FUNCTIONS AND GENRES OF CHINESE ESL CHILDREN’S ENGLISH WRITING IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME

by

Sin Heng Celine Sze

B.A., The University of London, 1989
M.Ed., The Hong Kong University, 1992
M.A., The University of Nottingham, 1998

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**ABSTRACT**

Drawing on a sociocultural perspective of genre as a social action situated in a particular context, this study examines the functions and genres of four second-grade ESL (English as a Second Language) children’s writing at home and at school. The two boys and two girls were born and raised in Canada, speaking English at school and with their siblings, and Cantonese at home with their parents who were immigrants from Hong Kong or China. A total of 67 pieces of school writing and 54 pieces of home writing were collected over a five-week period. Findings show that home writing exhibits a wider range of functions and genres than school writing. In the home context, the participating children wrote for more personal purposes, to entertain themselves, or to engage in social interactions with a real audience. In contrast, school writing narrowed the children’s choice of functions because of the teaching context, teacher expectations, and instructional objectives. Similarly, there was a greater variety in home genres, including greeting cards, diaries, notes, poems, and jokes in comparison to school genres that were confined to stories, journals, and list items. There was a strong relationship between the enactment of specific functions and particular genres while personal and social functions were more prevalent in their home-based than in their school-based writing. Qualitative analysis of the children’s writing shows that they constructed meaning with written language in individual ways in their enactment of functions and choice of genres and the use of different modes to represent meaning.

The study suggests that teachers should be aware of the value of the writing opportunities and contexts children have at home and, therefore, incorporate such home experiences into classroom teaching. It also has implications for parents to conceive writing as a sociocultural as well as language practice, and to recognize the role of the home environment in their contributions to their children’s constructing meaning with written language. They should be aware of the need to build on the children’s interests and needs while encouraging them to write, and to make connections with school in working towards their writing development.
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DEDICATION

To my parents who have supported me throughout my years of education, and who have instilled in me a life-long love and respect for learning, and perseverance to achieve my goals;

To my husband for his support in my academic and professional advancement, his patience, love, and understanding.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation reports a case study on the writing functions and written genres of school-based and home-based writing of a group of Grade 2 second language children born of immigrant families in a large urban city in Western Canada. The first chapter is an introduction to the study which includes the theoretical framework on which the research work is based, the purpose, and the rationale of the study. This is followed by Chapter 2 that reviews literature on related empirical research findings in the field. Chapter 3 is on methodology, the research design and the context of the study. The findings and related discussion are presented in the next three chapters in response to the three research questions guiding the investigation. Chapter 7, the final chapter, presents a summary of the findings and their theoretical implications as well as implications for teachers and parents.

This introductory chapter first presents an overview of the background of the study, followed by a discussion of its purpose and the rationale justifying the investigation on the particular topic. The research questions guiding the study are next presented. Then the theoretical framework and theoretical concepts in relation to second language acquisition and writing in which the research was grounded are discussed. The chapter ends with the significance of the study about its possible theoretical and practical contributions to elementary second language writing education.

1.1 Introduction to the study
1.1.1 An Overview

Drawing on a sociocultural perspective of genre as a social action situated in a particular context, this study examines the functions and genres of four second-grade ESL (English as a Second Language) children’s writing at home and at school. The four focal children attended an urban elementary school in a major city in Western Canada. The two boys and two girls were born and raised in Canada, speaking English in school and at home with their siblings, and Cantonese with their parents and grandparents at home.
Most studies of young children’s written genres have focused on children whose first language was English (e.g., Chapman, 1994, 1995; Donovan, 2001; Newkirk, 1987; Tower, 2002). As North America becomes more linguistically and culturally diverse, there has been an increasing interest in exploring the writing of young children who speak English as a second language. Although extensive research has examined the development of genres among adult or college level ESL students in academic settings (e.g., Hyland, 2003), little research has investigated the written discourse of ESL children and the social contexts of their writing, particularly writing activity that they initiate. It is this gap in the literature that gave rise to the present study. It aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of literacy development among children whose lives revolve around more than one language and more than one culture. While monocultural and monolingual children are not faced with choices as to which language (and its accompanying system of writing) and which cultural framework to draw from while learning how to write, children with a background like those discussed in this study acquire literacy under much more complex circumstances as they move between the languages and cultures which encompass their lives. In order to better understand the writing of these children who may speak one language in school and another at home, it is essential to examine the existing and the potential relationships between school-based and home-based literacy activities. This is what the study reported here attempted to do by exploring their writing functions and use of genres in home and school-based writing contexts. To limit the scope of the study, the investigation was confined to the children’s writing in English only.

1.1.2 Purpose and Rationale of the Study

This study examined the relationships between children’s functions and genres for writing at home and at school. It consisted of case studies of four Grade 2 children who were born of immigrant parents and were second language learners of English. Growing up in the mainstream community, these children attended schools in which English was the only language of instruction. The purpose of the study was to describe and compare these children’s writing in academic and family/community contexts to explore their function and genre repertoires. It is hoped that the research findings could offer some insights for educators to reflect on the writing instructional pedagogy adopted.
for primary level children from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, in exploring the children’s world of meaning making using written language beyond the classroom, a complex structure of their communicative practices has emerged. This could throw light on how these young second language writers developed their English writing abilities as they traverse across different social contexts and multiple discourses. Parents of immigrant families could better understand the value of the wonderful opportunities available in the home and community to facilitate their children’s writing development in English, a major component of literacy abilities they perceived essential for academic, social and economic development in the new country.

Literacy is conceived as “reasoning within multiple discourses” (Michaels & O’Connor, 1990, p. 1). It involves integrating different ways of thinking, talking, interacting, valuing, and reading and writing available to an individual to construct meaning in a particular social setting (McCarthey, 1997). This conception implies that as children grow up, they learn culturally appropriate ways of using language to express meaning as they come into contact with text at home in their early childhood (Gee, 1990). The focus on multiple discourses highlights the importance of the various writing situations, processes and products in the cultural settings in the children’s lives. Looking at the children’s school and home writing, the study serves to illustrate how individual children “interpret and transform the available cultural meanings” (Kenner, 2003, p. 88). Cazden (1988, 2001) maintains that familiarity with students’ personal and social worlds could reduce the psychological distance between the home and the school. Studying the children’s home-based texts sheds light on their home literacy events. Such events provide a foundation for helping the children develop more socially and culturally appropriate literacy skills. Understanding the language produced in their home and community could offer useful information that “may illuminate strengths in the children’s home and school environment…that lead to more success in literacy acquisition” (Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003, p. 32). It would benefit educators as well as parents to understand the variety of knowledge, skills and attitudes manipulated by the children so as to gain access into and build on their home culture (Garcia, 2000; Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon & Gonzales, 1995). Such understanding helps educators to better develop social networks to connect home and school in order to
facilitate academic and literacy development, and to make effective use of socially constituted “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

All writing is done for a purpose, whether explicit or implicit, conscious or subconscious. This applies to children and adults alike and spans across all cultural, linguistic and ethnic boundaries. A functional perspective on writing development for young children may not be embodied in all their learning environments. Although there is a general understanding that children write for a purpose, it has been observed that school writing is not always authentic and hence does not prepare children for writing in the real world for a real purpose (Atwell, 1998; Edelsky & Smith, 1984). Writing is often done in the school for instructional purposes rather than for a personal communicative or social purpose. On the other hand, home writing is a rich source for understanding second language children’s local literacies, their sociocultural ways of representing their culture and community, and the effect of social influences, such as cultural beliefs and rhetorical styles, on their literacy development in school (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005). Some writing researchers have looked at how bilingual children in low socioeconomic status families developed their writing competence in the home context in relation to writing functions. For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1990) researched the ways in which Hispanic children learned to write, and Teale (1986) investigated the literacy development of Anglo, African and Mexican American children. But little research has been done in Canada with children in Chinese immigrant families.

For writing to be effective and creative, some experience with a genre is needed (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Genre scholars have traditionally worked with children from native-English speaking backgrounds. With regard to learners of English as a second language, much of the work examining students’ genre development has been conducted at college or university level, looking at academic and workplace genres in particular disciplines (e.g., Hyland, 2003; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000; Swales, 1990). Comparatively little attention has been paid to genre learning among children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Recent research studies have shown that literacy instruction can draw on children’s out of school literacy practices, for example, Alverman, Xu, and Carpenter (2003), and Kenner (2000). Classroom writing instruction and practice can build on
students’ cultural and linguistic resources to connect in and out-of-school lives. The restricted repertoire of functions and genres with which students write at school is distinctly different from that of home-based writing that they produce for a wide range of purposes (Bissex, 1980). Real discourse for personal, cultural and social development can hardly be represented within the classroom. More research work is needed in this area, with detailed analysis of the purposes and types of writing engaged by children, to help connect the official and unofficial worlds (Dyson, 1989) of young English language learners to develop their literacy skills.

1.2 Research questions

Specific research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the differences between the functions of the focal children’s English writing at school and in their home?

   The children may have different purposes for writing in the two settings, the reasons for communication being located in the context of the situation. Writing functions are direct reflections of the intent for writing. A starting point to examine the differences would be identifying the writing functions enacted in the school and the home-based written texts, to be followed by a comparison of their frequency, nature and variety between the two settings. The research question can thus be refined into a number of sub-questions as follows:

   a. What writing functions are identified in the written texts of the school setting and the home setting?

   b. What functions are common to both settings, and what are specific to each?

   c. How are the individual writing functions distributed between different categories for personal, social, recreational, and learning purposes within each setting, and how does such distribution compare between the two settings?

2. What are the differences in the range of genres in the children’s school and home writing in English?

   Written genres will be different between the school and the home setting. The nature and variability of the written genres will be different across settings as well as their distribution within a particular setting. The research question can be defined in more specific terms as follows:
a. What written genres are identified in the written texts of the school setting and the home setting?
b. How do the two sets of genres compare with each other in range and nature?
c. How are the genres distributed within each setting and how do the two settings compare in terms of variability?

3. How do the children construct meaning with the use of written language writing in school and at home?

The analysis of how children construct meaning will focus on the writing functions and how they are related to genres adopted for realizing the writing purposes. The research question can be further defined with the following sub-questions:

a. What is the distribution of functions among specific genres within a particular setting and how do the distributions in the two settings compare with each other?
b. What different kinds of functions do the children enact in specific types of genres?
c. What are the unique ways in which the individual focal children construct meaning with their choice of functions and genres in their school and their home writing?

1.3 Theoretical framework

There are numerous theoretical perspectives on the learning and use of writing, for example, developmental, and cognitive. This study is framed within five interrelated perspectives: systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1978); the dialogic view of language and written genres (Bakhtin, 1986); the sociocultural perspective of writing (Vygotsky, 1978); multimodality in representation of meaning (Kress, 2000); and the writer’s agenda (Meyer, 1992).

1.3.1 Literacy as a Social, Situated, and Cultural Practice

This research study draws on a theory of literacy as a set of social practices mediated by texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1993, 1995). The starting point of this approach is the notion of literacy practices which offers a powerful way to study the link between the acts of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are
found and which contribute to their construction. Literacy practices are conceptualized as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives …what people do with literacy” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). They incorporate the values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships between individuals, including their awareness of literacy, their constructions and discourses of literacy, and how they make sense of literacy (Street, 1993). Barton and Hamilton maintain that literacy practices are social processes that connect people to one another, embedded in shared cognition and social identities; they are practices that exist in the relations between people within communities rather than a set of procedures adopted by individuals.

Literacy practices are realized through literacy events that rise from practices which help shape them. This highlights the importance of the situated nature of literacy: it always exists in a particular context. A basic premise underlying this study is that literacy is situated in particular context. The concept of situated literacy takes into account the context and the importance of literacy practices and events. All literacies are situated, as the use of written language is always located in particular times and places. Literacy activities are also reflective and part of broader social practices; hence literacy is best understood as “a set of social processes…observable in events which are mediated by written texts” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 9). This view is supported by other researchers, for example, Taylor and Blunt (2001, cited by Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, Chacon, & Banados, 2005) who stress that understanding literacy needs to focus on its situatedness, and that the unit of analysis in literacy research should change from the “individual learner to the structures and dynamics of the sociocultural setting in which the learning occurs” (p. 82). Given its social and situated nature, literacy can assume different forms in different times and places for different groups of people. There are different literacies associated with different facets or domains of an individual or group’s daily life, such as home, community, school, and workplace. The concept of multiple literacies (Street, 1995) stresses the importance of the social context in which literacy occurs; it is carried out in particular cultural settings for particular purposes, and is a cultural practice rather than a purely cognitive operation of a set of skills.

The study also draws on a sociocultural view of literacy. The most fundamental concept of sociocultural theory is that the human mind is mediated through the use of
symbolic tools or signs (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, human beings use symbolic artifacts, such as words and language to establish a mediated or indirect relationship between themselves and the world. In this view, writing is particularly important for mediating thoughts; its effects on thinking vary with the nature of the symbol systems and uses of writing in particular cultures and writing contexts. The human mind is a function system integrating symbolic artifacts into thinking; how people think and interact is influenced significantly by language, writing and other sign systems. Human actions are shaped by cultural, institutional and historical settings, and are mediated by symbolic tools as individuals participate in societal contexts; it follows that thinking and speaking or writing, as mediated and publicly derived use of representation, complete inner thoughts dialectically (Donato, 2000). Vygotsky makes a distinction between the conventional meaning of a word and its contextualized meaning that is derived from the particular way a human being deploys words to mediate a mental activity (Lantolf, 2000).

This perspective leads literacy researchers to look at children’s reading and writing practices within the local and the larger contexts in which they live and develop their literacy, which calls for the need to consider children’s “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and “imagined communities” (Norton, 2000). Communities of practice are those communities to which individuals belong while imagined communities are those that they hope to belong to. Children learn the tools of language and literacy in specific contexts within these communities where the construction of literacy practices is affected by race, culture, social class, and language (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Understanding children’s positions in these communities helps to explain why and how they engage in particular language and literacy practices or do not engage in them at all; it is also important to note that in developing their sense of community, they engage not only in actual community practices but also use imagination to create new images of the world for themselves (Wenger, 1998). It follows that acquiring literacy is not just the cognitive learning of knowledge and skills for reading and writing, but rather, a complex process of changing language learners’ patterns of participation in the communities they belong to or want to belong to (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The ways in which language learners construct their language and literacy practices are affected by the ways in which
they understand themselves, their cultural and social background and environment, and their aspirations for the future (Norton & Toohey, 2003). From this viewpoint, the writing that language learners produce in the various communities in which they live, learn, and share their practices is an important source by which to access how they acquire literacy and construct themselves as writers.

1.3.2 Writing as a Literacy Activity

The task of writing is challenging for adults and children alike because of the multidimensional processing of information, as informed by cognitive psychology (Riley & Reedy, 2005). On an operational level, a writer has to consider several aspects, which include thinking about what to write, producing a material script, coping with the technicalities of conventional symbols and the spelling system, and organizing the discourse of the text, all of which make multiple and simultaneous cognitive demands on the writer (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1985). Hayes and Flower (1980) contend that in producing an organized written text, the cognitive load on a writer, application of conceptual understandings, and the exercise of various kinds of abilities and skills can be likened to those needed by an air traffic controller.

Vygotsky (1978) argues that children should be taught written language and not just the writing of letters. The ways in which children use language to make sense of the world suggest that acquiring literacy goes far beyond mastering the discrete skills of reading and writing (Roger, 1990). The process of making meaning with written language involves many issues: the integral use of graphophonie, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic systems to signal content and attitude (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987, cited in Meyer, 1992). The development of literacy involves a growing awareness that language is used in different ways for different purposes, and that the form of a text is determined by its social purpose and cultural context. Rosenblatt (1978) defines writing as the production of sets of signs to be interpreted as linguistic symbols for making meaning to fit the writer’s purpose. This definition conceptualizes writing as signifier of meaning mediated through language to be interpreted. Based on this definition, Meyer (1992) argues that relationships are always implied in the use and development of written language. Interpretation of signs is always situated in a particular context and involves individuals who interpret them in light of their relationships with the self, with
other people or institutions. He further contends that in school and out-of-school settings, relationships with others and self involve power relations or authoritarian roles, such as those between teachers or parents and children. Relationships are influenced by permission, which in turn affects the individual’s movement, initiation of the writing activity, purpose for writing, and choice of topic of writing and materials. Individuals may write according to the instructions of a person or institution of power or out of their initiatives, with reference to the social and cultural contexts.

According to Halliday (1978), every act of writing has an ideational meaning for conveying a message, and also an interpersonal meaning that defines the social relationships between the writer and reader. Children take up reading and writing in ways that they find relevant to them personally and socially. They use them as vehicles to explore relationships within the exigencies of their family and community, constructing their individual repertoire of functions that reflect “the interests, needs, and issues most central to their individual sensibilities and life histories” (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993, p. 3). A fundamental concept of literacy development is that as children write, they use writing to understand, negotiate and transform their human relationships and experiences, and to make sense of their worlds. The way written language is used has important implications for conceptualizing the meaning of being literate, literacy development, and pedagogy.

1.3.3 Writing Purposes and Functions

The notion of function can be examined from a number of perspectives. While researchers, such as Heath (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) have offered different classifications of functions and uses of literacy, it is often difficult to assign specific functions to a particular text in practice (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Functions are inconsistent and often overlap a great deal, and that multiple functions may be served by the same single act of writing (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Chapman, 1999). These researchers also contend that it is not practicable to associate a specific set of functions with a particular genre. The function and purpose of a text is derived from and interpreted within the social context in which it was written, and hence:
A particular type of text, such as diary or letter, cannot be used as a basis for assigning functions, as reading and writing any vernacular text can serve many functions; people appropriate texts for their own ends...a text also does not have a set of functions independent of the social meanings with which it is imbued. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12)

A theoretical grounding for studying functions and purposes of writing in the present study was adapted from a framework of writing functions and purposes developed by Clark and Ivanič (1997). These authors distinguish between function and purpose though both pertain to the reasons for writing. Function refers to specific ways that writing as a semiotic system is designed to achieve by virtue of its fundamental characteristics and technical properties. Purpose in relation to writing is the fundamental driving force that lies behind the activity, and the intentions or goals that exist, sometimes subconsciously, in people’s minds. According to these researchers, the social functions that writing serves and is well suited for are record-keeping, thinking, communicating with others, producing evidence of understanding, and dissemination of ideas. In the present study, writing functions are interpreted as the specific ways of using written language to mediate the writer’s intentions, for example, expressing opinions and anticipating future events, in order to achieve a communicative purpose, as described by Clark and Ivanič (1997).

These two researchers divide writing purposes into two types: macro purposes, in which writing serves the society at large, and micro-purposes suited to daily demands and serving different kinds of social actions that drive people to write in particular situations. The notion of macro purposes is grounded in the theory that writing is ultimately used for maintaining or promoting certain interests of particular discourses, serving regulatory and reproductive functions to preserve the interests of dominant and powerful social groups or cultures. These functions play a role in maintaining hegemony of authoritative discourses. The regulatory function concerns regulating orderly behaviour to maintain dominant values, such as the use of laws written down to be applied by the courts and judges, while the reproductive function maintains and perpetuates dominant values, beliefs, and power relations through particular writing practices, and writing in particular discourses and genres.
The reproductive function has particular implications for children from minority or ethnic groups in which writing habits and uses of writing may differ from those in the mainstream culture. In the context of writing instruction in school, children, regardless of their cultural and ethnic background, are taught to write using discourse conventions and practices that they are expected to follow as they go through the education system. The reproductive function underlying writing instruction maintains the values of the society supporting the school system, and reinforces its ideological dominance and existing power relations. Children from ethnic minority groups who have not grown up with the mainstream cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) may not identify with the kinds of writing offered in school since their home values, meaning and writing practices may differ. Furthermore, they may not gain as much pleasure and success from school-based writing (McCarthey, 1997). Clark and Ivanič (1997) argue that there may be an uncomfortable tension for learners whose sociocultural context is at odds with the dominant one. On one hand, they have to engage in the dominant cultural writing practices to promote their interests, and academic and economic advancement in the mainstream community. On the other hand, they may be denying their allegiances to their own culture to conform to the requirements of the teacher and the expectations of their parents to succeed in school. As a result, they may turn to use writing as an act of social resistance to oppose the rules imposed by authorities. Writing-as-resistance is widespread among minority groups engaged in vernacular uses of literacy, university students, and campaign groups (Barton, Bloome, Sheridan, & Street, 1993).

1.3.4 Genre Theories

Genres have traditionally been perceived as regularized forms of writing that can be divided into categories and subcategories, and taught to students (Freedman & Medway, 1994). For example, texts can be divided into narrative and non-narrative writing, and narrative is further divided into recounts, accounts, and stories. To help empower non-mainstream students for success in schools, the Sydney School of genre scholars have recommended a structural approach to genre learning through imitation of models and learning of textual features (Christie, 1993; Martin, 1993). Their structural approach focuses on form and aims at expansion of students’ genre repertoires fostered through explicit instruction. In contrast, recent views of the New Rhetoric School
suggest that genre instruction should focus on thinking and communicating instead of textual features: the formal features of a genre are seen not as ends in themselves but in relation to “the writer’s social motive in responding to a recurrent social situation of a certain type” (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p. 3).

The understanding of genres as social actions is related to the Bakhtinian (1986) view that all language is dialogic: our use and understanding of words are developed through interactions with others in our communities and cultures. According to Bakhtin, language users observe how others use different genres to perform various social activities. As such social situations recur, writers make similar choices about the use of textual patterns, following generally accepted discourse forms for interacting with others. As children develop literacy, be it in their native or second language, they learn through engaging in meaningful activities and interactions with literate others. Bakhtin contends that children learn genres through recontextualizing or processing the words of others into their own speech or writing through a kind of social dialogue. Youngsters develop knowledge about the functions and forms of written language specific to particular situations through internalization of the processes, practices, and genres as they experience them in their sociocultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than templates that writers slot their ideas into, Bakhtin regards genres as flexible and open-ended forms that grow out of the needs of interactive activities in particular contexts, in the different spheres of human activity. Genres, as Swales (1990) defines them, are ways of communicating for certain communicative purposes which lead to specific rhetorical and linguistic choices.

Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) believe that genres provide a powerful way to think about the learning of literacy. Over the past two decades, research interest in children’s genre knowledge acquisition arises from multidisciplinary work in genre studies, moving from a study of formal text types to defining and organizing the kinds of possible social actions that texts can realize (Smith & Hiles, 2006). Children’s text production is a convenient site for investigating genre development. As children develop their linguistic ability, they become increasingly aware of the way that language is used in different ways for different purposes and social situations (Riley & Reedy, 2005). Based on a functional linguistic theory of discourse (Halliday, 1975, 1978),
genre theory explains how the form of a text is influenced by its social function and cultural context for both written and spoken language (Kress, 1985; Martin et al., 1987). However, Donaldson (1993) points to the fact that the understanding of such relationships in the use of language is not readily available to young children in their early years of literacy instruction. Teachers have to be aware of the role that written language plays in helping children organize and structure their ideas and enhance their thinking and self expression in relation to social motives, and also fostering their students’ development of metacognitive awareness of these processes.

Based on the perception that genres are context-embedded, localized, and tied to specific time and space, Bakhtin (1986) makes a distinction between primary and secondary genres. The former are used in daily communicative activities and can be learned without formal instruction. The latter are highly developed and specialized academic or sociopolitical activities that are more distant from daily contexts. Similarly, Gee (1990) makes a distinction between primary Discourses that are learned initially at home with family, and secondary Discourses that are learned through apprenticeship in social groups and institutions. Learning primary genres or discourses is an essential developmental task for young learners acquiring literacy. As they begin formal schooling, children then acquire knowledge of secondary genres through school-based writing. Since current understandings of literacy development emphasize building on children’s home literacy experiences, the validity of school literacies that are separate from students’ personal experiences with real world literacies is questionable.

The sociocultural view of literacy suggests a shift within genre studies from a focus on the cognitive learning of textual structures to diverse personal and social factors, and the intention of literacy events and practices. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1986), Chapman (1999) reconceptualizes genres as situated, social, and active, “cultural resources on which writers draw in the process of writing for particular purposes and in specific situations” (p. 469). She argues that genres are social actions that writers make in response to the different social contexts in particular discourse communities; writers are engaged in a creative process in which they can freely choose what they write and how they write to express their unique personalities, voices, and creativities.
sociocultural theoretical perspectives discussed here underlie the present investigation of a group of ESL children’s writing functions and genres at home and school.

1.3.5 The Writer’s Agenda

Halliday (1978) observed that when children put pen to paper, they wanted to make meaning and did it for a purpose. Many issues were involved in the making of meaning using written language. But according to Halliday, how language makes meaning within these systems at a given time is related to the ideational and the interpersonal meaning to be expressed as determined by the social context. This in turn contains three variables – the field, the tenor and the mode of the writing activity.

Halliday (1978) describes how a social context can be represented in terms of these three determinants:

…a social context (or ‘situation’ in terms of situation theory) is a temporary construct or instantiation of meanings from the social system. A social context is a semiotic structure which we may interpret in terms of three variables: a ‘field’ of social process (what is going on), a ‘tenor’ of social relationships (who is taking part) and a ‘mode’ of symbolic interaction (how the meanings are exchanged). (p. 188)

Though these concepts originally pertained to oral language use, they can also be applied to written language (Meyer, 1992). The field of a writing act refers to the ongoing activity or social process and the particular purposes served by the use of language in the context of the activity. When applied to writing, the field is not just the subject matter in hand but also the whole activity of the writer and the social situation in which the text is embedded. This relates to the ideas that the writer chooses to represent in writing as responses to the social or institutional setting that initiates the writing act. He/she may choose to write to aid memory, provide information, or demonstrate knowledge of specific content. The tenor is the writer’s social relationship with others in the setting as determined by his/her status and the role among the participants. The mode is the channel in which the meanings are presented or exchanged, or in essence, the part that language plays in the situation to mediate meaning. It is the writer’s understanding and perception of these issues that provides him/her the playing field on which he/she can fully utilize the available linguistic resources to achieve writing purposes. The set of role relationships, the tenor of the social situation also defines the writing functions, for instance, to express emotions, or convey information. The writer
writes to negotiate and transform relationships, assuming different interpersonal positioning as he/she interacts with others. These affect the amount and type of functions that the writer can enact in the text. The mode covers the channel of communication – the genre and the use of various semiotic systems, such as visuals, as the writer sees fit to fulfill the writing purpose.

The complexities of writing can be summed up by the notion of ‘the writer’s agenda’ (Meyer, 1992) which refers to “the issues which assumed an urgency for the writer” (p. 7). According to Meyer, the issues at stake might vary greatly but all involve decision making. As determined by field, tenor, and mode, the act of writing involves making choices between the different means and intent in representing meaning. The writer might focus on what message to get across with the writing piece, and this in turn determines the functions that he/she would enact in it. He/She might be conscious of some problems or limitations in the writing act that might need to be attended to in order for him/her to be understood by the reader. The issues might range from mechanical aspects of writing, such as the spelling of individual words, to the length, structure, and level of complexity of the text required to convey the message. And a greater urgency might revolve round the features of the text, its lexico-grammatical features, and the use of graphics to perform the functions intended. A writer’s agenda is transactional (Rosenblatt, 1978) and changes in response to particular settings and the children’s developing understanding of the uses of written language. Child writers can learn from experience which settings support the addressing or expansion of their agenda, and when they are obliged to set aside their own agenda to succumb to that of others.

As writers address the issues of communication in an agenda that is urgent for them, such as conveying a message to a person across time and space, they have to make a number of decisions. They make choices with regard to the variability and acceptability of the text; they also have to decide which features of the text are more important than others and have to be handled with greater energy or urgency. An agenda also extends to the choice of the systems of written language, the genre, the structure, and the linguistic features that are shaped by the function and the personal purposes of engaging in a particular writing activity (Halliday, 1985; Swales, 1990).
1.4 Theoretical concepts in second language writing

1.4.1 The Role of Writing in Early Second Language Acquisition

The field of second language (L2) writing has traditionally focused on students in higher education. The vast majority of research and literature has dealt with college or advanced level ESL student writers, and their development of writing abilities in content areas needed for academic success. Early second writing has been under-represented in the past, but the last two decades have seen an increased interest in addressing the needs of young ESL writers in their learning contexts. Such interest focuses on “the development of L2 literacy from the writer’s first encounter with a second language through the completion of high school education” (Matsuda & De Pew, 2002, p. 262).

A number of L2 literacy researchers have already undertaken study in the area, for example, Edelsky (1989), Hudelson (1984, 1986, 1989a, 1989b), and Urzua (1987). However, research on early L2 writing has not become a major focus in second language acquisition studies (Matsuda & De Pew, 2002). Much research has been carried out in the learning of reading and writing of bilingual children, but literacy in bilingual education is concerned primarily with reading rather than an equal emphasis on both reading and writing.

Traditionally, under the influence of European structuralist theory, such as the work of Saussure, spoken language has been privileged as the primary mode of communication in language development studies (Hymes & Fought, 1981). However, structural linguistics theories in second language learning have given writing a greater role in the language classroom (Matsuda, 2001). Olson (1994) points out that investigating the development of script as a linguistic transcription system could bring out the underlying linguistic structures into consciousness for study. Second language acquisition research has historically drawn on children’s first language acquisition, looking for analogies for developing theoretical frameworks and instructional practices. Two problems are found with the situation as observed by Harklau (2002). Firstly, where extensive empirical studies on early childhood language acquisition can be found to inform linguistics theory, a gap exists in the study of language acquisition between early childhood and the school years and beyond, a time where syntax and language knowledge continue to develop (Nippold, 1998). For second language writers, the
symbolising systems of the language have to be dealt with the use of graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues to represent meaning. This gap poses difficulties for developing theoretical perspectives and pedagogy for second language learning contexts in which most of the learners are of school age and not before.

Secondly, in the field of early childhood language acquisition, spoken language has been the major concern and literacy has often been overlooked. Harklau (2002) points to a need to understand such differences and to formulate an adequate theory to explore how second language children exploit literacy in their early stage of learning a second language.

In a traditional view, writing is little more than transcribing speech, and writing instruction is thought to potentially hinder the development of oral language (Graves & Stuart, 1985). However, empirical evidence has shown that L2 literacy can actually facilitate rather than interfere with the development of general linguistic competence (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). Many second language learners live in western communities where a print-rich environment is a common phenomenon. The importance of literacy has grown in contemporary societies, and the complexity of literacy has been widely recognized in both community and institutional contexts. Even without the face-to-face interaction found in speech, the use of text is dialogic; it involves a written input and an output for an intended audience (Bakhtin, 1986). Olson (1994) contends that “literacy is a social condition” (p. 273), and that readers and writers belong to a textual community who share common ways of reading and interpreting texts. This perspective is reflective of Bakhtin’s view that reading and writing are powerful means of communication and interaction, with effective linguistic input and output between a language user and other users whose language he/she appropriates. The socializing effect of written communication in daily life experiences has continually increased with the advancement of informational technology (Millard, 2005). The potential contributions of literacy to second language acquisition are too valuable to be overlooked.

The role of writing in second language acquisition has been delineated by Harklau (2002) who situates the issue of second language writing within the disciplinary context of applied linguistics and second language studies. She calls for more emphasis on writing in classroom-based studies, particularly at elementary and secondary school.
levels. It is essential to explore the distinct nature of early second language writing in order to “formulate an adequate theory for how second language learners exploit literacy in the initial stages of learning a second language” (p. 334).

1.4.2 Genre Development of Second Language Learners

The interest in studying children’s genre development arises from an awareness of their need to understand how language forms and generic text structures are used to present ideas and information using appropriate linguistic patterns. Learning of genres has also taken on a sociopolitical dimension. Martin (1989) believes that the learning of a range of genre forms in writing will empower students because the ability to use writing for understanding and exploring how the world works offers opportunities for change and academic success. He argues for extensive instruction in factual writing, particularly expository writing, in the elementary school literacy curriculum while not discounting the value of narrative and expressive writing. The attribution of a social purpose as well as a functional purpose to genres, he argues, requires genre structures to be made explicit to learners. The learning of genres is not only a socialization process but also a reflection of cultural ideology; it indicates to learners the assumptions and expectations of particular communities with regard to their use of language and valued knowledge (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

A key issue with children’s genre learning is whether they can benefit from instruction in academic and curricular genres (Chapman, 2004). Halliday’s (1973) emphasis on the functional use of language in context provides the theoretical framework for whole language approaches, but meaningful communication through written language may need to be structured. Christie (1993) believes that mastering the necessary linguistic resources for dealing with particular curricular content gives the learner control over the content. From this perspective, it is critical for second language writers to know how the discourse of curricular content should be structured, and to learn school valued genres. While many elementary ESL classrooms focus on learning narrative genres, educators should be more aware of the need to familiarize learners with genres associated with content area writing (Riley & Reedy, 2000). Through working with information that relates to other aspects of everyday life, the children can expand their interest in and knowledge of their physical and social worlds. The Australian
perspective on writing development emphasizes the benefit of genre instruction for second language learners, and the importance of connecting language use to social purposes (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). These genre theorists believe that gaining power over knowledge of text structures in content areas helps students to gain recognition in particular discourse communities. Hence, genre instruction has potential for “the empowerment of the socially disempowered, particularly children from non-privileged classes” (Leki, 2002, p. 68) through the process of “transculturation” (Zamel, 1997).

The Zamel study is based on a concept of literacy practices as going beyond issues of context and the text to the cultural uses and meanings of reading and writing (Street, 1995). Genres, conceptualized as culturally and socially constructed rather than just a technical component of literacy, can be used as a vehicle to examine how second language children appropriate textual forms and features of texts they read or produce in school for personal and social use in daily life. Anne Dyson (2001) demonstrates that children appropriate narratives from cartoons, songs, and classroom texts, recontextualizing materials from diverse sources to inform their writing.

1.4.3 Multimodality in Early Second Language Writing

Child writers are sign makers who use resources available to them in their sociocultural environments (Kendrick, McKay, & Moffatt, 2005). The signs that child writers use in their drawings and other kinds of visuals to produce and convey meaning reflect the here and now of their environment as well as the resources they draw from their environment (Kress, 1997). The meanings they attribute to the signs are not arbitrary, but reflect what is imminent for the writer at the moment of text production, the here and now of the social context (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). The sign-maker is “constantly transformative of the set of resources of the group and of her/himself” (Kress, 2001, p. 401). The drawings accompanying the text reflect the reality of the writing context as imagined by the child writer and also represent his or her beliefs, values, and biases; they can thus be a rich source of information about children’s ideas and conceptualizations in their literacy development (Kendrick et al., 2005), offering insights into “who the child is, including individual intentions, as well as cultural, social, and environmental conditions surrounding the making of the drawing” (p. 186).
Children’s use of both visual and verbal semiotic systems as meaning-making resources has specific relevance for second language teaching. Images provide second language learners with an additional channel for composing. Like their native English speaking counterparts, second language children use talk and drawing to help convey meaning of a text. Images provide an essential alternative resource with which they encode and communicate meaning where language competence falls short of the demand of the moment. However, such acts should not be taken to suggest that once the second language learner acquires sufficient proficiency in the language, the use of visual semiotics would be deemed as redundant. Rather, as Kress (2000) contends, in looking at children’s writing, one could not appreciate its full meaning without taking the image and writing together, there being “a semantic trade among speech, image, and writing (and other modes, too, and via other senses – touch, feel, taste) that is, simply, human” (p. 339).

With the advance of technology, children’s access to literacy has become more diverse from those experienced by their parents; new technologies find their way into different aspects of their reading and writing, providing easy access to other forms of meaning making, and increasing the multimodality of communication channels and processes (Graves & Stuart, 1985; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Images are not just complementary to language but assume tasks which language cannot perform (Kendrick & McKay, 2004). In writing situations where children can exercise more control over their construction of text, children have more choice in choosing modes of meaning making and use of materials. Choosing among different semiotic resources, such as verbal, visual or other modes of representation, and suitable materials, surfaces, substances and tools, the children turn their writing into a multimodal literacy artifact derived from their material efforts and situated in their lives (Ormerod & Ivanič, 2000). Hence, second language educators should not maintain that their role is confined to learners’ use of language only, but need to pay due attention to other features contributing to the meaning of a text. Particularly in classrooms where teachers and learners do not share the same cultural, historical and language background, teachers should try to understand and help “children transform what they know into modes of representation that allow for a full range of human experience” (Kendrick & McKay, 2004).
1.4.4 Connecting Home and School Literacies of Second Language Children

As a consequence of the social and demographic impacts of postcolonialism and economic globalization, many school systems have within their student population groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; this situation has become the norm rather than the exception as it was thirty years ago (Luke, 2003). Statistics from a recent population census in Canada show that in 2006, 19.8 percent of the total population was immigrants, the highest ratio in 75 years. In this and the previous census (2001), China remains the country most immigrants come from. In Richmond, a city near Vancouver with the highest percentage of immigrants in the country, 15.4 percent of the students aged between 5 and 16 are immigrants who moved to Canada over the past 5 years. Almost two-thirds of the students in the city speak a language other than English or French at home (Statistics Canada, 2007). These statistics point to a need for attending to the literacy instructional requirements of the increasing number of children from immigrant families, either newcomers to the country or born of immigrant parents.

The actual practices and demands of literacy have been undergoing transition (Alvermann, 2002). To address the demands of these new times (Luke, 2003), literacy research focuses on how to serve the needs of different ethnic and linguistic groups from diasporic communities, and to redress differential access to cultural and linguistic capital; from this new body of research emerge new configurations of language, literacy, power, and the meaning of “difference” and “diversity” in literate identities and practices (Luke, 2003). Some of these studies use hermeneutic, sociocultural, and critical approaches to redefine second language acquisition (e.g., Norton & Toohey, 2003; Pennycook, 2001). Such approaches focus on the interrelationships of social and linguistic fields and how people traverse between them, turning attention to children learning in communities and home contexts as well as in school. In his discussion of language and literacy in education policy in multilingual societies, Luke (2003) stresses the importance of knowing how people “use languages, texts, discourses, and literacies as convertible and transformative resources in homes, communities, and schools, [and how] these resources are recognized or misrecognised, remediated and converted in school-based literacy instruction” (p. 139).
Research into the development of early childhood literacy reveals that children coming to school have widely different literacy experiences: children’s literacy education begins within the home and the community, as they share literacy events with significant adults (Millard, 2005; Teale, 1986; Wells, 1986). Their experiences with language and writing also vary widely. Despite such variation, home literacy experiences in mainstream families are often congruent with school practices which often privilege the dominant white, middle class, and Eurocentric culture. These families and their children read and write at home, bringing items from home to share in class. Much of their interests, literacy habits, and ways and functions of using language and texts are in common with those in the school discourse (Cairney, 2000; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Heath, 1983; Pahl, 2001; Taylor, 1983). However, children from diverse cultures and backgrounds often have home literacy activities that do not match school experiences. As suggested by research studies, for example, Heath (1983), Purcell-Gates (1996), and Teale (1986), such variation from the literacy practices of the dominant culture often works to the disadvantage of second language children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds; they risk academic failure in school curriculum which is designed for white, middle class children. Because of the lack of resources, both social and material, they do not experience written text and other materials related to literacy in the target language to the degree the mainstream children do; they have little exposure to children’s literature, writing for self-expression, or meeting school expectations, such as sharing items from home. These children experience home and school as separate, the distance varying according to the extent to which they make connections between home and school literacy experiences. Moreover, the children may be torn between the demands of parents, teachers, and peers who may have conflicting expectations because of cultural differences in priorities and values (McCarthey, 1997).

For second language learners, the linking of home and school literacies in early schooling facilitates children’s literacy development (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). However, the making of school-home connections was often based on a deficit model with schools dominating the relationship in a one-way traffic transmission of school-based models of learning (McCarthey, 1997; Millard, 2005). The deficit model “precludes engagement with young children’s developing media
interests in favor of Big Book and environment print…ignoring cultural differences and the habits of learning or semiotic preferences created in homes and communities” (Millard, 2005, p. 57). Teachers can be agents of socialization to assist students in their language acquisition. Showing recognition and making use of the practices, values, and beliefs of the students’ cultural community and incorporating them in the language learning environment, teachers can help learners traverse continuously and fluidly between their home and school cultures building on what they have acquired at home (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002). On the other hand, mismatches between the nature and uses of literacy at home and at school may be a cause of children experiencing difficulties in literacy development in early schooling (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983), as when the curriculum does not make provision for students to transfer their literacy knowledge and understanding between home and school settings.

1.5 Significance of the study

An investigation of the functions and genres of home and school writing will help broaden understanding and bridge the gap between children’s home and school cultures. It also allows us to see how they draw on social and cultural resources from home to develop as writers. A comparative study of functions and genres in home and school settings will unveil the abilities and potential of children in using written language for self expression and communication when given full rein to their imagination within their capabilities of using English as a second language.

While children in immigrant families often lack the requisite cultural capital, and, possibly, also access to material resources because of their relatively low socioeconomic status background, it does not necessarily mean that home writing experiences for these children are not as extensive or varied as those of mainstream children. A deeper and informed understanding of home and school writing functions will illuminate how these second language children make use of their available assets to integrate inherited values and beliefs about literacy into their writing across situational and cultural contexts. To date, only a small amount of research has studied how continuity or discontinuity between home and school writing practices may have potential impact on children’s development and engagement with writing (Perry, Nordby, & VandeKamp, 2003). This
researcher has not found any studies focusing on how Chinese ESL children from immigrant families write for personal and social purposes.

Another significant contribution of the study is the understanding it provides about what can be appropriated from one domain, the home, to inform the learning and practice of writing in another, the school. This can be used to inform practices to mend school and home mismatches. While learning to write is no longer defined as the accumulation of a set of discrete competencies, it is important for educators to look further to other forms and patterns of meaning construction embedded in children’s out-of-school literacy practices, the “distinctive patterns in the home environment which mark them as members of specific sociocultural groups” (Millard, 2001, p. 16). A focus on genre in home and school writing serves to illustrate how minority children utilize their home resources and appropriate texts available in their specific home environment alongside those offered in school that cater for all children alike. This can shed light on how these linguistically and culturally diverse children can mobilize the resources available to them to create multimodal artifacts across the premises of home and school written communication, appropriating genres from popular culture and other reading materials available at home (Pahl, 2001).

The research study is based on the premise that the understanding of the functions and genres of writing at home has the potential to inform writing instruction in classrooms where children from minority groups are more often the norm than the exception. It could provide useful insights to teachers who are teaching children from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that they do not share. Teachers’ middle-class upbringing and learning experiences may not allow them to appreciate the socioeconomic environment of their students, and neither are they familiar with their lives outside the school (McCarthey, 1997). Second language children’s habits and social purposes of writing in their home and community may vary from those valued and practiced in school writing instruction, and hence their performance in school may not truly reflect their abilities and potentials. But often the responsibility for inadequate performance is passed onto the family and parents who are considered to be not doing enough to help their children enculturate into the mainstream school discourse. A better understanding of children’s writing practices in the home may help to remediate the deficit model of
school-home relationships. Information about how their students write at home, the functions and genres they engage in through writing as compared to those they are taught in school would help teachers develop ‘culturally responsive instruction’ (Au, 1993).

Such informed understanding would also benefit parents of the second language children. They could better realize and appreciate the role of the family and the home environment in their children’s writing development. The study provides insights about how parents could help their children develop their writing ability at home by providing social, literacy, and material support. The recognition of their value as key facilitators in their children’s education would also bring about more frequent and effective connections with the children’s schools. Such connections do not come automatically but may need to be structured by teachers with support from parents.

In summary, the findings suggest how second language learners’ interests and knowledge can be smoothly transferred from home to school and vice versa as they develop their writing ability in the two settings. Writing instruction can build on the children’s own purposes for writing as practiced at home and their knowledge of genre recontextualized from various sources in the two settings to realize meaning that has significance for them. Given such opportunities, the children can weave their school and home literacy experiences, creating texts centered not only on school-related topics but also on wider social and cultural issues in their home and community.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: FUNCTIONS AND GENRES OF CHILDREN’S WRITING

This chapter presents a review of empirical research findings on children’s writing functions and written genres. The review includes studies on children’s writing functions in school and at home, research on the development of written genres in children, and how they can be classified. This is followed by a review of literature on second language children writing at home and how their school and home writing experiences are interrelated. A review of investigations into the use of popular culture and multimodality in children’s writing is also included.

2.1 Language functions

Language is used to mediate all domains of human activity and social experience. Children are involved in reading and writing to various degrees in their daily lives and develop their language through using it in purposeful ways (Cazden, 1981; Halliday, 1973; Heath, 1983). They learn to read and write through observing others using written language (Teale, 1986), and interacting with literate adults, such as parents and older siblings, in activities involving literacy, and constructing meaning using printed materials with the help of scaffolding provided by adults (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1983).

The ways in which children become literate is important information to help understand how literacy should be defined and how it can be acquired. These ways have implications for school instructional pedagogy as well as children’s learning to read and write in the home and the community. Understanding the functions of language generally is useful in understanding writing functions in particular. Michael Halliday’s (1973) seminal work on language functions is the most cited classification in educational literature. He divided language functions into seven categories that formed the basis of his functional linguistic theory of discourse (1975, 1978).

1. instrumental language – to meet needs or wants;
2. regulatory language – to control the behavior of others;
3. interactional language – to establish or define social relationships;
4. personal language – to express one’s self, individuality, feelings and emotions;
5. imaginative language- to create a new arrangement of the environment synthesized from separate past experience or events;
6. heuristic language – to acquire knowledge and understanding, to explore the environment;
7. representational language – to communicate information, to report facts or conclusions drawn from facts.

Other researchers adopted a similarly social and cognitive approach in classifying language functions. In more recent research on children’s language functions, Dyson (1986) found that kindergarten children use oral language for a variety of functions. These included representational, directive, heuristic, personal and interactional uses of language. Using Halliday’s (1973) categories of language functions, King (1985) studied the talk of first and second grade children. She found that the first grade children could use oral language for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, and personal functions, while those at the end of first grade and the beginning of second grade developed the heuristic, imaginative, and informative uses of language. For children in particular, language helps them to project into the future and construct an imaginary world. It should also be born in mind that, as posited by Halliday (1973), the functions of language change for children as they grow older and develop their abilities in literacy. Moreover, different forms of language serve different types of functions. Written language plays a distinct role from speech for achieving life purposes and hence serves different functions.

2.2 Writing functions

Writing is a social practice in a literate society. It varies with use, and learning to write involves learning to use language in specific and culturally embedded ways (Farr, 1986). Written language is selected as a mode of communication over speech in many situations. As a semiotic medium, it is relatively more visible and permanent but less interactive when compared to spoken language; the writing process also proceeds more slowly and allows time for more careful planning (Clark & Ivanič, 1997).
Research efforts in the functions of writing started decades ago. Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) conducted pioneering work on language functions in children’s writing. They contend that writing is used to accomplish three basic functions: expressive, transactional and poetic. The expressive function is the most basic one: expressive discourse is closest to the self of the writer who verbalizes thoughts and feelings and shows relationships with the reader. Other functions develop from expressive ones into a continuum of transactional and poetic functions. The transactional function is to get things done and is highly referential. As for the poetic function, discourse aims at creating an aesthetic verbal object that pleases the reader. The writer’s main concern is the textual structure of the poetic creations and the feelings and attitudes attributed to a person, situation or object in the text.

Researchers have extended Britton et al.’s (1975) framework of language functions to children’s writing development. Children have been found to use writing for a variety of purposes other than expressive, transactional or poetic functions. Among them are to provide memory support, to help order information, indicate ownership, and organize daily activities or personal interests (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Heath, 1983; Hudson, 1986; Newkirk, 1989). Moreover, children also produce texts that possess symbolic and affective significance for recording personal events or experiences (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Writing has also been used to substitute oral language either in the absence of a listener or where there would be embarrassment if speech were used; it provides a comfortable distance in time and space between the sender and the recipient of the message in certain social situations (Shuman, 1986).

Writing can also serve a mimetic function which involves mimicking the style, voices and textual features of other writers (Heath, 1983; Hudson, 1986; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Young children are reported to imitate the styles and genres from texts they are exposed to, such as popular culture, children’s books and fairy tales. Their approximation is an attempt to try out adult roles and responsibilities. It is also an exploration of their literate identities that they might assume, transform or resist some day; it is an act of constructing and affirming their identity and developing a sense of
personal history (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993) through a process of “discourse experimentation” (p. 6).

Children’s purposes for writing are often derived from their daily lives in work and play. In Goodman’s (1986) study of young children’s literacy behaviors, it was found that their writing functioned in multiple ways: to show ownership, including authorship; label pictures of objects or scenes; extend memory; share information about self and others; invite and express gratitude; represent real and imagined events; and control behavior and the flow of information. Through play, children experiment with the functions of writing (Bissex, 1980; Bruner, 1984; Dyson, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). Bissex (1980) observed that her son’s major purpose for writing in Grade One was to learn to write, and that the majority of his writing revolved around his play activities and drawing. The second major function was sending messages through writing notes and cards. She observed that writing had meaning to him as an individual and as a cultural being, which suggests that “humans are meaning-making creatures, and language – spoken and written – is an important means for making and sharing meanings” (p. 107). She also found that the young child used writing in combination with labels and signs to convey message at first, and then later for encoding speech.

In reviewing children’s individual writing functions, it is important to note that a piece of writing can serve multiple functions, as reported by Dyson (1989). In her studies of children’s writing, she found that very often interpersonal and social functions are integrated with other functions; the act of story writing is often loaded with several functions at the same time, such as representing meaning, interacting with others, and reflecting on personal experiences.. As Britton (1970) observes, sometimes young children write not just to communicate but also to produce written objects for others. The written objects are used to convey feelings or attitudes besides information, as when children write to maintain or change their social relationships in the family or community. Sometimes they write for playful purposes, using the written medium to establish or foster links with their peers.

2.2.1 Functions of Writing in School

As children acquire language and literacy, the efficiency of development is closely related to the ways in which language is put to use as they learn it; how
effectively language is learnt depends on how it is used by the learner (Bruner, 1984). Writing being an integral, useful part of the school curriculum should be related to students’ individual needs (Mitz, 1981). King (1985) comments that schools are obliged to “extend the opportunities of children to use language for an ever increasing range of purposes - especially to use it to learn” (p. 37). While it is generally accepted that writing development should be more concerned with function than with form, and that a function-based approach to literacy development has been established since the 1980’s, some schools still put emphasis on the formal aspects of writing at the expense of writing purposes and how writing should serve children’s needs.

A limited number of studies have been done to explore the functions of writing in school. Following Halliday’s classification system, Mitz (1981) studied first grade children’s school writing and found that it was used primarily for personal, interactive, and informative functions. She also noted that imaginative and regulatory functions were seldom used. Writing functions differed somewhat for slightly older children who started to use writing to explore the broader social world beyond personal parameters. For instance, in a two-year study of the writing of second and third graders, Florio and Clark (1982) observed that the children used writing for four functions: to participate in the community, to know oneself and others, to occupy free time, and to show academic competence. More recent studies saw the emergence of creative uses of writing in school. For example, Millard (2005) focused on the narrative writing of a class of second graders and identified a problem solving function when composing adventures. The children were also encouraged to introduce familiar scenarios and characters from their favourite stories in books, comics, videos or computer games into their writing for expressive and creative functions. This shows that with appropriate teaching strategies, the children’s preferred modes of narrative could be accommodated within the current school literacy framework to serve various functions even within a single genre.

McGinley and Kamberelis (1991, 1993) introduced an alternative language arts programme designed to encourage children to use reading and writing for functions that they found relevant to their lives. The researchers found that while a group of third/fourth graders used writing overwhelmingly for personal functions, they also used it for social and political functions in order to establish or transform their social
relationships with others. Results also showed that a single book or piece of writing could have multiple functions which were frequently intertwined to support mutual meaning making. Children constructed their own repertoire of reading and writing functions that embodied their interests, needs, and issues; these reflected their life histories and individuality, constructing themselves as individuals as well as textual meaning.

McCarthey (1997) explored the connections between school and home literacy practices with five children from diverse backgrounds aged eight to ten. She noted that certain aspects of the curriculum and the participation structure seemed to contribute towards connecting school and home for some students but not for others: the content of the reading and writing materials were distant from some students’ experiences. Moreover, the focus of class instruction was on the learning and use of literacy. The writing activities, writing workshops, and research projects could have facilitated the use of students’ personal experiences but they were too “individualistic in nature” (p. 174). The student journal entries described out of school experiences but children were seldom encouraged to share with peers in class, implying that they were written for the teacher as the sole audience.

The review of the studies reflects that much of the writing done in schools was not authentic, and hence children were not prepared for real writing in life. As suggested by findings from research on children’s writing in school, the major purposes for writing in academic contexts in school are, firstly, to promote learning, that is learning to write and then to learn content, and secondly, to demonstrate learning for assessment purposes, giving evidence of possession of content knowledge and literacy development (Chapman, 2002). Staab and Smith (1986) argue that children have innate notions about the nature and uses of language and understand what writing can do for them. These researchers contend that students should write for genuine functions, to accomplish a task in a situation that they believe they truly have an opportunity to make a change, rather than merely to practice particular writing skills. To enable them to bring meaning to a writing task in the same way that they and adults do in out of school settings, they suggest that teachers should adopt a functional perspective, and raise learners’ awareness of functions so that writing tasks should hold personal and social meaning to the child.
This calls for a more productive literacy pedagogy that relocates classroom literacy activities within the needs and experiences of the children’s daily lives, where the meaning of literacy should transcend the comprehension and production of text to using reading and writing to “understand, negotiate, and transform human experience” (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993, p. 3).

2.2.2 Functions of Writing at Home

Extensive research has been conducted on children’s writing at home, for example, Heath (1983), Rogers (2004), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). Less attention has been given to the functions that home writing serves in comparison to school-based writing. However, with the advance of a sociocultural perspective to literacy learning and teaching, the issue has become a distinct research area in its own right within the study of children’s writing development.

Meyer (1992) developed his notion of writer’s agenda from a two-year case study of a child’s writing at home and in school during kindergarten and first-grade. A writer’s agenda was embedded within and across the many social settings in which the child writer lived. It includes making decisions about the salient features of the text and other issues that span across the system of the written language, such as spelling and choice of vocabulary. The school writing curriculum has an agenda defined by education authorities and interpreted by the teacher, prescribing instructional functions that do not always address the children’s own agenda. However, in out-of-school settings, young writers are free to use their linguistic resources and conceptual content to construct meaning for themselves, and to achieve writing functions that originate from and belong to them. The notion of writer’s agenda may explain why writing in out-of-school settings is often more flexible and constructive for child writers. Studying her young son’s use of written language, Bissex (1980) found considerable differentialization and specialization of writing functions in different contexts. At home, her son’s writing was done for a multitude of purposes similar to those served by speech. In school, the writing tended to be repetitious and monotonous, and there was rarely overlap of vocabulary between home and school writing.

A striking feature of home literacy activities is their social nature. Taylor (1982) observes that functions of children’s writing at home are closely related to their daily life...
activities, such as making signs for selling lemonade, listing names for club membership, or designing menus and sales slips as they engage in dramatic play. Teale (1986) points out that reading and writing function primarily as parts of social activities in the home or community rather than as isolated events in themselves. He notes that “literacy occurred within particular socially assembled situations and the vast majority of the time was engaged in for reasons other than the reading or writing itself” (p. 184). In a study of the relations between home background and literacy development of preschool children, Teale (1986) identifies nine domains of human activity mediated by literacy that young children participated in or observed in the home. These are, namely, daily living routines, entertainment, school-related activity, work, religion, interpersonal communication, teaching and learning, general information, and storybook time.

2.2.3 Functions of Writing at Home for Second Language Children

In research studies of the literacy development of children from diverse backgrounds, the social function of writing at home is just as prominent. Hammer et al. (2003) studied the writing functions of young working class children in White, Black and Hispanic families and observed the multifaceted nature of literacy in the home. Similarly, McCarthey (1997) found that writing in the home of Hispanic lower socioeconomic status children serves a variety of social and personal functions, such as sending invitations to parties and newspaper advertisements. Like the working class children of Trackton and Roadville in Heath’s (1983) study, these children and their families used writing to maintain social relationships and to serve religious functions. At the same time, they viewed literacy as a valuable tool for success in school. The young writers learned the meaning of print by accessing literacy materials in their home, and appreciated the role it performed in the concrete exigencies of their everyday lives. Rogers (2004) researched immigrant children and their parents’ writing, and demonstrated that most out-of-school writing was done for fulfilling social purposes, but provided little information on the types of writing that the participants engaged in. Paratore et al. (2005) studied the functions of household writing samples of a group of 17 preschool and elementary level immigrant children. They observed that the children, with few exceptions, wrote for three purposes: learning, recreation, and social interaction. They wrote in diverse genres which varied according to age groups. One significant
observation was that for these immigrant children, writing was a family event in which members of the family sat together with the explicit purpose of writing. The parents wrote to learn and conduct daily routine tasks, modeling the practice of writing for the children and providing materials for them to participate.

Findings from empirical research as reviewed above all point to the personal and social nature of children’s writing at home, regardless of the children’s background. They write to fulfill a real purpose or function just as they observe what their family members or adults do, and not to practice language or writing for its own sake. From a Vygotskian (1978) perspective that signifies a direct link between the society and the mind, cognitive activities, such as reading and writing, are social in nature. Cognitive psychology has informed our understanding of the different ways to become literate (Scribner & Cole, 1981). It follows that children’s written language activities are directly affected by the functions for which literacy mediates the social activities in the family and the community.

2.3 Written genres

A study of writing should aim at whole discourses in order to understand how features of text vary according to different kinds of writing (Cooper, 1983). Writing and speech have different structural patterns, and genres that appear in writing are not found in speech; learning to write involves learning new ways of using grammar and mastering the structural and organizational patterns of written language to perform different rhetorical actions in various genres (Martin, 1985). According to Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003), genres are “patterns in the way language is used: that is, it refers to patterns in the situations in which a text is used and patterns in the features of that text – its language, format, structure, and content” (p. 31). As we write, we make various linguistic choices resulting in different rhetorical patterns to serve our writing purposes in relation to context.

2.3.1 Classifications of Written Genres

Viewed from a sociocognitive perspective, genres are not just rigid forms of discourse to be adopted across all social and cultural situations. They are ways of organizing and achieving social actions that we appropriate from experience or learning and are made possible by the rhetorical uses of text. With this shift in definition, the
classification of written genres focuses on the social and cultural roles that they perform, moving from a structural to a functional perspective.

Several researchers classify genres adopting a functional approach. Based on the results of their study, Britton et al. (1975) divide language functions into expressive, transactional and poetic categories, as described earlier. They also propose some categories of genres for fulfilling such functions: chronicles, biographies, and narratives. Another system well known in education literature divides genres into narration, description, exposition and argument (Perera, 1984). Another functional classification developed by Moffett and Wagner (1983) includes the following genres: word plays, labels and captions of non-verbal content, actual and invented dialogue to represent written language, invented stories that are recounts of imagined events, true stories often written in past tense, direction/information of generalized facts written in present tense, and ideas/reflections written in present tense to generalize thoughts. Similarly, King and Rentel (1983) adopt a functional approach to interpreting children’s written genres. In their study of first and second graders, they identified the following categories: drawing with no text, statement/label with a single word or phrase for description, composition to describe some current experience in the present tense, interaction to describe shared experiences, chronicles to describe real events expressed in a story frame with unity in character, actions and theme, and tale or fictional story.

Some researchers classified genres according to time, and others focused on the nature of the content. Perera (1984) classified genres in school writing along the dimension of time: chronological and non-chronological. The first division, chronological, is similar to narrative and contains verbs that describe actions or events with temporal connectives, such as “next” and “then”. Non-chronological writing, on the other hand, is characterized by the use of verbs of attribution or attitude. Chronological, or narrative forms, can be further divided according to the relative distance between the writer and the reader. Ranging from most personal to the most distant are autobiographical accounts or personal stories, biographical accounts or stories about others and accounts of processes. A more common classification system found in the literature is the division between narrative and non-narrative writing according to the nature of the content. Narrative forms can be comparable to chronological writing and
non-narrative to non-chronological. Narrative forms can be further divided into three types - non-fiction stories about the children’s own lives; fiction or stories with real or realistic characters and which could be true but are in fact not; fantasy with make-believe characters’ stories which could not be true (Scarlett & Wolf, 1979).

While genres can be classified in different ways and from different perspectives, they range from more personal to more distant and are based on either real experience or imagination as commonly found among the various classification systems. The different kinds of genres identified reveal the extensive nature of writing and writing purposes in the use of language. Hence, it is important for children to learn how to distinguish among different genres, to understand how distinctive features of language are used for particular social and cultural contexts and functions (Smith & Hiles, 2006).

2.3.2 Development of Written Genres

Children understand the different natures of speech and writing (Goodman, 1986; Halliday, 1973; Sulzby, 1986). As they acquire literacy, they gradually move from a dialogic form of using language in speech to monologic discourse where they write in different structural patterns to fulfill various social or personal functions. The multidisciplinary body of work in genre studies has generated extensive research efforts in studying children’s acquisition of genre knowledge. Pappas and Petegrew (1998) argue that genre knowledge helps writers to construct texts and readers to read texts. A critical part of learning to write is the internalization of knowledge of different genres and the rhetorical purposes and situations for using them (Chapman, 1994; Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999). Based on a sociocultural perspective of literacy, this learning and socialization process also entails developing the ability to appropriate cultural practices and resources for communicative purposes (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). It is critical that as children develop their genre awareness, they should realize that genres are “metaphorical starting points for discursive activity” (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999, p. 138) rather than rigid moulds to fill with language for prescribed communicative purposes.

Research studies show that learning genre is an integral part of children’s literacy development, and that such learning is an emergent process (Chapman, 1999, 2002). Investigation of the influence of genres on the cognitive and social construction of literacy knowledge ranges from a traditional focus on narrative, for example, Pappas
(1993), to curriculum genres and informational writing in content subjects, such as science, music and social studies (Chapman, 2002). From a socioconstructivist perspective, children appropriate the functions and forms of written language from their social environment and their classroom context, using literate others and literacy artifacts, for example, the alphabet as a semiotic system, books, pen and paper, and the computer as resources to learn to write (Chapman, 1995, 2006).

Children’s sense of genre grows as they borrow their conceptions of genre from books and other media. Smith and Hiles (2006) studied the genre development of two first graders over the course of an academic year. The research objectives were to investigate the nature of genre development and purpose development, the purposes of different genres, and the opportunities provided by the first-grade classroom to develop the children’s language abilities. The findings show that young children were able to develop a great depth of knowledge relating to genres, and that they could make various connections between genres in reading and writing, transferring what they read from books to their text production. They began by borrowing texts and layouts from their reading texts and then incorporated them into their writing. Newkirk (1989) argues that in the course of this, there is a need to scaffold their approximations to help them construct knowledge about the types of structures and language features that are typically associated with a particular genre. Building on such knowledge, children would be able to produce more coherent text. Such scaffolding can be realized both at home through interactions with family members and also through apprenticeships in social groups, such as the community and the school (Gee, 1990).

The development of genre knowledge is not an isolated endeavor practiced for its own sake. The choice of genre is a response to a specific writing purpose for conveying specific content to an intended reader. The understandings of the various characteristics of text, such as “genre, typical content, functions, and audience” are essential for children learning to write effectively (Zecker, 1996, p. 2). Zecker’s investigation of the writing of first graders reveals intricate relationships between genre and content and between function and audience. As children become more aware of what is appropriate content for a writing purpose, they begin to develop a sense of audience. Directing their writing for an intended audience, they make specific choices in content to meet the needs of the
reader. And with reference to the content thus selected, the young writers choose the appropriate genre to realize the functions ascribed to the text. Thus, as the children write, content influences their choice of genre, and the needs of the audience affect the ways in which the writing purpose of the text is realized. When children internalize these composing possibilities with written language, they develop a repertoire of socially appropriate ways of using language in different contexts and for different purposes.

Research evidence shows that children develop genre knowledge early (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Langer 1986; Smith & Hiles, 2006). Studies of children’s writing in school found that their genre awareness starts to develop as early as kindergarten or even earlier. Donovan (2001), for example, reported from her investigation that kindergarteners were able to differentiate between narrative and expository genres even before they could write with conventional spelling. Similarly, Zecker (1996) demonstrated that Grade 1 writers showed knowledge of text characteristics even before they were able to produce conventionally recognizable texts. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1985) found that children, even at an early stage of learning to write, were able to shape their text according to various schematic constraints. Their enactment of genres was closely related to objects and activities in their daily experiences. In addition to stories, written genres produced by children included non-narrative writing: lists, letters, signs, club membership cards, birthday cards, alphabet books, quizzes and certificates (Bissex, 1980; Newkirk, 1987; Taylor, 1982).

Longitudinal studies of children’s writing offer important findings about children’s construction of genre knowledge. In a study of writing in kindergarten through Grade 5, Donovan and Smolkin (2002) found that many of the kindergarteners were able to differentiate between narrative and expository texts and could produce writing more advanced than labels and statements, and by the time they reached Grade 2, almost all of the children in the study could do so. Chapman (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of cross curricular writing from kindergarten to Grade 3, documenting a child’s writing development in social studies, science, mathematics and music, and the impact of classroom curriculum and the mode of instruction on his writing development. The findings show that the subject did a considerable amount of content area writing.
This focused on expository writing done in a range of genres, starting from simple lists and labels to multi-paragraph reports.

2.3.3 Development of Written Genres for Second Language Children

Investigation in second language children’s genre development and instruction has not been given as much attention as that of native English speaking children. However, insights from research findings on genre writing of first language children can throw light on the genre development of their L2 counterparts. While little information specifically on non-mainstream children’s writing functions and genres at home can be found, ethnographic work on the learning of children from different social classes provides extensive evidence that school practices in general privilege the interests, habits of meaning making, and home literacy practices of dominant, white, middle class, Eurocentric families (e.g., Cairney, 2002; McCarthey, 1997; Pahl, 2001).

Nevertheless, all children regardless of race, social class, and cultural and linguistic background, come to school with multiple experiences that play an important role in their acquisition of literacy (Au, 1993; Cairney, 2002; Heath, 1983; McCarthey, 1997; Teale, 1986). There is a need to understand children’s home writing process and products to explore the value they offer for school learning. The new notions of genre as described in Chapter 1 have accorded it a revitalized role and potential in the learning and teaching of writing in a wider context. Incorporating a new definition of genre into writing instruction has implications for reconceptualizing writing tasks, purposes and contexts in literacy development (Chapman, 1999). Based on a sociocultural view of literacy, writing for children goes beyond composing in specific textual forms to connecting with other people in order to establish social relationships and position themselves with a particular social stance; genre is not taught as an end in itself but for understanding meaningful content (Dyson, 1993). The literature on children’s genre development provides new insights into how educators can better help them learn to write. Its importance has been described by Smith and Hiles (2006) who contend that “[t]he understanding of genre forms, functions, appropriateness, and rhetorical possibilities are not only critical for developing reading abilities; they are also critical to learning to write for particular purposes and contexts” (p. 34).
Second language learners are often required to write different kinds of texts for different purposes in various classroom activities, for example, science reports and journals. Writing across the curriculum is a common literacy practice with L2 learners in varied age groups (Harklau, 2002). While expressive and literary texts may be the focus of writing at elementary level, transactional writing is just as important for literacy development. Children write to present information across a variety of subjects to meet curricular requirements. As part of their content area learning, young ESL learners are often engaged in informational writing in science and social subjects. They benefit from encountering a variety of genres or literary forms through reading: they can see how language functions to present content effectively to the reader to achieve the writing purpose, and thus learn how to make use of genres for obtaining information (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Knowledge of the characteristics of particular genres will help them create their own literacy texts (Hudelson, 1986). Hence, there is a need for “the legitimate and extensive uses of reading and writing across subject matter and grade levels” (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994, p. 459).

2.3.4 Written Genres in School and at Home

Children’s written genres are situated in the various social contexts in which they participate, and are closely related to their communal activities. Some studies have focused specifically on children’s writing in the school setting while others compared them across different writing contexts. Chapman (1999) identified three major genre contexts in school learning: classroom workplace genres, genres within the language arts (e.g., literary genres), and genres across the curriculum. Classroom workplace genres were written to get things done and to achieve genuine communication; they include reminder notes, agendas, and records of attendance. They had significant relevance for the children because they were associated with specific classroom routines, and were written for a real purpose that assumed immediacy for them. In writing across the curriculum as part of content subject learning, students developed both discipline-related content knowledge and language skills, including genre awareness. They drew upon genres as cultural resources and used them as a cognitive tool for constructing knowledge in content subjects.
In her study of children writing narratives in school, Dyson (1997) found that for both boys and girls, there were common desires for adventure and action, power, security, and love that urged them to work towards a vision of what was good, whether imaginary or in a real world. What was significant was the interplay of “the social and ideological dynamics that undergirded children’s authorial decisions and made those decisions significant markers of, and contributors to, individual and community growth” (p. 92). Regardless of their gender, the child writers used written language to express and pursue their personal interests in various directions. They made decisions about writing purposes in relation to audience, and selected appropriate content and genre to realize them in accordance with their personal ideologies and interpretation of social relationships.

Research evidence shows that there are different sets of genres written in school and at home. Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) studied the genres that young children encountered in these two settings. There were different kinds of written language used for many different purposes all around them in their daily life. The types of genres and the frequency in which they were found differed from home to school. Some of the genres were the same, such as children’s books, lists of grocery items for shopping, and lists of workbook pages to complete; these artifacts served to link their activities both in the home and in school. Others were different, for example, the television guide at home and the poem at school. It was noted that some of the genres found in the school were not found in homes or other out-of-school settings. These “school-only” genres were used primarily for learning or teaching literacy skills in the school context, as opposed to those that were used for daily communication purposes in informal social situations. The researchers pointed to a need to increase awareness of the genres that young children encountered in the two settings to bridge home and school literacies to support their literacy development.

Other researchers focused on the differences in the production of genres between the school and the home setting. Maloy and Edwards (1990) compared the writing done in school and at home by a group of first-grade monolingual and bilingual children. The children were able to select their own topics though they occasionally wrote on teacher-assigned topics. Their school genres included letters, nonfiction accounts of
activities during holidays, and birthday cards. The researchers concluded that such school writing could actually have “modeled what could be done at home” (p. 197). Millard’s (2001) case study of the home and school writing of three children, aged 7 to 11 years, showed that they were able to incorporate elements of their personal interests into school-based tasks within a genre. The children participated in a writing project in which they mainly wrote narratives. The girls seemed more adept to self-initiate writing and to use it for personal and private purposes, for example, writing letters or diaries, and dwelling on fantasies and friendships. The boys developed their ideas for composing narratives from simulated play outdoors or characters from computer games and fantasy stories. However, the researcher observed that the emphasis of the current school curriculum was on children “replicating and modeling pre-existing written genres and formats” (p. 4), focusing on the written word for communication and neglecting other modes of meaning making, such as graphic representation with pictures and diagrams, and the use of physical modes like drama and play.

Similar comments were made by Meyer (1992) who studied the differences between home and school writing of a first-grade student. Based on his analysis of writing samples produced by the child writer in the two settings, the researcher lamented the over-emphasis of the school writing activities on the graphophonic and syntactic systems of written language, and doubted to what extent such a stilted focus could benefit the developing writer. On the other hand, Hammer et al. (2003) denounced the lack of direct literacy instruction in certain schools systems, arguing that there was not sufficient explicit teaching in the whole language approach; the literacy events in the classrooms were limited to story books that children read on a regular basis and writing materials made readily available to them, and hence not enough emphasis on different genres.

2.3.5 Written Genres in School and at Home for Second Language Children

Most of the research on second language children’s writing development focuses on family literacy practices that involve both parents and children writing. Paratore et al. (2005) studied writing in immigrant families in order to understand children’s writing at home. The kindergarteners and first graders composed mainly in drawings narrating daily events with the added use of labels and captions. The rest were letters to family members, friends and teachers. A greater variety of genres was found in the writing of
the children from Grade 2 to Grade 6; they wrote stories, letters, poems, songs, shopping lists and worked on teacher-assigned worksheets in which tasks ranged from single-word or short-answer responses to extended writing. Review of the findings showed that many of these immigrant parents and their children found writing at home an interesting activity; it was considered part of their daily lives and a means to support their learning of the English language and enhance their literacy development. When comparing children writing at home and at school, the researchers found that they wrote more frequently at home, especially when parents made effort to initiate or encourage literacy practices. It was found that writing was most frequent in families where parents established writing routines and wrote as well as their children. In these families, the parents were able to motivate and engage their children in family writing regardless of their own oral and written language proficiency, and writing routines seemed to increase the frequency of such activities. For others, writing was less frequent, occurring as a more spontaneous and incidental activity. For certain school-age children in the study, home writing was confined to completing tasks assigned by teachers or parents. Some of the children, all girls, wrote at home upon self-initiation; they wrote daily and in a variety of genres. These children used writing as a form of entertainment and a way of expressing their affection, giving what they wrote to family members or friends. The findings of the study also suggest that boys seemed less inclined to self-initiate writing, and that the situation could be improved by paying more attention to writing contexts in family writing tasks that would engage boys as well as girls.

Exploring the complex relationship between second language writing and identity construction, Maguire and Graves (2001) examined one specific genre, namely journals, of three eight-year-old immigrant Muslim girls writing in English, their third language. In the researchers’ reflections on the participants’ texts, they found that these child writers could negotiate easily between and within the multiple cultural events in different languages both inside and out of school. An important finding was that these trilingual children developed the linguistic skills essential for supporting their writing most effectively when they used them in context, and that they appropriated discourses that were available and valued in their particular sociolinguistic and cultural environments, for example, family and school events. Such development and appropriation helped
towards both their expression of self and construction of identity. Moreover, there was much intertextuality observed in the children’s writing; ideas from stories they read reappeared in their composition in altered forms. There were also references to television shows, movies and videos. From a sociocultural perspective, these children were able to draw on “their personal experiences to construct their entries, incorporated elements of fantasy from the media around them, but employed different mediational means to meet their goals” (Maguire & Graves, 2001, p. 588). A desire for establishing an authorial presence or identity in their writing could also be observed in other studies of second language learners (e.g., Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1997). Regardless of their age group, second language learners had a similar motive and a need to signify the voice of a sensing person behind the written words, and to develop a sense of self-representation to show who they are and where they are in their social webs of experience.

The review of literature on home and school genres points to the fact that there are school-specific genres used primarily for the teaching and learning of literacy skills. Yet children are able to incorporate their personal interests into school-based writing tasks if they are written for a genuine communicative purpose or where they are allowed to make authorial decisions about writing purposes, genre and content. Sometimes there is too much emphasis on the practice of graphophonic and syntactic systems of the written language or modeling of pre-existing textual forms of writing. The goal of teaching students textual features of specific genres should not be limited to having them produce these forms in writing (Devitt, 2004; Smith & Hiles, 2006). Rather, students should be helped to develop an awareness of genre as they are immersed in various types of texts performing different functions. The goal is to help children develop “a critical consciousness of both rhetorical purposes and ideological effects of generic forms” (Devitt, 2004, p. 192).

2.4 Linking school and home writing experiences of second language children

In general, research has shown that home writing is a rich source for understanding ESL children’s local literacies, their sociocultural ways of representing their culture and community, and the effect of social influences, such as cultural beliefs and rhetorical styles on their literacy learning in school (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Gregory,
1997; Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; McCarthey & Garcia, 2005). Their writing also reflects the social and cultural nature of their home literacy experiences.

Inquiry into the practice of family literacy began as early as 1983 when Denny Taylor developed systematic ways of looking at reading and writing as activities that have consequences in and are affected by family life. Understanding the forms and functions of writing within families can inform and improve pedagogical practices for teaching writing in school (Paratore et al., 2005). However, while there is a general understanding that children write for a purpose as reflected in their family writing practices, it has been observed that school writing does not always prepare children for writing in the real world for real purposes (Atwell, 1998; Edelsky & Smith, 1984). One reason, as Bissex (1980) suggests, is that real discourse for personal, cultural and social development can hardly be represented within the classroom. Classroom teachers often set writing tasks in accordance with curriculum objectives, personal teaching philosophies, beliefs about writing development, and teaching outcomes. Writing assignments are typically constrained by instructional purposes as directed by school and board policies, such as students writing to practice skills in paragraph development and coherence. Since writing topics and prompts are set by teachers, there is often a lack of a real audience. Such limitations of school-based writing assignments were observed in an ethnographic study conducted by Early and Gunderson (1993) aimed at linking home, school and community literacy events in a Vancouver elementary school with a mixed student population of Canadian and immigrant children.

The school writing curriculum embodies an invisible pedagogy that overtly supports the child writer’s interests but which is actually centered round the teacher’s own instructional intentions (Bernstein, 1975). In their study of secondary students writing in the classroom, Sheeran and Barnes (1992, cited in Millard, 2005) observed that teachers seldom explicitly instructed the students about the rules of writing expected from them. As a result, many of them were left with little support for developing competence in the art and skills of writing. Millard (2005) notes that the situation is particularly disadvantageous for children whose home experiences oriented them to view learning as an adult regulated activity, giving rise to tensions “between the play-centred orientation of the classroom and the children’s own directed and growing struggle for competence
over the different modes of language” (p. 61). And it is not uncommon to find among second language learners children who come from a culture that situates learning heavily in the teacher and explicit instruction, such as the home context in the present study.

2.4.1 Developing Writing in the Home Context

To compensate for the limited literacy practices in the school context, researchers suggest that literacy instruction needs to draw on children’s out of school literacy practices (Alverman, Xu, & Carpenter, 2003; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Kenner, 2000). In the field of second language acquisition, it was found that elementary level English language learners engage in a variety of writing practices at home and at school, and that their writing practices and attitudes are influenced by home backgrounds and classroom contexts (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005). Research on the influence of cultural, social, and linguistic background on the literacy development of children from low economic status families or culturally diverse communities has been well documented, (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 1995; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992). These suggest that home and school literacy practices can be incongruous for children whose home and school environments may differ in the ways and extent to which they promote attitudes and behaviors towards writing. And research evidence has shown that mismatches in the nature and uses of literacy between home and school may cause difficulties in children acquiring literacy in early childhood (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983).

In an exploratory case study to investigate the connections that language minority children made between uses of writing at home and at school, Kenner (1997) showed that young L2 writers were able to work with home texts in school, incorporating in their written discourse print artifacts from daily life and knowledge of literacy in their home language. It was found that connecting children’s everyday literacy experiences at home and school provided opportunities for multilingual writing which helped children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds develop literacy knowledge. Kenner concluded that teachers should provide “a ‘home-school discourse’ open to children’s everyday literacy experiences, and to provide opportunities for multilingual writing, which can help children from different social and cultural backgrounds develop their literacy knowledge to its fullest potential” (p. 85).
While parents in many cultural and ethnic groups place great value on the school education of their children (Hudelson, 1989b; Li, 2002), there may be disparity in the orientation to the use and learning of literacy between home and school, such as views towards the concept and role of originality in composing text (Ping, 2000). The classroom often exhibits specific practices, principles and values, and should hence be conceived as a community by itself in the attempt to link home and school practices (Early & Gunderson, 1993). Based on their observations in ethnographic studies of the classroom, these researchers call upon teachers to make instructional change in the school. They advocate designing “classroom instructional practices which reach out to the broader community” (p. 106). The need for exchange of knowledge between family and school is further supported by findings in studies of literacy practices of bilingual children; they were found capable of drawing on out-of-school literacy learning to facilitate that in formal schooling (Huss, 1995).

A research study by Li (2002) on the effect of home environment on Chinese immigrant children’s literacy development found that the presence and use of human and social capital, that is the parents’ educational background and their social relationships with the family, contribute most to a positive home literacy environment. The children’s literacy development was also affected by their lives outside the classroom, their home environment, and the availability and use of print at home. She observed the parents’ devotion to promoting their children’s success in school and their integration into Canadian society, but lamented over the lack of home and school interconnectedness in some of the cases. While placing great hope in education to help their children integrate into the mainstream society, the parents were not interested in initiating any communication with their children’s school. It was noted that “[w]hether in the two entrepreneurial families or in the academic families whose parents are more literate in Chinese and English, all parents are distanced from their children’s school life, have little communication with the teachers, and little knowledge of what Canadian schooling is all about” (Li, 2002, p. 155). Thus, though coming from the same ethnic and linguistic background, children may have different literacy experiences, the type and quality of which are affected by their parents’ social capital and educational backgrounds (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005).
In another study, Xu (1999) described the home literacy experiences of a group of Chinese ESL kindergarteners and observed how they made functional use of English at home and in the community. The findings reflect the diverse and cultural nature of the children’s home literacy experiences: they had access to a wide range of print materials and writing supplies, and observed their parents and other family members’ engagement with the functional use of print across different social contexts. Another important element was the family members engaging them in a wide variety of literacy activities both in Chinese and in English. These findings suggest that children’s literacy development was the product of social learning from their culture and their interaction with literate others in it. The amount and quality of writing opportunities of students have consequences for their writing development, be it in their first or second language (McCarthey, Guo, & Cummins, 2005).

2.4.2 Popular Culture as Linguistic Resources

Second language learners’ cultural and language communities could facilitate their studies in school by providing them cultural resources and social processes accessed through contact with media, schools, family and friends (Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001). Despite the domination of prescriptive pedagogies in literacy instruction, research evidence shows that children develop their sense of genre by borrowing genre conceptions from books, popular culture and other kinds of media they are exposed to in diverse contexts (Devitt, 2004; Kroll, 1990; Smith & Hiles, 2006). Children construct their knowledge of written genres responding to texts found in their social worlds from which they actively appropriate genres for their communicative purposes (Chapman 1995). In a longitudinal study of children from kindergarten to Grade 4, Kroll (1990) found that the kindergartener’s stories were borrowed from various sources that included books, television and even basal readers. Devitt (2004) contends that as children develop their genre awareness, drawing from print and non-print texts in popular culture, they internalize the functions and features of these texts through speaking, reading, listening, viewing, and, of course, writing.

Popular culture is an important source with which children construct and negotiate meaning in their cultural and social worlds. In both school and home contexts, children, irrespective of their linguistic backgrounds, can come into contact with various kinds of
media in popular culture, for example, books, television, comics, videos, and cartoons in the mainstream language. Engaging in them can help them learn the practices, concepts, and values as well as the language of the mainstream community in interesting and enlivening ways. For instance, comics are a popular mode of entertainment for both adults and children; they are rich in cultural and linguistic materials, highly visual, authentic, interesting and easy to access. In terms of language, comics use a consistent register, and contain limited lexical phrases. Their textual and visual characteristics render them particularly appealing to second language children for whom popular culture often provides an intrinsic motivation to reading texts in the target language. They offer second language learners access to the pervasive symbols and scripts of social narrative and networks of their peers in school (Duff, 2002a).

Children are known to use whatever is at hand in their social and cultural worlds to find pleasure and affiliations in creating meaning and shaping their writing (Dyson, 1997; Kress, 1997). However, Millard (2005) observes that while popular culture “can increase children’s motivation to read and produce their own texts with connections with their popular cultural interests” (p. 61), many teachers regard popular culture as competing rather than helping children to develop their literacy. Texts and artifacts in popular culture are believed to distract children from book culture offered in school; school policies tend to ban cult objects and current crazes that children can get engaged with so often (Marsh & Millard, 2003). This perspective reflects the restrictions on the language arts curriculum resulting from a tightening educational policy to centrally control national curricula to the detriment of second language learners in the United Kingdom. This might well be a response by individual teachers; there were other teachers who worked with popular culture materials very effectively.

Family literacy practices have been known to provide valuable funds of knowledge and previous experience with use of written language that classroom teachers can build on to optimize non-mainstream children’s literacy learning (Moll et al., 1992). Innovative approaches to literacy curriculum have pointed to the importance of studying the home literacy events and products that provide the foundation for developing more sophisticated literacy skills (Hammer et al., 2003). If the school curriculum links to home literacies, children are more disposed to transfer their literacy skills and knowledge...
across different settings (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003). To become literate involves the socialization of the whole individual; literacy instruction should hence build on students’ cultural and linguistic resources to connect in and out-of-school life

### 2.5 Multimodality

Young children demonstrate attempts at writing long before their parents recognize them as such. Children’s early writing is multimodal: drawing pictures and adding text to their drawings in the form of letters or lines to represent writing, or telling adults about what the drawings represent (Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). In studies of early writing development, for example, Dyson (1986, 1988, 1989), young children were found using both drawing and writing as direct symbols to represent meaning. As they explored the use of print, they required the combined effect of text, image, and talk to convey the full meaning of their composition. They employed the visual aspects of texts and the interaction of words, oral language and pictures, weaving speech and drawing into their text as they wrote. Gradually, as children developed as writers, their world of text became more dominant than the drawings. At that stage, writing often preceded drawings; the focus was on encoding with words, and pictures were used to depict a series of related happenings in a storytelling style. Even at primary school level, children generally compose by first making elaborate drawings and writing labels to explain them (Newkirk, 2000). The use of symbolic media figures significantly into young children’s imaginary worlds. Dyson (1989) conducted a two-year study involving a group of kindergarteners and first graders. In creating stories, children used print, but their imaginary worlds basically evolved through dramatic play, talk and drawing. It was only over time that children could differentiate the boundaries between written, drawn and spoken symbols. By the time children moved on to Grade 2, they started to negotiate relationships between writing and drawing.

The politics of representation in language learning was the focus of Kendrick and McKay’s (2004) work on children’s drawing. Their study adopted an image-based method using an innovative way to investigate first and second graders’ perceptions of literacy across the various contexts of their lives. Their findings highlight the power of drawing as an alternative mode of representation in language learning.
graders came up with a broad array of visual representations situated in a variety of settings and literacy events many of which depicted literacy activities as extensions of the home domains. An interesting feature was the children’s images of imagined literacies, portraying themselves beyond here and now as readers and writers of the future, and in different professions, such as teachers and soccer players. Through the use of images, the children were able to express complex understandings of literacy. The fact that such images of literacy were not found in language arts activities in the classroom was evidence of the dominance of language in school literacy learning, the privileged position that language has over other forms of representation.

Similar findings were made by Millard (2001) in her study of a group of children aged 7 to 11 years writing between school written work and home productions for a graphic magazine; the written word dominates communication in the school curricula over all other forms of representation, such as pictures, diagrams, and physical modes like play and drama. Drawing and other forms of visual literacy, however, are generally held in low esteem in school, particularly in language education classrooms; teachers in general regard drawing and the graphic element of writing as a transition from images to words, and once children cross that intellectual step, they should leave drawing behind and concentrate on words to represent meaning (Millard & Marsh, 2001). In schools, children are often restricted to using only one semiotic mode, language, to represent meaning (Short, 2000, cited by Kendrick & McKay, 2004). A restrictive view on children’s use of images and signs in their exploration of print fails to notice the fact that language is only one way of conveying meaning. A communicative event can involve different modes used at the same time, and meaning can be conveyed through the simultaneous use of images, speech, and gestures besides print (Kress & Jewitt, 2003).

Research on children’s drawings in text also extends to the writing efforts of children in diverse social and cultural contexts. Maloy and Edwards (1990) conducted a home-classroom study of kindergarteners and first graders’ writing. The participants included both English speaking children and bilingual children of various linguistic backgrounds. The children were found drawing extensively in their home writing activities, and telling their stories orally. Drawing assumed great communicative significance for a boy with Chinese-English background. He drew pictures and wrote
text encoded in invented spelling to accompany his drawing. Then he put them into envelopes, sealed them and asked his parents to send them to their relatives in China. His use of visual signs enabled him to produce stories with detailed and complex plots.

Research findings of studies reviewed above provide the basis for challenging the politics of classroom practices that privilege language-dependent modes of representation over others. Such privileging is detrimental to the writing development of young children who are just learning to use print to represent themselves and their ideas, and even further to children from second language backgrounds. The perspective that there are multiple ways of representing meaning in combination with text has been acknowledged by theorists of literacy learning and adopted to interpret children’s integrated use of print and drawing in their construction of meaning (Kendrick et al., 2005). The findings also provide further evidence of the value of visuals in helping children to develop as writers, as they allow them to “represent whole areas of their sensory lives…[and] they infer the moods, sentiments, relationships and interactions that are embedded and diffused across the many literacy contexts of children’s lives” (Kendrick & McKay, 2004, pp. 123-4).
Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study adopted a quantitative as well as qualitative, interpretative research design to conduct a case study of four Grade 2 Chinese children learning English as a second language in an elementary school in a mainstream community where English was the dominant language. It sought to investigate the nature of functions and genres in the children’s writing produced across two settings, the home and the school. As a case study using data collected from naturalistic sources, it was conducted according to fundamental principles related to the ethics and validity of academic research. While some of the analyses were qualitative in nature, quantitative measures were also adopted. This chapter outlines the methodological assumptions of the study and describes the setting, the participants, the data collection, and the data analysis procedures. A summary chart provides an overall view of the research questions and how they were answered by findings from data collection and data analysis procedures at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Rationale for research design

3.1.1 Definition of the Case Study

The case study is one of the five distinct research strategies identified by Yin (1984). The term case study has been defined in various ways. Looking at case study as an object of study, Johnson (1992) believes that it is the study of one case, with the researcher focusing “attention on a single entity, usually as it exists in its naturally occurring environment” (p. 75). In the case of second language acquisition research, the unit of study is typically a learner, a teacher, a class, a school, a university, a programme or a community as an individual entity (Duff, 2002b; Faltis, 1997; Nunan, 1992).

The case study is distinctive in its technical design. According to Yin (2003), the technical definition of case study can be divided into two parts.

A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life content, especially when
the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 13).

The first part of this definition describes this particular logic of design by setting the scope of a case study. The focus on the importance of contextual conditions suggests that the choice for the research method should be based on its pertinence to the phenomenon of the study as compared with that of other alternatives instead of on philosophical beliefs about its relative strength or advantage. The second part of the definition deals with the more technical aspects of the case study inquiry: it generates a number of variables in the “technically distinctive situation” (Yin, 2003, p. 13), relying on multiple sources of evidence, and using theoretical prepositions developed in the inquiry to guide data collection and analysis. Hence a case study is an inquiry that examines an empirical topic by following a range of pre-specified procedures. In fact, methodologically a case study can best be described as “a ‘hybrid’ in that it generally utilizes a range of methods for collecting and analyzing data, rather than being restricted to a single procedure” (Nunan, 1992, p. 74). It is a comprehensive research ‘package’ that includes the logic of design, data collection techniques, and particular approaches to data analysis. The present study adopts this design approach to case study and incorporates data from various sources to provide a multiple evidence for understanding the phenomenon being investigated.

Yin (2003) believes that a case study approach is favoured “when a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control… because such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (2003, p. 6). In other words, where the research goal is to investigate how a certain phenomenon operates or why it operates in a particular way, the situation calls for the use of case studies. A consideration of the basis for deciding on the most adequate and appropriate research strategy may begin with a review of the purposes of research in general. Four purposes have been identified to link the objective of a proposed study to the general principles of conducting inquiry. To justify an empirical study for its significance in theory development or expansion, or contribution to practice in related fields, the purpose of the study may be either one or perhaps a combination of the following: exploration,
explanation, description and prediction (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). These authors suggest that variations of the case study approach can be used for the first three purposes, using different types of data collection techniques that range from participant observation to in-depth interviewing and document analysis. In case studies, the participants should be looked upon as individuals, and when they are compared, commonalties and differences emerge (Bissex, 1987). Case studies researching on selected individuals and making selective accounts of life are bound to be interpretative. Such research procedures are adopted in the present study, an interpretative-positivist inquiry to explore, describe and explain the differences between the school and home writing of children learning to write in English as a second language from a sociocultural perspective.

3.1.2 Case study in Second Language Acquisition Research

Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) stress that the case study is particularly suitable for studying situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context. The case study, as one form of qualitative inquiry among others, such as naturalistic inquiry, participant observation, grounded theory, exploratory research and ethnography, has been prevalent in educational research (Duff, 2002b; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Where qualitative research has been found particularly suitable for applied linguistics research, the case study approach has been widely adopted in the field of second language acquisition which is noted for the diversity in the background of the learners and its social and cultural nature. Each student is a unique case with widely different combinations of variables, such as language proficiency in their native and second language, ethnic and socioeconomic background, length of residence in the country, investment in the learning of the target language, and sensitivity to power relations in the learning context. Nunan (1992) points out that the strength of the case study lies in its suitability for small-scale research conducted within the bounded system of the classroom or other settings, such as action-oriented research projects conducted by graduate students and practitioners; the primary purpose is to explore and understand issues and problems within the setting itself through detailed study of individual students learning under specific circumstances. The focus being on the deriving of insights for improving the learning situation in a single classroom, generalization to other settings becomes a secondary issue. The intensive and holistic
study of a single entity in the context of the bounded system, very often the classroom, the school, the home or the community, can yield rich insights for improving teaching and learning practices.

In second language acquisition research, case study methodology has been adopted for studies of the development of linguistic performance in second language learners. The naturalistic approach allows the intensive and multi-faceted study of an individual’s use of language, spontaneous speech or writing, either at a certain point in time or at particular intervals over a period of time in real-life settings or the classroom. The studies are typified by a focus on the process, the naturalistic use of the language and aimed at the description of the language acquisition of a few subjects rather than generalization to the wider population to which they belong (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Interpretative case studies have contributed to expanding theories about the literacy development of second language learners. For example, adopting a case study approach, Jones (1985) focused on the use of monitoring by second language writers in composing written texts.

A major criticism of second language research is that researchers are often distanced from the immediate concerns of teachers and learners (Brown & Rogers, 2002), a situation that results from excessive focus on verifying understandings of theories, models and practices. A remedy to the problem is to situate research more directly on issues of central concern and relevance to teachers and their students. As defined by Creswell (1998) a case study is characterized by employing multiple sources to explore a subject of interest bounded by time and space, with the context of the case situated within its physical, social, historical or economic setting. Case studies and findings are bound by their context. Analysis of data and findings should be contained within the parameters of the selected individuals and this limits the theoretical generalization from particular studies to other contexts and circumstances. However, it is believed that this method of educational research, while confined to a specific case with its unique context and background, can produce findings that are generalizable to theoretical propositions though not to populations or universes (Yin, 2003).
3.1.3 The Issue of Quantification in Case Study Research

The quantitative-qualitative distinction in research methodology is often seen as a dichotomy between two opposing paradigms with their own philosophical base, ontology and related methodologies. A more current perspective encourages a mixed-paradigm approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994, cited in Duff, 2003). While quantitative research has traditionally been given higher status in research in social sciences and education, a combination of both approaches, although not very common, can be viewed as complementary rather than distinctively incompatible (Duff, 2002b). The case study, normally associated with qualitative research, may often adopt a more positivist approach than an interpretative one by employing strategies and statistical analyses that embody the central assumptions of quantitative research (Yin, 1984, 2003). It is not uncommon for qualitative case studies to incorporate quantitative statistical analysis as a major component of the research study (Duff, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1984). The approach to data collection and analysis is closely related to the nature of the research question and the type of data collected. In discussing the role of quantification in qualitative research, Lazaraton (1995) recognizes that obtaining data from multiple sources using multiple collection techniques is not uncommon in applied linguistics. Watson-Gegeo (1988) stresses that qualitative research methods may “involve quantification in the form of frequency counts, tests of significance, or multivariate analyses of patterns and themes” (pp. 584-585).

Hence the case study, though like ethnography, is often conceived as qualitative research in studies of language and literacy learning, may well incorporate quantitative analysis and statistical techniques. Yin (2003) believes that case studies can use any combination of qualitative and quantitative data obtained from multiple sources and are not limited to direct, detailed observation of the natural context. Chaudron (1988) notes that most researchers adopting qualitative techniques resort to analyses that involve the quantification of events: “the frequency, magnitude or proportion of occurrences of analytical units observed” (p. 15). In adopting a dualistic approach, the present study employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the various types of data collected. Statistical analysis of numerical data was used to provide measurements as evidence for making objective comparisons. On the other hand, descriptive or interpretative findings
were arrived at through qualitative analysis of other types of data to provide information on the process and products of the children’s enactment of functions and use of genres.

3.2 Participants

The participants in the study were the four focal children and their mothers. The children participated in the study with the consent of their parents. A consent form and an attached letter were sent home to the children’s parents. The letter provided information on the nature, objectives, duration and procedures of the study, and involvement of the participants in it. Since the researcher benefits from the study, the participants in their turn should receive certain benefits for their involvement in the study. The gain by the participants would take the form of information made available to the parents on the children’s development as writers in home/school based writing activities. In naturalistic research, sampling should be purposeful and selective rather than random and representative (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The focal children were selected based on their linguistic, ethnic and sociocultural background. The English language writing abilities of the four participating children encompassed various developmental levels as graded by their teacher.

The four students, two boys and two girls, aged seven to eight, were selected from the same class and had similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. All were ESL children born and raised in Canada. Their parents were working class immigrants from Mainland China or Hong Kong. Their first language was Cantonese which was spoken at home. They learned English when they started school; it was their language for learning and communicating with friends at school and siblings at home. It was also sometimes used for written communication in both school and home. According to Bhatia and Ritchie (1999), it is important to consider in the study of children speaking two languages the amount and types of input and use of each of the two languages. These children were raised in Cantonese-speaking homes where they learned to follow directions, answer questions, speak and interact with family members and members of the ethnic community in their parents’ native language. However, they were exposed all the while to English in school, and even at home through television and popular culture, shopping trips and outings into the English-speaking community.
The children worked with two teachers in the class. One of them taught the class full-time before she started co-teaching with another teacher at the beginning of the second school term. The help of the first teacher was enlisted for rating the focal children with regard to their writing abilities in English. She rated two of the children, Katie and William, (all the children’s names were pseudonyms) as average and the other two, Elaine and John, as above average. The rating was based on the children’s class performance in the writing programme as reflected in their writing samples, and also their individual scores in the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (Beaver, 2001) conducted at the beginning of the school year.

Katie was considered by the teacher as a quiet and steady worker. She was obedient and showed interest in learning in general. Rated as average in writing, she worked on written assignments following the teacher’s instructions closely, just meeting the basic requirements but not ready to invest more time and efforts. It is possible that showing more enthusiasm on her part could have rendered her writing more reflective of her feelings and ideas.

In the eyes of the teacher, William was a student with considerable capabilities but just not making sufficient effort. More interested in playing and talking with his friends in the classroom than sitting down to write, he was inclined to complete his written assignments by just doing the bare minimum. However, he showed potential for more elaborate work. He liked reading comics and playing computer games; these were popular topics in classroom and playground talk and games that he engaged in with his friends.

Elaine was rated the best Chinese ESL female student in the class in terms of writing ability by the teacher. She was capable, bright and resourceful. A friendly and outspoken personality, she was very social among her friends, moving around a lot in the classroom even in on-task time. Her work portrayed her lively and adventurous character, showing confidence and interest in all matters about her. In her writing, she reached far and wide for ideas which were more based on reflections of daily experiences than imagination.

Smiling meekly most of the time, John was a quiet and ardent writer according to his teacher. He produced long pieces of writing, much greater in length and complexity
in structure than what the teacher required. Elaborate and creative, his written work was rated high above that of his classmates. In fact, his teacher regarded his writing as comparable to that of his native English speaking peers despite his second language background.

3.3 School context

The study was based in an elementary school in an urban area in British Columbia, Canada. The four focal children were a subset of the participants (Grade 2) involved in a major longitudinal study, the Young Children’s Informational Literacy (YCIL) Project conducted in four elementary schools located in the same municipality\(^1\). It has been found that in many primary classrooms, the vast majority of texts engaged in by the children are narratives; this could hinder their success in school when they move to the higher grades and need to read more non-narrative genres (Duke, 2000; Pappas, 1993). On the other hand, Chapman (2002) observed that children engaged in a variety of curriculum genres, including informational writing, in a longitudinal study of students from kindergarten to Grade 3. In the YCIL project, teachers were provided with funds to buy children’s information books. These are books whose primary function is to provide information about the social and natural world, and are sometimes referred to as factual, non-narrative, or expository texts. The teachers were asked to use these books during whole-class and small group reading activities. Children were allowed to read them independently. The teachers were also encouraged to incorporate informational writing in their instructional programmes.

The public elementary school that these children attended enrolled approximately 300 children from kindergarten through Grade 7 from the local neighborhood. The school had both single classrooms and open area spaces occupied by three or four classes. The focal children were in a Grade 2 class with 22 students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, mostly Asian. The children’s classroom was in one of the open areas, yet it was relatively quiet because the space was large and designed for single class instruction, small group work, and multi-class meetings. The children sat at desks that were grouped together in sets of six. As noted earlier, two teachers, who

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spoke English only, shared the teaching load. The teachers in general adopted a “whole language” approach to the teaching of language in the class. Reading and writing instruction were based on a sociolinguistic view of language and language learning (Goodman, Smith, Meredith, & Goodman, 1987). School writing experiences consisted of responses to their reading, personal writing in journals, and also completing worksheets exercises designed by the teachers. School reading was, as discussed previously, centered round informational texts.

3.4 Home and community contexts

Though coming from the same cultural and linguistic background, the focal children’s families were slightly different in socioeconomic status. The parents also varied in their length of residence in Canada, ranging from 15 to 27 years. The home environments of three of the children were quite similar; they lived in houses in a quiet neighbourhood near the school, with ample living space for each family member. John’s family, however, lived in a rented basement, and he had to share a bedroom with his elder sister.

The parents’ educational levels ranged from elementary school to university. William’s mother had a university degree. She was employed, and used both English and Chinese in her daily work and home life. She was fluent in both spoken and written English. The fathers of the four children had all completed high school in their home country. They were all literate in Chinese and English. John’s father worked part-time, while the fathers of the other three focal children had full-time regular jobs. John’s father could speak a little French, the family having lived in Quebec for five years before moving to Vancouver. Both Elaine and John’s mothers had finished high school but Katie’s mother had only completed elementary school. The mothers of the focal children were all literate in their native language and spoke Cantonese for daily communication. Katie’s mother worked from home and used English occasionally in her work. As for Elaine and John, their mothers were housewives and knew very little English. All of the working parents used writing, either in English or in Chinese, related to their occupations.

There were similarities in the home literacy activities across the families. Chinese was used for social and cultural purposes. There were a lot of print materials,
such as newspapers, books, TV guides, and magazines. These were available in English or in Chinese in the household. The parents mostly used Chinese for pleasure reading. Writing in Chinese, however, was not that frequent. They used to write letters in Chinese to communicate with their relatives and friends in their home country or elsewhere. But with the advent of technology, they have all switched to using long distance telephone calls. The multiple use of literacy for everyday needs, such as writing out checks, filling in forms, and writing to organizations or government authorities was almost entirely conducted in English. The children watched television mostly in English, but the parents regulated the amount and type of viewing. The children also read comics and popular culture texts in English, though the parents wanted them to read more “serious” materials, or books with “more educational value”, such as information books or school related texts on science and technology.

Essentially, the children’s home literacy experiences varied with the parents’ social capital and educational backgrounds. There were children’s reading materials in all the four families, the amount varying with the socioeconomic status of the parents. However, it seemed that the parents were not aware of the fact that the key element was not the quantity of the reading materials but rather the kinds of materials they were and whether they were highly accessible to the parents and the children (Harste et al., 1984). The cognitive level of the content and the language of the books were also at stake. Katie’s bookshelf in her bedroom had rows of hard cover versions of English literary classics. There was also a volume of thick, fully illustrated English information books on different science topics, but these had barely been read. William’s parents also bought their children very expensive collections of English books. They read them to their children occasionally but found the text too difficult for them. Elaine had many storybooks and fiction chapter books in English that her mother collected, and she read them often. There were also some Chinese children’s books brought over from China that her mother read to her and her younger sister. Unlike the other children, John did not have expensive book collections in the house. He had some story books and comic books that his mother let him buy from the school book sales. These were his treasures that he read over and over again.
There were some English literacy opportunities out in the community for all four children. Their mothers took them on regular visits to the public library to read books and check out materials to bring home. They also went to book exhibitions and sometimes bought books from book sales at school. The parents all treasured such opportunities for literacy experiences; they believed that reading out of school would help their children improve their English literacy skills and extend their knowledge of the world. It was interesting to note that all the mothers engaged in a type of home tutoring by setting writing tasks in English for the children to do at home, even though most of them lacked fluency in their own written English. The purpose of making their children write at home was to practice writing in English. Sometimes the writing activities also served a social purpose, such as designing and writing a birthday card to send to a cousin. Responses from the children ranged from a reluctant compliance with such demands to engaging actively in self-initiated writing for the love of it. As requested by the researcher, the parents avoided setting any English language writing tasks for the children during the sampling period. This procedure was adopted in order to ensure consistency across the four focal children in terms of support or coercion from their parents. Upon this request, the parents reported that they sometimes reminded the children to write, but did not prescribe any particular writing purposes or text types for them. The writing samples collected from the home context were all produced on a self-initiated basis, planned and completed by the children themselves.

The children exhibited individual differences in their interest in and disposition for literacy activities at home. Katie was the older of two daughters in the family. Her younger sister, a preschooler, tagged after her and followed her example in activities related to reading and writing. Katie acted as a role model in this respect for her younger sister at home. Their mother placed great value on literacy, and was eager to help her daughters read and write better in English. She believed that a good way of achieving this was to amass a large amount of English reading materials for the children. She asked Katie to read to her and her younger sister whenever she had free time to sit down with them. Katie was also asked to write at home, but her mother was not clear about how to provide appropriate support or guidance.
William was the eldest of three sons in the family. His younger brothers looked up to him for leadership and ideas for play and other kinds of activities. He showed much confidence and initiative at home with his siblings. The parents, working away from home, were very busy during the day. Most of the child caring work was done by their grandmother who did not speak English. The children were very much left on their own to entertain themselves after school. They spent most of the time watching television and playing computer games. On weekends or when off work, their mother would read to the children or ask the children to read or write by themselves. According to his mother, William was a reluctant reader and writer. He showed more interest in playing. But his mother wanted him to ‘take the lead’ among the boys. She believed that his modeling would instill an interest in his younger brothers to read and write. She filed all of William’s writing done at home or brought home from school and showed it with pride to visitors.

Elaine, like Katie, had a younger sister. There was also a baby girl in the family that her mother baby sat for Elaine’s aunt. Because her mother was very busy with housework and babysitting, Elaine was often left on her own to entertain herself and her younger sister. She read moderately, mostly in English, but her mother also wanted her to read the Chinese books brought over from China. She obediently complied but found them not as interesting as the books in English. Elaine liked to write and did it on her own initiative. She wrote on a wide variety of topics, with ideas and content taken from her reading materials and daily experiences.

John was the most willing writer of all the four children. He had an elder sister attending Grade 4 in the same school. Without as much access to computer games and other artifacts of popular culture as his peers enjoyed, John and his sister took writing as a hobby and a pastime for entertainment. They enjoyed doing it, and wrote profusely on a wide variety of topics that interested them, without any coercion from their mother. Writing for them was making sense of their lived experiences and channeling creations in their imagined worlds. Their mother pasted their writing done over the years on the walls of the small living room to serve as reminders and models of how to write. She was very proud of her children’s work and efforts.
The parents all strongly emphasized their children’s schooling. Like most Chinese immigrant parents, they had high hopes for their children’s success in school and beyond. In addition, the parents had implicit trust in and expectations for the teachers to structure and discipline their children’s learning. This was based on their traditional belief in and respect for the authority of schools and teachers. And like many immigrants regardless of their ethnic origin, the parents wanted to preserve their native language in the family so as to foster cultural and ethnic ties with their home country. All except John’s parents sent their children to heritage language schools to learn the Chinese language. John did not take Chinese language classes for economic reasons, but his mother, who came from Mainland China, taught him how to write simple Chinese characters at home. The writing opportunities in the Chinese language school did not offer much opportunity for creative writing, however. Probably because the children had relatively limited knowledge of Chinese, most of the practice consisted of repetitive exercises or imitational writing based on models given.

Despite their heritage language training, the children’s writing activities were basically all in English. They did not write in Chinese in school or at home. The only text they produced in Chinese was the homework from the Chinese language school. As mentioned previously, this writing was confined to practice of Chinese characters, completion of worksheets, and making sentences with given words. There was no creative writing at all. Thus, their home writing was entirely in English as in the school context.

3.5 Data collection

Naturalistic data sources were used for the research, and data were collected from March through May, 2005. The particular time period was chosen because it was in the middle of the second term of the school year, a time when the children and the teacher became very familiar with each other and the class routines were well established. Moreover, the sampling period could end before June when the teacher would be very busy with assessment and reporting to be completed by the end of the school year. There were different sources of data which included writing samples, interviews, and field observations of the classroom and the family household of the individual focal children.
3.5.1 Writing Samples

To investigate the children’s writing in school and at home, their written products produced during the sampling period in the two settings were collected as the major component of the data. For the school-based writing, a weekly visit was paid by the researcher to the class to collect samples of the focal children’s writing during the sampling period. All of the writing texts the children produced during the week were photocopied by the researcher for the research study. A total of 67 pieces of school writing from the four children were collected. The school writing consisted of written work done as class or home assignments scheduled in the teacher’s weekly plan, texts produced in the day-to-day learning activities in the classroom. These included writing done in class under the teacher’s instruction and supervision, and also written assignments completed at home, such as journal writing. A photocopy of the teacher’s weekly plan was also made to provide details and background information for the various writing activities.

To collect samples of home-based writing, the researcher made a home visit to each of the four families at the beginning of the sampling period to meet the parents and explain details of the research study and answer any questions they might have. With the exception of John’s family, only the mother was available for meeting with the researcher, the father of the family being out of the house at work. The children were given a box folder each with several pockets to store their writing. They were also given a box of colour pencils that they could use for their writing or for any other purposes. This and the folder that provided easy storage and filing of written products were intended to make writing an enjoyable and natural part of the children’s family activities.

Fifty-four pieces of home writing were collected from the four children during the sampling period. No specific instructions had been given as to the amount or frequency of writing to be done at home. Children were asked to write as much or as little as they wanted. The home writing collected included self-initiated pieces, such as texts they normally wrote for fun, for expressing themselves, or at the request or demand of the family. As part of the research, the children were asked to sort their home writing into different types according to their content and purpose. Then they had to file them in
separate pockets of the box folder. They were also requested to assign a genre name to each set of the writing samples based on their own knowledge of genres. They were asked to bring in their folder to school on the day of the researcher’s weekly visit to their class. During the visit, the children showed her the writing they had done at home over the week. The writing samples were marked with stickers to indicate that they had been examined by the researcher and to show appreciation of their efforts.

3.5.2 Interviews

In order to learn about the home and school contexts, there were interviews of the children and their mother at the beginning and the end of the sampling period. The first interview was conducted during the first home visit. The questions for the interview are shown in Appendix A. In this interview, the researcher first talked with the mother and then the focal child. The mother was asked questions about her family and educational background, the structure of the family, and home activities related to reading and writing, the language(s) they used at home and at work, and their social and cultural purposes for using print at home and in the community in Chinese and in English. As for the children, they were asked to talk about their activities at home, how they spent their leisure time, the kinds of reading and writing they did at home, the kinds of popular media they liked, and the literacy activities they participated in the community. These interviews were conducted with a view to building up general profiles of the families and their practices related to the use of language at home and at work.

Towards the end of the sampling period, the researcher conducted a second round of interviews with the participants in their home (questions shown in Appendix B). Two separate interviews were conducted with two of the family members, one with the mother and the other with the focal child. The interview with the mother focused on the parents’ attitudes and expectations for their child’s school education. The parent’s views about the child’s writing ability in the two languages were also sought. The interview with the children focused on their writing activities at home, their purposes for writing, the kinds of writing they enjoyed doing most, and how they looked upon themselves as writers. The interviews yielded information on the family and the children’s occupation with writing at home and in the community, and this provided a
background for understanding the orientations of the children in relation to using writing for communication.

Interviews were also conducted with each child on specific home-based writing samples to collect information about the writing context and the purpose for writing (Appendix C). One writing sample was selected from each of the various genres that the child had produced. Questions were asked about what the child liked about the piece of writing, the reason for choice of topic/theme and genre, where he/she got the idea for the writing, how the ideas were organized, and what motivated him/her to write the piece.

3.5.3 Observations

Three field observations were made in the child’s home as part of the data collection process. The first observation was conducted at the beginning of the sampling period on the same occasion as the mother and the focal child were first interviewed. This observation aimed at understanding the family’s living environment, the relationships among the focal child and various members of the family, and the general availability of print in the household. The researcher made observations of the types and amounts of reading materials available in the home for adults and for the children, such as the different kinds of books and print media lying around in the living room. It also focused on the games and computer games the child often played, and the popular culture he/she engaged in. The second field observation was conducted during a visit to the family in the middle of the sampling period. The objective was to observe the child’s writing activities at home, the parent’s participation in them, and the frequency and amount of writing produced before and during the sampling period. The ways of storing and displaying their written products were also observed. The third one was made at the end of the sampling period. Close observations were made of the child’s reading materials at home, and the collection of books in Chinese and in English provided for their leisure and academic reading. The child’s engagement with them and the parent’s participation were also observed. Field notes were taken of the various observations made.

With regard to their school setting, field observations were made of the school premises and the classroom. Informal conversations with the regular teacher were
conducted to collect her views on the developmental level and performance in relation to writing at the beginning of the sampling period. During the sampling period itself, there were weekly observations in the classroom of the focal children and brief conversations with them as they engaged in teacher-assigned writing activities. Observations were made on their engagement with the writing tasks and their motivation and attitude in writing in class.

3.6 Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed for different purposes. The major goal was to detect categories in terms of writing functions and written genres in the children’s texts in order to provide a comprehensive description and interpretation of their writing behaviours and uses for written communication across the school and home settings. The data from the interviews and observations were analyzed qualitatively to interpret and generate background information about the focal children’s learning and writing environment. On the other hand, the home and school writing samples of the focal children’s were analyzed quantitatively to identify genres and functions and compared using descriptive statistics. Then, the various findings from the data were interpreted to generate profiles of the individual cases in their use of functions and genres and to draw conclusions and implications from the study.

3.6.1 Interviews and Observations

The interviews with the mother and the focal children and the home observations were interpreted qualitatively to draw a profile of the family environment of each of the focal children. The interview data collected from each of the focal children about their selected writing samples were also interpreted qualitatively to describe the writing behaviours and writing purposes in relation to a particular genre. These qualitative analyses were then used to establish profiles of the individual focal children in collaboration with the quantitative findings from other kinds of data.

The informal conversations with the classroom teacher and the class observations provided an assessment of the developmental level of the focal children, their aptitude and interest towards learning to write in class. Such qualitative information was used in collaboration with data from the interviews and home observations to portray the social, cultural and linguistic milieu in which the children learned to write in English in school.
and at home, a backdrop against which to interpret and compare the texts produced in the two settings.

3.6.2 Writing Samples

The writing samples were analyzed from both functional and formal perspectives. The analysis process started with dividing the writing samples into two groups in accordance with the setting, school or home, in which they were written. Then within each group, the writing samples were analyzed first for the functions for which they were written with reference to a categorization scheme drawn up for the study. Where the text was accompanied by drawing or graphics, analysis was also made of the visuals to support the coding of writing functions. After the functional analysis, the writing samples were categorized according to genre, with reference to the personal and social purpose(s) of the writing act, and the textual features of the text.

The set of writing samples from the school setting were photocopies; those produced at home were originals. Both sets of home-based and school-based writing samples were written in legible handwriting with conventional English spelling. However, there were occasional misspellings and grammatical mistakes in some of the samples. For easy reference, the scripts were all typed to form transcripts in Word documents. The visuals accompanying the writing samples ranged from simple line drawings to coloured pictures, picture series, and pictures with speech bubbles to represent dialogues. Unfortunately, the drawings from the school texts were available only in black and white.

3.6.2.1 Functional analysis

The functional analysis started with identifying and coding the function and categories of functions of each piece of writing. Identification of the specific functions was based on an inference of the personal and social goals for producing the text, the writer’s individual motivations and intentions underlying the specific act of writing. These could be aligned in nature with the micro-purposes of writing described by Clark and Ivanič (1997) that were generated by the immediate ‘context of situation’ following Halliday’s (1978) description.

A major step in the functional analysis was to develop a classification scheme for the coding the functions of the writing samples. After an examination of the texts
produced in the two settings, an initial list of functions was set up based on the various functions identified in them. The list was an adaptation of Chapman’s (1995) list of writing functions derived from Halliday’s (1973) work on the functions of language. Then the texts were coded for their writing functions with reference to the classification scheme. The functions in the present school writing samples were all covered in Chapman’s (1995) scheme. However, one extra function had to be added to cover the home writing samples.

It has been noted that writing functions could not be identified in isolation as a discrete entity (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Other features of the text had to be taken into consideration to provide cross-validation. In coding the samples for writing functions, certain formal indicators were used for inferring the functions embedded in the text. This involved an examination of the topic, the content, the lexico-grammatical items like nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs, and drawings that accompanied the text. For example, the use of the pronoun ‘you’ indicated an interacting function, while the use of the present tense and verbs like ‘wish’ and ‘hope’ suggested that the writer was anticipating future actions. Syntactic patterns and formulaic expressions were also examined to throw light on the writing functions of a text, such as ‘once upon a time’ indicated imagining.

As mentioned previously, many of the writing samples written at school and at home were accompanied by drawings or other kinds of visuals, such as pictures of events or objects with labels created by the children themselves. With a few exceptions, the drawings were made either during or after the writing, as reported by the participants in the interviews. An examination of the drawings showed that they were not just used for illustration, in the general sense of the word. They served more specific purposes, such as constructing or enriching meaning in various kinds of social context as depicted by the text as a whole. The drawings were therefore used to supplement or support the coding of functions for the text they accompanied.

A multimodal perspective was adopted in viewing children’s writing in this study. An underlying assumption of this theoretical approach is that both drawing and words are representational means by which children produce and communicate meaning. A theoretical underpinning of the approach is the equal treatment of all communicative
modes, as meanings are made, distributed, communicated and interpreted through many representational and communicative modes, not just language (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) argues that “make believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language” (p. 116). According to Vygotsky, drawing is essential to young children’s conceptual development, an internal representation of narratives spoken through images.

For the most part, more than one function could be coded for each piece of writing. It should be noted that for each type of function, for example, *referring to experience*, the function was coded only once no matter how many times references were made to experience in the text. The coding of the writing samples for functions involved judgment which was based on inference rather than objective measurement. This could be problematic in terms of reliability. In order to establish inter-rater reliability, a primary school ESL teacher who had research experience in second language writing was invited to participate in the coding process. He was first trained on a selection of twenty writing samples, ten from school-based writing and another ten from home-produced texts. The collection included samples from all of the focal children and all the writing genres identified in the corpus. Using the same selection criteria based on the definition of the various identified functions, the two sets of writing samples were coded for their writing functions independently by the two raters. Then the coding for the texts was compared to look for discrepancy. The two independent ratings produced an inter-rater reliability of 86 percent. The major discrepancy arose from the less obvious functions embedded in some of the home writing which could only be identified when taking the social context in which they were written into consideration. Discrepancy was then resolved by negotiation resulting in the two raters agreeing to the function(s) assigned to a particular piece of writing.

After the functional coding of the two sets of writing samples was completed, the data were analyzed with simple descriptive statistics involving frequencies, means, percentages, and ranking. The functional analysis was divided into two phases. For the first phase of the analysis, frequency counts were made of all the functions coded in each set of writing samples, and the mean and percentage of the functions calculated for each setting. These figures were compared and contrasted to show the differences in the
children’s enactment of functions in terms of frequency in school and at home. Next, the functions specific to each setting were identified. The functions common to both settings and those unique to either the home or the school context were compared and contrasted with regard to their variety and frequency. The specific functions were next divided into different categories for further analysis. According to Britton et al. (1975), when writing is used as a social action, people accomplish different purposes with meaning created from written language which is used to embody a wide range of personal, social and political functions. The purposes range from expressing, transacting information, recreation, to literary creation (Britton et al., 1975; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993; Paratore et al., 2005). Based on this theoretical perspective, the various specific functions were divided into four categories: personal, social, recreational and learning functions. The distribution of the individual functions within these categories was explored and compared across the two settings. Examples of the children’s work were presented to illustrate how the specific functions were enacted by the individual children in school and home settings to answer Research Question 1.

The second phase of the functional analysis took place after the texts had been coded for genre. The focus was on the relationships between functions and genres. First of all, the frequency of functions within specific genres was compared across the two writing contexts. The frequency of functions enacted by the individual children in specific genres in the school and the home writing was computed. Then the figures were compared to show the variation in the enactment of functions between the two settings in the same genres, namely, story and journal. Secondly, the relationship between different categories of functions, for example, social functions, and specific genres or genre groups, such as interactions, was examined. The distribution of various categories of functions within genres was compared across the settings. This would show how certain categories of functions were more prevalent than others in particular genres, and how a particular function category was more frequent in one genre than in another within the same setting or across settings. The findings about the relationship between categories of functions and specific genres would work towards answering Research Question 3.
3.6.2.2 Genre analysis

The analysis of genres involved a multi-step, recursive process. A classification scheme was adapted from Chapman’s (1995) study of written genres in first grade for coding the writing samples for genre and classifying them into genre groups. Certain modifications in the grouping of genres were necessary in order to accommodate the data collected in the present study. Once the new classification scheme had been set up, the writing samples were coded for genre. While many of the writing samples were coded with multiple functions, only one genre was assigned to each piece of writing. In this study, genres were conceptualized as discourse-level text types used as cultural resources drawn for particular purposes in response to recurring social situations. Given that the genre of a text is reflective of its content, form, context and the intention for which it is composed (Chapman, 1999), these interrelated dimensions were taken into consideration in coding the genre of a text. As with the coding of functions, two raters were involved in the coding process of the genres. A collection of twenty-four writing samples was used for the training purpose. This included writing samples from all four of the focal children in the school and the home setting; it also encompassed the various genres as initially coded by the children or according to the teacher as indicated in the weekly teaching plan. The two independent ratings produced a high inter-rater reliability of 94 percent, a result expected because of the transparency of the writing pieces.

After the initial coding for genre, each piece of writing was examined again in light of the genre that it was classified as, which was assigned by the writer or suggested by the source from which it was taken. For school-based writing, the genre of each piece could be identified in one of the following ways: the title shown on the writing piece; the subject title of the exercise book from which the piece of writing was taken, for example, ‘Story’ or ‘Journal’; or the genre specified for the writing task in the teacher’s weekly teaching plan. Being teacher-assigned writing tasks and completed under the teacher’s instruction, all the school writing pieces followed the conventional style and format of the genre they were supposed to be and this made coding them relatively easy.

With regard to the home writing samples, a genre had been assigned to each piece of writing by the writers themselves. As part of the instructions for the data collection process, the focal children were requested to sort their writing pieces into different types
and assign a name to each type for filing into the box folder given. An examination of
the content of the writing samples sorted into various genres showed that the participating
children had considerable genre awareness and explicit genre knowledge. With the
exception of two sets of texts, the writing samples had been appropriately assigned a
genre, with the use of conventional genre names, such as story, journal, diary, note, and
greeting card. One set of texts had been described by the writer as My favourite things,
a name he gave to a series of descriptive non-fiction writing about his favourite month,
season, etc. The second set was a piece of informational writing accompanied by
labeled drawings that the writer called Non-fiction writing. Indicative of the focal
children’s purposes of writing, the genre assigned by the writer or suggested by the
source merited consideration and was thus incorporated into the coding of the specific
sample.

The next step was classifying the coded writing samples into four genre groups in
accordance with the established classification scheme. First, there were the
chronologies – genres that were time-related and included actions or events that were
chronologically sequenced. The second general category was descriptions in which the
writer described an object or situation, identifying or commenting on the object referent.
Interactions formed the third group of genres. In these, written language was used as an
object to be given by the writer to a reader or a specific audience. They could relate to
either actions/events or objects, that is, they could be chronologies or descriptions or a
combination of both. The fourth and last group of genres was word plays. Words
were manipulated to fulfill certain aesthetic purposes; the writer played with language as
an object incorporating elements, such as rhythm or rhyming. Like interactions, they
could be chronological or descriptive.

After the writing samples were coded for genre and classified into genre groups,
descriptive statistical analyses were made of the data using frequencies, percentages, and
ranking. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for the specific genres
identified in each writing context and comparisons made across the settings. The
frequency counts and percentages of genre groups were also calculated to examine their
distribution in each set of writing samples. The figures from the two sets of writing
samples were then compared to show differences in the range and variety of genres between school-based writing and home-based writing in answer to Research Question 2.

The final stage of the data analyses was a qualitative study of the individual focal children, to document the unique ways in which writing functions and written genres were enacted and coordinated within the writing practices of these second language children. The objective was to present interpretative profiles of the four case study children, and together with the findings about the relationship between categories of functions and specific genres, the results were used to answer Research Question 3. Descriptions and interpretations were drawn from the various findings to highlight the ways in which these children used writing to understand, negotiate, and transform their experiences in the context of school and home. The children’s awareness of the life-informing and life-transforming potential of writing (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993), and their knowledge of functions and genres as resources for personal expression, social communication, and political construction of identity were examined. Writing samples and excerpts were used to illustrate the ways they engaged in school instructed and self-selected writing. An exploration of how these second language children wrote about themselves, their communities, and their culture would offer some insights to educators for developing writing curricula that would be more rewarding, meaningful and culturally relevant to learners of diverse backgrounds.

3.6.3 Summary of Data Analyses Procedures

The above data analyses are summarized in Table 1 which provides an overall view of the research questions and how they were answered by collecting different kinds of data and how they were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to answer them.
Table 1: Summary chart of research questions, data collection and data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the differences between the functions of the focal children’s English writing at school and in their home?</td>
<td>(for all 3 research questions) Writing samples collected from school and from home Interviews of focal children and their parents at beginning and end of sampling period</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of writing functions: coding of functions in writing samples; frequency of functions compared across settings; categorization of functions and their frequency compared across settings Quantitative and qualitative analysis of functions common and specific to the school and the home setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the differences in the range of genres in the children’s school and home writing in English?</td>
<td>Field observations of home environment and writing practices</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of written genres: coding of genres in writing samples; range of genres compared across settings; categorization of genres and their frequency compared across settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do the children construct meaning with the use of written language writing in school and at home?</td>
<td>Field observations of school premises and classroom Field observations of children in classroom writing activities Conversations with teacher on the focal children’s general performance and writing ability in school</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of relationships between functions and specific genres: frequency of functions within specific genres compared across settings Quantitative analysis of relationships between categories of functions and specific genres or genre groups; comparison made of relationships within and across settings Qualitative analysis of observations of the children writing in class Qualitative analysis of observations of the children’s reading and writing practices at home and information from interviews with parents Qualitative analysis of contextual information on the home writing samples collected from interviews with the focal children Qualitative analysis of the writing samples to identify characteristics in their use of written language to construct meaning and their genre knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (I): FUNCTIONS OF WRITING IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME

Written language is a semiotic tool that functions in various ways in society. Growing up as social participants, children learn about this tool with regard to its purposes, features and processing demands as they encounter it in daily activities and in the company of more skilful literate adults (Dyson, 1988, 1997). An underlying assumption of the present study is that the learning of written language is developmental and sociocultural; literacy is interwoven with the social fabrics of children’s everyday lives, their home, the community as well as the institutionalized academic setting of the school.

To study how the children’s teacher-assigned texts produced in school compared with the self-initiated ones that they wrote at home, the school writing samples and home writing samples were analyzed for their functions and then genres. The objective was to document how the children used written language to make sense of their experiences, and to affirm or transform their relationships with others. Then the data were compared and contrasted for similarities and differences between the two settings.

As stated in Chapter 3, the data were analyzed descriptively to compare frequencies, means, and percentages. This chapter focuses on the functions and their distribution between school-based writing and home-based writing. First of all, the functions identified in the two sets of writing samples are presented and explained. Secondly, the mean of the functions enacted in each setting are compared. Thirdly, the specific functions common to both settings and those unique to a particular setting are presented and discussed with respect to their characteristics. Fourthly, the specific functions are categorized into four groups according to their nature, personal, social, recreational and learning, in order to examine the distribution of the different types of functions in the children’s writing in the two settings. These procedures constituted the first phase of the functional analysis.
4.1 Overview: Functions in the children’s school writing and home writing

A total of thirteen different writing functions were identified in the two sets of data, 67 writing samples in the school setting, and 54 samples in the home. A list of the functions with their definitions is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Functions of the children’s writing produced in school and at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Imagining-fiction</td>
<td>To create an imaginary situation which could be true but is not, with true-to-life or real characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Imagining-fantasy</td>
<td>To create an imaginary world where there is no limit to actions, wishes or thoughts, characters and events were not real and could not be real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Expressing</td>
<td>To express opinions, attitudes and emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Referring to experience</td>
<td>To record or report past and present experience, incidents, sequence of events, and to comment or reflect on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Informing</td>
<td>To provide facts, information or evidence, to describe a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Anticipating</td>
<td>To anticipate future events or predict what might happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Practicing</td>
<td>To follow writing instructions or to practice general or specific writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Interacting</td>
<td>To establish or maintain social relationships, to participate in or respond to social or cultural events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Representing oral language</td>
<td>To use written words to represent speech; direct speech, and direct quotations in a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Representing written language</td>
<td>To represent print seen in their familiar worlds, or literary texts, including familiar songs and poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Reasoning</td>
<td>To explain, to reflect on events or situations, to justify judgments, to reflect on events, to draw conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Ego enhancing</td>
<td>To illustrate competence and independence, to impress or display knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Enjoying</td>
<td>To write for fun and to entertain oneself or others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Frequencies of functions in school writing and home writing

As a group, the children produced more writing in the school setting than in the home, 67 versus 54. But individually, the two high ability children wrote more in the home than in school. Elaine wrote 19 pieces at home as opposed to 15 in school. For John, it was 20 pieces at home and 18 in school. It was the other way round for the
average ability children. Katie wrote 18 pieces in school but only 10 at home; William’s production at home was very small when compared with his school-based writing, 5 versus 16. Despite this individual variation in the amount of production between the two settings, the home writing samples carried more functions than those in school in general.

A single piece of writing often embodied more than one particular function. Some of the writing functions were found in both sets of writing samples. Others were unique to either the school setting or the home setting. Within each group, some functions were enacted by all the four focal children in varying degrees while others were found in the work of only two or three of the children.

A comparison of the frequencies of the various writing functions in the two settings shows that the children evoked more functions when writing at home than in school. The figures are presented in Table 3. Within the thirteen writing functions identified, a total of 145 instances were coded for the 67 pieces of school-based writing. This resulted in a mean of 2.16 functions in the setting. As for the writing produced at home, a total of 157 functions were coded for the 54 writing samples, meaning an average of 2.91 functions per piece of writing. A simple comparison of the figures indicates that on average the children enacted 34.72 percent more functions when writing at home than when they did at school.

Table 3: Mean of functions in school writing and home writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of writing pieces</th>
<th>Differences in percentage in the number of writing samples</th>
<th>No. of functions coded</th>
<th>Mean. of functions per text</th>
<th>Differences in percentage in the average number of functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School: 67</td>
<td>school &gt; home by 24.07%</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>school &lt; home by 25.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home: 54</td>
<td>home &lt; school by 19.4%</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>home &gt; school by 34.72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the number of school writing samples exceeded that of home writing by 24.07 percent, the mean of functions found in the former was smaller than that in the
latter by 25.77 percent. This was an interesting finding in view of the fact that the home-based writing samples were not only fewer in number but that the texts were also generally shorter than the school-based ones. The finding suggests that although the children wrote in greater quantity and produced longer texts in school, they did not necessarily evoke more functions in a piece of text than when they wrote at home. On the other hand, they enacted more functions on average in their self-initiated home-based writing. The differences were noteworthy in spite of the relatively small number of texts produced by the children in the two settings.

4.3 Distribution of specific functions across school writing and home writing

As mentioned earlier, thirteen different writing functions were identified in the two sets of writing samples. A total of nine functions were found in the school context and eleven in the home context, with certain overlapping of the functions between the two settings. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the specific functions in the two sets of data. Among the thirteen functions, seven of them were commonly found in both settings. Two other functions were specific to school writing, and four others were found unique to home writing.

4.3.1 Functions Found in Both School Writing and Home Writing

The seven functions common to both the school and the home writing, as Figure 1 illustrates, were expressing, informing, reasoning, referring to experience, representing oral language, imagining-fantasy, and anticipating. Among these functions, five of them were enacted by all four focal children in both the school and the home setting, namely, expressing, informing, reasoning, referring to experience, and representing oral language. The first four functions were usually evoked for personal expression and social communication. They were found in high frequency in various genres in both settings. These functions shared one characteristic in nature: they were all associated with daily life experiences and activities. As the children grew up, they learned about the use of writing as a social tool that functioned in various ways in daily life. They explored and played with its functions and features, and used it as a means of self expression with literacy “woven into the familiar fabric of everyday life” (Dyson, 1988, p. 220). The children’s writing purposes guided their writing events and the resulting content and form of the written products. The purposes were in turn motivated by the
Figure 1: Distribution of specific functions across school writing and home writing

Notes:
§ Functions found in all focal children’s home writing
* Functions found in all focal children’s school writing
[ ] The number of focal children enacting the particular function in home writing

facts and events they experienced or observed, and the ideas, opinions, and feelings generated from them. In writing, they made sense of their personal and social worlds by referring to their experience, expressing their feelings about them, reasoning to justify their opinions, and informing the reader with knowledge or ideas they wanted to display or share.

Representing oral language was also a salient writing function in both settings. The oral language has always been used as a cueing system to generate or supplement text as young children learn to write. Talk surrounds their early writing; it is used to
invest drawings, labels, and texts with meaning, “providing both meaning (Representational function) and the means (Directive function) for getting that meaning on paper” (Dyson, 1983, p. 22). In the world of young children’s writing, talk is the substance of written language. Hence, it was not surprising that representing oral language featured commonly in both school and home writing. Although the children were in Grade 2, their writing still bore some of the characteristic features of young children’s writing for making meaning, such as labeling, visuals, and the use of oral language. Many of their writing pieces contained oral language represented in written form. This could be a monologue in phrase or sentence form; a conversation with several exchanges; words, phrases or sentences in speech balloons embedded in pictures. Through the use of direct speech embedded in text, the child writer depicted what had really exchanged between himself or herself and others, or what he or she was speaking or spoken to. The direct speech, whether put within quotation marks or speech bubbles, or presented in the form of written dialogues, allowed the writer to portray the exchanges in the first person rather than reporting the event as an observer. It was also reminiscent of young children’s writing attempts where talk and drawing generated and provided a context for producing text. Moreover, writing in reported speech might also make heavier demands on the written language competence of these second language children. Where the first four writing functions were enacted to represent daily life events, the fifth one, representing oral language, was evoked to add vividness and authenticity to the writing.

The other two functions that were common to the two settings, imagining-fantasy and anticipating, were enacted by all the focal children in their school writing but only by some of them in their home writing. Imagining-fantasy was found in the home writing of two of the focal children, and anticipating in that of three of them, as seen in Figure 1. The function of imaging-fantasy was closely associated with imaginary stories in which the children created characters and events that were not true to life and could never exist. Creating such stories seemed to be a recurrent and mandatory writing task in the school writing programme. The children all wrote imaginary stories and other text types that involved fantasy creations. However, with the exception of John, the more able boy based on the first teacher’s rating, the children did not do any imaginary story writing,
fiction or fantasy, at home while they all did that in school. As for anticipating, the function was closely associated with writing about daily events, wishes, and predictions of what might happen projected from present situations or personal aspirations. All four children enacted this function in their school writing. It was found in the home writing of only three of the children, Elaine, John, and William. Katie seemed more concerned with her past experiences and did not anticipate future events in her home writing at all.

4.3.2 Functions Unique to School Writing

As shown in Figure 1, two functions were specific to the school setting, namely, imagining-fiction and practicing. Both of them were found in all of the children’s school writing. Practicing was the more salient one, and was enacted consistently by all the focal children with more or less equal frequency in many of their school texts. It was the primary function in writing tasks set up for a definite instructional purpose, to practice writing in general and specific writing skills, such as the use of comma and connectives, paragraph development, and story grammar. The goal was to learn how the written language works; to list known elements, such as words, phrases, and grammatical and discoursal features; and to produce texts or elements of text in the classroom. In most cases, the practicing function was explicitly embodied in writing tasks identified as lists. These were worksheet type exercises that included instruction and explanations about their learning objectives and procedure. In other genres, the function was camouflaged under more stimulating writing tasks like story writing to practice specific lexico-grammatical features, such as the use of temporal connectives. It should be noted that unlike other writing functions, practicing was often evoked from the outside, built into the writing task by the teacher.

Imagining-fiction was found in lists written by all of the children, and stories produced by John and Katie. The latter were narratives of imaginary situations with true-to-life or real characters. As their titles were all different, they seemed to be free-choice writing produced in addition to the stories written to prompts set by the teacher. Interestingly, for some reasons, story writing in school focused on fantasies rather than fiction. Imagining-fiction was found in association with practicing, for example, in the writing of an imaginary situation to practice the use of the second conditional ‘if’. One specialty about these two functions unique to school writing was
the uniformity with which they were enacted; they were found across the board in the same writing task performed by all the four children. Such streamlining could only be achieved by having the functions written into the teaching objectives and learning outcomes of the writing tasks.

4.3.3 Functions Unique to Home Writing

There was a wider range of functions specific to the children’s home writing than in the case of school writing. Four of the functions identified in the home setting were not found in any school-based texts. They were interacting, enjoying, ego enhancing, and representing written language. There was individual variation in the enactment of these functions among the focal children though. Interacting was enacted by all of the four children writing at home. The other three functions were dispersed variably among the individual children, as shown in Figure 1.

The function of interacting was prevalent in the home writing samples. In the home setting, the children wrote in a variety of genres, such as greeting cards, notes and diaries to participate in or respond to social or cultural events. In the process of writing, the factors that call for interacting with others are based on an intention to send a message to a general audience or a specific reader for a particular purpose. These then give rise to a series of decision making processes involving the selection of content and formal features of the written product. Such decisions have to be made in light of the function the text aims to fulfill in relation to the cultural and social context in which it is written. These factors, it seems, are more readily available in a social discourse, such as the home and the community rather than the learning context of the classroom. It should be noted that the function of interacting was not found in any of the school-based writing samples. The writing situation in the classroom might not call for a real intended audience. It was often the teacher who was the final reader of the text and who judged and responded to it. The children seemed to be aware of the artificiality of the school writing tasks. At home, when writing for a real purpose rather than to display learning, they wielded their linguistic resources and genre knowledge to construct genuine messages. They wrote about things of personal concern and to people who would be really interested in what they said and respond emotionally and/or physically to them, as the individual profiles of the focal children presented in Chapter 6 will illustrate.
When writing at home, the children used written language not only as a vehicle for communicating messages and expressing feelings but also as a source of fun. *Enjoying* was one of the many writing functions for these children. Crafting a written product with the use of verbal and visual symbols became a recreational activity. Writing was used for self-entertainment as well as the enjoyment of others. When Katie, the average ability girl, was asked why she wrote a greeting card to her younger sister, she explained, “Because I always write stuff for her, she likes it…Because it is more beautiful and good…I like it that way.”

*Ego enhancing* was another function specific to home writing. The child writers wanted to demonstrate their competence and independence, to impress others, or to announce their successes through a piece of writing. It was often enacted in association with other functions, such as *informing* and *referring to experience*. The content embodying these functions provided a basis upon which the writer could highlight his or her achievement for ego enhancement. The underlying intention was to establish an identity, or to transform it in his/ her own view or that of others. Developmental literature points out that children aged 5 to 7 are particularly sensitive to an awareness of self and others which has been gradually taking shape since the preschool years (Gardner, 1982, cited in Dyson, 1988). The focal children were in this age group. Having somewhat gained control of the semiotic tool of written language, they proceeded with the creation of self and others, formulating an “I” in relation to “you” and “we”. They developed a sense of themselves as participants of the various communities in their social lives assuming both agency and subjectivity, defining their individual uniqueness as they examined themselves in relation to their peers. They used writing to explore the identity that they might assume, and in the course of this, promoted their ego to develop a sense of personal history.

The fourth function specific to the children’s home writing was *representing written language*. This function was to represent in print the literary texts that the children saw in their familiar worlds or created by themselves like songs or verse. In this study, such texts were all in the form of poems. With the familiar songs, rhymes and poems that they came across in school or home learning, they reworked the words to create a written artefact. In some cases, they were original productions in which they
manipulated the elements of rhythm, rhyme and alliteration appropriated from familiar songs and poems, feeding them with new content for literary expression. The function of *representing written language* could be associated with *enjoying* and *ego enhancing*. The children wrote literary texts not only for emotional expression but also to illustrate their competence and creativity in playing with language, having fun and entertaining themselves and others with written language.

4.3.4 Discussion of Findings of the Distribution of Specific Functions

A major finding about the children’s writing functions in school and at home was that they differed in three dimensions; diversity was found in the variety, nature, and enactment of the writing functions between the two settings. First of all, there was a slightly wider range of functions in home writing than in school writing, eleven as opposed to nine (Figure 1). The children evoked a greater variety of functions across the board when writing at home than in school. There were also more functions specific to the home setting than the school setting, four in the former versus two in the latter.

Secondly, the nature of the functions unique to the two settings was also different. The home-specific functions were *interacting, enjoying, ego enhancing,* and *representing written language*. As mentioned above, *interacting* was the basic social function of written language; it was a means of communicating with others and dissemination of information and ideas. *Enjoying* and *ego enhancing* were charged with emotional and personal fulfillment while *representing written language* embodied literary expression to create written works of art. These functions were geared towards the *personal, social,* and *recreational* purposes for writing; they could be aligned with the authentic use of language in the wider community as what adults in the literate society do with written language. The school-specific functions were *imagining-fiction* and *practicing*. The former is a very common writing function in language arts programmes in both western and non-western school systems. It was somewhat surprising that the children did not have fiction writing at all in their self-initiated writing. Rather than creating imaginary fictional or fantasy content for entertainment, these second language children chose to write for more personal or social reasons, on issues grounded in the sociocultural context of their day to day lives as second language speakers and children of immigrant parents. *Practicing* was a prevalent function in certain genres in school writing. In combination
with the functions of *expressing, referring to experience, and informing* that provided the writing content, *practicing* highlighted the use of writing for academic learning, particularly learning to write in the classroom. Writing as such was to display knowledge where the written product was an evidence of understanding and learning. The children wrote to show the teacher what they knew and what they thought. It was not communication in the real sense of the word but rather a specialized type of writing that exists only in educational institutions for monitoring and assessing students’ learning and progress (Dyson, 1988).

Thirdly, the enactment of functions was more uniform in the school setting than in the home setting. The school writing tasks were often ‘centrally’ controlled by the teacher and the instructional objectives. These in turn prescribed the genre and content as well as the writing purposes and functions of a task. For many of these class assignments, the topic and the genre were the same for all the children, and so were the writing functions embodied in the content which tended to be very similar among the children. Such pedagogical practice could also explain the difference in the range of functions between the two settings. When the children wrote to achieve a predetermined set of learning outcomes for a writing exercise, the range of functions would naturally be more limited and exclusive. This might be a necessary measure to secure learning outcomes and to ensure that all the students in the class learned and practiced the same skills. In the case of home writing, not only was there a wider range of functions but there was also more individual variation among the children in the enactment of specific functions. When writing on a self-initiated basis, the children had more personal space; they could exercise more personal preference based on their own intentions that motivated the writing act. Such writing was done for a multitude of genuine purposes; in school it could be repetitious and contrived to fit in with teaching objectives.

The children’s creation of self and others was bound up with writing in school as part of their personal and literacy development that school education was intended for. The process involved their socialization into the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the adult world, a gradual transformation of their childhood knowledge and practices through participation in peer group settings, such as the classroom, the home,
and the wider community. The issue at stake seemed to be the link between learning to write in school and the children’s use of the written language for making sense of their world and constructing meaning in real life situations. There was certainly an institutional need for children to write in class to meet the goals of school education. To ensure that their academic and social lives might intertwine, students should be given the opportunity to write not just to construct textual meaning in their mental worlds but also to construct themselves in relation to others in their social worlds. Schools are committed to helping children become literate, but it is important to “present that literacy within activities and imbue it with values that may make it work in more or less productive ways within the child collective” (Dyson, 1988, p. 221).

A fundamental use of written language is to establish or maintain social relationships (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). As children developed fluency and control over the various semiotic tools, such as words, drawings, and numbers, these became a dominant driving force in their behaviours (Vygotsky, 1978). They were able to express themselves in delightful and unique ways and became increasingly effective communicators with others. They could then participate actively and intuitively in their social worlds and explore their mental worlds prodding through their webs of experience (Dyson, 1988). Interacting with others using written symbols was a basic step in such attempts. As discussed in Chapter 2, written language allows time to shape thoughts and more opportunity to contemplate and control ideas than speaking does. This is particularly important for developing writers, such as the second language children in the present study. Writing has the advantage of allowing less than proficient language users time and opportunity for strategic moves to ponder upon formal accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness. Speaking, on the other hand, normally requires spontaneous decision and response at the very instance of utterance.

4.4 Categories of functions

To understand how writing functions were related to the children’s writing purposes, the thirteen writing functions identified in the corpus were divided into different categories according to the role they played in representing ideational and interpersonal meaning. Table 4 shows the categorization of the various functions into
four groups: personal, social, recreational, and learning. It also shows the average frequency of the specific functions among the writing samples in the two settings.

These descriptive statistics offer understandings about the coverage of the functions and the distribution of the individual functions within the various categories in the two settings. There was much diversity in these aspects between them, as the following discussion shows. Not only was the mean of the individual functions different from one setting to the other, but they were also variably distributed among the different categories in the school and the home writing context.

4.4.1 Personal Functions

The personal functions were expressing, referring to experience, reasoning, enjoying, and ego enhancing. The first three, expressing, referring to experience, and reasoning were concerned with the construction and organization of ideational meaning. The writer presented the content, topic and ideas, with reference to his/her experiences, then expressed emotions, opinions or attitudes about these experiences, and reasoned to explain them or draw conclusions. Expressing and reasoning assumed a higher percentage in the home than in the school setting. In Table 4, it can be seen that expressing made up 19.11 percent of the 157 functions identified in the 54 home writing samples. The same function assumed 17.93 percent of the 145 functions found in the 67 school-based texts. For reasoning, the figures were 14.01 percent for the home setting versus 9.65 percent for the school. On the other hand, there was a higher proportion of referring to experience in the school than in the home context, 14.49 percent as opposed to 11.46 percent. This suggests that the child writers were more inclined to express their opinions and reasoned about them in their self-initiated writing than in the teacher-assigned writing tasks in which they focused more on reporting factual daily life experiences.

Other than remembering and savoring personal experience, people also write to provide personal enjoyment and entertainment, to celebrate possible selves and role models (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993). As seen in Table 4, the functions of enjoying and ego enhancing were found only in the home setting; they made up 8.28 percent and 7.01 percent respectively of the total number of functions in the home-based texts. The absence of these two functions in the school-based texts points to the dominance of
Table 4: Distribution of specific functions in different categories in school writing and home writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>School (n=67)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Home (n=54)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Sub total</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to experience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoying</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42.07</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego enhancing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating</td>
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learning goals in the school setting where literacy growth was generally accorded more importance than personal interest or desire. In school or even at home, children perform learning tasks as instructed by those who have power over them, such as teachers or
parents. Chinese parents sometimes impose writing tasks on the children to make them practice their writing skills in the English language. As immigrants, they often face a dilemma in adopting a course for the academic and social development of their children. On the one hand, they accept and follow the dominant values, beliefs and practices of the mainstream community for economic and social reasons while at the same time they yearn for an emotional affiliation with their native language and culture especially for their second generation. However, their children’s academic success in school is of paramount importance. And with or without being aware of it, the parents ally with educationalists that design or implement the writing curriculum in fostering the learning aspect of writing activities, and paying less attention to children’s enjoyment and interest. When writing is imposed by someone in authority as in the classroom, it may not always align with the social or cultural interests of the students, especially in the case of second language learners. Clark and Ivanič (1997) believe that imposed writing serves the macro-purposes of people in power rather than the writer’s micro-purposes for writing generated by the immediate ‘context of situation’ (Halliday, 1985); the act is unconsciously contributing to the perpetuation of the values and practices of the dominant discourse that they might not identity with. The researchers regret that many students regard writing in academic settings as a chore because “[v]ery few write with enjoyment or with the sense of writing for their own purposes, to explore their own ideas” (p. 124).

4.4.2 Social Functions

The social writing functions identified in the corpus were informing, anticipating, interacting, and representing oral language. Informing is a basic function that motivates many acts of writing in daily life; people write to provide or convey information, evidence, or facts for particular reasons. It was the most frequent function in the school setting, assuming 18.62 percent of the total number of functions in the school writing samples, as seen in Table 4. The finding suggests that a large proportion of the writing tasks in school were aimed at imparting information to a particular audience or displaying one’s knowledge or understanding about a certain topic. The situation was not surprising in view of the fact that the class from which the focal children were selected participated in a major longitudinal research project investigating
the informational writing of elementary school children. It was only natural that the writing tasks assigned should be more geared towards the practice of this particular writing function. The effect had in fact spilled over to the home setting in which *informing* assumed a proportion of 10.19 percent, the highest in the *social* function category for the setting. For both settings, the children had achieved sophistication in incorporating this function with others in their writing.

*Anticipating* was a way by which the children envisioned possible events, objectified their wishes and emotions to share with others with the use of written language. The function was more prominent in the school setting (7.59 percent) than it was in the home setting (5.1 percent), as seen in Table 4. The smaller proportion of this function in the home-based writing might be attributed to the fact that *social* functions in the home setting included *interactions* which were non-existent in the school setting. Being junior members of the family and the community, they were conscious of their subjectivity in terms of power relations. Born and brought up in the Chinese culture where authority is closely associated with seniority of age, they were aware of the limited freedom they were allowed to air their opinions and plan their social and sometimes even personal activities and future events. However, they could express their wishes and desires in their writing, especially when writing on their own with no authority to answer to, on a platform where they could freely voice their thoughts and build up an envisaged identity for themselves.

The following writing sample is one of the five descriptions of favourite things that John wrote at home (Figure 2). It shows how the child writer expressed his personal feelings and desires through writing, and how he embedded the topical content in the exploration of his relationships and social ties with people around him in the family or the community.

The piece was a description of child writer’s favourite month and related activities. It embodied the *personal* functions of *expressing* and *reasoning*, and the *social* functions of *anticipating* and *informing*. John’s comments on the intentions of writing the piece were: “I wanted to tell…It’s my birthday, so I wrote it. Because I could tell my birthday, and could tell which month I like, a different month, another month.” He was not really sure which month was his favourite month, March or July. But he was full of the desire
My favorite month

My favorite month is March because it is my birthday. It passed now so now my favorite month is July because it is my mom’s birthday and it is summer that time! Then I will buy my mom sometime. Maybe I will not have time because I will play with my friends. I wish I can ask my dad if he can buy something for my mom’s birthday. I like to buy something. She do lots of work for me. She make my lunch and dinner.

Figure 2: John’s description of his favourite month

to let people know about his love for those months and the reasons behind it, his plans for activities in them, and his ability to tell the months that he liked. It was a safe spot within which he had full control of the resources and channels to express his desires on a personal basis. The focus was on the presentation of personal opinions, with a voice of his own, to assert a position of himself in relation to others. His ideas were further conveyed by a picture of coloured line drawings in the bottom half of the page. On the left was a tall brown building that was labeled “Shop”. Right next to it was a boy holding what looked like a banknote in his hand and had a speech bubble from his mouth saying “cool”. The boy was probably a representation of the writer himself, going to the shop to buy a birthday present for his mum. There was a car on the right side of the picture driven by a man who might well be his father driving him to the shop. The scene was not described in the text itself; it was but a situation that the child writer aspired to and hoped would materialize. He had artfully and implicitly recreated his anticipation with the use of images that complemented his verbal descriptions, providing the reader an access to his mental world.

The piece contrasted with the school-based texts on anticipating and informing.
where the goal was more focused on imparting academic information. This can be illustrated by one of William’s school journals (Figure 3).

(Transcript)

**Plant journal entry #2**

Today I planted my seed. First I used my index finger to poke three small holes in the soil. Then, we cover the holes with more soil. Finally, we water our seeds. | I wonder how many days the plant come up. I wonder when do I take the plant home. I wonder if my seed will die.

The journal was given a title, ‘Plant Journal Entry #2’, which rarely appeared in any other writing samples, school or home. This lends an academic and institutionalized sense to the piece of writing. It should also be noted that the text was accompanied by a labeled drawing of a flower pot with three seeds sown in the soil. The drawing was detailed and the labeling elaborate, showing the intensity of the child writer’s effort given to the piece. The sentences that described the process of planting the seed began with different temporal connectives: ‘Firstly’, ‘Next’, ‘Then’, and ‘Finally’. The text ended with three “I wonder’s” to solidify the writer’s anticipations for the growth and life span of the plant. This gave a personal touch to the text though a bit awkwardly included. It was one of the few pieces of school writing that incorporated the voice of the writer despite being somewhat forced. Like some of the home-based
writing, this piece presented a sense of self for personal expression and social affiliating, projecting a voice by which the writer established an authorial identity and an image of himself or herself behind the words (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001).

The use of the connectives to show the steps of the planting process and the list of wonders were probably tied to the *practicing* function of the writing task. Similar lexico-grammatical features were found in John’s school journal written to the same title. William was dutiful enough to add within straight brackets a heading for the list of wonders in the text. The functions of the piece were multiple: *informing, anticipating, expressing,* and *practicing.* Each of them was achieved appropriately and precisely in accordance with the teacher’s instructional goal. A comparison of the two texts, both written with more or less the same functions, illustrates how the writing acts in school were more focused on academic learning and practice. The underlying purposes of two pieces of writing could be different though the functions embodied in them were the same.

As stated earlier, *interacting* was a function unique to the home writing context assuming 8.28 percent of the total number of functions in the home setting (Table 4). The frequency was relatively low when compared with several of the *personal* functions in either setting. Nevertheless, as a social function, it provided a channel by which the child writers ventured off their narrow personal lives and reached out to the wider world. *Representing oral language* signified an interactive element in a piece of writing. It was spoken language recorded in direct speech to show the exact words with which individuals communicated in the text. The significance of this function lay in the child writers’ awareness of the use of the mediated speaking component to add weight to the text and to give it a sense of reality and vividness. A major purpose of writing was, after all, to portray social life in action, and such portrayal was more frequent in the home setting than in the school; the percentage of this function was 9.55 in the former as opposed to 7.59 in the latter.

4.4.3 Recreational Functions

The writing functions to achieve recreational purposes identified in the writing samples were *imagining-fantasy,* *imagining-fiction,* and *representing written language* (Table 4). The rationale for such categorization was that when these functions were
involved, writing was generally done for the purpose of providing entertainment. Imaginative pieces were written to create fictional situations to explore the possibility of true to life actions, or fantasies to extend the possibility of surreal ones to indefinite limits. The children wrote imaginary writing, both fantasy and fiction, in the school context. The percentages of imagining-fantasy and imagining-fiction were 9.65 and 4.83 respectively. In the home, there was no imaginary fictional writing, and the percentage of fantasy writing was a meagre 3.19, a few instances identified in a poem written by Katie and four stories written by John.

The fact that there was so little fantasy writing in the home setting could be explained by two possible reasons. Firstly, these young writers seemed not mature enough to write fantasy stories when working on their own. They might not have adequate instruction or practice with crafting fantasy narratives including an orientation, a crisis, and a resolution in the conventions of story grammar. When told to write fantasy stories in class, they just fed fictional or real life content into a surreal mould. They carried it as far as their imaginations allowed them, but were not able to tie up all the loose ends. Their stories were extensive but not as impressive as they were expected to be. It seems that the children would be more comfortable and efficient writing about their personal and social lives, actions and people that they came in contact with daily. Their writing purposes for free writing in school and self-initiated writing at home were more related to their lived experiences and reflections on everyday life events and activities. Secondly, being non-mainstream children, they might not identify with such imaginary writing in their stage of literacy development. Children use writing as a means to make sense of their social worlds (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1991). The social world of these children was made up of their family, school, friends, extended family, cultural community, and the wider community. Story as a form of language arts is a common literary genre in Chinese culture just as in western societies, and Chinese language children’s literature is full of fantasy fairy tales for moral education and enjoyment. However, to read and enjoy them is one matter, and to produce them in writing is another. The writers’ views of writing, of the functions and purposes of writing, and of themselves as writers may be affected by the culture they were affiliated with or born into (Hudelson, 1988). The children might perceive that writing fantasy
stories belonged to a much higher echelon and too distanced from their daily experiences. They might feel alienated or disinterested when asked to produce writing they did not socially or culturally align with. Their home and community context did not provide much cultural allegiance to the discourse of fantasies or motivate them to write such on their own either. They preferred writing with content and genre that were more in line with their home values, meanings and practices in the use of written language.

However, this does not mean that these children were not imaginative at all when writing at home. The two girls took to writing poems that were highly creative and embodied the function of representing written language. This function specific to the home context assumed a percentage of 3.82 (Table 4). But again, even in literary creation, the children based their theme and development on real life experiences. Figure 4 is a poem written by Elaine about the parts of her body. The ideational content was all derived from the immediate environment of her everyday life, another evidence of how children created meaning out of the social context in which the text was based (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

The poem was striking in its use of comparisons, a theme running throughout the whole verse. There was no rhyming at all in the lines, but the child writer’s comment on the piece of work was “it sounds like a poem.” As for the purpose of writing it, she

(Transcript)

Poem

My elbow is like a rock.
My body is straight as a log.
My eye-ball fast as a car.
My hair is crunchy as a grape.
My skin as smooth as a blanket.

Figure 4: Elaine’s poem about parts of the body
was not really sure, but said, “It’s about your body…because a body has these things.” A second grader was definitely clear about the names of parts of the body, but one could not help admiring how the child writer drew comparisons between them and the different kinds of objects. The line of association was somewhat out of the ordinary and yet so amusing and fitting. The similarity was not based only on appearance and shape, but also on speed, texture, and touch. The writing sample illustrates how children produced writing with themes originating from their individual selves, parts of the body in this instance, and incorporating elements from their social and cultural contexts, things of nature and man-made artifacts, as they explored the relationship between themselves and the external world.

The coloured pictures of the parts of the body and the objects they were compared to were just as significant. They were all drawn in detail and coloured elaborately to appear as life-like as possible. Putting the picture neatly in boxes and juxtaposing a body part with the object it was compared to was an act of textual function (Halliday, 1978). The writer used both visuals and language to help show her individual perspective on reality - how parts of the body were similar to different objects. Moreover, by doing so she posited her personal and authorial identity in various aspects: the fitness and beauty of her body parts; her perception of similarities between things; her unique mode of communication; and her capability of integrating text and images to represent meaning.

4.4.4 Learning Functions

There was only one writing function associated with learning in the corpus, namely, practicing. As seen in Table 4, this function was found only in the school setting; it made up 9.65 percent of the functions identified in the 67 school writing samples. Its relative frequency was not high, but the function was overwhelmingly the major intent of writing in lists and some of the journals. In the following list written by Katie (Figure 5), the child wrote a series of statements in accordance with the prompts given by the teacher. It was a writing activity that formed part of a class project on social issues in the community.
Some wonderful things about my community are:

- The school because we can learn and play
- Friendly friends play together
- I like cars because they drive me everywhere

Some ways to make my community even better are:

- More food to eat and clean grass
- Less bugs because they are all over
- No crying because it hurts my ear

Figure 5: Katie’s list of wonderful things about her community

In this second grade classroom, the main social purpose for writing was to learn to write, for children to develop their understandings of written language and how it worked. The framework was a kind of scaffolding to help them generate ideational meaning. By providing a focus on a particular topic and a framework, this worksheet type exercise served to raise the students’ awareness of social issues alongside practicing writing descriptions with attribute series. A dual instructional purpose was being aimed at: eliciting personal responses to a specific topic, and practicing a related set of vocabulary and lexico-grammatical features. As apprentices, the children were requested to present their ideas in separate statements, sentences or phrases, a preliminary step in preparation for writing coherent expository essays.

Transcript 1 shows a fiction story also written by Katie. It was a follow-up activity of the list in Figure 5 to explore further the topic of social issues in the community. This time the genre was a chronological narrative which could be experiential or fictional. The value of guidance and instruction provided by the teacher in class could be observed by comparing this story with the list in Figure 5. Katie’s list of wonderful things about her community and ways to make her community even better
were very much centred around herself and her immediate worlds, her school, friends, cars, and some really personal matters like babies crying that hurt her ears. Such egocentricity was replaced by empathy towards the plight of the poor in the community embodied in the narrative (Transcript 1). In this extended writing task, the child writer was directed, probably through pre-writing discussion, to look at the community with a broader view and brought to a heightened awareness of crime, social injustice and deprivation in the community.

When I went to Safeway, I saw a man that was on the corner. I gave him some of my own [money] but he still want more money. Then he grab all of my mom’s money and ran away from us. I think that he wants to be rich so he ran away from us. I feel sad and my mom feels the same.

Transcript 1: Katie’s experiential story about social problems in the community

With the specific functions grouped into different categories according to the purposes they serve, the next step would be to examine how they were distributed among the various categories. Comparing their distribution in the school and the home writing context would help to show how personal, social, recreational, and learning functions were differently proportioned in the children’s writing in the two settings. The percentages indicate that for both writing contexts, personal functions assumed the largest proportion of writing functions; they made up 42.07 percent of all the functions in school writing, and 59.87 percent in home writing. Social functions ranked second for both the school and the home setting. The two figures were also quite close to each other, 33.8 percent for school writing, and 33.12 percent for home. As for recreational functions, the group percentage for school writing was 14.48 percent as opposed to 7.01 percent for home writing. There was a bigger difference than expected, the situation probably due to the relatively large amount of imaginary writing in the school-based writing samples. Practicing that was specific to school writing assumed 9.65 percent of the total number of functions in the setting.
4.4.5 Discussion of Findings of Categories of Functions

A fundamental purpose for writing is creating meaning; writing is a process of making meaning rather than transcribing meanings that have been already made (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). For children, a goal for putting pen to paper is to make sense of their experiences in the social world, and to construct meaning with real experience or imagination derived from their social and cultural context. For ideational meaning, they would have to decide why they want to write in the first place, and then what message to put across, and how to shape the information and ideas in the message. As for their interpersonal positioning, they would have to consider for whom the message is intended, and what they want to achieve with the writing act in relation to others.

The child writers in the present study used writing to fulfill different kinds of purposes in school and home contexts. They embodied a wide range of functions in both the school and the home setting, personal, social, recreational, and learning, to write about themselves, their families, and their community. And similar to findings by McGinley and Kamberelis (1991) from their case study of third graders’ reading and writing functions, an overwhelming proportion of the focal children’s writing functioned in personal ways in both the school and the home writing context (Table 4). The children enacted personal functions to construct themselves while constructing ideational and interpersonal meaning at the same time. Second in position were the social functions for both writing contexts; written language was used in a fairly large proportion in social ways to affirm or negotiate relationships with others. Recreational functions ranked third in either context. The learning category was the least frequent one even in the school context.

Different patterns in the distribution of the various function categories between the settings could be found. As shown in Table 4, while the figures in the school setting show a gradual descent from one category to another, there was great disparity among the percentages in the home setting. That is to say, writing in the former setting was more evenly distributed among the categories of functions than it was in the latter. In the home setting, a great proportion of the functions was in the personal and the social categories; it was 59.87 percent for the former, and 33.12 percent for the latter. This was particularly important for the home setting where more than half of the functions
were related to personal expression and fulfillment. It was also noteworthy that expressing in the personal category was the most frequent function in the home setting assuming a percentage of 19.11 (Table 4). The figures indicate that the children’s home writing was by majority done for personal and social purposes. This corroborated research findings on children’s writing functions in the home and related social contexts (Hammer et al., 2003; McCarthey, 1997; Paratore et al., 2005; Staab & Smith, 1986; Taylor, 1982).

For cultural and literacy activities, such as writing, there is always a personal and/or a social purpose. Writing as a means of communication involves a personal purpose for representing oneself and a social one for interacting with others. Both are given rise by a need to respond to a particular social situation. When engaged in an act of writing, people are not only concerned about the way they represent the world but also how they position themselves in an interpersonal dimension; they assume certain perspectives about their authority and their relationship with the intended audience (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Adopting a particular position in relation to the reader, the writer conveys or exchanges ideas, information, hopes or anticipations about future happenings which also project an image of the writer him/herself. Such personal and social functions were particularly relevant for the second language children in the study. They were emerging members of different communities of practice and actors in various social and cultural spheres of activity. To be accepted and to assume agency, there was a need for them to explore interpersonal power relationships with others, examining and negotiating their social identity, their practices, values and beliefs in relation to those in the mainstream community. For example, they would want to establish an identity for themselves as a knowledge possessor among their peers having some specific information or knowledge to be shared with others.

Diversity was also found in the coverage of the functions within individual categories between the two settings. In the home context, there was not only a wider range of functions but also a more comprehensive coverage of them in each category. For both the personal and the social category, the whole range of functions identified was covered in the home setting. Ego enhancing and enjoying were not found in the personal category for school writing, however. Neither was interacting present in the
social category; there was instead a heavy focus on informing, the display of academic knowledge and understanding in a text. It should be noted that the high percentage of informing in school writing (18.62 percent) was mainly responsible for the closeness of the figures for the social category between the two settings, 33.8 percent for the school setting and 33.12 percent for the home (Table 4). As mentioned earlier, part of the emphasis on informing could be due to the major research project on informational writing that the class participated in prior to and during the data collection period of the present study. The major cause might be the literacy development objectives of the writing curriculum in particular and the academic learning goals of the school curriculum in general. As for the recreational category, the relatively wide gap between the settings could be attributed to the absence of imagining-fiction and the very low frequency of imagining-fantasy in home writing. The two imagining functions were the only components of this category for the school setting; representing written language for literary creation was not present at all.

The findings suggest that in the classroom setting, writing seemed more geared towards helping students learn how to write and construct academic knowledge than developing abilities in using written language as a semiotic social tool to meet life demands. While there was a fair distribution of functions for personal, social and recreational purposes, they were very often encased in academic learning writing activities for practicing specific writing skills and lexico-grammatical features. Some important elements, such as students’ enjoyment and self-aggrandizement had been neglected. Assumptions were often made that children would want to write in class assignments with prescribed parameters focusing on instructional rather than communication purposes. However, such writing tasks do have a role to play. Research findings show that there is differential and specialization of writing functions in the different contexts of the school and the home, (e.g., Bissex, 1980). The major purposes for writing in school are to promote learning, helping students to learn writing skills and academic content, and demonstrate learning of such (Chapman, 2002). The writing prompts found in some of the school writing samples might be considered prescriptive in that they set the parameters for the ideational meaning and interpersonal meaning of the text. However, there was a need for such learning through explicit
instruction and frequent focused practice with classroom writing tasks to achieve curriculum objectives.

A mandated instructional goal of the language arts programme is to prepare students for content area writing and writing across the curriculum to prepare them for academic learning in school and beyond. Chapman (2002) has shown that primary school children were capable of writing across the curriculum without being limited to writing in language arts. One specialty about the school writing in the study was the incorporation of an academic component across different genres, a situation not found in the home context. Many of the school writing samples were based on themes in social studies or science. Their topic, content, and genre were often streamlined through writing instruction and scaffolding to achieve the learning objectives of a particular thematic unit. Students engaged in descriptive or fictional writing as part of class research projects. The purpose for such writing activities was obviously writing to learn, not just the English language but also academic knowledge, skills and attitude on specific subjects and topics. These pedagogical practices accounted for the dominance of the learning element in many of the school-based written products.

The school writing tasks seemed to be confined to certain basic writing activities, such as story writing and journal writing other than worksheet exercises. Where the writing curriculum was aimed at developing an all round literacy, writing for social interaction, recreation and literary expression should not be left out of the curriculum. This is particularly important in the early stage of writing development as children build up their repertoire of genres. The typified forms of discourse are vehicles with which they can organize written language to achieve different writing purposes in response to recurring situational contexts (Chapman, 1999). Discussion of the written genres in the children’s school and home writing will be dealt with in Chapter 5.

In the home, where much of the writing was self-initiated, writing was a response to specific social situations rather than done for its own sake. The children used language in a lively and creative manner for different purposes and intended audiences. Allowing more time and freedom for creativity and expression, the home writing context might be more conducive to writing for personal and social purposes when compared with the relatively controlled writing situation in school. The absence of the need for
accountability was highly relevant, in particular for second language users. These children could write without inhibition for any imaginable purpose, without fear of appearing inadequate or inappropriate for lack of sociolinguistic competence. And most important of all, they could have free choice of topic, genre, content, context, and reader. Following their own writer’s agenda (Meyer, 1992), and given full rein to their imagination and expression, these child writers acted intuitively loading their written products with functions to fulfill their own writing goals.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) argue that writing functions are dependent on the social meanings with which the text is imbued. The home with its intricate ties to a cultural community is a broader and more complicated social context than the school. The non-academic setting of the context allowed the children more opportunities to act, to respond to actions, and to interact with others. The home was often permeated with a more complex social structure than the classroom; complicated interpersonal power relations played out with various members of the family and extended family living under the same roof, a common phenomenon in Chinese immigrant families. It was an abounding playing field for children to explore new roles and social identities, to understand or negotiate their experiences, and to transform their lives and relationships with others. The home provided a greater variety of social contexts that initiated a wider range of purposes for writing as “each individual act of writing produce[d] unique meanings to serve a unique configuration of purposes in a unique situation… created within the constraints of a cultural and socio-political context” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997. p. 110).

4.5 Summary of findings

The following findings were arrived at through quantitative analysis of the writing samples produced in the two settings. A number of functions were identified in the two sets of texts. Although the focal children produced more texts in the school setting than in the home, descriptive statistical analysis of the data show that they enacted more functions on average in their home writing than in their school writing. Some of the functions identified were common to both settings. Others were unique to either the school or the home, with a slightly wider range of functions found among the home-based texts than those produced as school assignments. While the functions
enacted in school writing were almost uniform among the four focal children, there was more individual variation among the children in their enactment of specific functions in the home setting.

The specific functions were categorized according to their nature and the writing purpose they served. Four categories of functions were documented, namely, personal, social, recreational, and learning functions. A comparison of their frequency in the two settings shows that there was a more even distribution of the different types of functions in the school than in the home writing samples. In the latter, an overwhelming proportion of the functions were related to personal and social writing purposes, while the practicing function was not present at all.

The findings in relation to functions support much of the existing research which suggests that children write for different purposes, and that written language plays distinctive personal and social roles in our daily lives. People write for action that includes social contact, for information, and for entertainment (Halliday, 1985). In writing as a social act, people accomplish three basic functions with the meaning created from written language: for expressing, for transacting information, and for literary purposes (Britton et al., 1975). On the other hand, the findings were somewhat different from those reported by Paratore et al. (2005) who found that elementary level immigrant children generally wrote for three purposes at home: learning, recreation, and social interaction. The present study shows that the second generation immigrant children engaged in writing for personal purposes as well as social interaction and recreation at home. However, probably because their writing was done on a voluntary self-initiated basis, learning purposes were not included.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (2): WRITTEN GENRES IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME

Where literacy development is conceptualized as a cultural process in which children learn about written language by internalizing social actions (Dyson, 1993), socialization into literacy is achieved through processing the words of others, in spoken or written form, in a kind of social dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). Based on this Bakhtinian perspective, written genres are compositional structures that are embedded in and develop out of the various spheres of human activity, a set of signals for constructing or interpreting the particulars of a specific communicative interaction, but are open-ended enough to allow for individual choice and creativity. Children experience and produce different written genres as they participate in recurring social situations in their everyday lives, such as the home and the classroom.

This chapter presents analyses and findings about the genres identified in the writing in the school and the home settings. Firstly, the individual genres identified in the two contexts are presented and compared in terms of their frequency and distribution across the settings. Then, the genres in the particular settings are discussed in relation to the genre categories they are classified into, namely, chronologies, descriptions, interactions, and word plays. Examples of writing samples are included to illustrate their features and the functions enacted in them. Next, comparisons are made between the two settings to show the range and variety of genres the children employed in their writing between school and home in answer to Research Question 2.

5.1 Overview: Genres in the children’s school writing and home writing

There was considerable difference in the frequency and distribution of specific genres between the two settings. Three genres were identified in the children’s 67 school writing samples: story, journal, and listing of items as shown in Table 5. More than half of the school writing samples were journals, and the rest were roughly divided between lists and stories.
Table 5: Frequency and percentages of genres in school writing

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<td>Elaine</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>5 (28%)</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
<td>5 (28%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>3 (19%)</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 (22.39%)</td>
<td>35 (52.24%)</td>
<td>17 (25.37%)</td>
<td>67 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the home setting, ten genres were identified among the 54 writing samples. With reference to Table 6, the journal was the most popular genre in the home setting as it was in the school setting although its percentage was much lower in the former than in the latter. This could be related to the fact that the children wrote in a wider range of genres when writing on a voluntary basis at home. Stories came last in the school setting. This was an unexpected finding based on a general belief that children would devote most of their writing to creating stories in language arts lessons or at home.

It should also be noted that while the four focal children wrote in all the three genres with almost the same amount in each at school, there was much individual variation in the range and type of genres they produced in the home setting; the journal was the only genre that all the four children wrote in at home. There was not only a wider range of genres but also a greater variety of genre categories in the home setting than in the school. While only chronologies and descriptions were found in the school writing samples, four categories of genres could be identified in the home-based texts: chronologies, descriptions, interactions, and word plays. In the school context, chronologies encompassed stories, journals, and lists while descriptions included only journals and lists. For the home context, chronologies were exclusive to stories and journals; descriptions were found in descriptions of ‘my favourite things’, non-fiction writing, drawings, and stories. Under interactions were greeting cards, notes, and
Table 6: Frequency and percentages of genres in home writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>My favorite things</th>
<th>Non-fiction writing</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
<th>Greeting card</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Diary</th>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Joke</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>3(15.79)</td>
<td>4(21.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(5.26)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(15.79)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(15.79)</td>
<td>5(26.32)</td>
<td>19(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(20)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(20)</td>
<td>2(20)</td>
<td>1(10)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(30)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>4(20)</td>
<td>8(40)</td>
<td>5(25)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(10)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(20)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(20)</td>
<td>3(60)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7(12.96)</td>
<td>15(27.78)</td>
<td>5(9.26)</td>
<td>1(1.85)</td>
<td>3(5.56)</td>
<td>6(11.11)</td>
<td>4(7.41)</td>
<td>2(3.7)</td>
<td>6(11.11)</td>
<td>5(9.26)</td>
<td>54(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(  ): percentage
diaries. Word plays included poems and jokes. These will be discussed in greater detail in the next two sections in relation to individual genres in the two different settings.

5.2 Frequency and distribution of genres in school writing

As stated above, three genres were identified in the children’s school writing: story, journal, and listing of items. It can be seen from Table 5 that the journal was the most dominant genre in the setting, comprising 52.24 percent of the total number of school writing samples. Lists and stories came next, constituting 25.37 percent and 22.39 percent respectively. It should also be noted that the focal children wrote almost the same number of pieces for journals and lists. Elaine wrote eight journals while the other three children wrote nine pieces each. For lists, they all wrote four pieces except John who wrote five. The difference in frequency was slightly wider for stories the number of which ranged from five for Katie to three for Elaine and William. In fact, there was very little individual difference in the total number of pieces of school writing among the focal children, ranging from 15 for Elaine to 18 for Katie and John. The figures in Table 5 show that in the school setting, all the four children wrote more or less the same number of pieces in the same range of genres, and in fact very often using the same title. This was not surprising at all in view of the fact that the children’s writing tasks were all set by the teacher who streamlined their work through the use of prompts and scaffolding provided in the form of pre-writing activities and worksheets.

The school-based genres included both chronologies and descriptions, as seen in Table 7. The former made up 55.23 percent of the total number of school writing samples while the latter assumed 44.77 percent. Each of the genres will be described below in respect of their nature and distribution between the two categories.

5.2.1 Stories

The stories in the school writing samples were all chronologies, narratives with crisis and complication. Some of them were imaginary which could be fantasy or fiction while others were experiential. By far most of the stories were fantasies, constituting 60 percent of the total number of stories. The primary function was imagining-fantasy, and secondary functions to support the major intention were expressing, practicing, and representing oral language. Most of these stories were written according to prompts set by the teacher for the whole class, with all the children
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fantasy</td>
<td>fiction</td>
<td>experi-</td>
<td>fantasy</td>
<td>experi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mental</td>
<td></td>
<td>mental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|        |        |        |        |        |        |
|        | fantasy | fiction | experi- | fantasy | experi- |
|        |        |        | mental |        | mental |
| Elaine | 1      | 4      | 1      | 1      | 2      |
| Katie  | 1      | 4      | 1      | 1      | 2      |
| John   | 3      | 4      | 1      | 1      | 3      |
| William| 1      | 5      | 1      | 1      | 2      |
|        | Total  | 6      | 9      | 17     | 17     |

|        | % within genre |        |
|        | number of pieces of writing in a particular genre |
|        | % among genres |        |
| Elaine | 60%  | 90%  |
| Katie  | 20%  | 10%  |
| John   | 28%  | 16%  |
| William| 17%  | 10%  |
| Total  | 67%  | 100% |

Table 7: Distribution of genres across chronologies and descriptions in school writing

[ ]: number of pieces of writing in a particular genre
Chronologies: 55.23% Descriptions: 44.77%

[15]: number of pieces of writing in a particular genre
writing on the same topic and producing similar content, and very often, enacting more or less the same functions.

All four children wrote a fantasy story about a donkey finding a magic pebble. It was based on a well known picture book, ‘Sylvester and the Magic Pebble’ (Steig, 1969) which was a winner of the Caldecott Award. The writing task was to retell the story that the children had read in class to practice paragraph development, a structured written exercise aimed at practicing the schematic framework of a particular form of story.

According to the teacher’s weekly plan, the students were encouraged to rewrite the ending of the story as part of the school assignment, but none of the focal children did this. Figure 6 shows John’s rendition of the story retelling. The story was made up of three paragraphs written under separate headings: ‘Beginning’; ‘Middle’; and ‘End’.

(Transcript)

**Story**

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

**Beginning**

“It was a rainy day,” cried the donkey! The donkey had a pebble he can make any wish he want. The donkey went to the forest and made a wish.

**Middle**

In the middle the donkey made a wish. He said, “I wish I was a rock.” So the donkey was a rock. “I wish I was normal.” But nothing happen. Then a lion came.

**Ending**

The donkey was sad, he will never turn to normal. Then his parents put the pebble on the rock. Then the rock was donkey.

Figure 6: John’s fantasy story about a magic pebble

This more able boy managed to develop the story with the given framework, but the resulting text seemed more like a collection of paragraphs than a coherent story. The
child writer was mindful of what happened in the different parts of the story, the beginning, the middle, and the end, and marked them significantly with the use of visuals. But he did not pay due attention to how the various parts were connected and how the events developed from one another. Moreover, he did not seem to appreciate the objective of the writing task. Rather than creating a new ending, he faithfully retold the story following the original plot, development of events, and ending, as did the other three focal children. This was reflective of the children’s tendency to recontextualize their reading materials, adapting texts that they had been exposed to in their writing.

Besides fantasy stories, there were three fictional stories constituting 20 percent of the total number of stories. They were free writing with self-selected titles and content, one written by John and two by Katie. The primary function was imagining-fiction, and the secondary functions were informing and representing oral language. John’s story was a simple recount of him finding no water from any tap in the house on a boiling hot day. Later he went to the shop and bought some water with the help of his friend after which they took a rest in a warm place. Katie’s fictional stories, on the other hand, were complete with crisis and complication. One of them was highly imaginative and seemed like a refrain of a class project on social problems in the community. The other was informative as well as fictional; it was about a caterpillar that she picked up from the sidewalk and put into a jar (Figure 7). It then turned into a butterfly and she set it free. The piece of writing seemed to be an extension from the class project on insects. It used the information and language that she had learned working on the project. The text was supported by a drawing of herself holding up to the sky a jar from which the butterfly emerged to fly far, far away. This added a sentimental touch to the piece which was basically written to inform how a caterpillar metamorphosed into a butterfly.

The rest of the school stories were experiential in content. Experiential stories were compositions about real, or supposed to be real, events in their experience, narrated in a chronological order with comments. As shown in Table 7, experiential stories made up 20 percent of the total number of stories, the same as fictional ones. There was only one experiential story in the school writing samples, a teacher-assigned composition
Story

One morning I saw a caterpillar on the sidewalk. Then I put it in a jar. It has holes in it. When it was bedtime it was still in the jar. Then I put the caterpillar on the drawer. When I woke up, the caterpillar was gone. And now it turned into a butterfly! I let the butterfly go and fly far, far and far.

Figure 7: Katie’s fictional story about a caterpillar

about the poor and homeless people that they had encountered. It was done as part of a class project inquiring into the social problems of the community. The major functions were referring to experience and expressing, and a secondary function was representing oral language, as illustrated by Elaine’s story shown in Transcript 2:

I saw a homeless person that have old toys to sell. I ask mom and dad, “Can we buy some toys?” My mom and dad said, “No.” I felt sad because I can’t buy any toys.

Once I saw a man that is homeless. He got a shopping cart. Inside there is cans in it. I saw a man that don’t have a shirt on, just pants. He got a sign said I need money.

Transcript 2: Elaine’s experiential story about the homeless
5.2.2 Journals

The journals were written in a school exercise book specifically assigned for the purpose. The children wrote almost the same number of journals: Elaine wrote eight of them and the rest wrote nine each. As seen in Table 7, they were roughly divided between chronologies and descriptions, 51.43 percent (2.86 percent + 48.57 percent) for the former and 48.57 percent for the latter. The chronological journals were free choice writing in which the topic and content were all different for each of the children. Among them, only one instance was imaginary writing. It was written by Katie, a fantasy recount of what she anticipated would happen if her plant grew up high in the sky and reached the princess’s castle. The other chronological journals (48.57 percent of the total number of journals) were all experiential writing, sequential recounts of daily life experience, such as going skating, playing with friends, watching TV, or having a loose tooth. When given a free topic, the children chose to write about events that they found interesting, and what they thought had significance for them, expressing their opinions and making comments. John wrote five of these, and the other children wrote four each. They were often records of time-sequenced events done over the weekend or predictions of what would be done on a certain day. The primary function was referring to experience, and secondary functions were expressing, informing, reasoning, anticipating and representing oral language. Figure 8 shows one of the chronological experiential

(Transcript)

**Journal**

On the weekend I played my computer, I went to “Battleon.com”. I went to level eleven. When I was finished playing computer, I watched TV. I watched Pokemon Banz. After I watched TV, I played my video games. Then I did my homework, there sure was a lot of homework.

Figure 8: William’s chronological experiential journal about his weekend
journals that William wrote about the things that he liked doing and others that he did not enjoy so much, using drawings and bubble speech to express himself. It also illustrates how pervasive pop culture was in the personal world of the child writer.

The rest of the journals were descriptions that made up 48.57 percent of the total number of school journals (Table 7). In these descriptive journals, the focus was descriptions and comments related to an object referent or situation and its attributes rather than actions or events. They were all realistic, describing real objects or situations in their daily life experience. Most of them were based on themes suggested by the teacher, with the same title for each child, such as ‘The best thing about my mother’ and ‘Planting my seed.’ The major function was informing, and secondary functions were expressing, reasoning, practicing, anticipating, and referring to experience. The focus on the informing function could be related to the major longitudinal research project on young children’s informational writing that the class was participating in with other classes and schools.

Other than these teacher-assigned descriptive journals, there were two self-selected ones. One was by Elaine describing what she would do if she could go to Disneyland with her friends and family. The other one was written by William, a realistic description of a visit to the Space Centre (Transcript 3). He enacted several functions within this relatively short text: informing, referring to experience, expressing, and reasoning. The major intention was to inform the reader about the space centre. He also referred to his experience and the fun he had there, expressing his feelings about them and reasoning to provide a rationale for his opinions. By describing his lived experiences and his responses to them, he positioned himself in relation to his social world and constructed a sense of self of the situation and of purposes (Hyland, 2003).

On April 11th 2005, me and my class went to H.R. Space Centre and the best part was the Life on Mars and the space centre arcade. The Life on Mars is fun because it was fast, it was a mission and I have to save Mars from shooting meteors that was falling towards Mars and to the ship. The H.R. Space Centre Arcade because there were a lot of games and different kinds of games.

Transcript 3: William’s descriptive journal about a visit to the Space Centre
5.2.3 Lists

The third type of genre in school writing was list, or a listing of items. They were series of phrases or sentences linked to a certain topic or object with varying degree of thematic interrelationship. Mainly in the form of worksheet exercises, they were written according to prompts and instructions given on the worksheet to practice specific writing skills, such as paragraph development and the use of punctuation marks. The major functions were practicing and informing, and secondary functions were imagining-fiction, imagining-fantasy, expressing, reasoning, and anticipating.

Being worksheet exercises or structured writing practices, the lists were produced in almost equal amount by each child, writing on the same topics and for more or less the same functions. Four such writing exercises were completed by each child. John wrote an additional piece in place of a fictional story about the poor and the homeless in the community. He wrote a list of ‘I wonder’ statements to comment on the social aspects of the community. The lists could be descriptive or chronological in nature, depending on the theme. As seen in Table 7, one of the writing tasks was chronological (23.53 percent) while the rest were descriptive, either fantasy (23.53 percent) or realistic (52.94 percent). In the single chronological list, the children wrote a series of fictional sequential actions in an event - the things that they would do if they were a teacher for one day. The objective was to practice the use of temporal connectives, such as ‘first’, ‘next’, and ‘finally’.

As for the descriptive lists, one of them was about real objects – a list of things that the children liked to do or eat to practice the use of comma. Another one was about a real situation, wonderful things in their community and the ways to make it even better. The third one was semi-realistic and semi-imaginary; the children were asked to draw up a list of attributes to describe the most amazing bug that they had ever seen. The children wrote in a worksheet ruled with seven lines for describing the different parts of its body. Figure 9 is William’s work in which he drew a verbal picture about the most amazing bug that he had ever seen. It was a beautiful combination of academic information and aesthetic description, and the work of the other three children had more or less the same effect. The child writers incorporated knowledge about bugs that they had learned in the class project on insects into their imaginary writing. They integrated
colourful and sensuous descriptions with the list of attributes about the name and characteristics of the different parts of the body of a bug, adding a literary effect to their work. The text was accompanied by a drawing of the bug with its features exaggerated in a cartoon like manner to match the description.

![Figure 9: William’s list of descriptions of the most amazing bug](image)

(Transcript)

**List**

Today I saw the most amazing bug.

With one circle yellow head.

With two straight antennae.

With one fat brown thorax.

With four glowing wings.

With one big, fat yellow abdomen.

With six skinny legs.

But it got away!

Have you seen my bug?

By William

5.2.4 Summary of Findings in School Writing

The findings from the quantitative analyses show that the focal children wrote in a limited variety of genres in the school writing context when compared with their home-based writing. There were only three specific genres in their school writing, *stories*, *journals*, and *lists*, while the home setting saw ten of them. In terms of genre categories, the school writing samples were confined to *chronologies* and *descriptions*. There was considerable distribution of these two categories within each of the three school genres though. The *stories* were *chronologies* that included both imaginary and experiential ones. Fantasy stories formed the majority while there were only three experiential stories. These were all written on teacher-assigned topics. Free writing with self-selected topics included three fictional stories. As for the *journals,*
approximately half of them were *chronologies*. They were written on self-selected topics and all except one, involved experiential content. The other half of the journals was realistic *descriptions*; with the exception of two instances that were free writing, they were written on topics assigned by the teacher. *Lists* included both *chronologies* and *descriptions*. Completed as writing exercises, they were roughly divided among imaginative *chronologies*, fantasy *descriptions*, and realistic *descriptions*.

The above summary of the findings in school writing genres points to the fact that much of the children’s writing was prescribed by the teacher in respect of genre and topic. The phenomenon was probably related to institutional efforts to meet the objectives of the writing curriculum and to ensure learning outcomes across students in the class. The findings also reflect the interest of the children when writing on their own. In their self-selected *story* writing, they chose to write fictional stories rather than fantasy ones. Moreover, *chronologies* were more popular than *descriptions* when writing *journals*. The child writers were more interested in recounting or narrating their lived experiences to make sense of what happened to them, what they observed, and their interactions with others in various social contexts. Perhaps as second language learners in an early stage of writing development, they found the recording of events and actions taking place in their immediate environment an easier task than describing them in abstract terms. In terms of both cognitive and sociolinguistic demands, the former was more manageable for these children. They had passed the stage of writing about concrete objects as observed among younger children who drew pictures to generate or anchor thoughts and content for writing, then labeled them or described their attributes (Chapman, 1995; Dyson, 1992). These children’s writing had moved away from an egocentric focus to a consciousness of their social experiences. Being older and having more physical freedom and social life, they engaged in more active and frequent interactions with others in the home, school, and community as compared with the first graders in Chapman’s (1995) study. Their focus was on to topics involving actions that affected their relationships with other members of the social contexts they participated in rather than physical objects or places as found in the writing of kindergarteners or first graders. For example, they wrote about their anticipations and aspirations for change that transcended their physical daily experiences. They had expanded their spheres of activity to the
wider community as they explored their position in relation to others. Even when writing within a set genre, such as stories, the children chose to write fictional chronologies rather than fantasies when given free selection of topics. Fictional as they were, the stories were chronologies built on imaginations that were actually extensions of their daily life experiences.

5.3 Frequency and distribution of genres in home writing

The children’s home writing exhibited a greater variety of genres than in the school context. As stated earlier, a total of ten genres was identified in the children’s home writing with journal being the most popular genre just like it was in the school context. Apart from stories and journals that were also found in school writing, there was an interesting array of genres which included greeting cards, notes, diaries, drawings, poems, jokes, descriptions of ‘my favourite things’, and non-fiction writing (a piece of writing identified as such by the writer herself).

For the analysis of the home genres, apart from stories and journals that were found in both settings, the others were grouped into categories according to their nature; for example greeting cards, notes, and diaries were grouped under interactions. This arrangement would made inter- and intra-setting comparisons easier and highlight the variety of the types of genres in the two settings. With reference to Table 8, journals, which were all chronologies, made up 27.78 percent of all the home writing samples. Coming next was the group of interactional genres that included greeting cards, notes, and diaries as mentioned above. Interactions constituted 22.22 percent of the total home-based texts. These were followed by word plays that included poems and jokes and which made up 20.37 percent of the total writing samples. The descriptive genres that consisted of drawings, non-fiction writing, and descriptions of ‘my favourite things’ came next; this group of genres assumed 16.67 percent of the total, the sum of 5.56 percent, 9.26 percent and 1.85 percent. Stories, which included both chronologies and descriptions, came last as a group by itself, making up only 12.96 percent of the total home writing samples.

As for individual distribution, John wrote 20 pieces in 5 genres, and Elaine wrote 19 pieces in 6. Katie, the average ability girl, wrote only 10 pieces but in 5 different genres. William, the average ability boy, contributed the least, writing only 5 pieces.
### Table 8: Distribution of genres across chronologies, descriptions, interactions, and word plays in home writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>My favorite things</th>
<th>Non-fiction writing</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
<th>Greeting card</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Diary</th>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Joke</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chron./Desc.</td>
<td>Chron. experiential</td>
<td>Desc. realistic</td>
<td>Desc. realistic</td>
<td>Desc. fiction</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Word play</td>
<td>Word play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>3 Chron. experiential [2] Desc. realistic[1]</td>
<td>4 - 1 - - - 3 - 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 - - 2 2</td>
<td>1 - 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 - -</td>
<td>1 3 - - - -</td>
<td>5(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15 5</td>
<td>1 3 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 6 5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% among genres</td>
<td>12.96%</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
<td>9.26%</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.71%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>9.26%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chronologies: 37.04%    Descriptions: 20.37%    Interactions: 22.22%    Word plays: 20.37%
in 3 genres. As mentioned earlier, the names of the genres were suggested by the children themselves. They divided their writing samples into different groups and assigned a genre name to each one of them. This process reflected their understanding, knowledge, and perceptions of the characteristic functions and features of the various genres they had learned about and practiced writing in and out of school.

5.3.1 Stories

Only the two more able children, John and Elaine, wrote stories at home. There were a total of seven stories constituting 12.96 percent of the 54 home writing samples (Table 8) as mentioned above. John wrote four stories and Elaine three. Katie and William did not choose to write stories in the home context. There was considerable variation among the children’s stories as in the school context. Five of the stories were chronologies about time-sequenced events. Similar to the school stories, these chronological stories included both fantasies and experiential ones, but there were no fictional stories, however. Descriptive stories were unique to the home context. There were two of them, one of which was a fantasy and the other a realistic description.

John’s stories were all fantasies. Three of them were chronological and one was descriptive. Two of his chronological fantasies were about a super hero, a fictitious character from the comics he loved reading very much. Transcript 4 shows one of these stories. Its structure and development followed the story grammar commonly found in comics, a hero fighting villains and protecting the meek. There was an orientation followed by a crisis. Then appeared the resolution which was the hero gaining super power in some dramatic way and defeating the villain. There was also a coda giving a sense of completeness to the story. What was interesting was the inclusion of two non-fantasy but fictitious characters in the setting, two kids that represented the ‘commoners’ who might well be the writer himself and his neighbour both of whom were comic fans. It was a way in which the child writer developed his sense of self, imagining that he was a kid who had the good fortune of meeting and being rescued by a super hero.

Once upon a time there was a super hero that can fly. There was two kid named George and Harold. They write lots of comics. Most people like their comics.
There was so much bad people to fight. George and Harold asked the super hero to fight for them and he did. So then a bad person made a big thing that the super hero can not make him died! So the super hero got some super power juice from a shop to drink. Then the super hero was so strong that he made the bad person died. Then the super hero went back to the place where he came from. George and Harold miss the best super hero of all.

Transcript 4: John’s fantasy story about a super hero

John’s third chronological fantasy was a fairly tale like story; he found a thousand ducks in his closet in the middle of the night and had some trouble looking after and feeding them. Finally, the problem was solved and he managed to keep one of them for his pet. His descriptive story was also highly imaginative and full of action; it was about a big city where kids could do anything they wanted because there were no bad guys but only good people. For these imaginary stories, whether chronological or descriptive, the major function was *imaginings-fantasy*, and secondary functions were *expressing, reasoning, and representing oral language*.

Elaine wrote three stories which were relatively simple and short when compared to John’s. Their schematic structure was also different. Two of them were chronological experiential recounts with no crisis or complication and one was a straightforward realistic description. The chronological stories were based on social contexts and about real events that she encountered in her home and school life, such as her baby cousin having a fever, and her class winning the raffle ticket sale competition. The descriptive story was also about real experiences. The major function for these stories was *referring to experience* which was supported by *expressing* and *reasoning*.

Figure 10 shows one of her stories, a beautiful description of a nature scene that she saw outside her window one morning. It was a sensational piece of writing involving sensory descriptions, a flower slipping from her fingers when she tried to pick it up, and feeling like a piece of cloud when she touched it. What was striking was a picture that she drew to accompany the text. It was drawn with coloured felt pens free hand showing a bright yellow sun, two blue clouds, and a number of black birds in the sky hovering over a grassy field spotted with flowers of different colours: red, purple,
yellow, and turquoise green. There was even an insect resting on one of the leaves. The whole picture was elaborate, colourful and delightful. This second language child writer used both verbal and visual symbols to convey her ideas, her representation of the beauty of nature that met her eyes when she poked her head out of the window one morning. The graphic image integrated with the textual representation, the former describing the physical context and the latter the sensational feelings. The picture also served to focus her description as she recreated the scene. The use of drawing was a strategy to make up for her lack of adequate linguistic resources and sophistication to represent her wonderful experience that she wanted to record on paper to keep the memory alive or to share it with others.

(Transcript)

**Story**

One morning I poke my head out of the window. It was full of grass, flowers and birds. When I try to pick up the flower, it did slip. It feels like touching a piece of cloud.

Figure 10: Elaine’s descriptive story of what she saw outside the window one morning

5.3.2 Journals

All four children wrote *journals* that constituted 27.78 percent of the total number of home-based texts, as seen in Table 8. This genre had the largest number of writing samples and was the only one that all the four children wrote in. However, there was much diversity among the children in terms of frequency when compared with the school journals. The number of pieces ranged from eight (John) to one (William). In between, Elaine wrote four pieces and Katie two. While the school journals included both
descriptions and chronologies, the children unanimously showed a distinct preference for chronologies when writing journals at home. They were all chronological experiential writing about time-sequenced actions or events related to real life experiences in different social contexts, such as visiting a garage, watching a show, or playing games. The primary functions of these home journals were referring to experience and reasoning, and secondary functions were expressing, anticipating, informing, and representing oral language. At home, the children wrote more widely about their experiences in the family or out-of-school daily life and activities. They were unlike the journals they wrote for the teacher in school with assigned topics, but were similar to the free-writing chronological ones, as shown by comparing William’s experiential school journal (Figure 8) with one written by John at home given below (Transcript 5). As in the school context when there was no restriction on the topic or content, the children used writing freely as a tool for recording and sharing significant experiences, events, and knowledge with others. In this home journal, John narrated a multitude of events distilled from a day’s work and expressed his different responses to them, with feelings fluctuating among happy, so-so, and experiencing the worst day ever in his life.

Today was a so-so day because my other friend kick me on the tummy and it hurt a lot. The happy thing was my mom got me Seven Up to drink and I let my mom drink some of it and she said it was so good. Then I saw small bean that are red and white and blue! Today was the worst day ever in my life and feeling sad. On Sunday it is Mother’s Day and I’m going to do what my mom say to me. The happiest thing is watching TV and enjoy watching so long! The sad day was last week because I lost my toy Patty and then few weeks I just looked somewhere and I found it and liked it.

Transcript 5: John’s experiential journal about a so-so day.

5.3.3 Descriptions of ‘My Favourite Things’

Descriptions of ‘my favourite things’ were descriptions according to the genre classification scheme. They contained factual or emotional descriptions of objects which happened to be things in the real world rather than imaginary. The intention was
to provide information about an object, an entity, a desire or some anticipation. Hence, the major functions were informing, expressing, reasoning, and in fewer cases, anticipating. There were five pieces of them, all written by John who grouped and named them ‘My favourite things’. Comprising 9.26 percent of the total number of home writing samples, they were a collection of descriptions of the things that he liked – his favourite juice, season, animal, month, and food. An example has been presented and discussed in Chapter 4, a piece in which John described his favourite month and justified his choice for it (Figure 2). Engaged in self-initiated writing, the child writer chose to write about a series of things interconnected by a central theme, the things that he liked most. The series was the only instance in the entire corpus. He provided information about the object or situation and described the possible related activities, then expressed what he liked about it, and gave reasons to justify his choice. There were also elaborate coloured pictures accompanying the text in four out of the five pieces in the series. Some of the pictures were used to present the ideas explicitly as those in the text; others were used to recreate an experience or scene, such as one in which the writer returned to his house to play with his friends after his least favoured animal, the cat, had been chased away.

5.3.4 Non-fiction Writing

‘Non-fiction writing’ was a description of real objects and experience. There was only one single piece of such writing, comprising 1.85 percent of the set of home writing samples. It was written by Elaine, the more able girl. The piece was a description of her experience and feelings about reading a book on dinosaurs. As shown in Figure 11, it was a short text made up of two sentences. She named the piece ‘Non-fiction writing’, a term she probably learned in the course of the informational writing project that her class was participating in. The functions were informing and to expressing her feelings. The major intent was to convey information on dinosaurs that she had learned after reading a book on the topic. The other function was to express her opinions on the book, and an implied sense of achievement of having finished reading the whole book in the day. Other than these, there was little personal or social intention for writing the piece that carried a distinctive academic aurora. The informing function was conveyed more by the use of drawings than written language. Probably in an attempt to
share with her readers what she learned in the book, she drew three dinosaurs and labeled them with their Latin names to accompany her writing. These line drawings were large, carefully drawn with bold lines and included some fine details. When asked about her reason for writing the piece, the child writer commented, “I read a dinosaur book and it was cool. Because I like, when I read that book, I came to like dinosaurs.” As for what she liked about the piece, she said, “The dinosaurs. [But] I can’t read any names of the dinosaurs.” She had enjoyed reading the book. Although she could not read their Latin names, she decided to express her joy by writing a piece to describe her experience and to present some of the information she had gained to be recorded and shared with others.

(Transcript)  **Non-fiction writing**

Today I read the whole book of the dinosaur book. It was cool!

Figure 11: Elaine’s non-fiction writing about dinosaurs

5.3.5 Drawings

There were only three drawings, constituting 5.56 percent of the home writing samples. One of them was produced by William, two by Katie, and they were all descriptions involving imaginative content. William drew a colourful picture on a small piece of paper showing a neat little house on an island surrounded by a blue sea. In
front of the house was a lush green lawn with a tall yellow tree, flower beds and shrubs. A caption in a box on the left of the picture says, “This is a picture of a house that live in an island.” And probably in an attempt to emphasize the location of the house, he drew a huge out-of-proportion octopus on the back of the paper as an extension of the picture. He could not articulate his reason for his choice of genre, content, and writing purpose. All he said was, “I looked at my drawings a long time ago...A paper, it’s there and I can only find this piece of paper.” His idea for the picture was probably derived from some drawings he had seen and liked. The child writer took to drawing the house and writing a caption to explain it in order to satisfy his desire for living near the sea, something a city child or his family might aspire to. The picture was created for the functions of expressing, informing, and enjoying.

Katie’s descriptive drawing was a picture of four faces showing different expressions which she described as ‘mad’, ‘happy’, ‘a bit shy’, and ‘babyish’. They were bold line drawings created with markers in different colours. A caption written in a blue cloud reads “faces with me”. She said that she got her idea for the drawing from the art class she attended on Saturdays in a community centre. The teacher told her to copy faces from a book. After completing that exercise, she drew some faces at home for fun and wrote a caption about them. Her second drawing depicted a dialogue between two cartoon characters. It involved imaginative content taken from popular culture. As seen in Figure 12, it shows the two cartoon characters engaged in conversation. It was a typical picture talk that children incorporated in their texts as they developed as writers (Chapman, 1995). Words or phrases were embedded within a picture to represent speech, translating oral language directly into writing. They were depicted as talk coming out of a person’s mouth in a speech balloon. Katie had enjoyed drawing the piece because she said, “I really like that show.” She really liked her work, saying “It’s so pretty...because they [the characters] are talking like a clown.” The child writer used picture talk to help her describe the characters and their emotions. This would otherwise have involved extensive use of words and abstract descriptions which she might not yet have the available linguistic resources for. The major functions for drawing were expressing, interacting, and enjoying, and a secondary one was representing oral language.
5.3.6 Greeting Cards

Several other genres marked home writing from that of school. For example, *interactions* in which writing was used to communicate with others were not found in the children’s school writing. However, this genre was in abundance in the home writing context. *Interactions* were identified in the form of *greeting cards, notes, and diaries*. *Greeting cards* were found in three of the children’s writing samples. There were six of them, three by William, one by John, and two by Katie, making up 11.11 percent of the home writing samples. They were an integration of drawings, coloured pictures, and messages of different types. For example, Katie wrote a *greeting card* to her younger sister to express her love for her, and another one to a friend who was a cheer leader to show her support. John’s *greeting card* was addressed to some cookies, to express how he liked eating cookies and wished to have some. William wrote two birthday cards to his friends and a Mother’s Day card to his mother. Simple as they were in language and discourse, the greeting cards were all crafted for authentic purposes to represent the authors’ emotions and feelings for others. The major functions were *interacting, expressing* and *representing oral language*, and the supporting function was *reasoning*. 

(Transcript)

**Drawing**

“your more like a clown fish:

“blabber mouth”

Figure 12: Katie’s drawing (picture talk) of cartoon characters
Figure 13 is the single greeting card written by John. While all the greeting cards produced by the other focal children were written for a specific intended reader, John’s was addressed to ‘Dear cookies’. Cookies seemed to be his favourite snack; there was mentioning of the food in five other instances in his school journals and lists. This unconventional greeting card was very unlike what was normally expected of the genre in terms of content and writing purpose. Instead of expressing greetings or extending invitations, John wrote to express his love and appetite for cookies. The major functions were expressing and interacting. It was supported by representing oral language as he spoke directly to the cookies in the second person. The formal and lexico-grammatical features were all there, such as the salutation. It also bore the design features of a greeting card: the front with a coloured picture, and the card opening up to show the message and more pictures. He left out the closure and his signature at the end of the message, though. Instead, he put in a speech bubble “The End” as if he had

Dear cookies, I like to eat cookies. I eat them most of the time and I just looked at the TV. I just see them make cookies. I want to eat them too! But my mom don’t buy cookie much. When you have a cookie, can I have it? I can eat so much cookie that I can just eat a box full of cookies. ‘The End’

Figure 13: John’s greeting card to cookies
forgotten that it was a message that required the notation of the sender as well as the receiver. The genre was selected as a convenient vehicle for conveying his message encoded in a monologue or greeting addressed to cookies. The piece of writing showed the remarkable linguistic and cognitive flexibility of the young child writer picking and blending linguistic resources to fit in with his writing purposes (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004).

5.3.7 Notes

The child writers also wrote in varying detail about their social interactions with family members in different kinds of situations in the form of notes. Notes were found in the two girls’ home writing; Katie wrote one and Elaine wrote three. The four notes made up 7.4 percent of the home-based writing. The two girls had quite different approaches to writing notes. Katie’s note was a message directed at her parents. It was written on the back cover of a writing pad announcing her recent achievement – she was now able to brush her teeth and change her clothes without having her parents “yelling” at her. The piece of writing showed the regularized features of a note, with a distinct salutation and the use of the prepositions ‘To’ and ‘From’ to denote interaction. Notes were an intelligent way to use written words to represent oral language, and to communicate messages that could be more conveniently conveyed in the written mode.

On the other hand, Elaine’s three notes were written for the purpose of ‘noting down’ things in her daily life. As shown in Transcript 6, they were short and simple descriptions of what she did. Though there was no salutation at all to show whom they were for, the texts were written for the purpose of communicating to someone about her daily life experiences and her achievements, such as her baby cousin dirtying her pants, making puppets with another cousin, and selling raffle tickets. She signified the interactive nature of her note by adopting a colloquial tone as if she was talking to the reader, “If you are lucky, you will win a prize!” This was reminiscent of the form used in flyers abundant in the junk mail that the child writer might have seen so often. Writing these notes of her own accord, her intentions were to communicate, to keep records and to make sense of what happened for her, and to share her lived experience with others. Both of the girls’ notes embodied the major function of interacting, and the
secondary functions of *ego enhancing, expressing, informing,* and *representing oral language*.

April 16, 2005
Today I sell 4 raffle tickets. Each ticket cost 1 dollar. I got 4 dollar now. If you are lucky, you will win a prize!

April 17, 2005
Today my cousin and me were making puppets and I made three puppets.

April 22, 2005
Today my cousin poo on his pants, it smell sticky!

Transcript 6: Elaine notes about her daily experiences

5.3.8 Diaries

John wrote the two *diaries* that constituted 3.71 percent of the home writing samples. Each of them began with the salutation ‘Dear Diary,’ a format he might have learned at school or in other contexts. The diaries were basically wish lists in which he expressed his thoughts and desires that he wanted to materialize in the real world. He wrote to communicate his wishes to a fictitious ‘Dear Diary’ and to himself at the same time, consolidating them on paper and giving reasons for them. The major functions were *expressing, interacting,* and *anticipating,* and secondary functions were *reasoning* and *representing oral language*.

Figure 14 shows one of the two diaries that John wrote. He expressed his wishes for more comic books, chapter books, and Spongebob books, books based on a popular cartoon character that he liked watching on television. Other than these desires, there were some less materialistic ones, such as the world becoming warmer so that he could go to his friend’s house more often and play for a longer time. What was even more interesting was the coloured picture he drew at the bottom half of the page. Under a clear sky, a bright sun and blue clouds, he drew a picture of himself against a background of blue saying “Bye” in bubble speech. He was leaving his home, a small dark-coloured house drawn on the left side of the picture, and going to a much larger house with a bright red roof shown on the right. This was an imaginary scene representing himself
waving goodbye to his mom and going to his friend’s house to play, a realization of one of his wishes. The words ‘Day time’ were written in big letters right in the middle of the picture and underlined for emphasis. This was used to signify extended day time as the world became warmer; there was more sunlight that allowed him to play longer in his friend’s house as he desired. The picture served not just to decorate the written product but to illustrate certain parts of the text and to give the reader access to the writer’s inner thoughts and what he could do if his wishes should come true. When asked about his reason for writing the piece, John said, “It is about living beside my friend’s house…I like it because maybe the wish can become true.”

Diary

Dear diary, I hope I can have more Spongebob books! Also I want a comic books. My friend is going to give me Spider man comic book I wanted it so much. I also want a book that is a chapter book. I want to blow bubbles so it can go anywhere to show the world! The most thing I want is to make the world to be warm so that I can go to my friend’s house so we can play together for a long time. Then I go home to eat my dinner.

Figure 14: John’s diary and wish list

5.3.9 Poems

Word plays were genres specific to the children’s home writing. They were found in the form of poems and jokes. They were all written by the two girls. The boys did not show any tendency for literary creation at all. Poems comprised 11.11 percent of the total home writing samples. The girls chose a poetic form to express their feelings about things of nature and play, with descriptions of imaginative objects or real
experiences. For example, Elaine wrote a poem about fantasy events based on a familiar nursery rhyme, substituting some of the words to create a poem of her own. In comparison, Katie’s poems showed more sophisticated formal features of poetry: her pieces came with a title and the sentences were written in separate lines to form a stanza. The two girls demonstrated knowledge of the special features of a poem, and how they could match genre with the topic, content and functions when writing one.

*Representing written language, enjoying, and ego enhancing* were the major functions, and *expressing* and *imagining*, both fantasy and fiction, were the secondary ones.

The following poem (7) was written by Katie, a short but highly creative and original rhyme. In this simple verse, the child writer celebrated the marvel of nature and presented herself as the master of the scene as she drank in its beauty. It has a distinct rhythmic pattern and content focus, much unlike the limericks that some young children write for the pure rhyming sounds of the lines.

Flakes
I’ll eat a flake
I’ll drink at the lake
I am the master
But don’t go too faster.

Transcript 7: Katie’s fantasy poem about snow flakes

5.3.10 Jokes

*Jokes* were another form of *word play* in the home writing samples. There were five of them, all written by Elaine, making up 9.26 percent of the home-based writing. The child writer named them *jokes* but they were actually riddles. She wrote them in dialogue form, one party asking a tricky question and another to answer and guess at the solution. The major writing functions for all these five jokes or riddles were *enjoying* and *ego enhancing*. The person who wrote or gave the riddle possessed some knowledge or trick that the guesser did not have. The child writer struck out an identity for herself as the ‘knower’ destined to enlighten and entertain others at the same time. A secondary function was *informing*, to pass on information that the guesser might not
have thought of before. But when asked the purpose for writing *jokes*, the writer was not able to specify. She said she just wrote them. As for the source of the ideas, some of them were her own creations while others were learned from friends or books she read. She probably also borrowed the design layout for supplying the answer to the riddle from printed riddles. She hid them from immediate sighting by writing them in an inverted position. Figure 15 shows two of her jokes she enjoyed so much in writing.

**Figure 15: Elaine’s jokes (riddles) about a frog and math books**

(Transcript) **Jokes**

What do you say to a one year old frog?  
(‘happy birthday’ written upside down)

What did the math book said to the other math book?  
(‘have any problems?’ written upside down)

5.3.11 Summary of Findings in Home Writing

The children’s home writing displayed different patterns in genre as reflected in the following summary of findings. Ten specific genres were identified in the home writing samples. When engaged in voluntary writing at home, the children wrote in all the four different categories, producing genres in *interactions* and *word plays* as well as *chronologies* and *descriptions*. Besides *stories* and *journals*, the children produced *descriptions of ‘my favourite things’*, *non-fiction writing*, *drawings*, *greeting cards*, *notes*, *diaries*, *poems*, and *jokes*. The *stories* included both *chronologies* and *descriptions* unlike the school stories which were all chronological. The chronological *stories* were either experiential ones or fantasies. As for the descriptive *stories*, there were both realistic and fantasy ones. *Journals*, the most frequent genre in the set, were all experiential *chronologies*. The reasons for the children’s preference for chronological writing in free choice school writing discussed above also applied here. It should also
be noted that fictional writing was not found at all in the home writing samples; the children were more inclined to write about real life experiences or situations, or, on the other extreme, highly imaginative fantasies.

The children’s descriptive writing encompassed a wide range of topics, ranging from favourite objects and situations, an Ethiopian living environment, to scientific content. Some of them were in the form of drawings using both visual and verbal symbols to make meaning. These included representations of favourite cartoon characters, funny faces and a dream house. The children used descriptive writing to convey their aspirations and wishes. They often coupled text with images to make up for the lack of adequate language resources needed for elaborate or abstract descriptions that they cognitively aspired to but were linguistically not yet ready for. Another possible reason might be their aspirations for artistic creation with lines, shapes, and colours to enrich their written artifacts.

*Interactions* and *word plays* distinguished home writing from school writing strikingly. The children produced a variety of text types in these two categories. Embodying an individual voice and personal thoughts, they were much more effective than the *journals* and *stories* that they wrote at home. *Interactions* included *greeting cards, notes,* and *diaries.* Whether they were written explicitly for an intended reader or not, the texts were messages meant to be recorded, communicated to or shared with an audience. *Word plays* were realized in the form of *poems* and *jokes.* Such writing depicted a sociocultural as well as literal use of language to provide fun, entertainment and self-aggrandizement. Writing in the various categories of genres, the children fulfilled a fundamental purpose for writing which “has to do with wanting to appear competent - knowledgeable about the social world conventions of writing, and yet also wanting to say something special, unique, and will be judged valuable by others” (Dyson 1988, p. 246).

5.4 Discussion of findings

5.4.1 Difference in the Variety of Genres between the School and the Home Settings

A major finding of the study was the diversity and richness of multiple genres in the home context. The children’s more variable use of genres in the home writing samples could be related to their functions for writing. In composing out of school, the
children were writing for themselves; they made a writing task their own and invested it with their personal interests, conceptions, and beliefs. The primacy of purpose (Swales, 1990) was just as relevant for these second language children as for college students engaged in written academic discourse. Writing on a self-initiated basis, the children wrote to fulfill a real purpose like what they observed their parents and other adults did, and definitely not to practice writing or the English language (Taylor, 1982).

The social contexts outside the classroom generated a wide range of purposes and motivation for writing. Social purposes were the driving forces that determined writers’ selection of genres when composing (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). The children produced more varied and extended written language than when they were writing in school, such as creating poems from familiar ones and elaborating on their wishes. The findings about the children’s home writing were in line with those reported by Yi (2007) from her study of a biliterate adolescent’s composing practices out of school. Despite the differences in age, ethnic and linguistic background, the focal children in the study exhibited similar patterns in their writing practices at home: they engaged in a variety of composing activities in multiple contexts, with multiple text genres for multiple purposes. Similar to the third-grade children in the study by McGinley and Kamberelis (1993), these second graders wrote for a variety of purposes. They created texts that have personal symbolic or affective significance for them to savor or recall individual experiences or events. The children’s writing functions, genres, and content reflected “their interests, needs and issues most central to their individual sensibilities and life histories” (p. 1).

In the course of writing, the children engaged in a process of self-representation and self-discovery. Writing out-of-school, they examined their home and social lives across the many contexts that constituted their mental world. They wanted to express their interest in the other participants in the community, a desire to be part of the social structure, and to be accepted and admired by others (Dyson, 1988. 1989). They wrote to affirm social relationships with their family members and friends, explore their power relationships with them, and adopt certain power positions within particular social formations (Dyson, 1989). For instance, with the use of notes, greeting cards, and diaries, they liaised with an intended audience to express their feelings and concerns,
while choosing an appropriate genre to match their purpose for writing and framing their ideas within the specific discourse pattern. Their diaries, drawings, and descriptions of favourite things were self-revelations of their perceptions of what they were and a particular identity that they would like to assume. In their non-fiction writing, poems and jokes, the child writers displayed their knowledge, capabilities, and sophisticated textual engagement in particular areas, to frame an authorial self as an owner of information and creativeness. Their stories were creations of imaginary situations (Vygotsky, 1978). And imaginary as they were, they were derived from real life situations; the children infused their intentions, fears and desires in their stories, an attempt to transcend situational constraints through the use of language. Their journals were all experiential writing providing snapshots of lived experiences that had particular meaning for them. They reflected the children’s awareness of social power positions, the meanings of social actions and the consequences of such. As inferred from the children’s comments on the texts they produced, they made conscious and willful choice of language and genre in their writing (Dyson, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). They decided on what to write and how to write with regard to purpose, function, genre, content, and the use of verbal and visual symbols. Through writing, they strove to rise above the constraints of daily life, to foster a sense of belonging in their social world among their cultural as well as the mainstream community. To achieve such goals, the children had spent a lot of their “intellectual and social energy trying to figure out how to position themselves among others in the world” (Dyson, 1997, p. 12).

5.4.2 Genres and Social Contexts

The written texts reflected the impact of literacy activities in the children’s daily life in and beyond school. As they searched for a sense of self, the children listened to and appropriated the voices of adults around them, their functions for writing, and the linguistic resources and conventions they used for achieving them. They observed and appropriated their parents’ use of written language, Chinese or English, for different daily personal and social purposes: for memory aid, management of daily routines, establishing and maintaining social relationships, and recreation. Being junior members of the family, they did not participate in translations for their parents or family writing activities.
that involved literacy as reported in related previous studies (e.g., Moll & Diaz, 1987). Rather, they wrote for themselves, for personal, social, and recreational purposes.

The children’s writing also served “mimetic” functions as reported in literature on related research (e.g., Heath, 1983; Hudson, 1986). According to McGinley and Kamberelis (1993), mimetic writing involves “modeling the voices, styles, and genre characteristics of other writers” (p. 5), or published authors that they admired or respected. These researchers likened such appropriation to a child putting on her mother’s clothing and approximating her speech style. Such modeling should not be seen as passive imitation or copying from models, but rather as active processes initiated by the children involving discursive experimentation. From a sociocultural perspective, the genres the children wrote in were related to those embedded in their literacy environment. The genres in their home writing samples should be identifiable in their classroom writing, but for some reasons they were not. They might have been constructed by themselves or appropriated from stories, fairy tales and other print media that they read in school or at home. The issue of intertextuality is outside the scope of the present study, but it should be noted that the children showed resourcefulness and creativity in their construction and appropriation of genres from academic discourse, pleasure reading, and popular culture. Elaine’s non-fiction writing was reflective of how a child writer adopted design features, layout, and use of images from the informational books that she read in class or at home. The other genres in the home writing samples that were not found in their school writing could well be an interaction of their home literacy practices and multimedia in either setting. For instance, the diary could not be found in the children’s school-based writing during or prior to the data collection period. The child writer, John, was not able to explain the source or the rationale for the choice of the particular genre. A possible explanation was that he observed his parents writing a diary, or even more likely, he could have encountered it in his reading. What was impressive was not just the genre and the formal features that he appropriated but also the functions a diary is usually employed by writers more capable and sophisticated than a second grader. This phenomenon has been reported by children literacy scholars, for example, Duff (2002a), and Smith and Hiles (2006) who contend
that children develop their genre sense by borrowing their conceptions of genre from texts and other media.

5.4.3 Children’s Genre Knowledge

Social contexts provide not only purposes for writing but also input and practice with writing conventions. Children develop their genre awareness early on before they start school (Donovan, 2001). Literacy instruction in school imbues them with knowledge and understandings of written genres. This could also be internalized from their reading and writing experiences (Vygotsky, 1978), and appropriated from their discourse community. Second language children living in western communities have always been surrounded by different kinds of print media in their home in both English and Chinese (Chang, 1998). They construct their genre knowledge from the English language texts they encounter in their social worlds, and their writing is a response to their literacy environment (Chapman, 1995).

Such development of genre was observed in the focal children as reflected in their text production. Their emergent knowledge of genre was displayed in three aspects. Firstly, they possessed a certain repertoire of genres which they acquired in their school literacy instruction and home literacy experiences and activities as shown in their self-initiated writing. Although they were second language children, their writing showed that they had considerable implicit knowledge of the different kinds of genres as they traversed from one to another for individual expression and social communication.

Secondly, the children showed awareness of the use of specific genres for particular social contexts and writing purposes. They had categorized and labeled the genres of their home writing samples appropriately, demonstrating their capability in matching textual form with purpose, context, and content, such as writing a note to communicate information. Thirdly, they had knowledge and understandings of the syntactic and textual features and design layouts in genre conventions, for instance, the denotation in a note to indicate the sender and the receiver of the message. The genre elements of, for example, a greeting card, were well incorporated: the salutation, the greeting, and a pictorial component to convey or supplement the message. The child writers also showed awareness of how to match lexico-grammatical features with the particular genre, such as the use of present tense verbs to describe feelings and relationships.
The children had at their disposal a repertoire of text types for meeting various writing demands. But their practice of genre was different between the school and the home settings. When writing out-of-school, they used it as linguistic and cultural resources; genres were specific textual forms for making literacy responses to social contexts. Armed with such awareness and understanding, they moved smoothly and freely among multiple genres as they composed at home. Had the children not been feeling competent and comfortable with the use and features of different types of writing, they would not have invested so much time and energy engaging in the many different genres. They were familiar with genres commonly found in the school discourse, such as stories and journals. But they also ventured to try out new genres outside school, or even invented new ones. Their creativeness was an indication of their abiding interest in composing. They showed diversity and intricacy in their composing practices that were quite different when they were writing on assignments in the school context.

Where the choice of function, form, context, and sometimes even content, had been made for them, their writing was less inclusive in genre and topic. They followed instructions and wrote in accordance with the conventions of particular genres, such as fantasy stories and descriptive journals. However, the child writers were not constructing meaning with their own writing intentions and materials through genres in the way that form follows function (Halliday, 1978).

Although prescriptive in limiting the children’s production of genres, the school writing curriculum had a definite role to play in achieving specific educational goals. Programmed to facilitate students’ literacy development and learning of subject content, the writing tasks in the classroom manifested institutionalized programme planning by the language arts department in the school, and systematic preparation and implementation on the part of the teacher. The writing activities were structured around thematic projects or units, providing a series of related writing practices for the students spanning across different genres. For example, as part of the class study unit on insects, the children wrote an imaginary fantasy story in which they imagined themselves being shrunk to the size of an ant. A related writing task was a descriptive journal titled ‘If I were an insect.’ The children had to choose a particular insect, describe it and justify the choice. This was followed by a related task in which the children described the most
amazing bug they had ever seen. Though the texts were imaginary, the children had to make use of the factual knowledge they had learned about the names and features of the different body parts of an insect. Another instance was the class project on social issues in the community. The children wrote a story on an encounter with the poor or homeless people in the community. Then they drew up a list of the wonderful things about their community and ways they thought would make it even better. There was both factual and evaluative writing. The tasks provided not only the practice of language and writing skills but also the consolidation of knowledge, and exercise of critical thinking skills and reflection, intertwining academic learning with realistic daily life events and imagination. Home writing, produced on a self-initiated basis with free choice of genre and topic, was not able to bring about such structured and comprehensive literacy learning without the teacher’s scaffolding. While school writing merited in being systematic, home writing excelled in authenticity, personalized and inclusive by embracing a wider spectrum of social contexts and writing purposes.

5.4.4 Conclusions

A comparison of genres between the two settings bore witness to the children’s diverse composing activities at home as found in Yi’s (2007) study; they engaged in a large amount of writing that was “comprehensive and inclusive in nature” (p. 30). In their school-based writing, there was greater variation within each of the genres than in the home-based texts, for example, chronologies included fantasy, fictional, and experiential writing, and descriptions encompassed both fantasy and realistic content. However, in their self-initiated writing, the children composed in a greater variety of genre categories that indicated more extensive ways of interpreting and representing their personal and social worlds. They produced chronologies and descriptions of their personal experiences and imaginations, interactions to explore their social positions, and word plays to play with words and ideas. Moreover, there was a seriousness of purpose attached to their writing outside of school. They invested more time and effort as shown in the greater number and variety of functions enacted that reflected their interests, needs, and issues that were central to them as individuals. They enriched their work with use of images and language to represent speech, showing sustained creativity and dexterity in their social dialogue with texts. Compared with the first-grade children in Chapman’s
(1995) study, these second graders showed more sophistication in their use of genres for achieving particular communicative functions. They demonstrated a wider range of basic and immediate forms of social relationships, such as *notes* and *greeting cards* for interactions other than narratives, as they approximated mature genre forms in their social dialogue with texts both in school and at home. These findings are encouraging, since acquiring genre knowledge is an important educational goal that will empower children for adult life in academic and professional contexts (Hyland, 2003). The data analyses have shown how these second language children demonstrated their developing awareness of genre elements, organizational structures as well as the functions of writing. Each child writer incorporated and constructed his or her notions of what writing was about from literacy experiences, a topic to be dealt with in the following chapter.
Chapter 6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (3): FUNCTIONS OF GENRES IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME

This chapter presents findings and discussions on the second phase of the functional analysis that focused on the distribution of specific functions within particular genres in school and at home. In answer to Research Question 3 on how children constructed meaning with writing functions and genres, the following analyses were made. First of all, frequency counts of the functions enacted in particular genres in the two sets of writing samples as a group and at an individual level are calculated. The figures are then compared to show the overall as well as individual variation in the children’s enactment of functions in relation to genres between school writing and home writing. Secondly, the relationships between categories of writing functions, personal, social, recreational, and learning, and specific genres or genre groups, such as stories, journals, and interactions are analyzed and compared across the settings. The percentage of the various categories of functions show how certain categories of functions are more frequent than others in particular genres, and how this differ for the same genre between one setting and another. Thirdly, individual profiles of the case study children are set up to illustrate their choice of genres and the unique ways in which they enacted multiple functions to serve interrelated writing goals in the two settings.

6.1 Functions of genres in school writing and home writing

It has been pointed out in Chapter 4 that the children in general enacted more functions in their home writing than in their school writing, a home mean of 2.91 versus a school mean of 2.16 (Table 3). A comparison of the enactment of functions in specific genres in the two settings will provide insights into how the individual children evoked functions when engaged in different types of writing in different contexts.

6.1.1 Frequency of Functions of Individual Genres in School Writing

There was not much diversity in the frequency of functions in individual genres in the school setting. As seen in Table 9, journals carried the greatest number of functions with an average of 2.29 functions per text. They were followed by stories (2.07), and
Table 9: Frequency of functions of individual genres in school writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School mean: 2.16</th>
<th>Journal (2.29)</th>
<th>Story (2.07)</th>
<th>List (2)</th>
<th>Total no. of text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>[35]</td>
<td>[15]</td>
<td>[17]</td>
<td>[67]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( ) Overall average number of functions
{ } Personal average number of functions across all genres
[ ] Number of texts

then lists (2), where the mean of functions for school writing in general was 2.16 (Table 3, Chapter 4). The journal was not only the most frequent genre in both settings (Table 5 and Table 6, Chapter 5) but also the genre with the highest frequency of functions in school writing. The focal children wrote more or less the same number of texts in each of the three genres, but there was more individual variation in the frequency of functions for stories than for the other two genres; the frequency counts ranged from 1.75 for John to 2.67 for William, showing a difference of 0.92 functions. The diversity was smallest for lists, a difference of only 0.45 functions between the highest frequency (2.2) and the lowest one (1.75). It should be noted that, being regulated by instructions and requirements for the writing tasks, the lengths of the texts produced by the individual children did not show much difference except for John who wrote longer texts than the other children in general. It seems that the amount of control rather than the length of texts was more pivotal in the diversity of functions.

The number of functions enacted by the individual children did not particularly relate to their writing ability. Of the four participants, Elaine and John were considered high in terms of writing abilities while Katie and William were average, according to their classroom teacher. With reference to Table 9, Elaine, the high ability girl, did not enact functions more frequently in any of the three types of writing than Katie who was deemed only average in writing performance. In fact, when writing journals, Katie incorporated more functions than Elaine for each piece of entry, 2.11 versus 1.88. As for the boys, John evoked more functions than the girls in journals and the most functions amongst all in lists. William in general wrote in smaller quantity and fairly shorter texts
than John, the most prolific writer among the four. But he had a much higher personal average number of functions than the other three children for stories (2.67) and journals (2.56). The same situation was found in the personal average number of frequencies across all the three genres: the ranking was deviant from the teacher’s assessment of the children’s individual writing ability. As shown in Table 9, William ranked first (2.44) and John came next (2.22), with Karen the third (2.06), and Elaine the last (1.93).

6.1.2 Frequency of Functions of Individual Genres in Home Writing

While considerable uniformity was found in the children’s school writing in the variety of genres and the number of pieces produced in each (Table 9), the pattern was quite different in the home setting. As shown in Table 10, the range of genres and the number of pieces in each of them varied significantly among the four focal children. Diaries scored the highest frequency of functions, with 5.0 functions on average. This was followed by descriptions of ‘my favourite things’, greeting cards, notes, poems, and jokes all of which had frequency counts higher than the mean of functions for home writing, namely, 2.91 (Table 3, Chapter 4). The genres with frequency counts lower than the mean of home writing were drawings, journals, stories, and non-fiction writing. There was also considerable individual variation in the children’s enactment of functions in journals, the only genre that all of them wrote in. Interestingly, journals had the greatest individual variation among all the home genres, ranging from 5.0 functions for William to 2.5 for all the other children. The smallest diversity was found in stories, where both Elaine and John enacted 2.0 functions in each of their stories on average. In terms of personal averages across all genres in home-based writing, William again took the lead as in the school setting, averaging 3.4 functions per piece of writing. Katie (3.1) came second, with John (3.0) and Elaine (2.58) in tow. The only difference between the two settings was John and Katie switching for the second and third position in the home setting. William remained first and Elaine last in both settings. But it should be noted that the Karen and John’s personal average number across all genres differed by only 0.1 functions in the home setting which was minimal.
Table 10: Frequency of functions of individual genres in home writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home mean: 2.91</th>
<th>Diary (5)</th>
<th>‘My favourite things’ (3.4)</th>
<th>Greeting card (3.33)</th>
<th>Note (3.25)</th>
<th>Poem (3)</th>
<th>Joke (3)</th>
<th>Drawing (2.67)</th>
<th>Journal (2.67)</th>
<th>Story (2)</th>
<th>Non-fiction writing (2)</th>
<th>Total no. of text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

( ) Overall average number of functions
{ } Personal average number of functions across all genres
[ ] Number of texts

E: Elaine
K: Katie
J: John
W: William
6.1.3 Differences in the Frequency of Functions of Individual Genres between School and Home Writing

The children in general enacted more functions in their home writing than in their school writing, a home mean of 2.91 versus a school mean of 2.16 (Table 3, Chapter 4). Likewise on a personal basis, the average number of functions across all genres in home writing for each of the four children consistently exceeded the school equivalents. For example, by comparing the figures in Table 9 and Table 10, it can be seen that Elaine’s personal average in the school setting for all genres was 1.93 functions where her home equivalent was 2.58.

The difference in the frequency of functions enacted between the two settings could best be illustrated by comparing the overall and personal average number of functions in genres that were common to both settings, namely, journals and stories. With reference to Table 9, the overall average number of functions in school journals was 2.29, but for the home setting, it was 2.67 as seen in Table 10. The figures indicate that more functions were enacted on average in home-based journals than in school-based journals. And this was consistently the same for all four children on an individual basis, as seen by comparing figures from Table 10 (home setting) with those from Table 9 (school setting) for journals: 2.5 versus 1.88 for Elaine, 2.5 versus 2.11 for Katie, 2.5 versus 2.44 for John, and 5.0 versus 2.56 for William. However, when it came to writing stories at home, the children evoked fewer functions than they did in school in general. The overall average number of 2.0 functions for home stories was below the school equivalent of 2.07.

6.1.4 Categories of Functions of Genres in School Writing and Home Writing

In the analysis of the distribution of writing functions among the various genres, certain relationships could be found between the categories of functions and specific genres or types of genres in both the school and the home setting. For such analysis, certain genres in the home setting were grouped together just as in the analysis of their frequency and distribution in Chapter 5. For example, descriptions of my favourite things, non-fiction writing, and drawings were grouped together as descriptions. The same applied to interactions and word plays.
Table 11 shows the percentages of the different categories of functions identified in the children’s writing samples in the two settings within specific genres or genre groups. The function categories were personal, social, recreational, and learning as analyzed in Chapter 4 (Table 4). It can be seen from Table 11 that specific genres were more closely associated with particular categories of functions than with others. School-based stories carried more recreational than social and personal functions because of the imaginary nature of the content. The recreational functions assumed 38.72 percent of the total instances of functions in school stories. In contrast, the functions in the home-based stories were dominantly personal in nature; personal functions made up more than half of the functions (57.14 percent). Journals in both settings were marked by the prevalence of personal functions, 61.25 percent for the school setting, and 80 percent for the home. Social functions ranked second for both sets of journals; they assumed 35 percent in the school setting and 20 percent in the home setting. As for lists, social functions were more frequent than the other categories, making up 35.3 percent of the total instances of functions coded in the genre. Their relatively high frequency was probably due to the informational nature of some of the worksheet exercises. Ranking second in lists were recreational functions and learning functions both of which took up 23.53 percent of the total instances of functions coded. The high percentage of recreational functions in lists could be ascribed to the fictional content of some of the writing practice. Personal functions came last in lists assuming only 17.64 percent of the total. The percentage of the learning function for lists was the highest among the three school genres; it was 23.53 percent as opposed to 12.9 percent for stories and 2.5 percent for journals.

For home-specific genres, the functions in descriptions were divided between personal and social functions, the former taking up 59.26 percent while the latter 40.74 percent. The functions in interactions were also shared between social and personal ones. In this genre group, the social functions were overwhelmingly dominant; they comprised 60.47 percent of the total instances of functions coded in the interactive genres. Personal functions (39.53 percent) made up the rest of the functions. As for word plays, personal functions were pervasive; they assumed 63.64 percent of the total. The rest
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>19.35</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>61.25</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17.64</td>
<td>59.26</td>
<td>39.53</td>
<td>63.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>29.03</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>60.47</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-creational Learning</td>
<td>38.72</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[ ]: number of texts in the particular genre or type of genres
were recreational functions and social functions, assuming 21.21 percent and 15.15 percent respectively.

6.1.5 Summary of Findings

The descriptive statistical analysis of the frequency of functions in specific genres shows differential enactment of functions in relation to genres in both settings. In the school context, journals had the greatest average number of functions among the three genres, followed by stories, and then lists. Within the ten genres identified in the home setting, some of them carried more functions than the others. Two characteristics were found in these genres: they were specific to the home setting and were either interactive or expressive in nature, or even both in certain cases. Home-based journals and stories were among those with the lowest frequency counts that fell below the mean of functions for home writing in general. With regard to genres common to both settings, namely, stories and journals, the children enacted more functions when writing stories in school than at home in general. But it was the other way round for journals which carried more functions in the home setting than in school for all the children alike, although its ranking was low among the other home genres.

On a personal basis, there was more individual variation among the four children in the frequency of functions they enacted in specific genres in the home setting than in school. The personal average number of functions across all genres in the home-based texts was greater than the school equivalent for each of the four children. With regard to individual ranking in their enactment of functions across all genres, the order was almost the same for both settings. The average ability boy enacted the most functions on average and the high ability girl the least.

The analysis of specific functions in genres shows differential association of particular categories of functions with specific genres or types of genres in both settings. Journals, home-based stories, descriptions, and word-plays evoked more personal functions than social and recreational ones. Interactions were noted for the high percentage of social functions in them. About a third of the functions in lists were social functions, followed by learning and recreational ones. School-based stories were more closely associated with recreational functions than with other categories. Personal functions had the greatest percentage in the home-based journals, followed by
word plays, school-based *journals, descriptions*, and home-based *stories*. *Social* functions were most dominant in *interactions*, then *descriptions, lists* and school-based *journals*. The proportion of *recreational* functions was highest in school-based *stories*, followed by home-based *stories, lists* and *word plays*. The *learning* function was more prominent in *lists* than *stories or journals* in the school setting.

6.1.6 Discussion of Findings

6.1.6.1 Relationships between functions and genres

The findings suggest that the frequency and the category of functions in a piece of writing were related to the particular genre of a text, the nature of the genre, the amount of freedom the child writer had when composing, and the amount of appeal the genre might have to a given writer. In the present study, some genres seemed more disposed for conveying a greater number of functions than others, for example, a *note* as compared with a *story*. And some genres were more likely to evoke certain categories of functions than others, for instance, *social* as opposed to *recreational* functions in *interactions*.

The finding that the highest ranking school genre in terms of functions was the *journal* was not at all surprising. Being personal entries of daily experiences and activities, the genre provided a ready and open communication vehicle for realizing a wide range of writing functions. A more contributing factor might be the relative amount of freedom the children enjoyed in writing some of the *journals* even as school assignments. There being less restriction on the language and discourse than the other school-based genres, the writer could freely use the journal to achieve any perceivable writing purpose. It was a site for expression of feelings and emotions, reflections as well as recording of activities and events. This was revealed by the high frequency of *personal* and *social* functions in them.

In the home setting, *journals* were also very closely associated with *personal* functions which assumed a large majority of the functions embodied in them. However, in terms of the frequency of functions as compared with the other home-based genres, the *journals* did not evoke as many or as wide a variety of writing functions as might be expected. No *recreational* functions were included. All the four focal children chose to write *journals* in their self-initiated writing. Their familiarity with the writing
purposes and structural features of the genre, in addition to its openness and versatility, should have accorded it a greater number of functions than other genres in the home as well as in the school writing context. The present situation might be explained by two reasons. Firstly, the children wrote a lot of journals as school assignments and, as a result, had habitually associated the genre with a specific selection of functions. The children’s view of journals for realising personal and social writing purposes was thus somewhat restricted. In fact, both sets of journals manifested more or less the same group of personal functions, namely, expressing, referring to experience, and reasoning. Secondly, the children, when given the freedom to write in any genre as they saw appropriate to their writing intentions, would want to venture to other less ‘explored’ territories, that is, genres that they did not often practise writing in school. They tried their hand at these ‘new’ text forms, together with their social and cultural underpinnings, to make sense of and give expression to the lived experiences of their choice.

School-based stories seemed more restricted in their conveyance of functions than journals in terms of frequency and capacity for personal expression. Story writing assumed a dominant role in the writing classroom; creating stories seemed a major activity to achieve pre-determined learning goals, such as imaginary writing. Most of the stories produced by all the four children were written to prompts assigned by the teacher. Writing with prescribed topics and following the teacher’s instructional agenda, the children seemed left with relatively little room or motivation to evoke functions in personal ways when creating stories. Moreover, they were all fantasies that might have been too culturally distant from the children’s lived experiences as discussed in Chapter 4. They had not much appeal to them as a tool for personal expression and making sense of their world. This explains the dominance of recreational over social or personal functions in them. Even for stories created on a free choice writing basis, the functions were limited to imagining-fiction and representing oral language. The narratives tended to follow a certain pattern in accordance with the story grammar the children were often exposed to in school or at home.

The low frequency of functions in home-based stories was also quite unexpected. One possible explanation for this might be that for these children, stories seemed closely aligned with classroom learning where story writing seemed dominated by imaginary
chronologies, fantasy or fiction. When writing on their own at home, they significantly used them for personal expression, as illustrated by the dominance of personal functions in them. However, the small number of home-based stories produced and their relatively low frequency of functions suggest that in voluntary writing the children did not seem to care much about writing stories that they had written in abundance in the language arts programme. The explanations for the low score of functions for home journals could be applied to this genre. Stories and journals were hence less appealing to the children when writing on a self-initiated basis. They did not accord them that much capacity for expression. Neither did they work on them with as much rigor as they did with the other genres that they seldom had the chance of working on in school. When physically and emotionally away from an instructional setting, they seized upon the opportunity to try out different types of writing as they manoeuvred the world of composing on their own.

The frequency and category of functions in particular context specific genres were significant. The lists used for classroom writing practice carried the least number of functions on average; these were mostly recreational in nature and the learning function was also prominent. In the home setting, certain genres stood out from the rest and carried more functions than the others. As pointed out previously, those genres with high frequencies of functions bore two common features: they were specific to the home setting, and they were interactive or expressive in nature, and in some cases both. This finding could be explained by the relationship between the nature of the specific genres and the range and characteristics of the functions they carried. The interactions were predominantly associated with social functions while descriptions and word plays were heavily imbued with personal functions for expression and enjoyment. For example, greeting cards and notes (interactions) were used for conveying greetings and messages in social discourse; they carried interpersonal as well as ideational meaning to affirm or transform relationships with an intended audience. The descriptions of ‘my favourite things’ (descriptions) were highly expressive of the writer’s opinions, feelings, and aspirations. As for poems (word plays), they were literary forms designed for expression of emotions and feelings. The jokes were actually riddles in disguise, and were written to entertain self and others.
Besides home-based *journals* and *stories*, certain descriptive genres in the home setting were low in frequency of functions. For *non-fiction writing*, there was only one sample and it was a straightforward piece imparting information and expressing opinions. The child writer might have aligned the type of writing with functions that were informational and academic in nature and no others. *Drawings* was also among the lowest ranking genre in the home setting. While all four children included drawings and pictures in their texts to varying degrees, only the average ability boy and girl included drawings as a genre by itself in their writing samples. Kindergarteners and first graders in general showed a general disposition to drawing pictures to provide a context for their writing, to communicate ideas, and to support the flow of ideas in their early exploration of the use of written language (Bissex, 1980; DuCharme, 1991; Dyson, 1983, 1988). Vygotsky (1978) argues that using drawing and writing with make-believe play could be perceived as different points in the process of language development. While young children look at both writing and drawing as direct semiotic systems in which meaning is embedded, older ones would gradually move towards the use of text for realizing meaning. The group of second graders in the present study could well be in a transitional stage where they learned to compose using print as the major medium and visuals for a supporting role.

### 6.1.6.2 Relationships between the frequency of functions and writing ability

Another significant finding from the descriptive analysis is that a child writer’s enactment of functions for serving personal and social purposes might not be directly related to his or her writing ability as assessed by classroom writing performance. The ranking of the individual children in their enactment of functions across the genres in both settings gave evidence of this. Academic and language ability might not play so much a role as other factors in the enactment of functions for these second language children.

Many issues are involved in the making of meaning using written language. For a developing writer and a second language learner, the symbolising systems of the language have first to be dealt with - the use of graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues to represent meaning. But according to Halliday (1978), how language makes meaning within these systems at a given time is further determined by the social
context. This in turn contains three variables – the *field*, the *tenor*, and the *mode* of the writing activity. Every act of writing carries an *ideational* purpose to convey a message, and an *interpersonal* purpose to define or negotiate relationships between the writer and the reader(s). But what purposes are generated depends on the determinants of language use and development: *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*.

When applied to the present study, the concepts of *field*, *tenor*, and *mode* highlight the differences between the school and the home setting. In school, the *field* of writing is defined by the instructional setting and the ongoing learning activities in the classroom; these set the thematic, linguistic and social content and the directions of writing activities. At home, the situation is different in that the writing act is embedded in the social and cultural discourse of the family and that of the community that often cast their influence on the home. This affects the activities of the writer and the choice of subject-matter for writing in the setting. The structure of the *tenor* at school is composed of teachers, other children, and non-teaching staff members. At home, there is *tenor* between the writer and the members of the family that include parents, siblings, grand-parents, pets, and friends and community members as well. The emotional ties with others as well as the social structure of the *tenor* are different. The *mode* of symbolic interaction at school is usually governed by the nature and the type of writing activities assigned, including the choice of writing materials and surfaces in terms of size and shape. It also pertains to the semiotic systems to be employed, although the use of linguistic text, images, and design features may be less prescriptive than other aspects of writing, such as topic and genre. As compared with the classroom, the home as a social context often allows more freedom and personal space for children to experiment with different *modes* of presentation in terms of variety and combination.

The categories of *field*, *tenor*, and *mode* collectively serve to predict text (Halliday, 1978). As they determine the writer’s purposes of the writing act, they also act upon the functions to be fulfilled to achieve the purposes. The enactment of functions, in terms of frequency, variety, and appropriateness, is hence reflective of a child writer’s social responses to the *field* in a writing act, the structure of the *tenor* that he/she wants to negotiate or confirm, and the availability or freedom in the choice of *mode* to represent meaning. In the present study, these factors seemed more influential

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than a child writer’s language proficiency or general writing ability as assessed by the
teacher based on a less than comprehensive impression of their writing performance
manifested in instruction-oriented writing.

6.1.6.3 The writer’s agenda in school and at home

The findings about the frequency of functions, and in particular the categories of
functions in specific genres, point to the fact that the enactment of functions in writing is
a nexus of the issues that a writer is focusing on at the moment, and his/her understanding
of the uses of written language for serving personal and social goals within a particular
setting. Based on such understanding, the child writers made decisions regarding the
issues, paying greater attention to those that were most ‘urgent’ or important for them to
address their writer’s agenda (Meyer, 1992). In the course of this, they employed
available resources to enrich their writing, solve problems and remove issues of urgency.
For child writers, such resources were generally derived from daily life experiences and
learning. Meyer (1992) relates the agenda of a developing writer to his/her experiences
in the following way:

A developing writer’s agenda is grounded within and across the settings in which she
lives. The agenda spans all setting and grows and changes as a function of the settings
and the writer’s developing understanding of the uses of written language within the
settings. A writer’s agenda is then transactional (Rosenblatt, 1978), and exists within
the social web of her experiences. A writer might address her agenda within, because of,
or in spite of the different settings in which she finds herself. (p. 8)

This perspective brings the understanding of the child writer to another level, the
embedding of a writer’s agenda in his/her web of daily life experiences, personal, social
and cultural, in all settings. But according to Meyer (1992), the notion of a writer’s
agenda is based on the writer engaging in authentic writing activities. It has to originate
from the writer him/herself rather than imposed by an external authority, such as a school
writing curriculum. When engaged in classroom or teacher-assigned writing, students
might well have to set aside their personal writer’s agenda to succumb to the demands of
more powerful individuals. In choice of theme, they are limited to topics and prompts
suggested or set by the teacher. There is also a lack of a real audience outside the
classroom. The restricted repertoire of genres and functions with which students write
at school is distinctly different from that of the writing they produce at home for a wide
range of purposes (Bisex, 1980). Real discourse for personal, cultural and social
development could be found beyond the classroom. However, even within the school
context itself, the frequency of functions increased with a decreasing amount of control
exercised upon the writing activity. For instance, journals, written with less constraint
in the form of task prompts as found in stories and lists, evoked a greater number of
functions than the other two school genres for all the four children. Moreover, a vast
majority of the functions were personal while most of the rest were social, indicating
how the children employed the genre for personal expression and social communication.

The child writers were free to follow their writer’s agenda when they were writing
on a self-initiated basis at home. To convey a message that assumed urgency or a
particular meaning for them, they approached the act of writing from a personal
perspective with a genuine purpose. Where writing was produced more for
self-fulfillment than to be judged by an audience for whom the text was seldom actually
intended, it seemed to generate more functions when compared with school writing as
suggested by the descriptive analyses. For example, there was a positive relationship
between high frequency counts of social and personal functions and types of genres
normally used for fulfilling interactive functions, such as diaries, notes, greeting cards
and poems. Interestingly, these genres can be aligned with the three general text types
identified by Britton et al. (1975) in a widely cited study on children’s genre development
- the expressive, the transactional, and the poetic. The phenomenon could be explained
by relating the children’s writing development to their home literacy experiences. Their
writer’s agenda would likely be affected by their understanding of the role of written
language conceptualised from home literacy practices and actual experience with writing.
Other contributing factors could be the issues that captured their attention and their
emotional state as they planned and carried out their writing. Whatever the factors
might be, the children embodied a wide range of personal, social and recreational
functions when writing on a voluntary basis. It was a private practice separate from
school writing (Schultz, 2002), one in which they experimented intertwining multiple
functions with multiple genres using an acquired language for a multitude of purposes.
6.2 Constructing meaning with functions and genres in school and at home

After a quantitative analysis of the children’s enactment of writing functions in specific genres, their writing samples were studied qualitatively to examine how they constructed meaning for personal and social purposes writing in a multitude of genres in school and at home. The profiles given below show different composing practices of the individual child writers in relation to functions and genres. For each of the four focal children, the analysis began with their writing practices and their characteristics. These were then illustrated with discussion of selected writing samples, and interpretations of their significance in relation to meaning making for the individual focal child. Finally, connections were made between writing purposes and their realization in the enactment of functions and the choice of genres.

6.2.1 Elaine the Inventor: Writing for Fun

Elaine was rated above average in writing ability by her teacher. Indeed, she was the second most prolific writer in the group after John. She produced 34 pieces of writing in total, 15 in the school context and 19 at home. Despite her high productivity, the texts she wrote in both contexts were usually short and simple in structure as compared with those of the other focal children. Moreover, her personal average number of functions was the lowest among the four focal children in both settings, an unexpected finding in view of the fact that she was a high ability girl in the teacher’s judgment.

Nevertheless, Elaine showed resourcefulness in the functions she embodied in her writing when composing. There was a good spread of functions among the different categories in both her school and home writing. However, the function of imagining, fiction or fantasy, was not found in any of her home writing. Elaine was more of a practical and academic person who chose to express herself based on real experiences rather than imagination when allowed to follow her writer’s agenda. It was thus not surprising that the personal functions of expressing and referring to experience were most prevalent in her writing in both settings. Ego enhancing and enjoying were two other personal functions that distinguished her home writing from that of the others. They were most frequent in her notes, poems and jokes that made up the bulk of her home-based texts. Of all the four children, Elaine seemed to enjoy writing the most. It
not only provided her fun but also heightened her self-esteem, serving a self-fulfillment purpose. She incorporated informing in what she wrote for entertainment, the jokes in her home writing. She enjoyed displaying her knowledge as someone who possessed information to be shared with others. The informing function was also significant in her free writing in the school context, the journals that were written with relatively little control by the teacher.

With regard to genres, Elaine was distinctive in her creativeness and endeavour. In the school setting, she wrote in three genres as did all the children in the group. Her home writing included six different genres, the widest range among the focal children. The genres spanned across all the categories of genres, chronologies, descriptions, interactions, and word plays in which she excelled. She displayed her ingenuity in writing by revisiting a recurring theme across a number of different genres. Winning the raffle ticket sale competition, she wrote about it in one of her school journals, a story and a note in her home writing. She spoke excitedly about her achievement, “I sold the most tickets in the class, in a raffle draw… I was so happy about that, I won a prize, and also that if we sold the most tickets in the whole school, we would win an ice-cream cake.” Writing was a way of celebrating for this child writer.

Disposed to write for self and other entertainment, Elaine wrote poems and jokes. She wrote poems for fun, sometimes rewriting a familiar one and sometimes creating original ones. The poem in Figure 16 shows representing written language in verse form. The major intent was enjoying and expressing. Putting the sentences in separate lines, she presented it as a poem although the lines did not rhyme at all. There was a kind of playfulness around the poem. Fun was derived from the sing-song tune of the numbers 1, 2, and 3 written in a forward and a backward chain alternately. This repetitive pattern was echoed by the description of the action of putting on costumes in the first and the third line. The Jack-o-lantern in the picture that accompanied the poem bore the typical scary facial features. However, the girl who was carrying it showed a big happy face and was actually drawn to the writer’s likeness. The drawing was intended to illustrate the last line of the poem with which she expressed her feelings for the festival where children always played the central role. Writing poetry was a
pleasurable process for her, a way to express what she saw and enjoyed in the world (Schultz, 2002).

Elaine’s jokes were actually riddles in essence. By calling them jokes, she aligned them with the jokes that she had read or heard in or out-of-school, a separate genre by its own right. She created a genre for herself to fit her writing purpose which was having fun with language, and to give more weight to her written artifacts. When asked why she wrote the jokes, she said, “I like jokes. They are funny.” The enjoyment derived from the writing act was satisfying. As put forward by Graves and Stuart (1985), “[t]he source of the sensation may be a minute yet precise detail...It is that moment of simultaneous surprise and recognition that gratifies both writer and readers” (p. 101).

Her notes were another example of how she interpreted genres in an unconventional way. They were not the traditional scripts for communicating messages from one person to an intended audience. Rather, they were notes written to her own self to savour significant experiences and the feelings given rise by them. Such practice showed her audacity as a young writer. It was also illustrative of her awareness and knowledge of genres, their contextual situatedness and social nature. She played around

Figure 16: Elaine’s poem about Halloween

(Transcript)

Halloween

123 we put our costume on.
321 we took off our costume.
123 we put our costume on again.
321 we put our mask on!
123 happy Halloween!
with them, interpreting them in her own way. Her aptitude for creating genres can also be illustrated by her piece of non-fiction writing about dinosaurs, the only one among the two sets of writing samples. Not knowing how to categorize the piece of text-cum-drawing aimed at informing and expressing into a particular genre, the child writer simply invented one for the occasion.

The finding was different from existing literature on children’s development of genres. Dyson (1997), for example, demonstrated from her study of elementary children’s writing that they appropriated genres from their discourse community rather than inventing them themselves; the genres they wrote could be identified in their classroom. In the present study, invention as well as appropriation was observed in this particular child writer. Nevertheless, while it was not certain whether the genre of jokes, as interpreted by Elaine, was among the written discourse embedded in the classroom, the notion of non-fiction writing had definitely been introduced to the class as they worked on their informational writing project. Hence, in a certain way, the genre was derived from the learning discourse, as its nature and content showed. But it had been given a twist to fit in with the writer’s purpose of demonstrating academic knowledge.

Given to creating with a free spirit, Elaine spared no effort to follow her writer’s agenda when engaged in self-initiated writing at home. To illustrate how her school and home writing differed, two writing samples were taken for comparison and contrast. One of them was a school journal, produced as a routine school assignment (Figure 17), and the other was a journal from her voluntary writing (Figure 18). The two samples were selected because they were similar in length, genre and content. Friends and daily life experiences shaped the theme in both journals that were short as typical of Elaine’s writing. The major difference between them was the writing functions evoked in the text. They varied in both nature and quantity.

For the school journal (Figure 17), the writing function was referring to experience, a personal function. The text started with the temporal adverbial “On the weekend” which was also found at the beginning of many school journals written by her and the other focal children. It could well be a prompt suggested by the teacher and one that they always fell back on when starting a journal. The journal was a chronological description of a series of activities she did on the weekend. She played on the computer.
On the weekend I play the computer. My friends came over. We heard some music. It was time for dinner. When we finish, we ride our bike to the park and then, we play. We went to Rupert Park. We went with my uncle.

When her friends came over, they listened to music. Then they had dinner after which they rode their bikes to the park with her uncle and played there. The text was accompanied by line drawings of some gymnastic facilities in the park, two flower beds and what looked like part of a football goal. It was a straightforward text giving a monotone picture of some of her daily experiences. A comment given by her teacher in response to her journal was “Sounds fun”. There was no expression of fun or enjoyment imparted by the writer herself though. However, simple and plain as it was, the recount included activities and people in her family, extended family, friends, and the community. These were part of her social life that she lived in and portrayed in her writing.

The home journal, as shown in Figure 18, was quite different in tone and depth. Unlike the school journal which started with the commonplace ‘on the weekend’, the text began with a topic sentence. ‘Today I went to Chinese school” signifying the theme of the piece. Right after that she commented on her experience, complaining that it was hard. Then she explained why it was so – the students had to do lots and lots of homework there. Next, she talked about her friend, Monica, who wanted her to be her Chinese tutor. This was followed by a dialogue, direct speech in quotation marks between her and Monica in which they negotiated the day of the week on which her help
Journal

Today I went to Chinese school. It is hard there. We have lots and lots of homework. Monica want me to be her Chinese teacher. I said, “Sure.” She said, “I want it every Thursday.” I said, “Sure.” Then she said, “Thank you.” I said, “No problem.”

Figure 18: Elaine’s home journal about Chinese school

was needed. There were several writing functions underlying the short text. She referred to her experience of going to Chinese language school. Then she expressed her opinions on what happened there, and gave reasons to justify her judgment. Finally, perhaps to illustrate how hard it was, she described her friend seeking her help with her Chinese language learning, substantiating the description with oral language represented in written form to give a more real life like sensation of the situation. To accompany the text, the writer drew a stack of thick volumes which she labeled ‘Books’. It could be considered an expression of her disapproval of her experience in the Chinese language school where there were books and work all the time and little else.

Thus, writing in the same genre and using more or less the same number of words, the child writer evoked a different number and different types of functions through the text. The school journal seemed like a stereotyped response to a task prompt writing about what you did on the weekend, a pure chronology of events and activities with little expression of feelings or opinions. It was the field of the writing activity that seemed to have limited the child’s perception of the nature and demand of the task which in turn affected the amount of investment she was ready to make. In her home journal in private writing, she felt at liberty to deal with a subject of a more sensitive and personal
nature; she ventured to describe her experiences at the Chinese language school and reveal her opinions about them. With regard to tenor, the writer would dwell on the relationships with those related to her in the context. The mode was a combination of linguistic text and drawing in both samples. But it was in the home journal that the drawing carried a functional role to add to the force of the text. Thus, for presenting both ideational and interpersonal meaning, the home setting seemed more conducive to purposeful writing and generated more intensive and varied writing functions for expression and communication.

The home setting also provided a more favourable social environment leading to purposeful and invested writing than the classroom for Elaine. As a student in class, Elaine was active and restless, roaming about the room and talking with other students during on-task time. She was highly alert to whatever happened around her and jumped at every opportunity to join in group chit-chat or play. The writing she produced in the school context was never too strong but just met with what was expected of a competent second language learner. Hence, she was rated high in writing ability amongst the Chinese girls with ESL background in the class. Her high productivity in terms of quantity might be another reason. When writing at home, she was more demanding of herself because of her social position among her peers. She was the oldest child in a small group of girls from two families that always got together during the day as well as for social activities. One of the girls was her younger sister. Then there was a cousin and her baby sister. They were her aunt’s children that her mother was babysitting. The children got together for play in their spare time. Elaine, being the oldest and the most knowledgeable member of the small community, was often encouraged to write by her mother in her free time while the younger ones would just play. The parent’s intention was for her to practice English language writing rather than for any sociocultural purposes. Elaine would show her writing to her peers, as a more learned individual, a poet and a ‘joker’ among them. Although they could hardly read it, their admiration and her mother’s approval were worth all the time and effort she invested in the work.
6.2.2 Katie the Weaver: Writing with a Voice

Katie, the average ability girl, did not produce as much writing as Elaine did. She wrote 18 pieces in the school setting and 10 in the home, making a total of 28. However, she was noted for her use of multiple functions in combination in specific genres in her writing. It was not a practice unique to her; most of the writing samples in either setting were written with multiple, interrelated writing functions. Yet the artistry and intensity with which she weaved a tapestry of written words to express herself was very impressive and specific. The identity of Katie as a weaver was derived from the metaphor of the web of experiences in which a writer is situated. According to Meyer (1992), a social web of experiences “extends across all the settings in which the writer lives and grows,… consists of school experiences, home experiences, and experiences in the community,.,, relationships with individuals and the tenors (Halliday, 1978) of those relationships” (p. 3). Children are often caught in the webs of understanding as they develop their language and literacy (Gregory et al., 2004). To engage in writing is to weave webs of meaning, using the written word for linguistic expression in complex ways (Chapman, 1997; Dyson, 1988). Writing as a human activity must be understood in terms of both the individual writer and the context in which the writing occurs (Rogoff, 1990).

In the children’s weaving of multiple functions, a social function often formed the core around which other functions emerged, a pattern found in most of their writing, as shown in one of Katie’s school journals (Figure 19). The teacher set the prompt for the journal – ‘If I were an insect’, a home assignment as part of a class project on insects. The children each chose an insect that they would like to be and described it. While informing was Katie’s major intent of the writing, her secondary ones were reasoning and expressing, a social function integrating with personal ones. Besides providing various kinds of information on butterflies, such as body parts and colour, the writer also gave reasons to justify her choice and expressed her thoughts about the insect. The text was accompanied by a picture of the insect spreading its wings under the sun and two clouds. The heavenly elements of nature were expressing their admiration for the butterfly about its being able to fly. The drawing did not provide any additional academic information but served to strengthen the expressing function in the text.
If I were an insect, I would be a butterfly so I can fly and see the sky. Because I butterfly is my favourite insect so that’s why I like to be a butterfly. I have wings to fly too. And fly just like the other insects. I have antennae too. And all different colours on me.

Figure 19: Katie’s informational journal about her favourite insect

Incorporating functions of quite different nature like informing, reasoning and expressing, the piece of writing illustrated how the writing purposes of expression and transaction (Britton et al., 1975) were served at the same time. The multiplicity of functions shown in Katie’s writing and that of other focal children corroborated findings made by McGinley and Kamberelis (1991) in their study of the reading and writing functions of third and fourth graders. The child writers in the present study selected content from their personal or social experience to match with their writing intentions. Then, they expressed their opinions, attitudes, or emotions about them. Next, they explained to justify their judgments based on reflections on events, and finally drew conclusions. These formed the basis for a particular ‘directional’ purpose for which the piece of writing was created, whether to anticipate, to inform, or to interact with others.

Katie’s intertwining of multiple functions was particularly significant in her home-based writing in which she was able to project a voice of her own. Both in school and at home, Katie was shy and demure. She was a well-behaved student in class, working silently and obediently following the teacher’s instruction. Her class
performance was satisfactory and was hence rated average in writing ability. She was submissive in front of her parents who were always pushing her to work harder in her studies. She behaved in the manner expected of a young junior member of the family as held in traditional Chinese culture, especially one who was not achieving too well. Her restrained demeanor, however, was dropped when she talked with the researcher whom she might align with the school community. While Katie was usually quiet in her ways, she was definitely very interactive in her writing. She spoke to different people she was concerned with in a strong and highly charged voice, as shown in the following example of a note she wrote to her parents in her home-based writing (Figure 20). The piece illustrates how a child writer could direct her writing at a specific and real audience for authentic purposes, and use it as a tool to convey information and feelings for negotiating social relationships and constructing her identity.

As in her school journal, Katie’s note was embedded with a multitude of social and personal functions. Interacting and ego enhancing were the major ones, supported by informing, referring to experience, and representing oral language. In this short note, the little girl greeted her parents good morning, expecting them to read it early in the day as they got up. She used linguistic expression to represent oral language, speaking directly to her parents as if she was interacting with them in person. The

(Transcript)

**Note**

Good morning, mommy and daddy! I already brush my teeth and changed clothes. You don’t have to worry about yelling at me. So I finished everything.

To: mom and dad
From: just Katie

Figure 20: Katie’s note to her parents
central message was informing them that she was being able to look after herself by referring to her experience that morning – brushing her teeth and changing her clothes on her own before her parents told her to do so. She was also expressing her opinion that she was becoming more independent, and that they did not have to worry about yelling at her to do all those things. Finally, she signed her name with “just Katie” giving it a causal flare. The style signified the function of ego enhancing as much as the note itself did. The little girl had composed a message to display her competence and independence, and expressed her pride in them. The way she signed it off was a gesture with which she proudly congratulated herself at having established a reformed identity in the eyes of her parents. She did it with her own efforts, and spoke about it with a clear and ringing voice to declare her capability. When asked why she wrote this piece of writing, she said, “I wrote it in the morning to Mum and Dad, for to be good…I like it because… I wake up early, earlier than my family.” The complacency with which she talked about her accomplishment spoke for her use of written language to make meaning of her activities and reform her identity.

Independent and voluntary writing allowed Katie to “position herself against the grain of accepted forms” (Millard, 2001, p. 12) to signify an authorial self. The format of her writing and its register were unique to her home-based writing. Given free choice of genre, Katie selected the particular form to match her writing purpose - interacting with her parents about a personal achievement which she could be too shy to talk about directly. In this she showed sophistication in her genre awareness, her understanding of the characteristics of specific genres in relation to writing purpose and social context. The choice was based on an attempt to avoid face to face interaction that could be awkward or embarrassing, even in communication between young children and their parents on personal matters in eastern culture. The use of the written word provided the writer an alternative channel of communication in which she could feel more secured or comfortable. The piece was a typical example to illustrate one of the social functions of writing as a semiotic system – to avoid embarrassment involved in oral transmission or in the absence of a receiver (Clark & Ivanić, 1997; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993; Shuman, 1986).
Where writing is the linguistic expression of meanings in written form, Katie mixed and matched various modes of representing meaning, weaving visuals with print and speech in her writing to convey meaning (Dyson, 1983, 1988). She used direct speech in quotation marks occasionally in her school stories, representing oral language with the written word. But more often she used “balloon speech” in her illustrations that accompanied the text. This was most frequent in her journals in both settings. In the pictures, the characters were engaged in dialogues with exchanges represented in speech bubbles. They contained either exclamations or phrases that highlighted the key points in the text, direct speech translated into writing. And as if not trusting that her own voice would show through, she would end the interjections with bold exclamation marks. The visuals were not only used as a supplement and an alternative mode of representation to make up the lack of language proficiency for a young second language writer, they were also illustrative of Katie’s blending of various modalities of communication, adding an element of ‘sound’ to the text (Yi, 2007). The expression of personal feelings with oral language was also observed in her school writing, for example, in one of her journals about a plant that wouldn’t grow. However, it was hardly a voice but a mournful groan directed to herself in an undertone, “What should I do? Maybe it is dying.” It was far from the bold outcry in the note to her parents.

Katie was a weaver not only of writing functions in texts but also of genres. In choosing to write in particular genres for different writing purposes, she created a speaking personality (Maguire & Graves, 2001) of her own as she weaved a web of social relationships with others through writing. She wrote in five different genres at home which included journals, greeting cards, notes, poems, and drawings that were personal and interactive in nature. The choice of people that she wrote to or about had affective significance for her, such as the note to her parents. Her greeting cards were directed to her younger sister and a friend who was a cheerleader to express her feelings for them. In the world of writing, shy Katie was able to own her personal space, finding a position for herself within social formations (Dyson, 1989). She assumed a personal voice to express herself about what happened around her and her feelings for other people through sophisticated textual engagement.
6.2.3 William the Producer of Meaning: Integrating Words with Visuals

While Katie was a weaver creating meaning with words, voice and sound, William was a producer of meanings integrating written language with images and other visual aspects of text. He was the only focal child in the study who employed modes of meaning making and design features made possible or influenced by computer technology, as demonstrated in his home-based writing. His use of graphic representation and exploration of creative writing forms made his work stand out from the rest in their visual perspective.

William also distinguished himself in enacting the greatest number of functions in his writing while producing the least number of texts. He wrote 16 pieces in the school setting and only 5 at home, giving a total of 21 writing samples, a small number when compared with that of the other focal children. Yet each piece of his writing was richly embedded with a good variety of writing functions. Being not very attentive in class, he was rated an average student not yet working to his full capacity. However, he was in fact a serious writer who paid meticulous attention to his composing practices. When he chose to write, he would do it arduously and carefully, showing industry and focus. One striking feature about his writing functions was the use of the written word for representing oral language; this was frequently found in his stories written at school, and journals in both settings. He incorporated direct speech in quotation marks, perhaps to evade elaborate description or abstract conceptualization, and in particular to depict the situation and relationships in perspective, inviting the reader for interpretation. He was devoted to expressing himself, a personal function found across all his genres in both settings and especially frequent in his school journals that incorporated a wide range of functions. This capability might have been overlooked by his teacher who would focus on other aspects in assessing his writing performance, such as the amount and length of the texts produced.

As a child writer, William was selective in his choices of genres for representing meaning. Writing in all the three school genres as set by class instruction, he also wrote in three different genres at home. These included a journal about the family’s visit to Disneyland, three greeting cards, and a piece of drawing. He preferred genres that incorporated a graphic component when writing on a voluntary basis, and was
particularly concerned with the visual aspect of his written products. He wrote in very neat and straight handwriting with good spacing between letters and words. Very skilful and assiduous in the use of punctuation marks, he ‘drew’ them clearly and boldly on the page, such as using a small darkened circle for a period, and a pair of tiny tadpoles for a quotation mark. He was also a great signifier with his use of written language, often signposting his writing direction or intention with markers. In some of his writing in both the school and the home context, he wrote ‘by William’ at the end of the piece, showing his strong sense of authorship. Sometimes he combined visual and verbal signals, for instance, using an arrow and ‘next page’ within brackets for meaning PTO. Bolding his words and exclamation marks was another kind of visual emphasis.

As a producer of meanings, William required the interaction of text and image to convey the full message of his writing (Millard, 2001), as shown in his preference for genres that allow the intimate integration of words, pictures and graphics. His love for visual effects in his writing was demonstrated in his greeting cards which included not only elaborate drawings but also computer printouts of figures and greetings in stylish fonts. Paying attention to minute details, he sometimes included personal information in his writing, for example, showing his name, address, telephone number, the name of his school, and an email address in a neatly drawn box in one of his birthday cards. All these played an important role in establishing an authorial self as an identity.

One of William’s school stories (Transcripts 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d) was given below to illustrate how he incorporated the function of representing oral language with imagining-fantasy. It also showed how he painted verbal pictures with written language that threw the scenes in the story into a three dimensional perspective.

**Transcript 8a**

*(March 31)*

One morning, when I woke up, I discovered that I shrinked into the size of an ant.

“How can I get out of bed when I’m shrink into the size of an ant?” Then I kept on thinking how to get out of bed, then the idea came to my head. My idea was to: to get the pillow and push it to the ground (to be continued)
Transcript 8b

(April 06) Then I pushed my pillow down to the floor. And jumped down to the pillow then I bounced back up to my bed. And then I start thinking again! (April 07) Then I got another idea. The idea was to get five pillows. And then I put five pillows to the floor. Then I put four pillows and then two then one. I made it like a stair. Then I went down to brush my teeth. (April 12) Then I went down to my dining room for breakfast. When I am done my breakfast, I yelled, “Bye, Mom and Dad.” But it was no use. Then my mom and dad said, “Did you hear that?”

Transcript 8c

Then my dad said, “It’s probably just the wind.” And then I pushed the door so hard. Then it finally open. And I went out. Then I went to my class. (April 20) First, I went to put my popsicle stick in the backpack and jacket and then I went to get a piece of paper and wrote: Dear Ms. Baker, I am shrinked to a size of an ant. Can you please make a medium sized name tag for me??!! From: William. Then I gave it on Ms. Baker’s desk. And then I ran to Derek and yelled, “Derek, Derek, can you see me?” (April 27) Derek thought it was an ant so he picked up the magnifying glass

Transcript 8d

and looked at me. “How did you shrinked into a size of an ant?” Derek whispered to me. “Well,” I said, “I didn’t shrinked myself into a size of an ant?” I yelled. Then Derek said, “I have a plan.” Then I said, “What is it?” I asked. And Derek said, “You’ll find out.” To be continued.

Transcripts 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d: William’s fantasy story about a boy being shrunk to the size of an ant

The story was a fantasy written in class with a given prompt – ‘One morning I woke up and discovered I had shrunk to the size of an ant.’ It was written over a number of class sessions that extended for several weeks. In each session, the children wrote a part of the story. Then they continued the story in another session, picking it up
again with a date chopped on the page after a lapse of a day or a week. Done over six sessions, William’s story became very long and consisted of four pages.

Given the task prompt to be used as the first sentence in the story, the children had the theme and the plot predetermined for them. And so was the learning purpose which was to practice writing imaginary fantasies. The children then created a story as their imagination carried them along. William’s rendition was more fictional than fantasy. The situation suggested by the prompt was magical, that is, fantastical and could not be true (Transcript 8a). However, as the story developed, the events and activities became embedded in a true to life though fictional setting. After discovering the predicament he was in, being shrunk to the size of an ant, the protagonist in first person narration carried on with his daily routine like getting out of bed, brushing his teeth, going downstairs for breakfast, and leaving home for school. He took steps to solve his problem using daily life objects and facilities. Instead of resorting to magic like wielding a wand, he used five pillows to build a stairway to land on the floor (Transcript 8b). The characters and places were real too – his mum and dad, his teacher and friends at school, and the classroom (Transcripts 8b and 8c). Writing the story session by session, the child writer managed to produce a fairly long narrative as he threw in more events, characters and settings to expand the plot. As he plodded on with the story, William was able to come up with some fresh ideas to feed into his narration after each time lapse. He closed the section he wrote on April 6 (Transcript 8b) with “And then I start thinking again!” Picking up the story again on the following day, he “got another idea” to get out of bed which had become gigantic to an ant-sized boy, and this time it worked!

William showed his good sense of reader awareness. His production varied in the different sessions, writing four and a half lines only on April 6, but nine lines on April 12. After writing the first page, he stopped and put in brackets ‘to be continued’ as shown at the bottom of Transcript 8a, signifying to the reader that the story was not yet finished and that more would come. It was a textual feature that he might have observed and learned from popular media, the television probably. This marker was not found in any other writing samples in school or at home. However, he never got to finish the story and bring it to a close with a resolution to the problem. The story had

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built up to a climax; the protagonist had succeeded in telling his friend Derek his problem after arriving at school. Derek thought of a plan to help him, but the story ended there with another ‘to be continued’ (Transcript 8d). How the magic power that shrunk him into the size of an ant was to be destroyed had yet to be told.

The story provided two paradoxical insights into William’s use and development of writing. First of all, the structuring of the story seemed to suggest that this second language child writer was not quite ready to write fantasy stories yet, despite the fact that he might have had plenty of exposure to this genre in reading and listening to mainstream children’s literature in school. The stories produced by John and Elaine, both rated as high ability writers, writing to the same prompt were even less inviting. They were long but weak in the plot which showed little coherence or structure, stuffed with irrelevant details as the writers trudged on session after session. It seemed that they were just obediently complying with instructions to continue writing an extensive story rather than working with a self-motivated intention to create a funny and interesting tale for enjoyment. Writing *imagining-fantasy* stories was an instructional goal of the language arts programme but it might not meet the interest and ability of children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Secondly, though failing to complete the story, William showed his strength in vivid narration and description, particularly in *representing oral language* with words as discussed above. He included several pieces of direct speech in quotation marks in his story. For example, there was a monologue in direct quotations in Transcript 8A. Then there were exchanges between his mum and dad found at the bottom of Transcript 8b and the top of Transcript 8c. A more extensive dialogue can be found in Transcript 8d, the last page of the story, in which the protagonist and his friend discussed his problem. It was interesting to note the variety of verbs used for describing the different ways the characters talked in the excerpt, for instance, “whispered”, “yelled”, and “asked”. They demonstrated the writer’s sophistication in his art of *representing oral language* with the written medium.

Figure 21 shows one of William’s *greeting cards*. It was a Mother’s Day card that he made for his mother. She put it on her night table and showed it to the researcher with great pride and joy. An elaborate written artifact incorporating various
kinds of media symbols and artful use of print, it was a wonderful example of how children integrated visuals with linguistic cues to convey meaning. First, there was the use of abbreviated forms like ‘CU’ to mean ‘see you’, and the number ‘2’ to stand for ‘to’. Secondly, coloured drawings were used in place of words, for example, the drawing of an eye to stand for ‘I’, and a log of wood to mean ‘would’. Such use of images to represent meaning was reminiscent of internet language where signs, pictures, punctuation marks, and letters of the alphabet are used as symbols to represent meaning in accordance with discourse specific conventions. Thirdly, there was the varying of print type like bolding of words and punctuation marks, and capitalization for emphasis.

The child writer’s intentions for creating this greeting card were multiple: to interact with his mum wishing her a happy Mother’s Day; to express his feelings for her, love, admiration and gratitude; and to point out specifically that he was grateful for her

(Transcript) Greeting card

Dear mom / 媽媽,

You are SO WONDERFUL! I LIKE IT WHEN U GO 2 THE PARK WITH ME. You are very nice. Thank you for taking care of me. You take care of me by giving me food. I like the way you hugged me. I hope you had a very nice day. You are the best. I like you. Happy Mother’s Day! I hope you love me. You are so sweet. (Would) (love) 2CU. Love,

William

Figure 21: William’s Mother’s Day card

The child writer’s intentions for creating this greeting card were multiple: to interact with his mum wishing her a happy Mother’s Day; to express his feelings for her, love, admiration and gratitude; and to point out specifically that he was grateful for her
care and why. The social and personal functions included interacting, expressing, representing oral language and reasoning. He enacted these functions writing in a colloquial style as if he was talking to his mother face to face, representing speech with verbal and visual symbols. This could explain the use of Chinese characters in the salutation. After writing ‘Dear mom’, he put a slash and then two characters meaning and sounding ‘Mama’. That was the way he and his brothers called their mother.

When representing oral language in writing, he reverted to the form that he used in his home language to signify intimacy and authenticity. On the front of the card he put a detailed drawing of a dinosaur, something he liked and wanted to share with his mother. He took great effort to produce an elaborate and affectionate piece of writing. When asked about the reason for writing this card, he said, “I don’t know… I have knowledge of my mom.” He was very pleased with his achievement with which he entertained his mum and showed his warm feelings for her. Like all other focal children, the second language child writer chose to write something that he was comfortable with, something that was familiar and gave him confidence and pleasure in doing. The time and effort invested in the piece of writing, and the seriousness of approach were illustrative of the importance that William accorded to writing as a social practice. For him as well as for other children in the study, home writing was embedded in the daily life events and current issues rather than fantasies. Born in a working class immigrant family, the concern with practical issues for sustainability, comfort and relationships assumed greater importance to this child writer, a disposition he might have inherited from his home culture and practices in the family’s daily life.

6.2.4 John the Image-maker: Creating Meaning with Imagination

John was the high ability boy among the four focal children in the study. He was a prolific writer producing the largest number of texts in the group. There were 38 pieces in total, 18 of them from the school context and 20 from the home. His home writing spanned across five different genres that included stories, journals, greeting cards, diaries, and descriptions of ‘my favourite things’. Writing was as easy for him as any other pastimes that he enjoyed, such as watching television, reading comic books, and playing computer games. He took pleasure in composing which pleased both himself and his mother. He seemed well acquainted with the resources of written
language, composing for a variety of purposes in different social contexts and navigating smoothly in the sea of functions and genres to achieve such purposes.

Imagination was a recurrent theme in John’s writing in both the school and the home setting. Heath (1986) conceptualizes imagination as the image-making power of language; writers use imagination to separate themselves from the natural world, focusing on the fragments of life that are of significance to the imagination of the writer and the reader that co-create the text. She sees writers recombining past experiences and knowledge in the process of imagining, expressing ideas about objects, actors, and events that they have never yet wholly perceived, and synthesizing them to create new future images. The role of the writer as an image-maker to produce new synthesis with imagination resonates with Wenger’s (1998) notion of imagination in situated learning - a link between engaging with practices in the here and now of present realities and aligning ourselves with broader enterprises for the future. John, writing in his capacity as a child and student, situated his writing purposes and content in the sociocultural contexts of his everyday life. But as an image-maker, he created for himself an imagined community (Anderson, 2006; Norton, 2001) that he wished to participate in. With his resourceful and creative use of written language, he fused his images of past and present experiences to envision a world in which prevailing realities would be given a turn to bring about a better future.

John’s aptitude for making images with imagination was reflected in the functions he evoked in his writing. His imaginary capacity included creating both fantasy and fiction. The recreational function of imagining was prominent in his school-based writing just as it was for all other focal children working in accordance with the teacher’s instruction. But writing on a self-initiated basis, he was the only child who engaged in imaginary writing with stories and journals. All four of his home stories were fantasies two of which were about a super hero, a fictitious character appropriated from the comic books he loved to read. As for home journals, all the children wrote chronologies about real life experiences. John, however, included one piece in which he described a dream he had about living on a fun planet with all his friends and family and having a great time playing there. The images he projected were mostly positive and happy. Sometimes, he expressed his views on certain unpleasant realities but envisaged a better state that
would be realized in the future. Transcript 9 shows one of John’s home stories in which he described an imaginary city, an ideal place where he and his friends could play safely and long outside their home. The images constructed revealed his discontent with the present situation, for example, the fear of danger when playing outdoors, and his concern for social and, perhaps also, economic security.

Once there was a big city that people can live there. There are no bad people to fight and no super hero. They can do anything they want. Kids can go to the park, shop and friend’s house because there are no bad people in the big town just good people live there! There can be people ball just give it to them and play with it together. There are a playground so much kids play in the playground all day long. Most kids don’t buy thing because your mom and dad buy lots of toys and good foods to eat. I can do so much thing with my best friends cried one of the kid! There is a mom she help wash dirty to make it clean. Now it is night time everyone goes home and asked their mom to make their dinner.

Transcript 9: John’s imaginary story about an ideal place to live and play

The piece of writing incorporated recreational, personal, and social functions. The major intent was imagining-fantasy, and secondary functions were expressing, reasoning and representing oral language. The last function was included because there was some direct speech in the text. It was a line spoken by one of the kids, ‘I can do so much thing with my friends’, but it was not put within quotation marks. John expressed his hope for an ideal city, and gave reasons to justify the conditions he described in it, supporting them with an exclamation direct from a participant’s mouth about the freedom and fun the kids could enjoy living in it. The child writer’s aspirations for the future included not just freedom from danger but also stability, family love, friendship, peace, and harmony. He wished for a place where food and toys were plenty, where super heroes vowed to fight villains were not needed at all, and where kids could go home after having fun with friends to a house kept clean by their mother who would make dinner for them.
John created images with resourceful use of genres as well as functions. He used his private writing to explore issues and make sense of his life in the moment (Schultz, 2002), composing in various genres that he manipulated skillfully to fit in with his writing intention. His *greeting card* to some cookies discussed in Chapter 5 was an example of how he used a conventional form of language common to experience for an unconventional writing purpose. His *diaries* were not so much records of daily events as they were wish lists in which he expressed his desire for more comfort and luxury, such as having more chapter books and comic books about cartoon characters like Spider Man and Spongebob Squarepants. He would also want to have more strawberries, a gold fish and a yellow duck for a pet, and other goodies that could improve the quality of his life. While addressing ‘Dear Diary’, he was actually writing for himself to cope with the daily stress of living, as what he might have observed in the family. In one of his *diaries*, he wrote, “I also can be rich so that I can buy anything I want. Like on the superstore and one big car just for me and my mom because we can stay there so long even it is raining.” Similarly, his *descriptions of ‘my favourite things’* were reflections on his daily life and what he wanted to pursue. For instance, when describing winter as his favourite season, he wrote, “My best things to do at home is with my Dragon Ball Z toys and draw lots of thing! I like to do reading, playing and sleep. I can write lots of stories.” As he informed his reader about his favourite juice, food, animal, month, and season, he was at the same time creating images of a better future for himself and his family.

While *imagining* was concerned with explorations into an unreal situation, *anticipating* was about future events that would likely happen. In making images, John liked to predict what he would do, making meaning by linking his present experiences to the fun and satisfaction that future actions would bring him. He enacted the function of *anticipating* more frequently than any other focal children, transcending himself in time and space (Wenger, 1998). In one of his home-based *journals* shown in Figure 22, he made a series of statements about future events, the things that he would do and their predicted outcomes. They were marked by the use of the present progressive for the future tense, and temporal adverbials to denote time, for example, ‘on the weekend’, and ‘on Friday’. The writer’s primary function was *anticipating*, but the ideational meaning
was based on some real experience. Hence, again, a social function was intertwined with personal functions mutually supporting each other; anticipating was supported by referring to experience, and reasoning to make sense of the anticipations.

(Transcript)

Journal

Today I’m going to watch a fighting show and on Friday I’m going to watch dragon ball Gt and dragon ball Z! On the weekend I’m going to play outside with my friends and go shopping too. Today I made a card about Patty because I lost the toy of it. So I can see Patty. I’m going to playland and to try to win Patty and keep him for my life! I can go to school with Patty and don’t lose him. Also today I was drawing pictures that are Pokemon!

The end

Figure 22: John’s journal about his anticipations

As shown in Figure 22, the child writer’s anticipations all revolved round his daily life activities like watching television, playing with his friends, and going shopping. After describing these routine activities, he focused on a recent happening that led to a present action, making a card of a toy named Patty. The reason for doing this was that he had lost the toy and making a picture of it would allow him to see it everyday. This also led to another anticipated action; he would go to Playland and win the toy so that he could go to school with it and keep it for life this time. At the end of the text, he wrote ‘The end’. He probably used the discourse marker to signify a rounding up of all his anticipations that were quite a few, and his pleasure of having created and represented his thoughts and planned actions on paper.
One striking feature about John’s writing in both contexts was the incorporation of popular culture. He appropriated characters from cartoons on television and comic books, computer games or other kinds of media. Dyson (1997) observed how boys in second grade used popular culture symbols in their writing, and succumbed to the appeal of a super hero. John exhibited the same behaviour in his writing. His fantasy stories echoed the discourse of adventures and were strewn with images from popular children media. The child writer revealed his love and desire for toys and computer games in his stories, journals, diaries, greeting card, and descriptions of ‘my favourite things’. Watching cartoons on television seemed to be his favourite pastime other than reading and writing. Such practice seemed to play an important role to sustain his creating images with writing. He wrote prolifically and imaginatively, using popular culture for ideas and identified with the characters in them, super heroes that protected the meek and helped the poor. This corroborated findings that young children incorporate popular culture creatively to achieve particular writing purposes as reported in studies on writing development for English native speaking children (Dyson, 2001; Kroll, 1990; Millard, 2001, 2005), and second language children (Duff, 2002a).

The images that John created with his imaginary writing dealt with personal as well as societal themes. His writing, and in particular home-based writing, figured into his daily life more profoundly than for any other focal children. The writing intentions were well incorporated into his choice of genres that helped him reflect on his life with the use of written language. His voluntary writing was noted for the quality of engagement as he manipulated the various genres with a twist, bridging his world of reality with an imaginary one. John did not have as much material luxury in his daily life as the other children in the group did, but his social experience was plentiful. In his small closely-knit family, he was one of those children that were constantly dragged around on errands and included in everyday activities, and who hence enjoyed an advantage over other children in learning to read and write (Harste et al., 1984). When asked why he wanted to write and enjoyed doing it, John responded, “I did something, so then I wrote it down. Because it’s cool, I did that. Because I did something on that day, and it’s easier and faster so I want to write.” Writing to this young second
language writer was entertainment, the creation of images to make sense of what he did and wanted to do, and a window to an imagined community.

6.2.5 An End Note

The results of the qualitative analysis show that the four focal children had different styles and patterns in their enactment of functions and use of genres in their writing practices. This was particularly significant in their home-based writing that revealed a greater focus on personal and social functions in their creative use of written language for expression and communication. They exhibited different patterns of integrating functions with genres to construct meaning about their present and future experiences as an inventor, a weaver, a graphic producer, and an image maker. Their capabilities and creativeness portrayed in their writing samples were amazing and spoke against their assessed writing ability or even their being categorized as second language children at all. They all wrote with a voice, projected in various ways. Disguised by their silence or inadequacy in class, some of these second language children might yet have their voice and writing capabilities to be unveiled. This illustrates the complexity of understanding children in composing which is complex and multi-faceted. The children’s knowledge and understanding of writing functions and genres and their accomplishment in out-of-school writing argue strongly for the value of connecting school and home writing practices in early literacy education (Gregory et al., 2004; Heath, 1983, 1986; McCarthey, 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Taylor, 1983).
Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER WORK

The preceding chapters presented the analysis, findings and discussion about the functions and genres in the writing of the four second language children in their school and their home based writing, arrived at with both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected. This chapter presents a summary of the findings and the conclusions drawn from them, and insights made into the writing of the ESL children in the two most important contexts of their personal and social lives. These form the basis for generating implications in relation to the theoretical framework and concepts in which the study was grounded. Then, implications for teachers and parents are presented for improving English writing development for second language children with regard to the role they play in the two contexts. Finally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further work are discussed.

7.1 Findings of the study

The following findings were made in response to Research Question 1:

What are the differences between the functions of the children’s English writing at school and in their home?

The children produced more texts in the school setting than in the home within the data collection period as a group. But on an individual basis, the two high ability children did more writing than the average ability boy and girl at home than in school. On average, the children enacted more functions writing in the home setting than in the school both as a group and as individuals, probably because they practiced more genres of writing. Between the two sets of writing samples, 13 different writing functions were identified. Seven of them were common to both settings, 2 were specific to the school setting and 4 to the home, implying that the children evoked a greater variety as well as a greater number of functions when writing at home than in school. The functions specific to the school setting, namely, imagining-fantasy and practicing, were found in the work of all the four focal children. A great proportion of those common to both settings were also enacted by all the children in the group. As for the home-specific
functions, there was much individual variation with the exception of interacting which was unique to the home setting. All four children enacted this function among the various kinds of interactive genres they wrote.

The children’s writing in the two settings also differed in their writing purposes as shown by the type of writing functions embedded in the texts. While multiple functions were often evoked in a single piece of writing, the children were in general more disposed to writing about real life experiences for personal and social purposes than imaginary creations in their home writing. Four categories were identified among the 11 functions in the two settings with regard to the writing purposes they served: personal, social, recreational, and learning. In the home setting, more than half of the functions were personal ones, such as expressing, referring to experience, reasoning, enjoying and ego enhancing. Social functions took up approximately one third of the total number of functions, for example, interacting, informing, anticipating, and representing oral language. The rest were recreational functions, such as imagining, writing in fantasy; and representing written language in the form of poems and jokes. No learning functions were found in the home context. As for the school writing, about one third of the functions were in the social category just as in the home. Less than half of them were personal ones, a smaller proportion than in the home setting. On the other hand, recreational functions were higher in proportion in the school than in the home setting because of the relatively large amount of imaginary writing done in school, such as fiction or fantasy stories. The single learning function, practicing, made up about one tenth of the total number of school writing functions. These findings show that the children wrote most often for personal purposes in the home writing, and wrote for social purposes with more or less the same frequency in both settings. The recreational purposes were realized in the form of imaginary stories and journals in school-based writing but through literary writing such as poems by two of the focal children in the home setting. It should also be noted that the children seldom engaged in writing fantasy in the home setting, and fiction was totally absent just as the learning function was.
The following findings about genres answered Research Question 2:

What are the differences in the range of genres in the focal children’s school and home writing in English?

The children produced a greater variety of genres when writing at home than in school. In the school setting, all the four children produced writing in the same three genres, namely, stories, journals and lists and with approximately the same number of texts in each. Most of the stories and about half of the journals were written to the teacher’s prompts. Lists were worksheet type exercises used for practicing specific writing skills, lexico-grammatical items, or writing in general. In the home setting, the children wrote in varying selections of genres ranging from three to six. Four categories of written genres were identified in the two sets of writing samples: chronologies, descriptions, interactions, and word-plays. The school writing samples were divided between chronologies and descriptions, with the former slightly exceeding the latter. The journal was the most popular genre in the school and also in the home setting. Consisting of both chronologies and descriptions, journals made up more than half of the school writing samples. The rest were roughly divided between stories which were chronologies, and lists which included both chronologies and descriptions. The absence of interactions and word-plays in the school samples was another major difference between the two settings.

In the home-based writing, there was a good spread of genre categories. Chronologies made up one third of the total writing samples while the rest were more or less evenly divided among the other three categories. As stated above, the most popular genre was journals. They were all chronologies based on experiential content and made up slightly more than one quarter of the samples. As for stories, most of them were chronologies but descriptions were also included. Besides stories, descriptions consisted of drawings, non-fiction writing, and descriptions of ‘my favourite things’. Interactions included greeting cards, notes, and diaries. Poems and jokes were the word-play genres which were confined to the two girls in the group. The findings confirm that while there was individual variation among the four children in the variety of genres and genre categories, the children in general wrote in a wider range of genres in their voluntary and private writing.
The following findings were responses to Research Question 3:

How do the children construct meaning for personal and social purposes with the use of writing in school and at home?

There was a strong relationship between functions and specific genres in both settings. In the school context, journals evoked the greatest number of functions on average among the four focal children, followed by stories and then lists. Diaries carried the most functions and stories and non-fiction writing the least in the home writing. The variation in the frequency of functions among the genres was greater in the home setting than the school. At a personal level, the children also showed greater individual variation in the frequency of functions across all genres in the home than in the school setting. While journals was most popular in both settings and the only genre found in all the children’s home writing, its frequency of functions was relatively low in the home setting when compared with its top position in the school setting. However, certain genres found in the home setting distinctively evoked more functions than the rest; they were interactive in nature and unique to the home writing. This illustrates the importance of social interaction as individuals deliberately use words to interact with others in particular social situations (Dyson, 1997). Moreover, there was differential association of particular categories of functions with specific genres or genre groups in both settings. The children evoked a greater number of personal than social and recreational functions in journals, word plays, descriptions, and home-based stories. The interactive genres were more used for social functions than for other categories. As for the recreational functions, they were most prevalent in school-based stories because of the imaginary nature of the writing content. The learning function was highest in frequency in lists than in stories and journals in the school writing.

Little relationship was found between the frequency of functions and writing ability as assessed by school writing performance. As mentioned in Chapter 6, this might be due to the teacher focusing more on other aspects of the texts than the variety of functions and the potential for use of written language for expression and communication. These aspects and the children’s individuality as writers might not be easily noted in the school-based writing. In both settings, the average ability boy ranked first in the frequency of functions across all genres, and the high ability girl came last. The average
ability girl even came second in the home setting though very closely followed by the high ability boy in the third position. The second and third positions of these two children were reversed in the school setting. The range of genres among the individual children in the home setting seemed more reflective of their relative writing ability in the teacher’s assessment, the high ability boy and girl writing in a greater variety of genres than the two average ability children. While enacting the highest frequency of functions in general in both settings, the average ability boy produced the smallest number of texts and in the narrowest range of genres in his home writing.

The children showed multiple ways of constructing meaning with written language in their enactment of functions and employment of genres. Each of them displayed individual disposition in their choice of writing purposes acting in and responding to specific social contexts regardless of their relative differences in writing ability. They all showed sophistication in using various kinds of social and cultural resources and combination of different semiotic systems to represent meaning. Their various writing motives were realized in the writing functions they enacted in their texts and the selection of appropriate genres to match with them. Their writing, particularly the home-based products, demonstrated their ability in using written language to make sense of their experience of the world in ways conventionally adopted in the social discourse despite their being second language learners. In the school context, the genre had been predetermined by the teaching objectives and the writing curriculum both of which limited their writing purposes and hence functions to a considerable extent. On the other hand, there was more scope for individual choice in the home setting as revealed in the wider range of function categories and genres identified. With the freedom they enjoyed in their voluntary writing, they showed variable preferences for writing functions, such as enjoyment and ego enhancement, creating imagined communities, representing a voice of one’s own when too shy to articulate in speech, or expressing affections that oral language or actions could hardly achieve. In creating meaning with text, the children assumed different writer identities through which they showed their awareness of written language as a semiotic tool for expressing and positioning oneself (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Their creativeness and resourcefulness was demonstrated in their invention of genres and combining different semiotic systems to
They artfully integrated text and images to enhance the visual aspect and meaning of their text, and in particular, to bring a sense of wholesomeness to their writing to their hearts’ satisfaction. They also freely employed characters, images, and concepts from popular culture to represent their world of lived and imagined experiences.

7.2 Conclusions drawn from the findings

In general, writing in the school context was characterized by uniformity with regard to functions and genres and the number of texts produced in each genre. In the home environment, the children wrote with a greater variety of functions and genres; they also showed greater individual variation in their enactment of functions and choice of genres in the home than in the school setting.

7.2.1 The Classroom as a Learning Context

Viewed from an instructional perspective, the uniformity and subsequent conformity of the students to class instruction was a necessary pedagogical consideration, as illustrated in the present study in two ways. Firstly, the children wrote a variety of genres to practice general as well as discrete writing and grammar skills to improve their writing competence. Secondly, writing to the teacher’s prompts and instruction, the students were able to engage in a different variety of specified genres in relation to a theme in their learning projects; this allowed them to assume different positions and perspectives to view a recurrent issue and for different writing purposes. Such explicit learning and integration of writing practice with curriculum learning could hardly be achieved with self-initiated free writing but only through scaffolded language instruction in the classroom.

However, the findings in this study suggest that the children’s writing in the school context was confined by the writing curriculum and instructional purposes. Constraints in the classroom context, such as teacher prompts and instructional objectives limited the children’s use of genres and functions. Therefore, there was a smaller variety of genres and functions found in the children’s school writing than those produced outside of school where they wrote for many different communicative purposes. When given a free choice of topic, form, and content in out-of-school writing, the children were able to exercise a much wider array of literacy knowledge and skills.
They demonstrated a good sense of the rhetorical possibilities that various genres made available to them.

The classroom as a learning context lacked certain important elements that the home environment could better provide – social interaction and authentic and meaningful context that were essential for achieving language proficiency (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Inevitably, writing in the classroom for learning purposes would tend to be imposed as opposed to home writing where children had free choice of topic and genre to serve their own, self-generated writing motives.

For children from diverse backgrounds, imposed writing might be associated with the macro-purposes of reproducing or perpetuating dominant values (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Writing in the school could be seen as imposed by bureaucracy, the education system, or other more powerful individuals, such as the teacher. This was particularly noted when the topic, content, or genre, was culturally different or distant from views and practices in the children’s own literacy discourse, such as fantasy stories for creative writing for some of them. Writing in the classroom with prescribed writing purposes and genres, the children could hardly claim ownership of their work. Conscious of the instructional purposes of writing, they wrote accordingly to display their learning process and outcome in order to gain approval. They might complete the task more for an economic than for a linguistic purpose – to get the job done. The social and contextual constraints rendered their work almost the same in approach, functions, and content. This was demonstrated in their school-based stories and journals on specified topics, and not the least their worksheet exercises. They reflected the description made by Graves and Stuart (1985). It was “the same information, the same words, just rearranged. The piece was not an expression of the unique and wonderful child….It was about as different from the next boy’s writing as a Dodge is from a Plymouth” (p. 37). The children’s school writing thus lacked a voice, a quality of the writer as an author or a speaking personality (Maguire & Graves, 2001). Clark and Ivanič (1997) believe that “[w]hether the purpose for writing is self-generated or imposed has a crucial effect on the process” (p. 123); they concluded that writing for one’s own purposes is easier and more enjoyable, and the outcome is more satisfying and perceived to be worthwhile.
When children wrote on their own, they served their micro purposes or their immediate motivation to write as generated by the context of situation. This could be reflected in the high frequency of functions in the journals as compared with stories and lists in the school setting. Though in many cases they were written in response to given topics, journals would still allow the writer ample freedom with regard to the functions evoked in them and the content to realize them. Hence, it could be concluded that the home setting should be considered a major site of learning to write alongside the classroom.

7.2.2 The Home as a Context for Development

The children’s home writing was impressive for its richness in the range and diversity of genres and functions when compared with texts produced in school. This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Bissex (1990) and Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003). Yet in some ways, the greater variety of functions and genres in home writing as compared with the school-based texts was somewhat surprising. First of all, the teachers, as participants in the YCIL project, had been encouraged to have the children write in a broader range of genres instead of focusing on the narrative which is typical of primary classrooms (Duke, 2000; Pappas, 1993). It had been assumed that there would not be such a gap between school and home genres. Secondly, Chinese immigrant parents often focused on correctness in writing and this might constrain second language children’s written expression. Teachers, on the other hand, would encourage learners to write without undue concern for formal accuracy, an approach that theoretically should be more conducive to free expression. However, such perception was not verified by the findings. In this study, freedom was more evident at home than in school. Interestingly, teachers often see themselves as facilitators of children’s writing in providing scaffolding and prompts to help them grow as writers. The parents in this study, on the other hand, simply told their children to write so that they could practice their writing skills, not caring about what they wrote and for what purposes. Perhaps teachers need to balance scaffolded writing experiences with opportunities for children to choose their own topics, audiences, and motives for writing in order to help them find more meaning to use of written language in school-based writing tasks.
The social factors in the classroom that limited the child writers’ development as authors were replaced by others in out-of-school contexts. As illustrated by findings in the study, the home context allowed the children to discover their own meaning and find a voice for themselves through writing. The sociocultural context of the home provided a more suitable environment for children to develop as writers in an authentic situation. Authenticity of the situation and the writing act was the most essential element. Firstly, the children wrote for real life writing purposes derived from social motives, such as to succeed, to be accepted, to bring about changes in their present or future situations or relationships with others. Secondly, there was an intended audience whose reactions to their writing they cared about which bore upon what they wrote and how they wrote it. Thirdly, the children wrote in their own space, writing in a pace and at a time of their own choice. Time constraints had often been an important factor in determining the quality of a student’s work and his/her approach to it. Not having to work within a set time framework or physical space implied not just the amount of time allowed to complete a piece of work but also the time allowed to explore and experiment with different discourse and language features and modes of representing meaning. These include the choice of genres, macro structures, and lexico-grammatical features as well as the use of images and integrating them with text for communicative and visual effect.

As a cultural setting, the home of these second language children was more dynamic and developmental when compared with the school. The family is a learning environment where children are socialized into the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills adopted by the society of which the family is a part. This is achieved through participation in activities constructed mutually by their participants in social events within particular contexts (Cole, 1985). Being immigrants, the parents of these children aimed at change, transforming and struggling for upward movement in relation to their social and political environment. Within such efforts, there was a dialectical relationship between individual members within the family setting and the family itself as a whole; together they constituted a family life circle targeted at a series of developmental changes for achieving competence in the social world (Li, 2002). The family of these children could be seen as a synopsis of the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that the children would participate in when they grew
The home was alive with different types of social and cultural activities and events; there were also multiple interactions and conflicts that gave rise to the use of written language for communication and adjustment of relationships. The family was hence a site of struggle as well as socialization for these children. Family activities, including literacy practices and events, provided a milieu for developing cognitive processes to represent knowledge of objects, concepts, situations and relationships, against a background of traditional cultural values, and dynamic social aspirations. In sum, the home context was complex and inextricably linked to multiple webs of social and cultural experiences that the school was no comparison to.

In developing as writers, children appropriate the functions and genres of written language from their social world as used by more literate others. From a socio-constructivist Vygotskian perspective, children learn first on a social level internalizing what they experience, and then develop through an active process of transformation on an individual level. Literacy activities and events in the family are influenced by the social, economic, and political practices of the particular community it belongs to. The children in the study observed their parents using symbolic signs and literate artifacts for achieving various personal and social communicative purposes, in both their native language and English. They reflected on and consciously chose those signs that would help them organize and articulate their own inner thoughts (Dyson, 1997) such as writing journals, notes, greeting cards, and diaries. Through appropriation, internalization, and transformation, the children developed their knowledge and skills for generating genres, such as greeting cards, notes, and diaries that did not seem to have been part of their school experience to convey their own writing functions.

Working together, these social and cultural factors made the home an invaluable setting for writing development. There was no lack of motivation, purposes and functions for writing. There was also genuine input regarding the content, function, form and context, the interrelated dimensions of genre. Writing was a source of self-fulfillment and no longer an exercise as they wrote from a self-generated motive. For instance, Elaine wrote jokes or riddles to entertain herself and other junior members of the family; John described his favourite things the need for which arose from specific situations in the family. With freedom including the choice of topic, they could address
important events in their lives and the people in those events, and to explore ideas pertinent to them. The children could make choices about the field of the social process of writing, the tenor of social relationships, and the mode of symbolic interaction, the variables of a social context that determine how language will make meaning at a given time (Halliday, 1978). This in turn opened the door for writing with a voice, constructing a social identity with it, and claiming ownership (Norton, 1997, 1999). In creating with written language, the children were also setting goals for themselves, exploring how they wanted to be in the eyes of themselves, others and their readers. Language hence was no longer a “transparent medium… but, rather, a medium through which the self [wa]s constructed” (Dyson, 1997, p. 13).

7.3 Theoretical implications

7.3.1 Writing Functions

Writing provided the children with a means to make sense of their personal and social experiences. These children wrote primarily for personal interests and mediating their positions in the social world. Even at their early age, they were capable of expressing abstractions, creating images for themselves, and pondering social issues. In a Hallidayian view of writing, their ideational meaning was strongly based on their real life experiences and reflections while their interpersonal meaning was inextricably tied with their positioning in the family and their peer community. In a functional linguistic theory of discourse (Halliday, 1975, 1978), written language has significant implications for these second language children in relation to specific functions, particularly in voluntary writing. Among the different types of language use in Halliday’s classification scheme, they evoked personal functions to express themselves, their individuality, feelings, and emotions; interactional functions to establish or define social relationships; imaginative functions to create a new environment synthesized from separate past experiences or events; and representational functions to communicate information and conclusions drawn from facts. One additional use of representational language that has special implication for these children, as suggested by the present study, was representing oral language and written language with words, the former to incorporate speech as part of the text for emphasis and authenticity, and the latter to create literary artifacts for enjoyment.
Writing as a purposeful activity is used for a wide array of functions. One major concern is communicating meaning as supported by findings in the present study. Another is the thinking function that facilitates learning (Chapman, 1997; Riley & Reedy, 2000) and which was significant in the children’s home writing. As a cognitive as well as social and cultural act, writing calls into play different kinds of thinking. The thinking function of writing has been elucidated in the knowledge-transforming model of writing proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993). They contend that composing goes beyond the ordinary ability of putting “one’s thoughts and knowledge into writing. It means… being able to shape a piece of writing to achieve intended effects, and to re-organize one’s knowledge in the process” (p. 157). However, the high levels of thinking, such as structuring, synthesis, analysis, organization and transformation had seldom been called to use in the children’s classroom writing, as argued by Graves and Stuart (1985). Writing often took the form of a structured and well organized mould for filling in with content by the writer. Focused on dealing with the linguistic complexities of writing in the students, and in particular second language children that were represented heavily in the class, the teacher might have been unaware of this empowering function of writing (Riley & Reedy, 2000) and the role of written language in the organization, structuring and enhancement of thinking (Donaldson, 1993). In individualized writing, the children synthesized, analyzed, and organized their webs of experiences as they inquired about themselves and relationships with others. Then they represented them appropriately to make meaning, gaining new insights into them through the thought processes.

7.3.2 Written Genres

While social relationships provided the child writers with the purpose and ‘sense’ of writing, social contexts provided them some practice on conventions. The genres of the children’s writing could be seen as repositories where they embedded social realities in language through recurrent use of conventionalized forms to get things done (Hyland, 2003). The linguistic outcomes reflected the social context and nature of their writing (Martin, Christie, & Rothery, 1987), in the way that genre theorists believe that “every successful text will display the writer’s awareness of its context and the readers who form part of that context” (Hyland, 2003, p. 21). Their resourcefulness and flexibility with
language use were uncovered in their adopting, inventing and identifying genres when writing out of the school context. They made choices about what and how they wrote, trying out various genres to extend their writing experience. They also demonstrated their implicit sense of genre in ‘borrowing’ texts and layouts from their reading and adopting them in their writing. Their work could well be summed up by Meyer’s (1992) description of writer’s agenda in regard to genres:

> When a writer is offered, either vicariously or explicitly, many types of genres of written language to explore and given the freedom to address her writing agenda, she expands her written language repertoire…She may even invent genres or types of writing which were new to her, if not to the world of writers. (pp. 19-20)

The notion of writer’s agenda was evidenced in the children’s assuming ownership of their writing in their voluntary home setting. The children incorporated and constructed their notion of what writing was from home experience, school learning and the larger social context. They were capable of using genres from these social worlds as cultural resources (Chapman, 1999; Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999). It was their awareness and knowledge of genres that distinguished them as competent writers, and that which overshadowed their relatively inadequate language proficiency because of their social and cultural background.

### 7.3.3 Writing as a Sociocultural Practice

Literacy is always a part of culture, and the use of language is a social, cultural as well as cognitive phenomenon (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Viewed from a sociocultural perspective, the children’s writing suggested an inextricable link between literacy learning and participation in their home and community. Other than quantity, the children’s home-based texts went beyond the school writing not only in function and form but also in the way they created personal links to their social environments. They chose genres suitable for their writing purposes in relation to the cultural form of expressing meaning. The children had been responsive and responsible composers in achieving particular responses from others they were concerned about, employing appropriate forms conventional to the social community where they lived. Their writing reflected the strong influence of the family and its sociocultural beliefs about the use of
written language for the children in the study: establishing one’s position and confirming relationships with others for solidarity when living in an adopted country.

Children learn the signs of print and its uses through conscious and voluntary efforts (Vygotsky, 1986) as demonstrated by the home writing practices of the children. Literate others, such as their teachers, parents, and perhaps even peers, offered their guidance to promote their consciousness about language in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), helping them to grow “into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). In Bakhtin’s (1986) dialogic perspective, these children’s writing development extended from social learning to the use of a diversity of social voices and perspectives to articulate their inner thoughts or ‘speech’ internalized from interactions with literate others. All in all, the children’s writing behaviour supported the theoretical conception of writing as a sociocultural practice that has particular implications for learning to write in a second language (Pavlenki & Lantolf, 2000). The ESL children’s writing across the school and home settings revealed a wealth of language and literacy knowledge that could be quite different from the knowledge demanded or expected by the school, but this could be put to effective use as suggested in the following section.

7.4 Teaching implications

In recognition of the value of out-of-school writing activities and the multiplicity of literacy learning sites available to students, teachers could move away from an authoritarian role and shift their instructional orientation to a more social and personal development focus. The findings in the study might provide teachers with an alternative view from which to reflect on their beliefs and practices about teaching L2 children to write.

7.4.1 School Writing as a Sociocultural and Situated Practice

A theoretical grounding for the study was the situated nature of literacy. Language and literacy are social practices rather than skills to be learned in formal education (Street, 1995). An approach to understanding children’s texts should take into account the writing contexts, the meaning of which vary with different cultural groups. An implication for this theory as derived from the present study is the variety of locations for learning to write in multicultural communities, and the importance of multiple sites of learning. The children embedded their writing in their family and community lives.
when writing both in and out of school context. The home and the community formed an integral part of their learning environment. Their various literacy learning contexts played a vital role in sustaining school learning, as did the social and literacy support provided by their parents (Chang, 1998). Vygotsky (1978) argues that all thinking and learning is social and historical in origin; children’s understanding of literacy is located in the contemporary and historical background of the family and the community in addition to that of the school. Hence, writing can be acquired in a variety of settings not beginning in or limited to the school, but extended over a continuum of the individual, family and the community (Cairney, 2002, 2005; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; McCarthey, 1997).

The writing of the children uncovered “both the multitude of different settings in which children learn as well as the complexity with which they interpret these settings to themselves” (Gregory et al., 2004, p. 9). Findings in the study contribute to the understanding that literacy is situated everywhere in people’s daily lives (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). This may pose a challenge to the school as the premium location of literacy learning. However, the flexibility and fluidity with which the children traversed between the two settings suggested that the school and the home environments could work in complementary ways to help them acquire literacy, especially if schools could capitalize such connections. Their home writing experiences served to widen their sensitivity to different social and cultural situations. They also opened up avenues for using writing for self expression and thinking with the literacy tools they learned in school. Equally important was the contribution of the school context; class instruction provided the children with exposure to and practice in the use of the written language, a repertoire of narrative and non-narrative genres, and systematic learning of writing strategies and skills.

The benefits of school writing instruction would be enhanced if the writing tasks could incorporate the sociocultural domains of writing and were situated in the spheres of activities in the children’s daily lives, such as the home and community which reflected complex social settings and membership of various social groups. The writing should bring from a purpose and for an intended audience that had significance for the writer, and not just to practice writing. For instance, as extended work in the project on social
issues in the community, the children could write reports on their investigations and share them with students from another class in a presentation session; they could also write letters to officials or city councilors to reflect the situation and offer suggestions to bring to light and remedy the problems identified. An awareness of the functions of writing and audience in setting school assignments would enable children to use written language in ways that adults and even children do in natural settings in out-of-school contexts. This would help learners find more meaning and pleasure in school writing tasks, and hence invest more time and effort in completing them.

7.4.2 Children’s Writer’s Agenda and Writing Skills

To allow children to follow their writer’s agenda and foster their enthusiasm, teachers could provide opportunities for children to choose their own writing purposes, for at least some of the time. Recognition of the importance of purpose in shaping the linguistic characteristics of text greatly benefits both the teacher and the learner (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Even more so is the shift from the usual focus on form to the purpose and the functions of a writing act. Teachers could also provide more authentic, challenging and stimulating purposes for writing to help towards their linguistic, cognitive, and social development. Hudelson (1984) has shown that child ESL learners can write English for a variety of purposes even early in their development. Children could be given the opportunity to choose writing topics as well as writing purposes. When composing on a more personal basis and for authentic purposes, children would be intrinsically motivated by the writing activity. Classroom instruction and scaffolding could be combined with the children’s writer’s agenda to facilitate writing development.

A more social and personal orientation to language learning and teaching should encompass genres as well as writing purposes. An effective approach to writing development involves not only explicit instruction but also provides learners with a broader range of experiences with the different forms of writing (Riley & Reedy, 2000). The narrow experience of genres in the early years of schooling was criticized by Martin, Christie, and Rothery (1994) who observed that children in primary grades “were stranded there writing stories” (p. 237). Extensive research evidence has confirmed that children have an intuitive understanding about language and its use including genre awareness (e.g., Smith & Hiles, 2006). Teachers may need to explore and experiment
with strategies for directing such knowledge to help students form heuristic models about
the rules and conventions of written social actions in particular types of contexts. This
is not to suggest a focus on the transmission of traditional genres in what Street (1995)
describes as an autonomous approach to literacy, but a call to teachers to “broaden their
understanding of other forms and patterns of meaning making which are imbedded in
children’s literacy practices out of school” (Millard, 2001, p. 16).

The remarkable cognitive, linguistic, and artistic ability of these children shown
in their home writing uncovered the hidden skills they possessed in making meaning with
print. Very often teachers, in the throes of enabling ESL students to get to grips with
the formal complexities of writing, might not have time to attend to the social and
cultural differences between the children’s home and school. On the other hand, they
might have to meet the wishes of many of their parents who would like to see more
writing tasks or exercises in school for language practice, as influenced by their cultural
beliefs about learning. The quantity of writing demanded of the children in class could
have obscured the quality they could actually feature in composing, such as that shown in
their voluntary writing. The impressive linguistic and cognitive skills of each of the
focal children could be well beyond the reach of their teacher. Educators need to be
aware of these hidden skills and develop a framework of principles to record and use
them to guide the writing of children from multicultural communities (Gregory, 1997).

Such considerations have particular relevance for assessing the writing ability of
second language children. It could be misguided by less than complete information and
understanding about a given child based on classroom performance. Focus could also
be on content and organization while excluding writing functions and genres. Disguised
by their silence or relative low productivity in class, these learners might in fact have
great potential for developing into writers. This was exemplified in the case of Katie
and William who showed intensity and involvement with writing in their home-based
texts; they merited in the variety and richness of functions and genres embraced in them.
Teachers may need to look at children’s writing from a more global perspective, paying
attention not only to structure and content, but also to the use of language for expression
of meaning. They should judge the effectiveness of the writing act by the variability of
the writing functions enacted, and how they mutually support each other. The
appropriate choice of genre in relation to the writing purpose in the particular context (Christie, 1987), and mastery of lexico-grammatical features and genre elements are all indications of the strengths and weaknesses of a child writer.

7.4.3 Connecting School with Home

It is hard to imagine how much teachers would miss if they did not know about the writing students engaged in out of the school walls; their notion of the child as a writer would only be partial if all that the teachers could grasp of the children’s writing potential was the school-based texts (Yi, 2007). In the present study, the journals seemed to be the only written home assignment and half of them were prescribed writing. It would be very helpful if the teachers were aware of the extensive range of genres and the multitude of functions enacted in them when the children wrote in their private world. Teachers need to be more aware of the value of the writing opportunities and the contexts the children have at home and connect these to writing instruction in the classroom. For example, they could encourage children to write in the context of everyday home and class activities for more genuine communicative purposes. This could serve to widen the range of functions and genres in their school writing. In addition to focusing on the practice of specific writing skills, school writing for ESL children may need to pay more attention to the various aspects of writing motive, function, and genre related to their experiences in the home or community. Children could ‘bring their home’ into the classroom, leading to more sharing and understanding of their diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Tapping into what children enjoy writing at home, teachers can “help the children see the connections between the literacies they observe and participate in at home and what they engage in at school…expanding the two worlds” (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003, p. 35). Previous research has stressed the importance of connecting school and home, and using children’s cultural and literacy experiences at home as resources for literacy learning (Early & Gunderson, 1993; McCarthey & Garcia, 2005; Xu, 1999). The funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) from the children’s homes contained many material and intellectual resources in the multicultural community essential for family or individual functioning and well-being. Teachers could incorporate these historically and culturally developed skills and knowledge as resources for developing meaningful and
contextualized study units or projects (Gregory et al., 2004). Children living between and within different linguistic and cultural settings as those in the present study are often perceived as deficit because of their limited access to mainstream academic and social discourse. In recognition of the fact that meanings, functions and methods of transmission of literacy acts vary with cultural and social norms (Langer, 1987), teachers need to acknowledge all kinds of literacy experiences the children had other than those in line with the Eurocentric conception of literacy activities endorsed by the official school world. Rather than focusing on children’s diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as deficits, they could turn around and view their experiences and understandings in the family and community as an asset contributing to their literacy development.

In connecting school and home, especially in multicultural contexts, it is important for teachers to have a better understanding of their students’ literacy practices out of school and any possible incongruence between school and home regarding beliefs and practices about writing and writing development. Home visits need to be given a high priority; teachers should try to understand their students, their concerns and how they live, viewing them from an intercultural perspective (Li, 2002). Special attention should be paid to children entering school with language and cultural practices different from those of the teachers who are often of white, middle-class backgrounds. In home visits, teachers could learn about the home literacy activities and events to get a full picture of the child as a writer across different settings. A highlight of the visit would be looking at the child’s home-based writing, commonly found in Chinese families as in those of many other ethnic communities, that the parents would be proud of showing to the visitor. The child could also be invited to bring the work to school and share with the class. It is also important for teachers to recognize home practices in connection with the use of different semiotic systems, the family’s access to and types of reading materials at home, their engagement with print and non-print media and popular culture. The children in the study demonstrated creative and effective use of visuals integrated with print to enhance representation of meaning (Dyson, 1992). The pictorial images they formed of their experiences and the references made to characters and activities in popular culture media were all part of the multiple literacies in their home environment (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Visual literacy has rarely been given a high status in school
(Millard, 2001) but has particular implications for children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

7.5 Implications for parents

The findings in the study have particular implications for parents for helping their children learn to write in their role as more literate others in the home environment. As the participants were from Chinese immigrant families, the discussion was situated in Chinese cultural and social values, beliefs, and practices related to literacy that the parents of the focal children had brought with them from their native country.

7.5.1 Writing as a Social and Cultural Practice versus Language Practice

While both parents and teachers valued literacy and the attention to be paid to the formal written language symbol system, they might not share the same perspective on literacy and how it is to be learned. The children might hence be caught between different expectations of teachers and parents affected by their ideologies in learning, such as the transactional, learner-centred approach to literacy that they experienced in school (Chang, 1998; Li, 2002). As observed in the interviews, the parents in the study looked back to their own literacy learning experiences in Hong Kong and China when viewing their children’s writing development in the English language. They believed that writing was associated with a set of rules to become skilled at; competence was achieved through modeling and practice of reading and writing in the form of class work and home assignments. It was a structural approach in which children strived to perfect their accuracy and calligraphy of the characters they learned by rote, and then construct sentences with given vocabulary items. Creative writing was not encouraged until children had gained a proficient mastery of vocabulary and syntactic structures. This traditional banking concept of learning is still prevalent in many Chinese heritage language classes and was endorsed by the parents in the study who would like to see more writing practice in school and home assignments and greater emphasis on formal accuracy.

The parents saw the children’s writing at home as additional work that would pay off in their improved language proficiency. In Chinese traditional conceptions of learning, academic achievement is a result of individual effort, seriousness of purpose, and perseverance much more than that of ability or aptitude (Ping, 1995).
language learners, the children wrote in the wake of their parents pressuring them to work harder in school and to do more reading and writing at home for literacy development in the English language. Their motive was engaging their children in more intensive language practice to promote literacy skills needed for academic success in school and then later in university or advanced studies, as influenced by their cultural belief about perseverance and industry. This was typical of Chinese parents who placed great value on their children’s school education and associated academic achievement with a professional career and subsequent economic and social advancement (Chang, 1998; Li, 2002; Xu, 1999). With the exception of John’s parents who had limited financial capital, the parents of the other children had purchased voluminous English fiction and non-fiction books for their children, as influenced by Confucian ideology that emphasized the authority of texts and classic reading materials. However, a review of the findings shows that the availability and use rather than the quantity of books in the home might be a major factor in facilitating children’s writing development. The availability of writing events and physical and social support by literate others would be more important and relevant, as in the case of John whose mother had always shown great support for her children writing at home and had induced in him a love for writing.

To help their children develop the necessary writing ability and skills, the parents could benefit from understanding how their beliefs, practices and expectations about literacy might be different from those held in the school or the community, and how they could re-orient them to the emergent and meaning-based models of literacy supported by teachers in North America. The parents need to recognize that in the concepts of social learning, children are not passively receiving knowledge of literacy; they should be perceived as “active seekers of meaning who construct knowledge about literacy as they work to make sense of the literate world around them” (Gregory et al., 2004, p. 15). Writing is a situated practice for enculturation into their sociocultural world as much as a vehicle for achieving linguistic accuracy and competence. As children develop their ability to produce written texts in forms embedded in and appropriate to a particular social context, they learn why and what individuals write to make meaning of their experiences as practiced in the community. Instead of emphasizing formal accuracy or length of texts, a focal point in viewing children’s writing would be their increasing
knowledge and understanding of how written language could be invoked as a social tool to use their thoughts and creativity, as reflected in the variability of genres and functions for realizing contextualized writing purposes. In recognition of the role of sociocultural factors in writing development, parents need to expand on literacy activities and events in the family to enrich and support their children’s social as well as language experiences.

In Chinese families, both the physical and the social home environment have a strong impact on the children’s learning with their traditional parental supervising and monitoring model (Li, 2002). The parents often extend school learning by requesting their children to do school-like writing activities after they have completed their homework. However, writing for enjoyment and self-realization seldom figure into writing practice at home. There is a dichotomy between writing and play. Writing is strictly an activity for academic learning and language practice, and is ‘serious business’ as described by Perry et al. (2003). However, to promote interest in and the time spent on writing by the children, parents should work towards promoting self-initiated writing for personal purposes and fun rather than imposing it on them. Providing assistance in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) on a frequent and consistent basis, such as a ‘family writing time’ once or twice a week; parents could discuss with their children daily experiences and help them reflect on the meanings they have for them within their cultural and cognitive capacity. Parents could model the purposes, materials and the process of writing themselves, showing a genuine interest in writing themselves. They could write together with the children, sharing with them the various kinds of writing they engage in for managing daily routines and social situations in order to widen their experience of writing purposes and genres. They could also offer practical help to make writing a regular and natural part of home experiences and inherently facilitate their children’s acquisition of writing skills by providing easy access to writing materials and stationery in the household (Maloy & Edwards, 1990). Harste et al. (1984) aptly contend that “the most salient home factor relating to literacy learning is one we have termed availability and opportunity to engage in written language events” (pp. 42-43).

Literacy activities could extend from the home to the community. The creative functions and the diversity of genres and content in John’s texts suggest the benefits of
social experiences to writing development. While material input was limited in the house, he was always taken around by his parents on errands, shopping trips as well as visits to the public library and book sales. Such experiences and exposure served to heighten children’s awareness of the use of writing as a tool for communication and mediating relationships.

For their enjoyment and need, children should be encouraged to employ resources from popular culture and computer technology, and the use of drawings and visuals in composing. While some Chinese parents would frown on references to popular culture as being ‘unorthodox’, they should accept them as a part of children’s personal life as much as invented spelling is a part of the writing development process. The children in the study revealed writing capabilities beyond the imagination of their teacher and parents. A multimodal and multi-literacy approach to communication processes building on their capacity and interest would greatly facilitate these young writers working to the full capacity of their creativeness.

7.5.2 Connecting Home with School

Where teachers are highly respected and valued in Chinese culture for their professional knowledge and the esteemed role they play in promoting children’s learning, parents should also have similar expectations for themselves in providing social and literacy support in the home. Chinese parents often have different conceptions of relationships between home and school. They strongly believe in the authority of the teacher and the importance of strict enforcement of obedience; it is the exclusive duty of the teacher to give the students explicit instructions about what they should or should not do (Au, 1993, 2006; Chang, 1998; Gregory, 1993; Xu, 1999). For social, political, and economic reasons, they quietly adapt to the dominant language and practices of the school, conforming to the school discourse in the education of their children, and entrusting it to the sole responsibility of institutional authority.

However, while respecting the authority of the teacher, many of the students’ families hold beliefs about how children learn that differ from those practiced in school. They request more home assignments and a more structured approach to education. Studies into children’s literacy development, for example, Teale and Sulzby (1989), have revealed its emergent nature. But some parents would only consider sitting down to
work with texts producing a physical outcome as serious learning. Such tension could have been eliminated if parents connected more frequently and readily with teachers. It benefits parents to recognize that they are key facilitators in their children’s literacy learning (Bissex, 1980), as evidenced by “the rich constellation of writing practices that are part of [their] world outside the walls of [their] school” (Yi, 2007, p. 35). The awareness of the importance of multiple sites of learning would raise their esteem of the role they played in supporting their children at home; they would feel they could have more to contribute in school activities and teacher-parent conferencing. Consequently, they would be more forthcoming in meeting with teachers to exchange views on writing instruction and practice. With the various forms of literacy learning sites available to children, parents should recognize and utilize their position as resources for helping children to learn in an interrelated school and home community (Chang, 1998).

Parents in immigrant families often find themselves exhausted dealing with the financial and social hardships of resettling in a new country. They may have to work long and hard for a living, and have less support from their extended family and community than they would have in their home country. Yet they would spare no effort to work towards the academic success of their children. Such efforts should include devoting time and attention to connecting with teachers in school and collaborating with them. Enabling their children to acquire literacy is not the sole responsibility of the teacher even though they are enrolled in school, as neither is their role as parents limited to ensuring the children finishing all the school assignments at home.

7.6 Limitations of the study

It is important to note that the study is limited because the writing samples collected might not portray a true picture of what the children wrote at school. The children might have written in other school contexts on a more personal basis, such as notes to their classmates. If such texts existed, they were produced outside the teacher’s teaching agenda and hence were not collected. The results might not yield findings that could be generalized to the wider population of Chinese ESL children born of immigrant parents. Another limitation was that the sampling period covered only part of the academic year’s curriculum. A more diverse range of genres and functions might have been found when looking at the whole school year. Still, the amount and variety of
writing generated by the children at home on a self-initiated basis came somewhat as a surprise. The results would have been less surprising had the study been conducted in classrooms where teachers had provided writing tasks involving a wider range of genres or in a different sociocultural context where parents were perceived to place less emphasis on correctness of form.

7.7 Future research

Much of the research on genre development has focused on children of mainstream literate backgrounds who have been immersed in Eurocentric story grammar and schema of fairy tales (Donovan, 2001). In view of the fact that an ever increasing proportion of the student population in elementary schools across North America is made up of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, there is a need to devote research efforts to studying the learning of genres and related issues among these learners (Donovan, 2001; Donovan & Smolkin, 2002; Tower, 2002). As a starting point, research questions should aim at helping these students to understand and produce the genres as used in the mainstream culture for effective schooling. Extending from this area, future research could also focus on how children acquire genre knowledge and factors accounting for literacy acquisition at home and at school. A closer look could also be made into their writing to study their macro structures and how they are related to the functions and genres of the texts. It would also benefit second language education to conduct a similar study comparing L1 (first language) and L2 students. Another area of investigation would be the relative effectiveness of explicit instruction and implicit immersion in the genre development of ESL children.

While the present study focuses on English writing, the influence of L1 literacy, and the transfer and appropriation from L1 to L2 are important for examining ESL children’s writing development. This should form a future research question in examining L2 children’s writing across home and school contexts. Another direction that future research could take is investigating how the practice of writing at home and in school influences L2 acquisition in general. What constitutes good writing in terms of function and genre as perceived by ESL children, teachers or parents would also be a relevant future research topic in the field of early second language writing. To conclude, the internalization of the communicative uses of language in different contexts and for
different functions should be given greater consideration in elementary second language education.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

1. Interview questions for mother of focal child

Demographic data – Place of birth:
   Age range: 30- 40, 41-50, 51-60
   Native country:
   Native language:
   Other language(s) spoken:
   Literacy in which language:
   Native country:
   Years of residence in Canada: since
   Level of education:
   Work:
   Language used at home:
   Language used at work:

Part One: Family literacy practices

1. How often do you read/write at home? What do you read/write?

2. What kinds of print are there in your home?

3. What are the purposes for which you use print (Chinese/English) at home?

4. What are the purposes for which you use print (Chinese/English) in the community?

5. What books/magazines/newspapers and other forms of reading materials do you buy/borrow/subscribe for yourself?

6. How do you rate your literacy in Chinese/English?

7. What literacy events/practices are there in your home? (E.g., visits to library or bookstore)

   General comments:

Part Two: Child literacy practices

1. How does your child learn to read and write at home? In Chinese or in English?

2. What kinds of reading materials does your child read at home?

3. What pop media texts does your child read at home?
4. How often do you buy reading materials for your child? Language/type?

5. Do you ever use print to communicate with your child?

6. How often do you read to/share read with your child at home? What language/topics/forms are they?

7. Do you write with your child at home? How often? What is the purpose of writing? What language is normally used?

8. Does your child write at home? How often? What is the purpose of writing? What language is normally used?

General comments:
2. Interview questions for focal child

Demographic data – Place of birth:
   Age:
   Native language:
   Other language(s) spoken:
   Literacy in which language:
   Native country:
   Years of residence in Canada:
   Language used at home:

Reading and writing activities at home and in the community

1. What do you like doing most at home?

2. How often do you read/write at home?  What do you read/write?

3. How often does your parent read/write at home?  What forms are they?

4. What kinds of print are there in your home?

5. What books/magazines do you enjoy reading most?

6. What kind of pop media do you like and read – TV, radio, video, movies, comics, magazines, video games?

7. What are the things that make you want to write?

8. What is the purpose of writing in general?

9. What kind of writing (genre) do you enjoy most?

10. Do you read and write outside the home?  Where?  For what purpose?

General comments:
APPENDIX B

1. Interview questions for mother of focal child

1. What kinds of writing does your child do at home in Chinese and in English? How often?

2. What social and cultural purposes does your child write at home in Chinese and in English?

3. Does your child participate in any language related activities in the community, e.g. joining a Chinese language programme?

4. How do you view your children’s reading and writing ability in English and in Chinese?

5. What goals do you have for your child’s education?

6. What is your attitude towards your child learning to read and write in English and in Chinese?

7. What is your view of your child’s literacy abilities in English and in Chinese in the future?

General comments:
2. Interview questions for focal child

1. What kind of help does your teacher/parent give you in your writing?
   
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<th>Parents</th>
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2. Do you enjoy writing in English/Chinese? Why/Why not?

3. What difficulties do you experience in writing in English in school/ the home?

4. What do you think can make you write better in English?

5. What is most important about good writing in English?

6. How do you look at yourself as a writer of English?

7. Do you think you are different from other children, e.g. Caucasian children, because you speak a different language at home?

8. What are your views of writing in English and in Chinese?

General comments:
APPENDIX C

Interview questions for home-based writing samples (one from each category/genre of the children’s own choice)

1. What do you like about this piece of writing?
2. Why did you choose to write about this topic/theme?
3. Why did you choose to write in this particular form(genre)?
4. Where did you get your ideas for your writing?
5. How did you organize your ideas for this piece of writing?
6. What made you start writing this piece of writing?

General and specific comments on the piece of writing: