THE EFFECT OF GOAL-SETTING AND PLANNING ON THE WRITING COMPETENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines an intervention study aimed at improving the essay writing skills of secondary school students. The programme has been conducted with Year 8 and Year 10 students from two different schools. The premise of the study is that goal-setting and planning are crucial, often ignored, elements of the composing process. These factors influence writing quality, and may be related to student attitudes to writing.

Two intact Year 8 and Year 10 classes from two schools were designated as Control and Experimental Groups respectively. Two facets of writing were assessed at pre-test. Firstly, writing attitudes and writing anxiety levels of students from both groups were determined using the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Inventory, a pre-tested instrument in the form of a Likert-type scale. Secondly, the writing competence of both groups was assessed by means of an in-class essay. Year 8 students wrote narrative essays, while Year 10 students wrote argumentative essays. These were marked by two experienced teachers using pre-determined marking criteria. The Experimental Group underwent the intervention programme, comprising ten to twelve class periods over eight weeks. The Control Group continued with regular English classes during this time. After eight weeks, the two groups completed a post-test comprising a second in-class essay and the questionnaire. Think-aloud protocols were also conducted with case studies from the Experimental Groups in each year group.

Results suggest that direct instruction of goal-setting and planning strategies does influence the composing process and the quality of student writing. In some cases, this instruction also serves to alleviate writing anxiety. The study has implications for classroom practice and student writing competence.

INTRODUCTION
This paper is based on work in progress. The research is currently taking place in two co-educational schools within the Metropolitan Sydney region and data is being collected and analysed at present. For this reason, the present paper will focus primarily on the background, methodology and expected outcomes of the study. Brief mention of initial results will be made.

RESEARCH QUESTION
A study of the effect of goal-setting and planning on the writing competence of secondary school students and the relationship between these processes and the trait of Writing Apprehension.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

DEFINITION OF TERMS
Writing Goal: A goal is a ‘future, desired state’ (Lee et. al. 1989:2). A writing goal is a reference point for guiding and giving meaning to subsequent cognitive processes (such as planning and revising) and physical actions (such as the act of writing) which will lead to the attainment of that goal - completing a piece of writing. In the case of many adolescent writers, the goal is frequently ill-defined and unclear.

Writing Plan: A writing plan is a decision or group of decisions about a writer’s goals in a piece of writing (Scardamalia et. al. 1982). The plan involves the strategies to be used to achieve the writing goals.

Writing Competence: The ability of individuals to express adequately their response to a question or set task in written form. This is quantitatively assessed by allocating marks for (i) competence in presentation of content - including relevance of material to the given topic and cohesion of sentences and paragraphs; (ii) competent use of the mechanics of writing, including spelling, punctuation and syntax.

Composing Process: The process of composing a piece of writing is ‘multi-faceted’ with many of the constituent elements functioning ‘simultaneously, recursively and/or in a linear fashion’ (Pianko, 1979:5). It comprises cognitive processes which involve skills such as the analysis of ideas, memory searches and the synthesis and integration of information. The process entails the crucial operations of translating thought processes into visible language, along with reviewing and revision of the written product. As well as the cognitive component, there are more observable external behaviours such as pausing, fidgeting or deletion of written work, to name a few.

Writing Apprehension: A term coined by Daly and Miller (1975), Writing Apprehension (WA) is a situation and subject-specific individual difference concerned with people’s general tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to demand writing - especially when accompanied by some amount of evaluation. Theoretically, those with low WA should perform better on tests of writing skills than highly apprehensive writers, since the latter find writing unrewarding. The trait is assessed by a self-report measure entitled the Daly-Miller
Writing Apprehension Inventory (1975).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
The skill of expressing oneself in writing is one which all writing teachers aim to develop in their students. Yet for many years, the cognitive processes involved in achieving a coherent and articulate piece of writing were, at best, referred to in vague terms; or at worst, ignored and left to chance. In recent years, the process of composing written text has received increased attention from such authors as Hayes and Flower (1980), Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986) and de Beaugrande (1984). This reflects an acknowledgement of the importance of the composing process as the basis of all writing production. This study focuses on one of the many facets intrinsic to composing text - that of the role of planning and goal-setting in the composing process and its effects on the writing competence of adolescents in two genres - narrative and argumentative writing.

Several general models of the composing process have been developed and since it is not the purpose of this paper to review the literature extensively, the Hayes and Flower (1980) model of the composing process serves to illustrate what many models acknowledge - the fact that planning and goal-setting are an integral part of the composing process.

The concepts associated with problem-solving and goal-setting have informed the models of Hayes and Flower (1980), de Beaugrande (1984) and others who have suggested that a problem-solving approach is the nearest approximation to an accurate representation of the writing process. In her study entitled Adolescent and Adult Conceptions of Planning (unpublished paper, 1994) Denise Chalmers discovered that adolescents fail to conceptualise planning as (i) a means of reducing stress; (ii) a means of solving problems; (iii) a means of setting and prioritising goals. Since writing is so often depicted as a ‘problem-solving process’, it is important for teachers to demonstrate to students that the process of writing a narrative or an argument is like a problem which may be solved through careful goal setting and planning.

The importance of a clearer understanding of the processes involved in composing text is highlighted by Pianko (1979:20): ‘What characterizes ‘poor’ writers...are their underdeveloped composing processes’. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986:789) suggest that it is the formulation of writing goals and sub-goals which seems to present the biggest problem for writers. In determining the role of goal setting in student writing competence, Scardamalia and Bereiter suggest that one of the distinguishing features of expert writers is that for them, goals are ‘highly functional symbolic entities’ and they are actively involved in
the formulation of networks of sub-goals which lead to the achievement of ‘main goals’ (1986:789). It is the contention of these authors that the difficulty for student writers lies more in the construction and representation of goals than in their pursuit (1986:790). They propose that goal construction should be viewed as an integral part of writing competence, rather than an externally determined precondition of good writing (1986:789).

A further variable under scrutiny in this study is that of Writing Apprehension or Writing Anxiety. This term was coined by Daly and Miller (1975) who devised an inventory to assess the trait. These authors define ‘Writing apprehension’ (WA) as the tendency of a person to avoid the process of writing - particularly when it is to be evaluated in some way (1975:244). It reflects the individual's general predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably toward situations where writing is required. The highly apprehensive writer typically finds writing unrewarding, avoids the process as much as possible, and experiences more than normal amounts of anxiety in situations involving writing. Lyn Bloom (in Thompson 1979:1) refers to WA as an anxiety which is a ‘cluster of feelings, beliefs, and behaviours which keep a person from writing at all, or with less efficiency and effectiveness than he or she might do otherwise’. Thus, Writing Apprehension (WA) describes the individual's 'general predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably toward situations where writing is required' (Daly in Daly and Shamo, 1978:120).

Although the work of Daly and Miller forms the basis of this study, other researchers such as Selfe(1984) and Faigley et.al. (1981) have made use of the Daly-Miller WA Inventory and have found it to be a useful predictor of WA in general. Articles supporting the validity and utility of this measure are available. It appears that little research has been conducted in this area over the past decade and I was not able to locate any articles refuting the validity of Daly and Miller's WA Inventory. I believe that WA is a trait worthy of acknowledgement and investigation, because of the reluctance of many high school students to write, since they find expression on paper difficult. Unfortunately, many of the studies reviewed have investigated only tertiary students from the United States of America. Nevertheless, they are beneficial as a means of establishing a foundation for the current study.

According to the literature, High Apprehensives tend to 'avoid the practice necessary to develop and maintain competencies in writing-related skills' (1981:16). On the other hand, Low Apprehensives generally display confidence in their writing ability, frequently enjoy writing and typically achieve the best results. Prudence is necessary, however, when making generalisations of this nature. Hansen (1977 in Van der Zanden and Pace, 1984:352) found that some anxious students may occasionally perform better than
non-anxious students. Thus under some circumstances anxiety impairs performance, while under others it promotes high achievement. Most important of all, however, is the theory that there is a curvilinear relationship between anxiety and school achievement. Van der Zanden and Pace (1984:352) suggest that up to a certain point, anxiety serves to arouse the individual, leading to improved performance, but if the level of anxiety increases beyond that point, performance is hindered. This theory was shown to be valid in the pilot study.

Burgoon, Jones and Stewart (in Daly and Miller, 1975b:175) examined the relationship between cognitive stress and language intensity - in persuasive writing in particular. The latter is defined by the researchers (in Daly and Miller, 1975b:175) as ‘language indicating degree and direction of distance from neutrality’. The authors found that when people were placed under cognitive stress, they generally produced less intense communication than when they were not under such stress. This was particularly true of persuasive writing. Using this theory as a foundation, Daly and Miller (1975b) found that students who scored high on their WA Inventory - in other words, those who were particularly apprehensive - experienced high cognitive stress in writing situations and thus employed less intense language in persuasive essays than was the case for those indicating lower WA levels.

Harvey-Felder (1978 in Faigley, Daly and Witte, 1981:16) discovered that negative or poor teacher responses to early writing attempts of children, along with deficits in skills training correlated positively with WA later in life. Since goal-setting and planning are essential writing skills, it appears that the research supports the need to develop such capabilities as a means of lowering excess WA in writers. In the research that has been conducted, cause-effect relationships have been difficult to establish. It has only been possible to refer to those variables which influence and serve to increase WA. Some of these factors include ‘an early history of aversive conditioning, poor skill development and inadequate role models’ (Daly, 1979:37). Thompson (1979:1) suggests that other bases for this anxiety include fear of structuring and ordering thoughts. This fear is significantly related to the process of goal-setting and it is the proposition of this researcher that such ‘fear’ can and must be alleviated in order to relieve WA and facilitate more successful and rewarding writing experiences for students. Other fears contributing to WA include fear of revealing oneself through the written word; fear of the blank page; and fear of being evaluated; not to mention the fear of failure. Furthermore, WA has been found to be inversely related to self-concept and self-competence ratings (McCroskey et. al. 1977 in Daly, 1979:38).

Naturally, it is important for teachers to distinguish between the beneficial tension of successful student writers and the more destructive anxiety exhibited by poor writers. A certain amount of stress is useful in any situation; however as Thompson (1979:1) points
out, current research has not ‘primarily concerned itself with the creative tension experienced by successful writers: the term, as it is applied in research is negative’. Writing anxiety is a complex issue, since it comprises a number of different components including affective, cognitive, environmental and behavioural facets. To effectively measure and monitor all these areas is a difficult - if not impossible - task. Nevertheless, some researchers have attempted to explore how certain teaching techniques may be used to reduce WA.

Fox (1980) reported that student-centred methods of teaching composition, with much group work and structured peer response sessions, served to reduce WA to a significantly lower level at a faster rate than did conventional writing instruction. Thompson (1979:6) pursued the theory that a study of the various aspects of language would reduce the mystery surrounding language and the writing process itself. The language study course included such aspects as exploration of the history and formation of language; study of grammatical rules; learning how to make connections between thinking and writing; and learning how to order ideas in a logical, cohesive manner. Thompson formulated an attitude scale and discovered that after college level students had undergone a language study course, WA declined. Furthermore, writing grades rose significantly as anxiety scores decreased.

Seiler et. al. (1978) investigated Communication Apprehension (CA) and its effects on college students. These researchers suggested (1978:12) that teachers need to be informed about the effect of anxiety on student behaviour. For instance, when students avoid interactions with teachers, their avoidance may not be due to lack of motivation or because they lack intelligence. The avoidance may simply be a result of CA.

Not only does apprehension affect student-teacher relationships; it influences how young people approach their work. This research has a direct bearing on the goal-setting process, as it is during pre-drafting that writers formulate a plan – whether it be conscious or sub-conscious – determining which goals they intend to pursue, and how these will be attained. Selfe (1984), using the Daly-Miller WA Inventory, found that High and Low Writing Apprehensives approached writing tasks differently. She observed eight college students as they composed their responses to two academic writing tasks. Results indicated that the ‘High Writing Apprehensives were fearful as they approached the writing assignments and were not at all confident of their ability to compose an effective essay’ (1984:48). Low Writing Apprehensives, however, were more confident and expected to be more successful. Other findings included the fact that High Apprehensives generally were less adept than were Low Apprehensives when it came to gathering and synthesizing important information to be used in the
essays. This is particularly important since the ability to gather and synthesize information is specifically related to the goal-setting and planning process.

Selfe also found that High Writing Apprehensives generally worry more about composing the first sentence perfectly (called ‘local’ planning), than about the overall structure and coherence of the essay. Therefore, there was a difference in the amount of time devoted by the two groups to 'global' and 'local' planning (1984:49). When asked why he put examples in the order he did, one of the High Apprehensives responded: ‘I just wrote them down, and I didn't think of the order... I don't think it matters.’ (1984:52) However, the investigator reported that all four Low Apprehensives ‘revealed conscious and sometimes complex strategies for arranging points according to a logical hierarchy, a chronological sequence, or an order of perceived appeal’ (1984:52).

The Daly-Miller model is primarily psychological rather than psycholinguistic. According to Fox (1980:39), Daly and Miller adopt a student-centred approach, based on Maslow's theory of self-actualization. It appears that the intention of Daly and Miller was to measure general anxiety about the process of encoding written communication. WA is defined as a trait since that which is measured is a generalized reaction to a specific state, namely, the active encoding of written messages. The WA Inventory assesses the emotional response of individuals to writing, rather than focussing on cognitive aspects per se. Language development and its subsequent effect on the writing of individuals is clearly not the primary concern of these researchers, since they make no mention of theories relating to the composing process. In their assessment of the Daly-Miller WA Inventory, Bridwell and Beach (1984:228) suggest that the Inventory fails to consider the ‘situational forms’ of WA. Thus, writers may be more or less anxious depending on the writing topic, the intended audience, or the writing environment in general.

In 1984, Daly and Hailey extended the dispositional model of WA and introduced the ‘state’ dimension of WA. The writers acknowledge that the initial research assumed that WA was a stable, enduring trait; however, they now posit that there are in fact two forms of WA: dispositional and situational. The dispositional WA is an enduring, stable trait measured by the self-report instrument. The situational form of WA is transitory in nature, changing according to situation. Unfortunately, as Daly and Hailey (1984:260) point out, the empirical use of the construct of WA limits it to ‘assessable’ situations and there is a lack of research on situational WA. There are two main variables affecting situational anxiety (Daly and Hailey 1984:261) - these are the writing assignment and the writing environment.

It is hoped that the current study will contribute to our understanding
of situational WA, since the methodology of this study involves intervention in terms of developing goal-setting and planning abilities during the composing process. The study also explores the way in which two different writing styles - namely narrative and argumentative - influence WA. While this has already been explored in the research, there is an added dimension in this study - the age factor. The research intends to examine whether or not age influences the importance attached to goal-setting, and in turn, whether or not this affects WA levels.

The relationship between WA and goal-setting is well illustrated in the work of Phillips and Metzger (1973). While these authors do not refer to WA as such, they do speak in terms of 'reticence' to communicate (1973:220), and it is on this research that Daly (1977) based a great deal of his own theory of WA. Phillips and Metzger focus on human communication in general, yet there is a lot to be gained from their interpretation of the link between reticence in communicating and goal-setting. They envisage reticence as a 'learning problem'. Reticents often do not communicate because their perception of self and/or the situation may be distorted. This, they believe, leads to indecisiveness, which results from ignorance of what the communication requirements of a given situation are. These authors believe that we need to teach the reticent person to revise the way s/he sees human communication and her/his role in it. At the foundation of the treatment program for reticent communicators is goal-setting training. Robert Mager (in Phillips et. al. 1973:229) states: ‘Instruction may help a person if there is a difference between what [s/]he is doing at present and what [s/]he needs to be able to do or would like to be able to do’. This involves a personalized goal-setting procedure which ‘leads quickly to a change in attitude which in turn can lead to fulfilling needs and further better behaviour’ (Glasser in Phillips et.al. 1973:228). Clearly, if writers are experiencing WA, something needs to be done in order to alleviate detrimental anxiety levels. It would seem that if the writer actively, consciously monitors and controls her/his thinking processes whilst setting goals and planning what is to be written, then this may serve to reduce WA, whilst facilitating positive writing experiences.

Selfe (1984:45-64) points out that no substantive research has been done to define the relationship between WA and the processes students employ as they compose. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between WA and the goal-setting process which is an integral part of the composing process. Composing comprises cognitive processes which involve skills such as the analysis and synthesis of ideas, memory searches and the synthesis and integration of information. These enable goal-setting and planning. At this point, the crucial operations of translating thought processes into visible language, along with reviewing and revision of the written product may
Such an interplay of cognitive processes is acknowledged by authors such as Flower and Hayes (1980) and Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986) in their respective models of the composing process.

It appears that goal construction and representation is more problematic for young writers than is the strategies for pursuing those goals, since, once goals are stated, children are able to use problem-solving strategies to pursue them. To distinguish between different writers' approaches to the process of goal-setting, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983:22) refer to ‘high-road’ and ‘low-road’ writers. The ‘high-road’ student is one who always pursues goals beyond reach. Her/his mental capacity is continually channelled into the changing nature of the task. Hence, for such a writer, the process of writing becomes a task of representing meaning rather than transcribing language. Children on the ‘high-road’ continually incorporate new relational considerations into the writing task. ‘Low-road’ writers, on the other hand, tend to utilise their mental capacity exclusively for the task at hand. They are continually ‘thinking of what to write next’ (1983:27). In other words, there is no functional distinction in their mind between and idea and the language used to express it. The problems which such writers face include the inability to generate sufficient content, and the tendency to ramble due to lack of direction and effective Planning. Bereiter and Scardamalia believe that the most anxious writers are those on the ‘low-road’ (1983:31). Writers on the ‘high-road’ feel that they are in control of the ‘obstacles’ they face and they see these as challenges. However, the ‘low-road’ writers see writing as ‘out of their control’. Scardamalia and Bereiter see the main distinction between the two types of writers in their ‘mental life’ (1983:32). ‘Low-road’ writers simply view writing as a clerical process which may communicate ideas, but does not have a role in one’s mental life. Such writers are unable to engage in writing as a ‘massive integrating process’ (1983:31). Thus, the primary task, according to these researchers, is for teachers to develop goal-setting and planning abilities as they are integral to the ‘construction of meanings’ (1983:32).

Scardamalia and Bereiter suggest inherent problems could be remedied by such activities as conferencing and the articulation by children of their writing goals, so that global goals might be converted into operative subgoals (1986:789). There is a danger in this somewhat simple remedy. While emphasising the importance of goal-setting skills, these authors fail to suggest how the goal-setting process actually works. Neither do they address the problem of whether or not it differs according to age, or genre of writing. These questions form part of the current study.

Writing certainly can be described as a ‘problem-solving process’
(Scardamalia and Bereiter 1986:781). As such, students need to be provided with skills to solve the 'problem' of writing. In an attempt to reduce 'cognitive strain' (i.e. demand on short term memory or conscious attention- Flower and Hayes 1980:41), writers seek to develop strategies which will divide writing into stages and eliminate certain constraints for a period of time. In order to deal with simultaneous demands on attention, writers need to set goals and priorities. In setting priorities, writers eliminate some other constraints or possibly choose to satisfice. In a later article, Flower and Hayes (1981) suggest that as part of the planning process, writers use a number of different kinds of plans to guide the composing process, and they suggest that good plans are operational in that they specify a sequence of procedures.

It is the contention of this researcher that adolescents, in particular, have difficulty coming to terms with the goal-setting process. Often, high school students - particularly those in senior high school - are expected to produce essays which demonstrate a high level of writing maturity and organisation, not to mention an ability to express in writing complex and abstract forms of reasoning. While such expectations clearly exist, preparation for and instruction in the vital processes of goal-setting appear to be sadly lacking in many high school classrooms. It is as if students are expected to learn how to plan their essays through a form of writing osmosis. Horrocks (1969:104) acknowledges that adolescence is a period in which young people have a need to order, to be precise, and organised. They also display a need to construct, build and put thing together. It is this very need for order and organisation which may pose a problem during the composing process, because the novice adolescent writer encounters conflict between her/his desire to organise knowledge and the frustrating inability to modify, revise, and select material which will be most relevant to the final product.

My aim is to determine the writing anxiety levels of adolescent students and to assess the extent to which these are related to students’ ability to set writing goals, plan what they will write and ultimately compose an essay.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH THUS FAR
In 1992 I conducted a pilot study with 60 Year 11 students. The Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Inventory was administered and results from this instrument were correlated with results from two essays - one narrative and one argumentative - written by each of the students. This pilot study of Writing Apprehension in Year 11 students, showed that:-

1. WA does influence the level of writing competence in both narrative and argumentative essay writing.
2. The relationship between WA and level of competence is not inversely proportional - thus one could not conclude that high WA automatically decreases level of writing competence.
3. The relationship between WA and level of writing competence is
curvi-linear, with subjects in medium-high and medium-low levels of WA (based on the Daly-Miller WA Inventory) displaying the highest levels of writing competence in both genres of writing.

4. Extreme WA (both high and low) tends to interfere negatively with writing competence.

CLARIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM
1. WA is a significant component influencing the composing process.
2. The ability to set and pursue writing goals through planning is a second important factor affecting writing competence.

3. Current definitions in goal-setting theory are at times confusing and contradictory. The models developed as a result of those definitions are useful, but frequently vague with respect to the composing process and the nature of goal-setting and planning in writing.

THE CURRENT STUDY
HYPOTHESES
1. WA and the ability to set and pursue goals through planning during the composing process are related.
2. WA and the ability to set and pursue goals through planning affect writing competence as manifested in the quality of essay writing in Year 8 and Year 10 students.

METHODOLOGY
The study is an intervention study, comprising approximately ten classes over an eight to ten week period.

SUBJECTS
The subjects are drawn from Year 8 and Year 10 in two co-educational secondary schools in the Sydney Metropolitan region. In each school, intact mixed ability classes are used in Year 8 and Year 10 respectively. In each year group, one group serves as the Control, one as the Experimental group. The size of each class is approximately 30 students. The sample size across two high schools for Year 8 is 125, with 122 subjects in Year 10.

RESEARCH DESIGN
In order to assess the effect of goal-setting and planning on writing competence, a quasi-experimental design with Experimental and Control groups is used. An intervention is administered under experimental conditions, with subjects remaining in intact classes. The allocation of intact classes is clearly the least disruptive method of research in a school context.

The treatment for the Experimental groups consists of an eight- to ten-week intervention programme, conducted in conjunction with regular English teachers in the respective schools. An average of one to two
periods a week is taken up by the intervention procedure.

Pre-Test
Groups are tested prior to the intervention using identical testing instruments. The pre-test consists of two parts. Firstly, students complete a questionnaire comprising a combination of the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Inventory and questions devised by the researcher. In addition, there are four open-ended questions asking students to (a) define a plan; (b) explain what sorts of activities they plan for; (c) define a writing plan; (d) define a writing goal.
The second part of the pre-test comprises a writing activity. Year 8 are given a narrative writing task, Year 10 are given an argumentative writing task. On the instruction sheet, students are told to use the planning space provided as marks will be given for the quality of their plan.

Post-Test
Experimental and Control groups are re-tested at the end of the intervention period. The post-test consists of two parts. Firstly, all students complete a questionnaire including all the questions asked at pre-test, as well as some additional questions devised by the researcher. The second part of the pre-test comprises a writing activity. Year 8 are once again given a narrative writing task, while Year 10 complete an argumentative writing task. On the instruction sheet, students are again told to use the planning space provided as marks will be given for the quality of their plan. The Experimental groups in each year are also asked to write down their writing goals for the task.

In particular, the post-test seeks to
* determine any change in goal-setting and planning abilities;
* determine any improvement in writing competence;
* determine any change in writing apprehension and attitudes to writing;
* compare the relative improvement of the Experimental and Control groups in writing competence.

Student Interviews and Think-Aloud Protocols
After the intervention procedure, three students are chosen from the Experimental group in Year 8 and 10 respectively. These students are chosen on the basis of their Writing Apprehension levels, such that students displaying High, Moderate and Low Writing Anxiety levels respectively are interviewed and asked to engage in think-aloud protocols. This involves goal-setting, planning and writing an essay in the presence of the interviewer, whilst “thinking aloud” onto a tape recorder. The interviewer may ask questions at different times.
Teacher Interviews
Teachers are interviewed twice - one week after the intervention and one term after the intervention. They are asked to comment on their perceptions of the effect of the intervention programme on students’ writing progress.

DATA ANALYSIS
The following analyses will be undertaken:-
1. Essays are scored using a pre-determined set of marking criteria, incorporating the work of Connor (1990), McCann (1989) on criteria for assessing the quality arguments.
2. Essay plans are scored using criteria developed by the researcher. These include amount of relevant detail included in the plan; ability to summarise and organise key ideas or events (for narrative writing) and the utility of the plan in determining the structure and organisation of ideas in the essay.
3. Responses to the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Inventory are scored using the pre-determined scoring procedure suggested by the test developers (Daly and Miller 1973).
4. Comparison of Experimental and Control group mean essay and Writing Apprehension scores at post-test (using pre-test scores as the covariate) using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).
5. Relative improvements in essay writing competence between Experimental and Control groups are analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).
6. Effect sizes at post-test will be reported. Effect size is calculated by dividing the mean differences of the Experimental and Control group by the standard deviation of the Control group.
7. Pair-wise t-tests using Experimental and Control group mean scores to determine growth from pre- to post-test.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
In the light of the literature review and the earlier pilot study, there are a number of broad, conceptual outcomes which one would expect from the proposed study. Firstly, it is expected that moderate levels of WA, combined with the ability to set and pursue effective writing goals, will enhance the quality of essay writing in Year 8 and Year 10 students. Secondly, one would expect that extreme levels of WA - both high and low - would adversely affect the students' ability to set and pursue writing goals; in turn, this would tend to negatively influence the cohesion and quality of essays.

Thirdly, it is expected that, as a result of intervention in the form of teaching students how to set goals and plan during the composing process, those in the Experimental group will generally produce essays which are more cohesive and of a higher standard (using the pre-determined marking criteria) than those in the control group.
Fourthly, the developmental factor and the nature of the writing task are two factors which are expected to influence the importance which students attach to the value of goal-setting and planning in writing. One would expect that the older, more mature writers in Year 10 would attach a greater importance to the need for careful establishment of goals and plans as part of the composing process. It is possible that, because of the simpler nature of their writing tasks, Year 8 students may not need to spend as much time setting and re-setting sub-goals and planning their work. Furthermore, it is expected that differential cognitive development of Year 8 and Year 10 students may have an impact on the importance attached to goal-setting and planning by each group of subjects. Finally, in view of the vague use of the term "goal" in models such as that of Flower and Hayes (1980), it is expected that a modification of this model of the composing process will result, with an emphasis on the recursive nature of the goal-setting and composing process.

INITIAL RESULTS
Contrary to expectations, it does not appear that those in the High WA group necessarily achieve lower grades than those displaying more moderate levels of WA. In both Year 8 and Year 10, some students in the High WA levels achieved the highest grades on the pre-test essay. However, results have yet to be consolidated. On the other hand, those students displaying the lowest levels of WA do appear to be attaining lower essay results as compared with those in with higher levels of WA. Thus, low WA appears at this stage to interfere more noticeably with writing competence than does high WA.

Based on responses to the questionnaire, it would appear that the most anxious students are those who are high achievers (based on school results). Initial data analysis suggests that for a certain number of students High Writing Apprehension was lowered as a result of the intervention. Similarly, those with excessively low WA (synonymous with apathy and/or low achievement) showed an increase in levels of Writing Anxiety at post-test. This would seem to indicate that for some students who, at pre-test, demonstrated dangerously low levels of WA (i.e. they demonstrated a non-chalant attitude to their writing), the intervention served to increase their concern about writing. Some students moved into the Medium-High levels of WA which, based on the earlier study, are more synonymous with positive achievement.

As expected, those who set goals and planned carefully before writing appear to achieve higher results in their essays than those who do not engage in planning at all. The quality of essays - both narrative and argumentative, appears thus far to be closely related to the quality of essay planning. However, the nature of this relationship has yet to be explored. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. For instance, some students with moderately high WA omitted a written plan - preferring rather to plan whilst writing. For some writers, this
approach can be successful. This highlights the need to consider the ability of students as a key variable influencing writing competence.

Initial results suggest that the majority of students in the Experimental groups of both year groups have benefited from increased attention to planning and goal-setting. This has manifested itself both in mean essay scores and in verbal and written responses from the students. It would appear that older students in Year 10 do attach more value to planning than some students in Year 8. However, the difference was not as great as I expected. In both year groups, students said that they had not been taught how to plan a story or an essay and the majority of students wrote that they thought it was important to plan what you were going to write before starting the writing task. When asked to write a plan, the majority of students seemed unsure of themselves, stating “we haven’t been taught how to do this.”

Initial results suggest that in narrative writing, those who are able to provide a sketchy plan of main characters and key events - even if they are not in the same order as in the story - are able to produce more cohesive and creative stories than those who do not plan or who provide too much detail. Year 8 students’ story plans range from writing out the first few sentences, to providing a detailed description of characters, to writing one or two words. Those who are able to jot down main events and to conceptualise possible moments of conflict or suspense, produce stories of a higher quality than those who write a list of events, with a predictable conclusion.

In Year 10, those who organise ideas into arguments for and against, conceptualising how these will fit into the framework of the essay, produce the best essays. Some students appear to think that a plan involves writing whole sentences - thus wasting time. Many seem to have difficulty summarising their ideas in a few words. Without fail, those who do not show any evidence of planning produce essays of a lower quality than those who take the time to plan.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE INTERVENTION
At first the concept of goal-setting was foreign to most students - particularly in relation to writing. However during and after the intervention, the students were encouraged to devise their own writing goals. These ranged from general goals: “to write enough” or “to get a good mark”; to specific goals regarding the content they wish to cover and particular words they may mis-spell etc.

Year 8 responses included:
I never knew that you could plan a story like this. It has really helped.
I think that I am less worried about writing stories because I have learned how to make them interesting. I have learned to plan ahead and
to aim for my goals.
Having a plan helps me to have much more to write about. I used to run out of ideas and things to write about, but not anymore.

Year 10 students said:
In exams, it really helps to have a good plan. It helps to give me more ideas to write about and I don’t go blank like I used to.
Now that I have set goals for my writing, I feel like I have more direction.
I think more carefully about what I put into each paragraph now that I am using a plan.
I think that plans are most useful when I have a limited amount of time. I never thought I would say this, but I think it is important to jot down a plan, even if there is a limited time to write the essay. It makes all the difference in the world to the quality of my essay writing.

TEACHER RESPONSES TO INTERVENTION
A Year 8 English teacher said, post-intervention:
The programme has encouraged the students to think about how they will put their story together, rather than just launching straight into writing for the sake of it. They seem more confident...

A Year 10 English teacher said, post-intervention:
The programme has influenced the way students approach their literary essays. They now ask different questions about the essays we do in class. For example, they want to know what the focus of the question is so that they know how to set their goal to answer the question correctly. It seems as if, when I give them an essay question, they visualise what the essay will look like. They seem to be drawing up plans more often and depicting their response to the question visually. The intervention has affected the sorts of questions the students ask about the essays they have to write. The programme seems to have given confidence to my lower ability students especially. They seem to have more confidence in themselves and are more apt to ask questions now.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
It is acknowledged that one of the limitations of the study lies in its small sample size. Only Year 8 and Year 10 students are sampled, thus the results may not be generalizable to other age groups. However, for ethical reasons, it was not possible for me to access Year 11 and Year 12 students for the time required to carry out the intervention. In addition, only two schools have been used. This also reduces the generalizability of the results.

Clearly, the intervention is carried out over a limited number of classes. Thus, while it would be ideal to conduct a longer study, time
and the constraints of school programmes do not allow for this.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Care has been taken to ensure ethical principals are observed throughout the intervention. Neither the names of schools, nor those of students or teachers will be identified at any stage. The extent of expected involvement was explained to all students at the outset of the intervention. The right to withdraw from the study or to refuse to answer any question was also explained. Precautions have been taken to ensure that those not involved in the intervention are not disadvantaged in any way.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS
Flower and Hayes' (1980:31) definition of the writing process as an act of ‘juggling’, perhaps best summarises the attitude of many who have been given the task of producing a piece of written text. For those who are unable to set goals or engage in a dynamic goal-setting process throughout the task of composing, writing appears as precarious and uncontrollable as a juggling act. Yet, just as practice develops skill and expertise in the juggler; so a practical understanding of the utility of goals and how to develop them facilitates the performance of cognitive feats during the composing process. It is hoped that this study will draw the attention of practitioners to the importance of teaching students how to set goals and plan their writing such that the writing ‘juggling act’ might become a little less mysterious, less anxiety-filled and less ominous for adolescent writers.

REFERENCES
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