't have the book so I hope this paper will do." Finally, he declared, "I will continue on DJing until the end of the year if you don't mind. I really love this DJ."

4.2.5 Student-Teacher Relationship

In most societies, it is normal for the social roles of teachers and students to be accorded high and low status respectively (Wright, 1988). This social distance implies that students do not always have direct access to their teachers. Furthermore, in the class the teacher's attention is usually divided between so many students that it is difficult to get the teacher's personal attention during class time. But in dialogue journalling the way is open for students to have direct access to teachers via the textual space of writing. This was not lost on Mazlan who appreciated the fact that he could get my full attention in the interactive writing without engendering envy or jealousy in other students because the attention he received was given privately on paper. As a concomitant to this shared writing, a bond naturally developed between us which made Mazlan feel important and cared for. Consequently, he enquired if he could treat me as a sister. In another entry, he wrote:

Lan: I felt that throughout this journal I've been sharing a lot of things with you including my family's controversy. I think I've cultivated a sense of trust in you that makes me feel a whole lot closer to you than other teachers. I dunno about you, but I felt such everytime we engage in a conversation, etc. if our relationship prior to this DJ writing is merely teacher and student, I think it has escalated another level to friend to friend or auntie to nephew bonds. I am eager to see how our relationship would be in three months from now.

Not surprisingly, as feelings and experiences were mutually shared, a caring element was introduced and a nurturing relationship resulted (Noddings, 1984). In my own journal I reflected:

I don't know which direction we're heading to in this DJ writing but I want to be there to see him being able to pick himself up each time he falls. To let him run but not too far, to let him explore and soar like a kite but with the string loosely in my grip until he's ready to take off on his own without crashing to the ground with disastrous consequences (see Appendix E).

Milton Mayeroff, cited by Noddings, (1984) observes that, "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him (sic) grow and actualize himself (p. 9)" and that succinctly captures my relationship with Mazlan which evolved in the course of our journaling together.

It goes without saying that the dynamics of student-teacher relationship will be affected as a result of the extended student-teacher writing. Before participating in this writing, Mazlan said that he associated 'teacher' with fear, formality and everything that was not sociable. He explained:

Teacher means someone you cannot share personal things with. Just somebody teaching in the class, nothing more, nothing less. But when it comes to DJ writing, teacher climbs a few steps down. It's like talking to an auntie or friend.

While Mazlan said that asymmetry of power was not fully neutralised as he still had to respect me, his teacher, he opined that I played a less dominant role in the journal writing. This was also observed by Jones (1991) who claims that in dialogue journaling, the teacher seems to camouflage her (sic) authority and

allows the student to know the teacher as a human being rather than as an authoritative figure. Schlosser (1992) explains that students' perceptions of teacher behaviours, classroom practices and school life, more than the events themselves, contribute to how much students learn. For Mazlan, the novelty of this writing experience was a positive one as it gave him a new pair of lenses to see with and a more thoughtful outlook for making sense of his experiences and relationships with others in the school.

4.2.6 Teacher Responses

What really hooked Mazlan to dialogue journal writing was the fact that the writing 'talked' back to him and the person who did the talking back was a valued other. The importance of getting a response for one's writing cannot be overemphasised because whoever indulges in the act of writing craves for a response to what is being communicated (Burniske, 1994). In Mazlan's case, he commented that getting a reply from me never failed to fill him with anticipation as he sometimes found my entries hilarious, full of surprise and often containing new words which he 'savoured' hungrily. Thus the real information exchange between us created a sense of suspense and interest which helped sustain the extended writing.

Lan: This dialogue journal is a truckloads of fun. I can't tell you how much I enjoy interacting in this way. It makes me smile to myself! Well, gladly I could tell you teacher that despite my problems, I'm still happy today, because of this journal which I had anticipated the whole night. I knew there'll be words of wisdom from you teacher

and I could feel that my English is enriched everytime I receive a reply.

In another entry, he enthused:

It was enticing to read over and over again especially your reply teacher since your sentences are arranged in apple-pie order and the use of various vocabularies never failed to seize my interest. There's simply no reason for me to stop this means of communication since it brought me nothing but 'nourishments'!. . . Do you know teacher that somehow you are able to make me giggle to myself - which often wins the class undivided attention - with your words? As if you have read through my mind and pressed on the right button to tickle me.

Mazlan also pointed out that reading my response made it easier for him to learn and remember new words as these words were embedded in familiar contexts and related to his lived experiences.

The content of my response was not always ego flattering though. There were times when my entries were serious and annoyed Mazlan as they were not what he had expected.

Lan: I think that's all I wanna write today. Insatisfaction is mounting in me. I hate to do things when I'm consumed with anger.

Mazlan wished to start his days with laughter instead of sadness. Most mornings before class began, Mazlan would come to my desk in the staff room to check if I had written my response. As my initial entries were funny he often urged

me for a quick reply. But when he received serious entries in which our opinions clashed, the writing aroused in him feelings of ambivalence (see Appendix Q).

In this section, I have attempted to sketch how the interplay of social and psychological forces affected Mazlan's relationship with me as well as his attitude towards writing. My analysis seems to suggest that my interactions with him coupled with his own personal characteristics had impacted our shared writing in ways that were mostly positive. As a result of our journalling together, a congenial relationship developed between us, and this in turn paved the way for a meaningful and optimal ESL writing context to flourish.

4.3 The Nature of Language Use in Dialogue Journal

Dialogue journal writing enables us to situate our thoughts and communicative intentions in space and time. This writing is reproducible and open to scrutiny. As such it allows us to examine how participating writers activate the meaning-making potentials of the language system and extend the range of language use in order to achieve their goals. Because we use language to mediate our experience and to define reality to others as well as to ourselves, an analysis of the discourse in this dialogue journal will help us to understand language in use - how real people use real language in real communication to achieve real functions.

The organization and interpretation of a language system is perceived in terms of functions. In dialogue journal writing participants are given opportunities to use a plethora of language functions, some of which are not commonly allowed in the classroom. Classroom teaching tends to be dictated by topics or curriculum specifications which do not permit students to express their lived experiences as

and when they are encountered. However, in dialogue journal writing, students are allowed to talk about the 'here and now' which they are immersed in and feel concerned about. Thus the nature of language use in dialogue journals is responsive to students' lives and provides the immediacy for them to express their life worlds and experiences. Experientially, it allows teachers to connect with students while pedagogically, it allows teachers to scaffold students' learning and thinking processes.

With regard to the functional use of language in this journal, the salient functions as used by Mazlan involved apologising, expressing or giving opinions, sharing personal feelings and concerns, reporting events or dilemmas, complaining or venting, empathising, seeking comfort, seeking advice, seeking clarification, explaining, confessing or confiding, describing events, describing scenery, narrating, asking questions, giving reasons, expressing gladness, expressing anger and disappointment, expressing dissatisfaction, responding or connecting, asking favours, offering help, showing concern, stating intention, reflecting or self-evaluating, elaborating as well as thanking.

The common functions used by me involved empathising, advising, expressing opinions, evaluating, asking questions, problem posing, cautioning, expressing gladness, showing concern, explaining, giving reasons, extending help, clarifying, talking about books and poems, teasing, scolding or nagging, warning, responding or connecting, praising, expressing hope, apologising, offering solution as well as expressing anger and disappointment. Additionally, in the dialogue writing, I used language to scaffold Mazlan's learning as well as to model language use. Finally, as is common in a dialogic process, both of us also appropriated each

other's words in our interactions. Following, I will draw on some selected excerpts from our journal to illustrate and explain the various ways in which language was used in our written communication.

4.3.1 Informal Communication

Paradoxically, while Mazlan loves both Malay and English, he however found it easier to write in English than in Malay. To him writing in Malay is more restrictive because it involves the use of certain protocols. To convey a message, he has to choose appropriate forms of address and indirect speech acts so as not to cause offence to the reader. Coming up with suitable rhetorics or what he called "*bunga-bunga*" [flowery expressions] which are valued in Malay is rather problematic. On account of this, he found it more natural and less demanding to write in English because the social and cultural expectations and conventions are more casual as compared to Malay. Even if his target reader were a Malay, Mazlan felt that he would be more comfortable writing in English provided his reader could understand the language. Because Mazlan considered English to be a user-friendly language for informal communication he felt relaxed and motivated to dialogue with me in English.

4.3.2 Reporting Significant Events and Seeking Advice

The freedom to generate his own topics for writing provided Mazlan with opportunities to select important instances in his life as topics for writing. Being a teenager, interacting with girls and having relationships with them were the highlights of Mazlan's life. Consequently, topics on girls or boy-girl-relationship

(BGR) frequently featured in his entries. As these were marked and valued events in his life, he felt compelled to share them with me.

Lan: I'm really in a mess right now teacher and it's about Sarimah. I saw her tensed or so I thought earlier in class. So I thought maybe all the exam papers and reading at the eleventh hour is taxing her over the limit. So I decided to pull a joke on her. Something that will make her forget about the exam. All day long on Friday I tried to figure out an 'up-to-date' joke just to keep her mind off study a bit. So I did and the joke was about "I have fallen for her" - fallen as in fallen in ♡. I thought she would take it as a plain joke because it seemed that all the girls in this school knew that I was already occupied with the MWP (Machine Workshop Practice is a vocational course) girl. But teacher her reaction was utterly out of my prediction. She went to me furious and upset about the letters. . . . Everyone was staring at us at the warden's office as she scold me that night. She accused me of playing with her feelings and she was worried about the letter until she cannot study the whole evening. I didn't expect things would be like this. It was meant to be a happy ending. So teacher, I really, really need your wise opinion to solve this problem as soon as possible. . . . I'm in a dilemma now. Sarimah had been crying this few days and she cannot concentrate on her revision. Dearest teacher, my guilt thickened overnight. This is very extremely far from my intention.

P.S.: Got another issue coming up teacher, brace yourself.

Stillar (1998) notes that writers draw on the resources of the language system to construct forms of interaction that signify possible orientational and attitudinal roles for the writer and reader toward the content of the discourse. In the excerpt above, Mazlan began by stating that he had a problem involving Sarimah. He then revealed that she was stressed because of the examination. To ease her stress and take her mind off the examination, he decided to play a joke on her. Thus it can be seen that Mazlan was attempting to establish his innocence by foregrounding his good intention towards Sarimah, by explaining that the joke was meant to cheer her up and by emphasising the well known fact that he was already preoccupied with another girl. He was therefore positioning himself as a victim of circumstances and not a villain in the above episode. The use of such selective details can be construed as a subtle ploy to persuade me to exonerate him of any wrong-doing as he had not anticipated the negative outcome. Viewed from this angle, his choice of language was meant to orientate me to his point of view and to evoke in me feelings of sympathy for him.

4.3.3 Mediating Learning

Writing is used to mediate between individual cognition and social phenomena (Barton, 1994). This is reflective of Vygotsky's theory that learning is first mediated on the social plane and then on the psychological plane (Wertsch, 1990; Lee & Smorgorinsky, 2000). On the interpsychological plane, learning often involves mentoring by a more knowledgeable other who engages in an activity that scaffolds the learning process of the less experienced person. Meaning is mutually constructed through joint activity and as a consequence, cognitive development

takes place. Vygotsky (1978) posits that as a result of a long series of developmental events, interpersonal processes are transformed into internal processes.

By reporting his dilemma to me, Mazlan opened up windows to his life world that allowed me to understand the sticky situations that he often found himself in. As I responded to his problem I was able to use this opportunity to scaffold his learning process.

I: I'm sorry to hear about the misunderstanding you had with Sarimah. It's no use crying over spilt milk but you should have considered her feelings before playing the joke on her. What if she really likes you? If so, it would appear as if you were playing with her feelings. Now, to the more delicate matter of BGR, it is not just a case of boy meets girl, they fall in love and live happily ever after. Conflicts can get in the way. There are high points and low points as the drama unfolds and complications set in. Doesn't that sound like a typical love story? How the story ends normally depends on the scriptwriter and director. What are you? I see you as the main actor (protagonist) in this story and perhaps you are also the director and scriptwriter. That's a powerful role you are playing. Before this story was birthed, I tried to abort it as I sensed that complications would set in and the knock-on effects might cause some students to be hurt as well as distract them from their studies. But I am not the director or scriptwriter of this story. Over to you Mazlan, er.. Mr Director, I mean Mr Scriptwriter, whatever. What have you got to say? I sense

you are a romantic and you'll say, "And they live happily ever after." I'm bracing myself for the cliffhanger in the next episode.

In this excerpt my questions and analogy served to maintain and advance the topic that Mazlan had initiated so as to lead him to a higher level of reflection and self-expression about the topic (Peyton, 1988b). The analogy of scriptwriter, director and main actor involved the use of 'interactional scaffolding' (Cazden, 1983) whereby through this interaction with me, Mazlan was provided a process to think through critical questions which he would not have thought of unassisted. The analogy and questions encouraged learning as they permitted Mazlan to see more clearly the wheat and chaff in his ideas (Haley-James, 1982). My role here also exemplifies what Vygotsky (1978) described as guided interaction within the student's zone of proximal development in that I was assisting Mazlan to develop a higher psychological functioning which was conducted first through social dialogue. I guided him to think about the possible consequences of his action and aimed to help him construct meaning from the events in his life so that he could begin to internalise this process for himself. In addition, I also appropriated the word 'brace' which Mazlan had used in his entry and, likewise, Mazlan appropriated my use of 'scriptwriter' and 'director' in his reply as he tried to mitigate his wrong-doing:

If I am a scriptwriter, I'm surely a lousy one. If I'm a director, then this movie I'm directing won't sell. I'm just an amateur and there's still plenty room for improvements. I've decided to apologise to Sarimah tomorrow after school. I must admit I cannot live a day without her laughter. My day won't be complete teacher, without her smiling at me.

4.3.4 Describing People and Narrating Events

Continuing with his reply, Mazlan wrote a long discourse confessing everything that had happened. In this entry, he revisited his first day in school, described how he queued in the wrong line and had his first encounter with the girl from the Machine Workshop Practice course.

Lan: Since things have reached this perplexing stage teacher, I think I better confess the real thing to you teacher. Well the story started the first time I stepped into the hall of the school. My first assembly on 17 January 2000. It was my first day, but I wasn't nervous. I had prepared for those stary eyes and hums of voices questioning me since a week ago. I still remember that day, I queued in the wrong line. Coincidentally that MWP girl was standing straight behind me. A mere 2 metres away. She was smiling at me and I could see curiosity in her glittering eyes. Pretending to be cool I flashed her a grin. That smile teacher, is the first thing that attracted me. She got a natural grin even when she wasn't grinning and her smile seems like a frown. I just melt (I make it least apparent though) away when she carved that smile on her fair face. She's fair and she got a lot of pimples, but the combination is what made her irresistible. She has the same height as Sarimah only she's more voluptuous. Nice body cutting. She walks in the most feminine way I've ever witnessed before. She's always neatly dressed in the morning. Ironed clothes, silk headscarf, clean shoes and a shoulder bag (see Appendix G for a description of this girl in his essay).

Narratives characteristically focus on describing scenes and events from the past. Within this genre, details are frequently given in the orientation (introduction) section to provide background information as observed in Mazlan's entry. However, any discourse is not just concerned with conveying information about events. Encapsulated within a discourse are three types of involvement - self-involvement of the writer, interpersonal involvement between the writer and reader and involvement of the writer with what is being written about (Tannen, 1992). By providing specific details such as the date, the place and the encounter, Mazlan was actually engaged in his own memory and at the same time contributing to my involvement with him as the writer of this text as well as involving himself with the recalled event. The details provided a sense of authenticity and clarity to the narration thereby presenting the reader with an impression of verisimilitude. Further, Mazlan made repetitive use of the word 'first' as in 'first time', 'first assembly', 'first day' to add emphasis to the significance of that eventful day. He also made use of related lexical items in 'smile', 'grin' and 'frown' to provide textual cohesion. Words associated with feminine qualities also abound: 'voluptuous', 'nice body cutting' 'walks in the most feminine way', 'neatly dressed - ironed clothes, silk headscarf, clean shoes and shoulder bag'. These words were meant to evoke a positive interpretation and feeling in me towards the person described. Additionally, words were also juxtaposed to create impact as in 'smile ' and 'frown', 'melt 'and 'carved', and 'fair' and 'a lot of pimples' which helped to enhance the description given. Apart from presenting a vivid image of the girl and the circumstances of their first meeting, Mazlan was also using language to create a response in me towards his stylistic use of language. As much as I noticed the

literary elements used, I also noticed how a word like 'voluptuous' which would not commonly be used in the language classroom, had crept into Mazlan's discourse. This word also caught my attention because of its sexist connotation. In light of this, I feel that the journal is a wonderful site for students to experiment with language use and for teachers to contest and challenge students' linguistic choice so as to enhance communicative competence.

As well as being attracted to this 'MWP' girl, Mazlan was also attracted to Sarimah who was his classmate and with whom he spent a lot of time together as they were both members of the school debating team. He explained his conflicting emotions in the following entry:

Sarimah and I got close together. Things got so (I dunno how to explain) between us. A few times she cursed the time for passing so fast. I found out lots of things about her. Very few of them I dislike. For instance, she's funny when she joke and though she seemed serious, her behaviour is contrary. A weird medley of combination makes her quite interesting. Afterall her chin is an asset that'll catch anyone's attention. But unfortunately things turned sour after the debate. They (Sarimah and Ana) stopped talking to me. Sheri said they felt guilty because we lost and afraid that I was angry with them.

Sheri brokered his relationship with the 'MWP' girl and so they had their first date. Mazlan recounted:

It lasted for two hours and it was the sweetest moment for me this year. But teacher, I met Sarimah everyday and spend most of my time in school around her instead of the MWP girl. I thought the infatuation towards

Sarimah would fade as now I was with the MWP girl but it didn't. It got worse day after day. I hate myself for that. Even though my relationship with Ella (MWP girl) had just started, I felt I had betrayed her. So for a moment I kept things under, hoping it would change but it didn't. It reached the climax last Friday, when I suddenly wrote that letter. It was actually my confession. My real confession. Guilt haunted me afterwards. So I came out with an excuse. To turn all the confession into a joke. A very bad one. So teacher, that's the whole scenario unfolded. I could only blame myself for being 'an infatuation junkie'.

The questioning strategy in my previous entry had paid off as it resulted in Mazlan writing a long discourse to problematise his situation as well as to confess, narrate and describe his social reality to me. Language was therefore used to develop knowledge and understanding as well as shape representations of reality and interpretations of experience (Mercer, 1995). Using language as a social mode of thinking I had provoked critical reflection, learning as well as created an attitude of open dialogue in Mazlan. Interestingly, in this entry Mazlan's stance had changed from that of innocence to admission of guilt and this culminated in his own evaluation, "I could only blame myself for being an infatuation junkie". Such an evaluative comment is yet another typical feature found in the coda section of the narrative genre. As evident, in this excerpt Mazlan had stopped trying to cover up his wrong-doing and instead, he had openly confessed his actual motive for playing the joke on Sarimah. Also as a natural consequence of talking about his life world, Mazlan was able to give me interesting and lively descriptions of people who were important in his life. Furthermore, echoing Bakhtin's (1986) assertion

that we take words from other people's mouth, I noticed that Mazlan had taken the word "unfolds" from me and had recycled it as "unfolded" in his reply. Such recycling of language may be an important way of assimilating the thinking of others (Mercer, 2000).

4.3.5 Making Sense of Life World and Relationships with People

As intimated earlier, a learner's cultural development appears twice - first on the social plane between people as an interpsychological category and then within the learner as an intrapsychological category (Wertsch, 1990). As Mazlan dialogued with me, he discovered himself in the process. He realised that he was empowered to make decisions concerning things that affected him. This discovery instantiated his decision to patch things up with Sarimah and Ana. Thus collectively and individually, language was used to transform experience into knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995). Consonant with Vygotsky's (1978) claim, human psychological processes are mediated by language and I believe that the process of social writing with me facilitated Mazlan's "intramental (individual) development" (Mercer, 2000, p. 144), which enabled him to make better sense of his life world and his relationships with people.

4.3.6 Expressing Feelings and Opinion

In the excerpt below Mazlan used language to express his feelings and opinion.

Lan: I felt as if my rib cage gonna burst! I'm so on top of the world. Oh my God, I'm so overwhelmed. I'm tremendously happy! I just

wished that I could tell you why, but unfortunately I couldn't. I just couldn't. Oh my God! This weekend, it's been a time of joy. It's been long I didn't felt this way, enchanted, bewitched. Oh teacher, it's like dwelling on cloud 9. Stung, I was stung by love! I know teacher, that love during teenage years never gonna last, every adults thought so, but I think this one is exceptional. I won't reveal who she is, fear it might receive your disagreement, but I wish you'd be happy for me.

Students seldom get opportunities to express or share such genuine, spontaneous emotions with their teacher. But in dialogue journal writing where the power differential between teachers and students is levelled off, students are free to reveal their inner feelings and viewpoint. What is note-worthy in this excerpt is that Mazlan wrote from a reader-based perspective with a clear sense of audience awareness. He anticipated that I would not approve of the new girl in his life so he refrained from revealing her identity to me. He had learned to play the role of an active provider of pertinent information, someone who had the power to co-negotiate the direction of this information exchange (Peyton, 1988b) as he saw fit. Much as he wanted to share this good news with me he did not want my disapproval to cloud his happiness. Indirectly, he had typecast me as being unable to relate to this new happening in his life. I took issue with him over this in my reply.

4.3.7 Teasing, Rebuking and Asking Question

I: You're over the moon and I'm pleased for you. Honest. Contrary to what you might have thought, I'm not so old-fashioned as to expect you to live and behave like a medieval monk! Bet you RM10 I know who the blushing maiden is who's causing your heart to misbehave like a wild elephant on a rampage. Ha! Perhaps that explains why you're teetering between heaven and earth - eating but not tasting anything, sleeping but being fully awake. It's so exasperating yet you wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, would you? Ah! see, I'm not so antiquated. I can still connect with the young. Give me a break. . . . I have always advised you to have healthy relationships with girls. They are the spice of life. What I don't recommend is for you to change your taste so often that I'll have to ask you what's the flavour of the month - Vanilla? Chocolate? Strawberry? - that I would definitely disapprove.

In my response I teased him as well as rebuked him for indirectly stereotyping me. The camaraderie that ensued allowed me to pitch my language at the 'i + 1' level (Krashen, 1985) as a means of extending Mazlan's learning. Primarily, my language choice was meant to demonstrate the use of certain lexical items and expressions. My intention was to give Mazlan an opportunity to assimilate new language into his existing framework via a natural and fun way of teaching which embraced his topic and life experience.

Mazlan soon discovered that he could not keep the big secret of this new relationship from me. Two weeks later he wrote to say that he accepted my bet and

hoped that my "intuition was in gear" because the secret was so special that he felt inclined to share it with me. Again I took the opportunity to pull his legs.

You know teachers are not supposed to bet. That was written in jest. I think I know who she is but I won't mention it. Anyway, you always gravitate towards her. Your eyes sparkle and your smile lights up like a thousand bulbs when you talk to her - so much so that TENAGA [Electric Company] will soon go bankrupt if you continue to generate so much heat!

Then referring to a comment he had made in an earlier entry, I asked, "You said that you struggled hard to understand women, especially your present girlfriend. Why is it so difficult to understand the opposite sex?"

This kind of information question is another instance where I used interactional scaffolding to help Mazlan think through the specific details of his comment so that he could elaborate on it. Elaboration is valued in written discourse because it requires the writer to be explicit and to provide greater details and specificity in order to make the writing comprehensible (Staton, 1988c). What emerged from Mazlan's elaboration was a lengthy, interesting and beautiful prose which I will present below.

4.3.8 Elaborating

Lan: To understand a woman, you must have the knowledge of a universe, at least that's how I think so. It's hard for me to fathom woman because I never grew up with one. I couldn't even understand my mum sometimes. My girlfriend to me is like a book that I treasure. A book so special, so interesting I could never let it

go. In order to know what's the content I have to study every page delicately. Every phrases, every sentences is different from the other. Each with its own meaning. Sometimes when a word is unfamiliar, you'll have to search for it from the dictionary (another book with more experience in it). But even with a dictionary it doesn't help sometimes. So you'll have to continue on reading, pocketing every new unfamiliar words until your pocket swell and you don't have any idea of how you could solve those puzzling word. And when you finally do, you forget which page and paragraph those words came from, making you even more perplex you'll need to swallow a couple of aspirins, that is why I struggle to understand woman. But even with those missing words and the growing headache you still find the story intriguing. You felt addicted. You wanted more. You wanted to find out how the story's gonna end. You could just browse to the last page to know the ending but you don't. You want to enjoy it, understand it, mounting every *adegan* [episode] one by one in your mind, slowly relaxly. Every turning of a page, you could feel your curiosity grew. You read through every lines with intense feeling: love, anger, jealousy, hatred, care, compassion and lots more. You feel as if you are also part of the story. And in the ensuing days, as you turn a page, you'll feel thrilled to find out things big or small about the story. And sometimes, you would just wish that the pages won't run out - that you'll keep on turning the pages and find out more things that'll

keep you amused, give you small shock, etc. That is how I viewed my girlfriend. Not as a 'thing' though, don't misunderstand teacher. She is like a never ending story.

The excerpt above is loaded with metaphors and similes which are categories of likeness by which Mazlan organised the data of his experience (Mercer, 2000). The linguistic devices Mazlan used reflected his choice for representing the participants (the writer, reader and subject of the text), event and means for making sense of his girlfriend. Mazlan began by implying that one needs the knowledge of a universe to understand a woman. He then proceeded to use similes such as 'book' and 'never-ending story' to describe his girlfriend. In other words, Mazlan was suggesting that it is useful to use some of our knowledge about books and stories to help us (the reader and writer) make sense of the complexity and difficulty he faced in trying to understand this girlfriend of his. The words or phrases attributed to the book and, by extension to his girlfriend, included 'treasure', 'special', 'interesting', 'unfamiliar', 'puzzling'; and the story he was reading was so 'intriguing' that he 'could never let it go', that he would pocket every new, unfamiliar word until his pocket swelled. Being a difficult text to comprehend, he needed a dictionary to help him demystify the enigma that she presented. Consequently, he became even more perplexed than before and a growing headache developed, yet he was undaunted by all this. In fact his curiosity and addiction for her became stronger and he did not want this wonderful feeling to end. In this excerpt the transitive verbs are associated with male actions while the female is presented as a passive 'recipient' of male actions or as an 'object' to be 'conquered'.

Although Mazlan added a caveat to say that he did not view his girlfriend as a 'thing', his language choice, however, revealed a dominant or patriarchal attitude towards the opposite sex. Notwithstanding, I was happy to see him add that disclaimer about not perceiving his girlfriend as a 'thing'. This was because I had reprimanded him for being chauvinistic in an earlier entry when he wrote "I hate fat lady - show they don't know how to take care of themselves (see Appendix K)." In my response I had accused him of viewing women merely from an aesthetic point of view, as a 'thing' to be admired and nothing more. Thus I was pleased to note that he had taken pains to defend himself against further attack in this entry. To me this was testimony that he had undergone an "apprenticeship in thinking" (Mercer, 2000, p. 133) where language was used to provide him with frames of references to recontextualise his experience into cultural knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995).

Additionally, despite the grammatical errors made in the above excerpt, I was amazed to read this compelling text by Mazlan. My amazement stemmed from the fact that Mazlan came from a literacy impoverished background as his family could not afford the luxury of buying books to read for pleasure. Yet Mazlan's writing was rich in the vocabulary of literacy and peppered with rhetorical elements such as repetitions (every page, every phrase, every sentence, every unfamiliar word, every episode, every turning of a page, every line, so special, so interesting), alliterations (pocketing, pocket, puzzling, page, paragraph, perplexed) and collocations (book, content, page, paragraph, browse) which contributed to mutual intelligibility of interaction and interpersonal involvement between the reader and writer (McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Tannen, 1989).

I also saw a hint of intertextuality in the repetitive use of 'every' which could have come from the writing of Chief Seattle - a text that I had given to Mazlan's class wherein Chief Seattle wrote, "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore. Every mist in the dark woods, every humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people (in Noor Azlina and Spykerman, 1991, p. 74)." Bakhtin (1981) says that we do not learn words from a dictionary but from people's mouths and that the words only become our own when we populate them with our own intentions. Clearly, Mazlan's writing indicated that he had been inducted into "ways with words" and "ways of thinking" (Mercer, 2000, p. 133) by interacting with other people and recycling their words in novel ways as manifested in his use of language. To sum up, Mazlan's writing had successfully created meaning through the use of familiar imageries which had helped to activate relevant experience and send a subtle metamessage of involvement and rapport between us, the communicators in this dialogic writing.

4.3.9 Praising

As befitting, I praised him for his effort.

I: I noticed you write best when you're in love. Your words flow like a happy gurgling river, sweeping your reader along with the undercurrents of your feelings and passion. Maybe I should recommend that all the 5E1 students fall in love and then perhaps they will write me captivating and absorbing stories that make me want to read on and on. That's a wonderful piece of descriptive

writing you've given me. Keep it up! I'm very impressed with how you describe this new relationship of yours. Your writing shows maturity of thought and vivid use of language. Love seems to have lifted you up so high that even your language seems to 'take off' and soar instead of meander. Well done! Where did you learn those nice words and phrases from? Certainly not from reading Chinese comics!

If we wish to see originality and an occasional flash of brilliance instead of lifeless essays, we must allow our students to write without inhibition, without fear of failure, without the debilitating effects of the red ink or grade. More often than not, the response that students seek from their teacher is a dialogue, an intellectual response to their ideas (Burniske, 1994). Mazlan's reply affirmed this, "Thanks for the compliment. It's very uplifting (felt like I'm floating and my head's getting bigger)." Significantly, the word 'uplifted' was initiated by me when we first embarked on this interactive writing. I had written:

I know how it feels to be in a relationship - you see everything through rose-tinted spectacles, you're so uplifted that you think your permanent residence is on cloud nine.

Since then, Mazlan had individualised this word and given it specific shapes on numerous occasions when we interacted in writing. Copying a word in a notebook or memorising it is not the same as appropriating it. To appropriate a word requires a dialogic context for endowing the word with one's own intentions. Thus, as Fallon asserts, "without this dialogic engagement words remain empty forms (1995, p.140)." She emphasises that they only come alive in 'living

interaction' as exemplified in these two entries by Mazlan: "She laughed throughout the movie teacher and it was so funny to watch her cheerful face - uplifting"; and "I was thrilled since I could once again hear her laugh. Sincere and uplifting."

4.3.10 Complaining and Reporting Events

When we write, we draw on the resources of the language system to construct content and to present people, processes and circumstances in ways that have social consequences. In the following excerpt Mazlan used language to complain about school. Some valuable insights can be gleaned from his complaint.

Lan: Don't feel like talking today. So I might as well write you something. I feel like throwing everything that has been bottled inside me out today but I don't think that's healthy. Yesterday was my fault and I've apologised to Puan Farah after being lectured a while. I really hope this talk about me and Sheri will dissipate soon when I transfer back to the hostel. I wouldn't want any more teacher disturbing her emotions further. I assure you the decrease in my mark has nothing to do with her. It's my attitude. Poor Sheri if there were anything she brought to me it would be nothing but sheer joy and feeling of being loved. I was in KLCC yesterday after I've decided to bunk school. The park was embraced in tranquility and I sat there alone with my books. Sheri was having a slight temperature when I phoned her around 9.30, I asked her out. I didn't know she was sick, but she came an hour later. She forced herself to

come. She was quite hot when I tested her forehead. She refused to go back when I insisted to sent her. Teacher, she made me cry. I cried and cried. I was touched but I cried in my heart. So I don't want anymore disturbance or talks about her. We never conduct ourselves over the limit. Since when did throwing smiles and grins band [banned] in schools. This is an obvious injustice. Stereotypical and conservative thinking. I hate this school. I hate its existence! I'd do anything to change it if I have power to.

Colvin and Schlosser (1998) say that students see teachers as the personification of school. As such, messages from teachers may be interpreted to represent the institution of school itself. In school, students seldom get the opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction or grievances about school or teachers. Yet complaining is an important communicative event because it empowers students with a voice to express their disenchantment which can lead to a sense of enfranchisement despite the conflicting things that happen in school. It also has pedagogical value because in complaining students use language to write about a conflict, provide an explanation of its truth and give explicit information in order to be understood (Shuy, 1988a). Additionally, complaining is instructive as it tells the teacher important information about how students feel so that the teacher can respond appropriately. As dialogue journalling provides space for students to complain, it therefore plays an important function in helping students rid themselves of negative feelings. The teacher's reply can also help them see the situation from another perspective which they may not otherwise have thought of on their own. This can lead to cognitive development.

While Mazlan cast himself as the wrong-doer in this episode, Sheri was depicted as the poor, innocent victim. The institution (school and teachers) was presented as stereotypical, conservative, unjust and hateful while words that were ascribed to teachers had negative connotations like 'lectured', and 'disturbing'. Overall, the emotive words in this entry evoked in me sympathy for these two students whose life worlds seemed to be at odds with school. As a confidant I could not help feeling sorry for Mazlan but as a teacher I was aghast to know that he had skipped school and used that time to have a date with Sheri who was absent from school because she was feeling poorly. Writing a reply (see below) to this entry was therefore a struggle as it was a contested site with my allegiance being pulled by opposing forces.

4.3.11 Expressing Anger, Disappointment and Problem-posing

Real communication is invested with feelings and genuineness of response. As a teacher, I felt that Mazlan had behaved irresponsibly in playing truant and in using that time for a rendezvous with Sheri. Because I was very disturbed and angry over the incident, I vented it out on him.

I: It was foolhardy of you to do such a thing and to put Sheri at risk by your rash behaviour. That shook my confidence and trust in you. I must confess that I was angry and disappointed in you. As it is, I don't quite approve of your Saturday outings because they're robbing you of valuable time for studying but it's your prerogative to decide how you spend your Saturdays. However, to skip school on Monday and go out on a date, no matter how innocent this might

have seemed, was really a bad decision. You could have been caught by the authorities at the park and have yours and Sheri's photos on the front page of all newspapers with the headline screaming, "Students play truant to go dating"! Or you could have been found out by Puan Farah. Imagine the consequences. Your reputation would be tarnished forever. Anyway, this is your private affair and it's best that I don't interfere. Otherwise you would accuse me of being a busy body. It's just that your private life and activities can affect your public life in school. Not just yours, Sheri's too. You should also know that teenagers are hot-blooded people with raging and uncontrollable hormones so don't over estimate yours and Sheri's ability to stay cool in the face of temptation. This reminds of TV soaps and I hate TV soaps!

Such an incident points to the ethical dilemma that I, as a teacher-confidant, faced. Some of my colleagues knew that I was working on this dialogue journal writing project with Mazlan and that I was, in a sense, mentoring him in the process. If he were to be caught in any kinds of trouble I would surely be hauled up for questioning by the school administrators. I struggled with the question of empowerment. To what extent should we empower students to make decisions for themselves? Where do we draw the line between empowerment and interference? Another issue which I had to grapple with concerned the genuineness of my response because it could affect the student's mental and emotional state. Ultimately, there is only a thin line between using language to challenge a student's thinking and attacking his or her decision making as I found out.

4.4 Conclusion

In this penultimate chapter, I have discussed the contextual dimensions, the socio-psychological dimensions and the nature of language use in this interactive writing between Mazlan and me. Although the physical context of the site was generally unfavourable to Mazlan, the key attributes of dialogue journal writing were, however, instrumental in turning the deficits he faced into bright prospects for ESL learning besides meeting his personal needs. Additionally, the socio-psychological dimensions comprising the intramental (individual) and intermental (social) factors (Mercer, 2000) helped to enhance the dialogue journal writing as well as contributed positively to Mazlan's attitude and motivation for learning English as a second language. Last but not least, I have also shown that in this dialogue journal writing, Mazlan and I had used language for a multitude of functions. Language was used for getting things done, for social communication, for the guided construction of knowledge and understanding, for the internal organization of experience as well as for cognitive development. I have also noted that our language use was not neutral as our choice of words conveyed particular value judgements, commitments and "invoked particular connotations, contexts, and power relationships (Maybin, 1994, p. 132)."

Next, in my concluding chapter I will draw together the key findings that emerged in this study, discuss their implications for ESL teaching and suggest recommendations for further research.

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