

CHAPTER SEVEN

TEACHING PRACTICE

In the teaching practice component of the programme, the teacher trainees had to spend six weeks teaching in schools around University of Malaya, that is, in the Klang Valley. The teacher trainees were given 10 to 12 hours a week to teach English. The mentors who supervised the five teacher trainees during simulated teaching also supervised and evaluated the teacher trainees during teaching practice. Both mentors (Amreet had a different mentor from the others, see p. 143) informed the teacher trainees that they would observe two lessons taught by each trainee at any time during the six weeks for supervision and evaluation. The teacher trainees taught all four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) during their teaching practice as was required by the national school curriculum. They could integrate the learning skills in their lessons but were required to design their lesson plans in such a way that one of skills was foregrounded.

I observed four lessons of each of the five teacher trainees (20 lessons in all) when the teaching of the writing skill was the main objective of the lesson. I was also able to sit in at three post-observation, mentor-mentee conferences. During these conferences, strengths and weaknesses of the lessons were pointed out by the mentor, problems were brought up by the teacher trainees, and suggestions and solutions were given by the mentor.

Chee Leng, Laura and Siti taught in the same secondary school in Shah Alam. Depat taught in a secondary school in Damansara Utama and Amreet, in a secondary school in Petaling Jaya. (Shah Alam, Damansara Utama and Petaling Jaya are towns

close to the University of Malaya.) They were given Form Two and Form Four classes to teach because students in these classes did not face any major government examination.

In the lessons that I observed during teaching practice, there were a number of recurrent issues. These issues concerned difficulties faced as the five teacher trainees struggled with salient points of implementation of ideas discussed during the writing course. The following is a discussion of these issues under the broader pedagogical headings, language-focussed activities, genre-based approach, process writing and error correction, as used by Mr. Lopez during his course. Activities under the genre-based approach are discussed first because the genre-based approach was by far, the most popular approach among the five teacher trainees during teaching practice.

The Genre-Based Approach

Although the five teacher trainees at times used a number of language-focussed activities, the genre-based approach (Mr Lopez's interpretation) dominated the lessons. The teacher trainees explained to me that they felt more comfortable using the genre-based approach since this was how they themselves had been taught English and how they had been teaching previously. Mr. Lopez had explained the use of the genre-based approach to help students develop and expand on ideas, with a focus on word order, sentence order, linking words, topic sentences and development of paragraphs (see p. 94 and p. 100 for details). However, except for Amreet, the manner in which the focal teacher trainees used the genre-based approach was rigid, focussed on surface features and left little room for student creativity. This was a point brought up the mentor during simulated teaching (see p. 156). However, rigid formats and models prevailed

throughout teaching practice. The five teacher trainees appeared to use the genre-based approach in the manner they had been using prior to enrolling in the B.Ed. (TESL) programme (details discussed in Chapter Four) rather than on the ideas of Mr. Lopez. This point of the difficulty of changing ingrained practices is discussed in detail in chapter two on the theory concerning teacher change. The following are examples of the kind of activities and a discussion of difficulties faced by the five teacher trainees under the genre-based approach.

The Use of Mind Maps

The creation of mind maps after discussions in class was the most popular of the innovations suggested by Mr Lopez under the genre-based approach. But none of the five teacher trainees really developed on the mind maps as suggested by Mr. Lopez to include sentence structure, sentence order, organisation of paragraphs and use of linking words and none developed the “master brain pattern” suggested by Mr. Lopez (see p. 106 and p. 112).

The following vignette shows how Depat created a mind map to help students in their writing.

Vignette No. 3: Depat’s class.

Here, Depat was trying to get students to write a story on co-operation (in keeping with the syllabus requirement to teach moral values). Depat first displayed a picture of a scene of a fire. The picture had been drawn on large piece of mahjong paper and he put this up on the blackboard. Then the following took place.

Depat: What is happening in this picture?

Chorus: Fire

Depat: Who do you see in the picture?

Student A: People.

Student B: Neighbours.

Depat: Yes, what are they doing?

Student C: Water.

Depat: What are they carrying?

Student D: Buckets of water. (Depat writes the word "bucket" on the blackboard)

Depat: Good. What are the people doing? Why are they carrying buckets of water?

Student B: Helping to off the fire.

Depat: Yes they are co-operating to put out **they** fire. What are they forming?

No answer.

Depat: They are forming a chain (Depat writes the word "chain" on the blackboard. He writes words around the picture to form a mind map). Do you think they can put out the fire?

Student E: No, Not enough water.

Depat: Good, how can the villagers help the fire victims?

Student F: Call bomba (Malay word for fire brigade).

Depat: Yes, they can call the fire brigade. How else can they help?

Student G: Give money and food.

Depat: Yes, they can collect donations to **help** the fire victims. They can rebuild what?

No answer.

Depat: They can rebuild the victims' house.

As students were answering his questions, Depat created a mind map around the picture he had displayed. These words were written on the blackboard around the picture – fire brigade, bucket, co-operate, donations, chain, and victim. Depat then told students that he was going to read out a story about the fire in the picture (model) and they were to take notes and then write out the story. Depat never developed the mind map in the ways suggested by Mr. Lopez to include sentence structure, linking words, paragraphs and so on (see p. 112). Depat used a model instead (given in the deductive manner as suggested by Mr. Lopez for weaker students, see p. 104) and taking notes (also as suggested by Mr. Lopez, see p. 95) to help students write. The first stage mind maps are not without value because Mr. Lopez did explain that such maps are effective with good classes (see p. 105).

Underdeveloped mind maps (first stage mind maps as explained by Mr. Lopez, see p. 105) was a common feature among all the five teacher trainees during teaching practice although, in their lessons plans, the teacher trainees described their students as being weak or of intermediate proficiency level. I felt that students would have benefited and lessons would have been more interesting if the maps had been developed in the manner suggested by Mr. Lopez (see p. 106). Chee Leng created the underdeveloped mind map shown on Figure 27 after questioning students and eliciting key words, before asking students to write on the attractions of the Shah Alam Lake Gardens.

Amreet, like Depat and Chee Leng, also created underdeveloped mind maps shown in Figure 28, when trying to get students to write on occupations. She too first held a discussion with students and elicited key words in order to create mind maps.

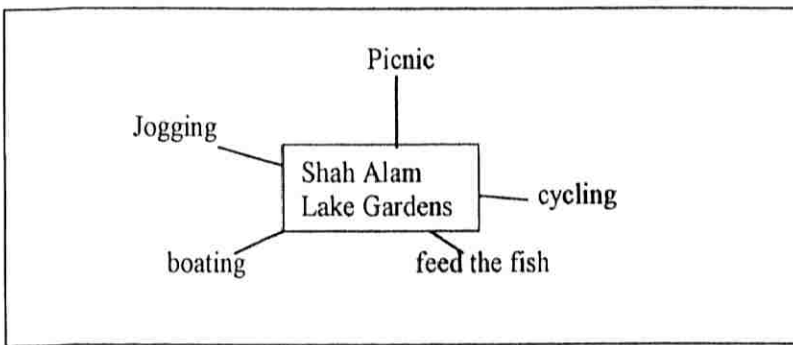


Figure 27. Mind Map Constructed by Chee Leng

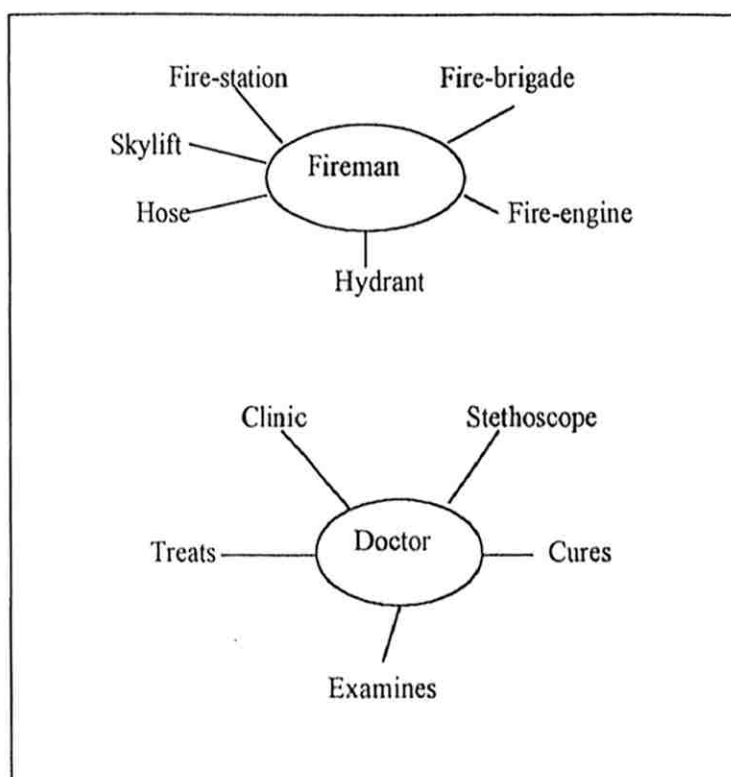


Figure 28. Mind Maps Created by Amreet

Similarly, Siti, like Depat, Chee Leng and Amreet, wrote key words around a series of pictures, which she displayed to her class. This picture series is shown on Figure 29. The following vignette shows how Siti created a mind map around the pictures that she displayed to her class.

CHART 4

Stories on Moral Values: Self-Reliance



Figure 29. Siti's Picture Series

Vignette No 4: Siti's class.

Here, Siti was helping students write a story based on the pictures displayed.

Siti: Class, Look at the first picture. What do you see in the picture?

Student A: A poor family

Siti: How do you know it is a poor family?

Student B: The attap roof.

Siti: From the looks of the house you can tell it is a poor family. What else can you see in the picture?

Student C: Four child.

Siti: If only one we say one child. But for four what do we say?

Student D: Four children

Siti: Good, four children, now look at the next picture, what do you see?

Student E: Father fisherman, mother wifehouse.

Siti: Wifehouse?

Student F: Housewife

Siti: Yes, from the work they are doing you can tell that the mother is a housewife and the father is a fisherman. (Siti created a mind map around the picture series by writing the following key words – poor family, housewife, fisherman and four children).

Siti: Well, what happens in the next picture?

Student G: Mati lemas.

Siti: In English?

Student H: Drop in water.

Siti: Drowned. One day there was a storm, the fisherman's boat capsized and the fisherman drowned. (Siti writes the words "capsized" and "drowned" around the pictures displayed.)

Siti: Well, what happens next?

Student I: Do business nasi lemak and eggs.

Siti: Yes, the mother does business. She sells nasi lemak and eggs at the market. What does she do in the afternoon?

Student J: Mengkuang.

Siti: Yes, that is in Malay. In English?

(No answer)

Siti: Weave. In the afternoon she weaves mats and sells them for money. What does she do with the money?

Student K: Buy clothes and pay.

Siti: That right, good, she buys clothes and pays bills. (Siti continues writing key words on the mind map created.)

Siti's mind map, like that of the others, remained at the beginning stage of the procedure explained by Mr. Lopez (see p. 106 and p. 112). Laura, however, unlike the rest of the teacher trainees, went a bit further to create a more detailed mind map after questioning students as shown in the following vignette.

Vignette No. 5: Laura's class.

Laura, here, was helping students write a descriptive essay on the state of Selangor.

Laura: What is the capital of Selangor?

Student A: Shah Alam.

Laura: Yes, we know that Shah Alam is part of Selangor. What are the other parts of Selangor?

Student B: Klang.

Laura: Yes Klang, Sepang, Banting. There is also a seaside here. Anyone knows?

Student C: Morib.

Laura: Yes, Klang is also the what?

(A student mumbles something in Malay.)

Laura: In English we say royal town. Today, we will focus on two popular places in Selangor, which are Shah Alam and Bandar Sunway. What are the attractions in Shah Alam?

Student D: State Mosque.

Laura: What is so special about the mosque?

Student E: Tallest minaret in the world.

Laura: Another name for this mosque?

Student F: Blue mosque.

Laura: Yes, the dome is blue so it is called Blue Mosque. (Teacher writes key words in the form of a mind map around the word "Shah Alam" on the blackboard.) How many people can pray here at any one time?

(No response to question.)

Laura: 16,000 Muslims can pray here at any one time. What are the other attractions? You got chocolates and other things being produced here. Where are these coming from?

Student G: Factories.

Laura: Yes, what other attractions?

Student H: Agricultural park.

Laura: Yes, you also have a theme park here called Wet World. Anyone knows how much to enter?

Student I: Seven ringgit for adults and four ringgit for children.

Laura: Yes, theme park situated next to what?

Student J: PKNS building.

Laura: No.

Student K: Lake Gardens.

Laura: Yes, Lake Gardens. What are the attractions at the Lake Gardens?

Student L: Boating and swimming.

Laura: Good. Now we will discuss Bandar Sunway, another attraction in Selangor. Where is Bandar Sunway?

Student M: Next to Subang Jaya.

Laura: What are the attractions here?

Student N: Sunway Pyramid.

Laura: What do you have in Sunway Pyramid?

Student O: Shopping.

Laura: Yes, it is a shopping paradise. Anything else?

Student P: Ice skating.

Laura: Good, anyone been to Sunway Lagoon?

Chorus: Yes.

Laura: What do you have there?

Student Q: Dry Park and Water Park.

Laura: What is the entrance fee?

Student R: Fifteen dollars.

Laura wrote down key words during this discussion to form a mind map on the black board. Her mind map is shown on Figure 30. Laura's mind map differed from that of the others because she went a bit further to develop the first-level and second-level words.

In the creation of mind maps, what was common among the five teacher trainees was that they all wrote key words around a main word or picture after eliciting these key words from students. Laura went further to develop second and third level words. Laura was the only one to use a mind map (albeit underdeveloped) during simulated teaching and the mentor praised her use of the mind map (see p. 170), possibly because the mentor was unaware of Mr. Lopez's suggestions about development.

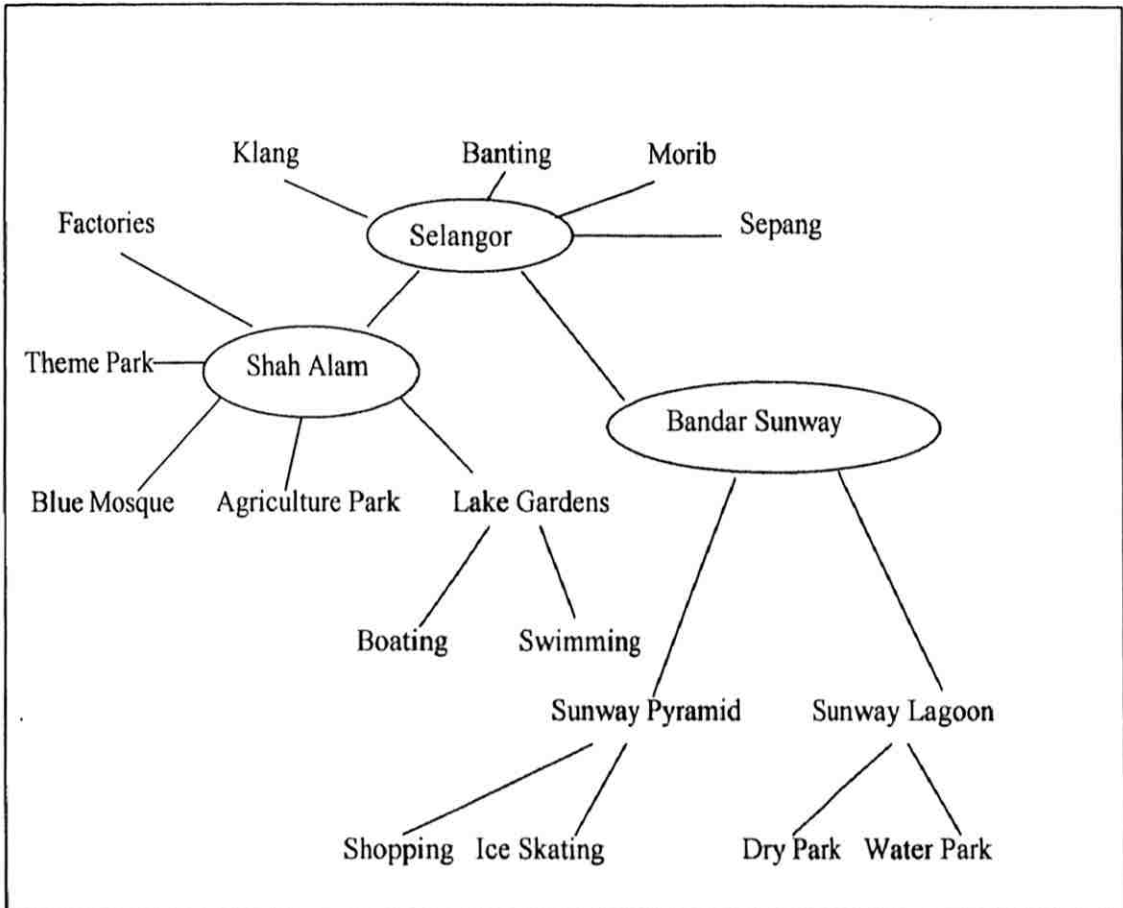


Figure 30. Mind Map Created by Laura

If the other teacher trainees had also used mind maps during simulated teaching, a deeper discussion on mind maps may have resulted in a re-examination of Mr. Lopez's suggestions on development and more input from the mentor. However, the mind maps remained at the first stage of development as explained by Mr. Lopez. Mr. Lopez had explained the development of the mind map to show sentence order, order within a sentence, the use of verbs, the use of paragraphs and the use of linking words. Finally, Mr. Lopez had explained how a "master brain pattern" could be developed to

help students write on similar essays (see p. 106 and p. 112). When I asked the five teacher trainees about why they were not developing the mind maps in the manner suggested by Mr. Lopez, they claimed they had difficulty recalling the development suggested by Mr. Lopez. The time lapse of about a year (Mr. Lopez's course ended on 21 February 1998; teaching practice started on the 22 March 1999. See structure of the programme p. 41) and lack of practice may be the reason for this.

The Choice of Topics

The five teacher trainees complained to me that they had no choice but to use the pre-determined topics prescribed in the syllabus during teaching practice. This was because of the need to carry on from where the permanent teachers (whose classes they took over for teaching practice) had stopped. They could not choose topics which they would have liked to teach or allow students to choose topics which the students liked. Topics like describing places and giving directions seemed to have dominated the lessons since these topics were supposed to be taught during the six weeks allotted to them. The national school syllabus known as KBSM or Kurrikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum) prescribes the content with specific topics for the teaching of language skills (see Appendix P for KBSM topics). While Jones (1998) and Silva (1998) debated on teacher-chosen topics verses student-chosen topics (see p. 36), in Malaysia it appears that neither the teacher nor the students decide on the topics! This is because teachers feel that they have to follow topics prescribed in the syllabus.

Problems With Materials Selected

Mr. Lopez said that he provided the teacher trainees with carefully selected materials in the hope that the teacher trainees would be able to design their own after understanding the theoretical principles behind the materials provided (see p. 76). I felt that all five teacher trainees had difficulties in this area. At times, the material selected was too simple for the class while at other times, the material was too difficult, complicated or unclear for the students. When the material was suited for the students, unfortunately the potential was not fully realised in the lesson. At times, too many materials were prepared and at times, there were glaring errors in the materials used. The following are examples of the materials used by the five teacher trainees.

In one of Depat's lessons, he used pictures to get students to write a story about a disobedient little boy injuring himself by climbing a tree. In another lesson, he used a story about a greedy dog losing its bone by barking at its reflection in a river. Depat seemed to be using material from his prior teaching in a primary school. The mentor pointed out that more sophisticated content should have been used for teaching teenagers in an urban school. Similarly, Chee Leng made students write an invitation for a birthday party and Amreet had students write instructions for making a paper-plate puppet. I felt that such material were not suited for the urban teenagers that they were teaching. Sirc (1997) and Khan-Egan (1998) both promoted giving topics that ignite the passions of students (see p. 37).

Siti, on the other hand, used materials that were too difficult or complicated for the class she was teaching.

The handouts she used in a class are shown on the following pages. The three passages that were chosen for her handout (shown on Figure 31), I feel, should have been edited to make them shorter and clearer. The language and vocabulary made the task too difficult for her students and too difficult for Siti to keep students focussed on what she was trying to teach. Moreover, the writing (font size) was too small and the three articles cramped into a single sheet added to the difficulty of studying the articles. There were too many long scientific words (e.g., erythromycin, bronchitis, tetracycline) in the second article which further complicated matters. During the discussion on the article, Siti used a number of terms that appeared difficult for her students, for example, “pharmacist”, “authorities” and “unqualified” but she did little to explain the meanings of these terms. She seemed to assume that students knew the meaning of the terms she used, but it was obvious to me (at the back of the classroom) that the students were having difficulty understanding because they appeared to lose interest in what she was saying and started chatting among themselves.

Siti had to spend too much time on the first two articles (shown on Figure 31) because they were too difficult for the students and as time was running out, she had to stop the lesson before even looking at the third article. When she asked students whether they could complete the task (shown on p. 201) on the third passage at home, there was no response from the students. Moreover, she could not complete the final task of getting students to write a letter to a newspaper as described in her lesson plan. The wrong choice of the reading passages spoilt the lesson.

Read the articles below and complete task-sheet 2

1 Proud and happy with improvement at KLIA

WHEN things weren't going well at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport during its first few days of operation, much attention was focused on even the most minuscule of shortcomings.

I feel it is only fair that we give KLIA its due recognition now that things have improved by leaps and bounds.

As a regular at the airport, I feel compelled to congratulate the management and staff of KLIA for the smooth and efficient running of such a world-class facility.

Since its opening, much improvement can be seen in the management of our magnificent new airport, and I truly enjoy its facilities and services more with each flight.

I have been to many fine airports around the world, and I can confidently say that KLIA is comparable to the best there is.

That gives me great pleasure to see cheerful faces of satisfied passengers and staff going about their work at KLIA, sharing a very invidious sense of pride and this fine showcase of the indomitable "Malaysia Boleh" spirit.

However, there is one suggestion I'd like to make which I'm sure KLIA passengers will appreciate.

The airport management should ensure that trolleys for departing passengers are placed right after the immigration checkpoint of the Boarding Area.

Trolleys should also be made available right outside the Boarding Gate for disembarking passengers.

Passengers, especially women with children and elderly folk with hand luggage will appreciate this very much.

My heartfelt congratulations also to the Minister of Transport, Datuk Seri Dr Lim Joo Keng who has been giving KLIA undivided attention and expert guidance in ensuring its efficient operations.

Asfendi Norwawi
KLIA

2

Don't let unqualified people sell medicine

A FEW years ago, my husband who is allergic to penicillin, sulphur, and common antibiotics like erythromycin, had a bad attack of flu and bronchitis cough.

Our family doctor prescribed an antibiotic, "Rifadin", which he was not allergic to. Since the doctor did not stock this rather costly antibiotic, he gave us a prescription to obtain the drug from a pharmacy.

At a pharmacy, near the Kuala Lumpur Hospital, a salesgirl served us. The pharmacist was nowhere in sight.

My husband told the salesgirl that the drug looked different, but she insisted it was "Rifadin" from a different packaging.

My husband had a severe allergic reaction which could have killed him.

Our doctor rushed over to give him an anti-allergy jab. The drug was not "Rifadin" but "Tetracyclin."

We called the pharmacist who came over to my place that night with great apologies. I did not report him nor sue him as he was most remorseful.

I advised him that he should dispense drugs personally as they do in the West. To protect the public, pharmacists must be present or hire other pharmacists to help them at the pharmacy.

I hope the authorities will take note of my personal experience and not let drugs be dispensed by unqualified persons even from a pharmacy.

MRS C. TAN,
Kuala Lumpur.

3

No reason for cooking oil, sugar, flour shortages

WHY are people rushing for cooking oil, sugar and flour when these items are scarcely used because people are more health conscious?

Our staple food is rice and not flour. Malaysians eat rice and not spaghetti, bread, cakes, pies or buns.

In fact, we should be having a surplus of sugar, cooking oil and flour. In view of the numerous campaigns urging the public to reduce the intake of sugar and cooking oil.

Well, are the current shortages of sugar, cooking oil and flour real or artificial? Created by traders and manufacturers to promote or stimulate quick sales especially during the

current economic slow down?

The public shouldn't panic. Take it calmly and try to practise the look-and-see attitude. Don't rush to the hyper or supermarkets. They love to have you there. If you do so, you are caught inside the "net".

That's what these businessmen and manufacturers want. Don't be too sensitive or be taken in by the rumours.

The public should give their fullest support and co-operation as they are the consumers. They too can help by not overstocking on these items.

Lau Bing
Subang Jaya

Figure 31. Siti's Handout

Task Sheet 2

Read the articles and complete the task sheet given by filling the table below. The first one has been done for you.

Article	Main Point	Function	Supporting facts	Suggestion (if any)
1	improvement in KLIA	to show appreciation/ to congratulate	1. smooth and efficient service 2. satisfied customers 3. modern facilities	easy access to trolleys for passengers
2				
3				

Figure 31. Siti's Handout (Cont.)

In another lesson, Siti used the following two passages as models when trying to teach students how to write about the achievements of successful people.

Against All Odds

Mary Greda had an impossible dream. Many laughed at her. A school dropout, she could barely read and write. "How could she," they asked, "dare to dream of becoming a doctor?" But Mary persisted. Diligently and patiently, she set out to learn. Even the stroke that paralysed half her body could not stop her. Painfully, but surely, she soon learnt once more to move, speak and write. When she entered college, Mary's problems increased. She had to support herself and her family. So Mary worked in the morning, attended classes in the afternoon, played with her children in the evening and when they were all asleep, she took out her books and studied. There were times the struggle to succeed was too much and she felt like giving up. But only for a while. The dream shone bright and strong within her. "I'm nearly there," she would tell herself. When she was 35, Mary Greda graduated as a doctor. It was the greatest triumph of her life. "I have made it," she thought. "I'm a doctor." Her impossible dream had come true, because Mary Greda refused to give up.

Master Of My Fate

If you asked Roderick Legaspi where he was born, he would say, "I don't know." Perhaps there is nothing strange about it, except that Roderick is an unusually successful businessman – One who has created an innovative and famous enterprise. A distinguished Filipino, he rose from poverty to a position of honour and influence.

He was an orphan and grew up with foster parents. In his own words, "I was sent out into the world with only a few dollars in my pocket." After many disappointments, this orphan got a job as a bus boy with a restaurant in Baguio. A hard worker, who had the power to think big, Roderick did a good job. Eventually, his boss sent him to see what could be done with a small restaurant in Manila that was doing badly. Roderick managed to bring the restaurant around.

This is how his ambition was born. Roderick took his savings and opened a restaurant serving fried chicken, because he had loved this particular dish since he was a child. Roderick named his restaurant after one of his daughters, Sally, and it gradually took off. Roderick used the best ingredients and designed attractive outlets. He attributes his success to a sound mind and strength of character.

Today, the Sally's chain consists of more than three thousand restaurants all over the world.

The reading texts would have been much more interesting if local personalities had been used. During the pre-reading activity in this lesson, students were excited over the use of famous local names as examples of successful people. However, the use of foreign names in the reading texts and foreign places killed the earlier excitement. Siti, herself, found it quite a mouthful pronouncing the names of the two characters in the reading text. The passages could have been easily edited to use local names and places.

Similarly, Chee Leng used material which was simply too confusing for her students. Her handouts are shown on the Figure 32. Chee Leng told the students to work in pairs to complete the exercise. After ten minutes, Chee Leng asked the students for the answers. There was confusion as different students shouted out the answers and Chee Leng just kept nodding her head and looking down at her paper.

This was a confusing exercise because Chee Leng did not explain what was meant by right or left of a building. Were the students to assume they were in the building facing forward or were they to consider anything on the right hand side of the sheet of paper to be on the right?

Moreover, I felt that in almost all the sentences given, at least six options out of the eight could be considered correct. For example in sentence two, 'The field is.....the school,' any of the options "close to, to the right of, at the back of, in front of, before, to the left of" is possible because the teacher did not clarify where the front of the various buildings were. As a result, various answers were given and Chee Leng appeared lost (looking down into her sheet and nodding) in accepting or rejecting answers of students and only said that more than one answer was possible.

Sek. Men. Keb. Seksyen 24, Shah Alam, Selangor

Task sheet 1

Name :

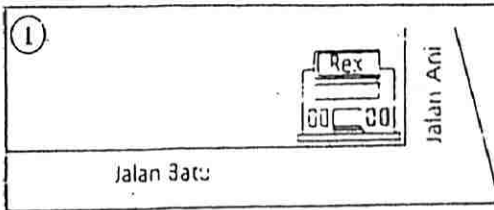
Date :

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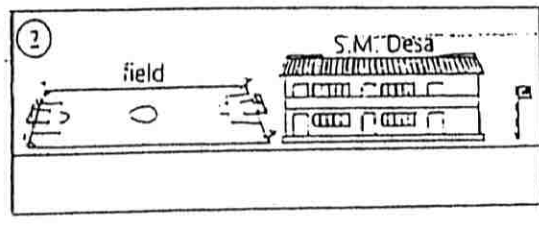
As you are walking to school, you see many landmarks. State the position of these places stated below by filling in the blanks using the words from the box.

before
close to
to the right of
at the back of

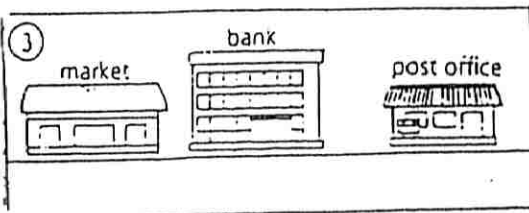
in between
on the corner of
in front of
to the left of



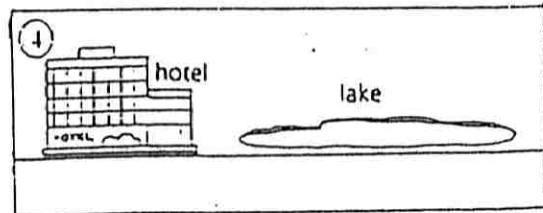
The cinema is
Jalan Batu and Jalan Ani.



The field isthe school.

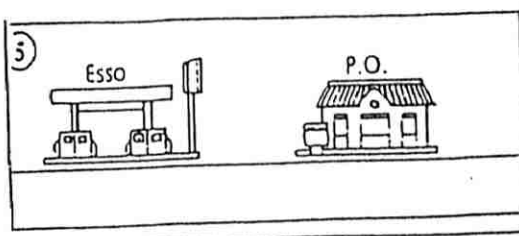


The bank isthe market
and the post office.

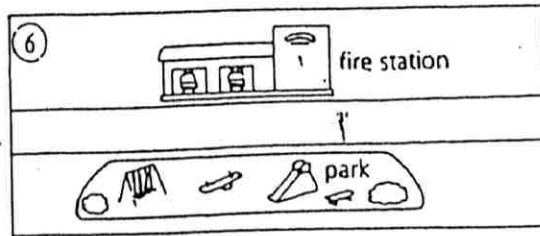


The hotel is the lake.

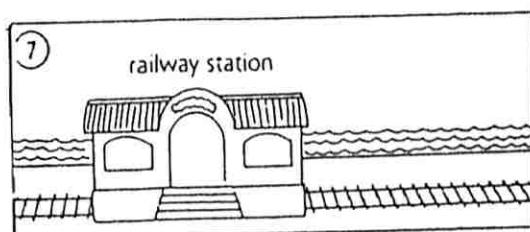
Figure 32. Chee Leng's Handout



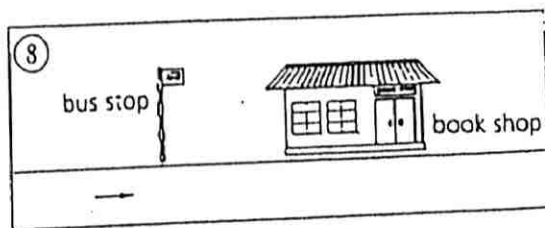
The post office isthe petrol station.



The fire station isthe park.



The river isthe railway station.



The bus-stop isthe book shop.

Figure 32. Chee Leng's Handout (Cont.)

She then suddenly switched (in embarrassment) to the next activity on her lesson plan. If Chee Leng had pilot tested the exercise, the flaws would have been obvious.

In one of Laura's lesson, the material selected was suitable for her students but the potential was lost in the manner in which she implemented the lesson. The following vignette shows how Laura used the material.

Vignette No. 6: Laura's Class.

This was a 40-minute single period lesson. Laura was trying to teach students how to describe an accident. She first showed and discussed the meanings of different road signs. Then the following took place.

Teacher: Anyone witnessed an accident?

(When there was no immediate response to the question, Laura put up a sketch map that appeared to show how an accident took place.)

Teacher: What do you think has taken place?

Chorus: Accident

Teacher: How many cars are there?

Chorus: Two.

Teacher: What other vehicle can you see?

Chorus: Motorcycle.

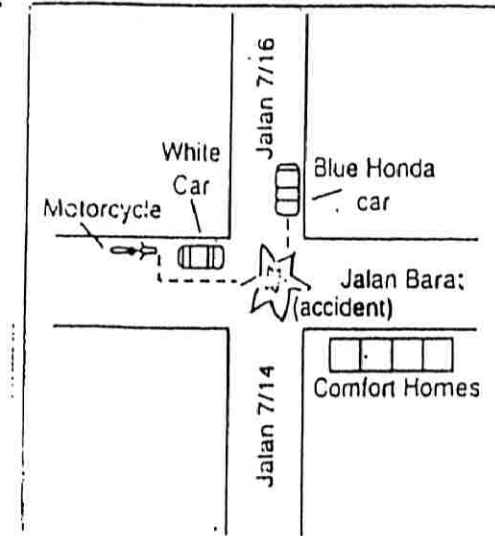
Teacher: Is there a traffic light in the map?

Chorus: No.

Laura then distributed task sheet one. She told students to read the passages given and answer the questions that followed. Students were told to work individually on the task. The handouts are shown on the following pages. While students read silently, Laura watched them from the front. As students began writing, Laura warned them not to copy from each other. When time ran out after about 20 minutes, Laura collected their work. Although she had interesting pictures and very good passages with sketches, there was very little discussion and teaching and the lesson seemed more like a test. I felt that the potential of the task sheet was simply wasted. There could have been an interesting discussion among students as to whose fault it was for the accident. There was perfect opportunity to use role play with different students taking the role of the drivers, motorcyclist and witness. However, Laura simply turned the lesson into what seemed like a test. There was little point in doing the comprehension and vocabulary questions that followed.

The lesson could have been developed to lead to students writing their own police reports concerning an accident after reading the three models provided. This could have been done in groups to allow for interaction, peer teaching and immediate feedback. But Laura turned the lesson into a stressful test with students handing in their work to be corrected. After the lesson, Laura told me that she was afraid of this class because this was her first lesson with them. She was too nervous to encourage interaction among students and was worried about how they would respond to her.

Below is a map and three police reports made by witnesses about an accident involving a car and a motorcycle. Read the reports carefully and answer the questions that follow.



Driver of the car

I, Tan Lee Hock, was at the junction of Jalan 7/16 and Jalan Barat. I was waiting for a long time because there were many cars. Finally I saw a white Proton Saga approaching. The indicator to turn left was on. I thought that as the car was going to turn left, I could cross the road into Jalan 7/14. Suddenly a motorcycle appeared. It was speeding and it hit my car on the side. My car was badly damaged. The side was dented and the window broken. Fortunately, I had only a few cuts and bruises.



Motorcyclist

I, Lim Kee Ming, was riding along Jalan Barat. The white Proton Saga in front of me slowed down. The indicator, to turn left, was on. So I overtook the car and drove straight on. Suddenly, a blue Honda Accord crossed the road. I tried to stop but was unable to do so. I banged straight into the car. I was thrown over the car. I was badly hurt. I had a broken leg and I also hurt my head. Some passersby sent me to the hospital.



Witness

I, Siti Kamariah, was standing outside Comfort Homes on Jalan Barat. I was watching the traffic because I was waiting for a taxi. I saw a white Proton Saga with its indicator on to show that it was turning left into Jalan 7/16. A motorcyclist was behind the car. There was a blue Honda Accord waiting at the junction of Jalan 7/16 and Jalan Barat. Suddenly, the Honda drove straight on. At the same time, the motorcyclist overtook the Proton Saga and sped up. The motorcyclist tried to stop but he hit the car. He was thrown over the car. He was injured and some passersby took him to the hospital.

Figure 33. Laura's Handout

- 1 Why did Tan Lee Hock decide to cross the road?
 A He was tired of waiting.
 B He didn't see any other cars.
 C He thought the white Proton Saga was turning left.
 D He did not see the motorcycle.
- 2 The motorcyclist
 A did not try to stop from hitting the car
 B was not badly injured
 C hurt his leg and head
 D wanted to turn left
- 3 A witness is a person who
 A is involved in the accident
 B sees the accident
 C is interested in the accident
 D is near the accident
- 4 Siti Kamariah was watching the traffic because she
 A wanted to see the accident
 B was waiting for a taxi
 C likes to watch traffic
 D was hoping to see an accident
- 5 According to the reports.
 A the car was only slightly damaged.
 B the white car caused the accident.
 C Siti Kamariah sent Lim Kee Ming to the hospital.
 D Tan Lee Hock wanted to go into Jalan 7/14.
- 6 The expression sped up means
 A slowed down
 B drove faster
 C stopped
 D continued driving
- 7 How badly was the car damaged?

- 8 What did the motorcyclist do when the Proton Saga slowed down?

- 9 Where was Siti Kamariah when the accident happened?

- 10 Find the opposites of these words in the passage:
 a under _____
 b few _____
 c in front of _____
 d short _____
 e inside _____

Figure 33. Laura's Handout (Cont.)

There were glaring errors in the material that Depat and Chee Leng used. In one lesson in which Depat was teaching students how to write postcards, the following was one of the models used.

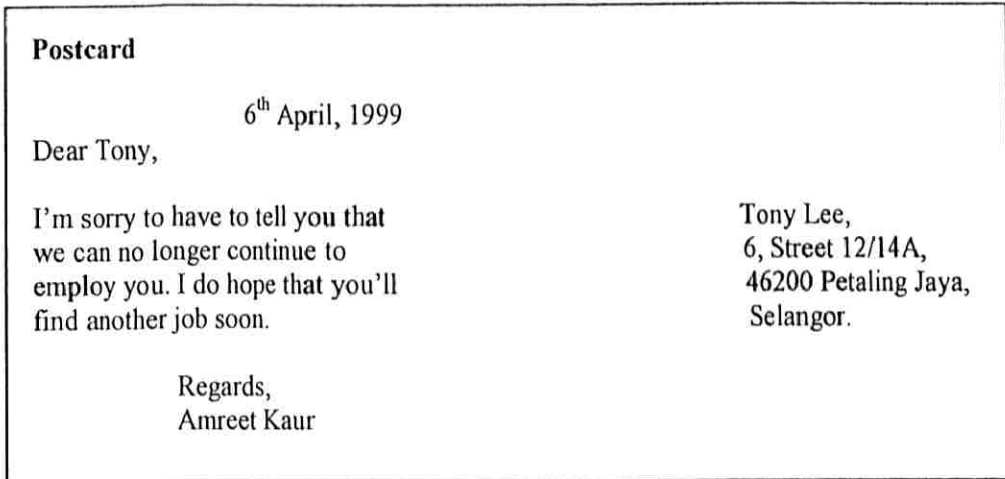


Figure 34. Depat's Model

I was quite shocked to see that the postcard displayed a termination letter. Obviously, Depat did not know that termination letters are not sent in the form of postcards. Fortunately, Depat did not pay much attention to this postcard. He only asked students to identify the writer and the receiver of the postcard.

In one of Chee Leng's handouts, the instructions for doing the exercise were as follows:

Look at the sketch map and give direction to your neighbour who has just moved in the way to your shop.

The instructions were confusing. The word "direction" should have been "directions", it was not clear who "your neighbour" was and the rest of the sentence was awkward.

Students were confused about what they were supposed to write and Chee Leng had to spend a lot of time explaining what she meant.

In another of Chee Leng's handouts, the instructions were as follows.

Due to lack of time, a tourist from Japan would like you to describe to him about a beautiful place in Shah Alam. Write the information below the place you would like to introduce to him.

Once again, Chee Leng's instructions on the handout were awkward. It was not clear what she meant by "Due to lack of time" and the sentence, "Write the information below the place you would like to introduce to him" was vague.

Chee Leng often had too many handouts. In one 70-minute lesson she had five handouts and moved from one activity to another in too hurried a manner. Similarly, Amreet, in one of her lessons, also had five different handouts for a 70-minute lesson and like Chee Leng hurried through the lesson. Amreet, who normally had well designed lessons, explained to me that she panicked just before the lesson when she realised that she had forgotten to bring the material she had planned to use for the lesson. It was only when I approached her, just before the lesson, when she realised that she had forgotten to bring her lesson plan and materials. So, she quickly photostatted some other material to use, just before the lesson. I found it difficult to follow her lesson because she had not given me a lesson plan. (All teacher trainees were required to prepare and compile lesson plans of every lesson they conduct.) When Amreet gave me her lesson plan for this lesson, about a month later after much persuasion, the contents appeared very different from what actually went on in the class.

In some lessons, the five teacher trainees were so caught up with content that there was little discussion on writing. In one of Laura's lessons, students were asked to

write on interesting places in the state of Pahang. The places discussed were Beserah Beach, Cameron highlands, Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill, Taman Negara, Lake Chini, Balok Beach and Cherating Beach. There were too many places to discuss and as a result, Laura had to move quickly from one place to the next. The places discussed were exciting holiday resort areas in Malaysia, which could have been discussed in greater detail if there were not so many places to discuss. I felt that it might have been better to discuss one resort in greater detail than to skim through so many places. The lesson appeared more of a geography lesson than an ESL writing lesson. The attractions of the places, the holiday atmosphere, the people living there, the legend (Lake Chini), the turtles and so on could have made for more in-depth and exciting discussions. However, dry details like the location, distance and names of places were focussed on.

Catering to Mixed Ability

Mr. Lopez had shown how exercises could be adapted to suit students of different levels of language ability. Only Amreet and Depat did something to cater for mixed ability in the classroom. Amreet often put students into different groups according to their writing ability and prepared different sets of handouts of varying difficulty to cater to mixed writing ability. This was done once by Depat in one of his lessons, which I observed. However, I often felt that Depat underestimated the ability of some of his students. From their quick responses or comments, I was sure that they were not as weak as Depat supposed. The other three teacher trainees, Chee Leng, Laura and Siti, did nothing to cater for mixed language ability in the lessons I observed. At times, the exercises prepared were suitable only for the very weak in the class or

only for the average. Often, the good students were not challenged with activities suitable for their level of writing ability. Redondo (2000) provides a comprehensive list on the advantages and disadvantages of mixed ability groupings. She states:

I would advocate operating a flexible system in which the most appropriate form of grouping is implementing according to local needs and that overcomplicated systems should be avoided in order not to jeopardise class cohesiveness and students' sense of belonging....I suggest here to consider 'homogenous groups' and 'within-class grouping' as pragmatically feasible options. (p.126)

Language-Focussed Activities

Amreet was the only one of the five to effectively move away from the genre-based approach and create an exciting, friendly classroom atmosphere through her stories, riddles, poems, games and jokes. Looking at Amreet's comments about language focussed activities (p. 91) and the genre-based approach (p. 114) it is clear that she preferred the use of language-focussed activities. She was able to take advantage of her years of teaching experience (13 years) to create interesting and exciting language-focussed lessons. I enjoyed observing her lessons because she was confident, she had the full attention of students and there was always a game-like atmosphere with students competing to get correct answers. Although Amreet had much praise for the language activities suggested by Mr. Lopez, she said the language-focussed activities she was using were gathered more from her years of teaching experience than from Mr. Lopez's writing course.

Of the language-focussed activities suggested by Mr. Lopez, the use of scrambled sentences was the most popular among the five teacher trainees during teaching practice. However, there were often problems because sentences were often

interchangeable and the teacher had to concede that many versions could be accepted. In one of Depat's lessons, students were told to come up to the front of the class and rearrange 19 sentence strips to tell a story based on six pictures displayed. Depat encouraged students to come up and, initially, students were enjoying the activity. But after some time, Depat had difficulty getting volunteers as students had lost interest. The activity with the 19 sentence strips took up too much time and thus became tedious. Why 19 sentence strips for only six pictures? I felt that a single sentence strip for each picture would have sufficed. Depat had to struggle to display all 19 strips, he wasted a lot of time doing this and he lost the attention of the students who were busy chatting among themselves.

Other than scrambled sentences, activities using jumbled up words, eliciting key words, providing a skeleton text and providing key phrases were at times used by the five teacher trainees in the lessons I observed during teaching practice. Amreet went a step further to create an exercise using jumbled up letters to form words and her students enjoyed the game-like atmosphere created by the exercise as students competed to be the first to get the correct word. Notably missing, in the lessons I observed, were other suggestions of Mr. Lopez like "mutual dictation", "grammar dictation", "memory game" and "reformulation". As Laura said (see p. 92), the teacher trainees may have needed more practice with these exercises to confidently use them during teaching practice. Moreover, the time lapse between the writing course and teaching practice may account for difficulty in remembering the details of exercises discussed during the writing course.

Process Writing

No one attempted the adaptation of the process writing approach in full as suggested by Mr. Lopez although all the five teacher trainees did incorporate in their lessons, the principles behind process writing as explained by the Mr. Lopez (see p. 119). They encouraged peer interaction through pair and group work, held brainstorming sessions, and allowed peer teaching and peer correction in an attempt to move towards student-centred teaching.

Questioning Techniques

Students responded to questions asked by the five teacher trainees with one-word or one-sentence answers. This is not surprising because of the manner in which the questions were asked, which actually needed only one-word answers. This is clearly seen in Vignette Three (p. 186), Vignette Four (p. 192) and Vignette Five (p. 193). The students also seemed to have been trained to just answer questions and then keep their mouths shut. Moreover, the five teacher trainees seemed satisfied with the one-word answers. Mr. Lopez had shown the teacher trainees how to use questions to respond to students' answers, in order to help students develop their ideas. He explicitly told the teacher trainees to avoid questions that ask for one-word answers and had also given examples of the kind of questions to ask (see p. 129). This point was also brought up by the mentor during simulated teaching (see p. 156). However, the teacher trainees may have needed more practice with the question types and more time to internalise the suggestions given by Mr. Lopez. Weissberg (1994) suggests the following kind of questions that will generate better responses from students.

What do you think about the first sentence in this paragraph?

What are ideas we could use here?

Go on, what else?

Can you think of an example?

What could be the reason for that? (p.134).

Tsui (1996b) suggests that an effective strategy is to get students to write down answers before offering them to the whole class. She also points out the importance of wait time saying that teachers who turn to another student for response or who answers the question themselves upon getting no immediate response may be damaging the students' self-esteem. However, she also warns, "insensitive lengthening of wait time can exacerbate the anxiety rather than alleviate it" (p. 160).

Group Work

Mr. Lopez had stressed the effectiveness of using group work to encourage peer interaction and creating student-centred lessons. Amreet, Siti and Depat used group work consistently during their lessons. However, Chee Leng and Laura were initially resistant to this idea and it was only after much coaxing from the mentor that they started using group work during their teaching practice. Except for Amreet, the focal teacher trainees faced many problems using group work effectively in the classroom.

Depat ignored the manner in which students grouped themselves. In one of his lessons, there was one group of eight, another of six and another of five students. Depat should have announced that students get into groups of five. Then, there would have been three groups of five and another of four students. Simply telling students to get into groups was not enough. Depat could have also made sure that the races and sexes were mixed in each group. This would have prevented Chinese being the dominant

language of students' discussions in his class. The mixing of sexes, as was the case in the group of eight, resulted in better discipline in the group and also better and quicker work. Moreover, in this lesson, Depat did error correction and gave feedback on the students' work in front of the class while the students were still in groups. I felt that Depat should not have allowed groups to continue their discussions while he was giving feedback in front because the classroom became quite chaotic. It would have been better to collect all the students' group work and display them in front whether they had finished or not. In this manner, Depat would have had the attention of all students during his feedback and error correction session. While Depat was trying to point out errors, nobody paid attention. It was extremely stressful for Depat to try to do so because students were chatting in their groups and packing their bags to leave as time was already up. It would have been better to break up the groups and tell students to return to their original positions for the feedback and correction session.

Siti, Chee Leng and Laura faced similar problems about the way they organised groups. While Depat had problems with students discussing work in Chinese, Siti had problems with students discussing work in Tamil. These problems arose because Siti, like Depat did not pay attention to the manner in which students' grouped themselves. The problem of students speaking in their native tongues during group work did not arise during simulated teaching because the teacher trainees all spoke in English. Had this problem arisen during simulated teaching the mentor would have provided guidance on how to handle such situations.

In one of Chee Leng's lessons, the groups slowly began to disintegrate. One by one, students returned to their original two-by-two positions while some remained in

groups. However, Chee Leng appeared to ignore these movements. This resulted in some students doing their work individually, some in groups, and some not doing work at all.

Only Amreet paid strict attention to the way students' grouped themselves. She called students by name and told them which groups to join, thus ensuring the groups were well organised and that races and gender were mixed. Furthermore, she prepared exercises of varying difficulty to cater for mixed language ability. She took the trouble to find out which were the better students and grouped them accordingly. Nelson and Murphy's (1992) study on L2 writing groups recommended the following criteria for deciding upon group membership: "the initial preference of students; avoidance of a shared first language; a mixture of males and females and a shared or similar writing topic" (p. 189). Except for Amreet, the others felt that students were more comfortable with others of their own race and that the school authorities did not encourage the mixing of sexes.

Error Correction

Mr. Lopez had discussed at length the various ways of dealing with errors (see p. 127). However, the five teacher trainees often gave the writing tasks to be done as homework thus forcing tedious marking of individual work. When group work was given, all five attempted to correct all errors that they could see on the work displayed by the groups. This often took up too much time and resulted in the teacher trainees giving feedback on only some of the work of the students. It also resulted in the teacher trainees being unable to complete the lesson as planned. Mr. Lopez had repeatedly

stressed the importance of whole class error correction, peer corrections, correction of selective errors, responding to errors, dialogues on errors and immediate feedback. The teacher trainees explained to me that they were correcting all errors and giving individual written work as homework because that was expected of them by headmasters and parents. All five teacher trainees expressed fears of not showing that they were giving homework and correcting all errors. When I asked Amreet after one of her lessons, why she did not correct just selected errors instead of struggling to try to correct all errors in the work displayed after group work, she appeared to have forgotten this suggestion by Mr. Lopez and was truly surprised and pleased with the idea, saying, “Now, why didn’t I think of that”.

Amreet, Siti, Depat and Laura often did subtle correction of oral errors as recommended by Mr. Lopez (example seen in Vignette No. 3, p. 186). Chee Leng, however, constantly interrupted students with corrections of their oral errors. In one of her lessons, one of her students bravely volunteered to describe the way from the student’s house to the school. The student struggled with vocabulary and key phrases as she tried to explain. When she finally finished, I was quite shocked when Chee Leng responded with “Very confusing”. It was not surprising then that Chee Leng had difficulty getting responses from students and she had to resort to pointing to students and ordering them to answer her questions, in that lesson.

Concluding Discussion of Chapter

The genre-based approach, most widely used during teaching practice, provided a variety of activities but reflected more the way the five teacher trainees learnt writing

themselves than on Mr. Lopez's ideas. The difficulty of changing ingrained beliefs about teaching was stressed by prominent researchers on teacher change such as Markee, Fullan and Kennedy (discussed in chapter one and two). While Mr. Lopez focussed on development of students' ideas, the five teacher trainees appeared to focus on surface features and rigid formats and models. Mind maps used by all five teacher trainees were never developed in the manner explained by Mr. Lopez. There was a significant move towards peer interaction, group work, peer teaching and peer error correction only after input from the mentors during post-teaching conferences. However, the teacher trainees struggled with selection of materials, with finer points of implementation and salient aspects of classroom management, issues that unfortunately did not arise during simulated teaching. This may be due to the nature of simulated teaching itself which did not reflect the realities of the classroom (e.g., students speaking in their native tongues, group disintegration, unruly chatting, one-word answers).

Amreet and Siti, who had previous experience teaching in secondary schools, fared better than the others in implementing ideas from the writing course. They were more at ease in moving towards student-centred lessons, more confident with materials chosen for their writing lessons and were able to build a better rapport with students. I felt that their previous experience with secondary students was an advantage, clearly reflected in their selection of materials, in their mannerisms and in their rapport with students. Depat, Chee Leng and Laura, who only had previous experience with primary level students were often stressed and lacked confidence. Often, they selected materials which were more suited for the primary level students they had been teaching

previously. All three of them often had on a stern, serious face, had no qualms scolding students in front of the class and appeared reluctant to put students into groups for peer interaction. In one of Laura's lessons, as students walked into the classroom, she glared at them, arms akimbo. After the lesson I asked her why she did that. She was surprised, she was not aware she did that. Nunan (1996) states, "The first few minutes seem particularly important in creating the appropriate tone of the lesson, and the atmosphere which is established at the beginning of the class often persists for the duration of the lesson" (p. 43). Depat, Chee Leng and Laura did most of the talking, did little to encourage student participation and most of actual writing was given as homework.

APPENDIX P
KBSM TOPICS (Cont.)

No.		Form I	Form II	Form III	Form IV	Form V
10.	LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS	greet, welcome and take leave of someone or a group of people; introduce someone and oneself; invite someone, accept; refuse and thank someone for an invitation.	apology, expressing condolence, and congratulations, and offering help, and advice	expressing appreciation, encouragement, and concern.	expressing displeasure and regret, social skills, such as interrupting a conversation and joining in and participating in a conversation.	to refute; express and respond to constructive criticism; and to express support.
11.	POEMS	simple poems	simple poems.	poems	poems	poems of famous poets.
12.	PLAYS					short plays.
13.	SOCIAL SKILLS					common courtesies.
14.	DISCUSSION					on topics of common interest.
15.	CONVERSATION					on a variety of topics.