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Adults learning to write: exploring alternatives to functional writing

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she say

I say good morning

he say yes

I go back to my sister

she ask me what they say

he wait for two days

then he take onother lady

because I don't know

Correct use of the simple past

I was born

I got up

I found master

he replied

Correct use of the past continuous

that man (he) was not going to work

Incorrect use of relative clauses

I have got lady work for us

Incorrect use of the infinitive

only the lady going look after

Correct use of the infinitive

people looking (for) the lady to look after the children

I don't know how to talk English

Incorrect use of the present continuous

I coming to tell you

everything he talking with me

Correct use of the present continuous

I'm looking (for) the job

Lack of subject-verb agreement (third person singular)

the other lady come

he say (several examples)

other lady send me here

she ask me

he look the children

he wait for two day

he take onother lady

To having my first baby ***13.6***

I was 18 years old, my boy friend were 20 years. The hospital I have my first born is call Ekhombe Hospital. I have my son with the scissors I though I going to die it was very sow I stay in hospital one week. That time we wasn't take three days or 4 day. We stay long until you feeling better. afte all I was very happy when I go home with my little boy name Jabulani. And his father was happy he say the baby name is Nkosinathi he look after him he give me money for the baby. Jabulani stat at school when he was 6 years and his father he was start to be a teacher. And his perent give him money to give me.

The time my boy friend working he is a good man that time I never suffering with his children.

Syntactic features

Incorrect use of the simple past

my boy friend were 20 years

The hospital I have my first born is call Ekhombe Hospital

I have my son with the scissors

I stay in hospital one week

we stay long

when I go home with my little boy

he say

he look after him

he give me money

Jabulani start at school

his father he was start to be a teacher

And his parent give him money to give me

he is a good man

Correct use of the simple past

I was 18 years old

it was very sore

I was very happy

his father was happy

he was 6 years

Lack of an auxiliary verb in the past continuous

I though(t) I going to die

until you feeling better

The time my boy friend working

I never suffering with his children

Use of the incorrect auxiliary verb

That time we wasn't take three days

Me and my friend *5.11*

My friend name was Mary Sikakane. She had a goats, One day I went to Church When I am coming back, Church, on my garden I was got plants I was plant the carrots, cabbege, spinash and onion, I was very cros We start to urgument me and my friend.

I went to my friend to tell her about the goats ate all my plants. She did not even say sorry to me. She just "said you must make your fance around your garden." My fance wasn't tall enough it was short it was easy the goats jump up. And she "said I like to urgument for nothing." After that I was very cros. I went home I sat down and I think what can I do to my friend.

One I got a plan I went back to her "I said to her I want to got to police station to repot you" You got a goats but you not look after them." She was afraid when I say that then I went back home.

After two day she came to me. She "said my friend I am sorry about the words I said to you and about my goats ate up all you plants, I am going to buy some more plants and we going plant again." We do that my friend said to me we plant it again. The veg grow up very nice and she said I must stop urgument. I was felt very bad when I find my veg is all ated up after we fixing all I feel oright is the end of urgument

Syntactic features

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Incorrect use of the simple past

I was got plants

I was plant the carrots

We start to urgument

when I say that

the goats jump up

and I think

We do that

We plant it again

The veg grow up very nice

I was felt very bad

when I find my veg is all ated up

after we fixing

I feel oright

is the end of urgument

Correct use of the simple past

she had (a) goats

I went to church

I was very cross

I went to my friend

She did not even say sorry

She just said

my fance wasn't tall enough

it was short

it was easy

I was very cros

I went home

I sat down

I got a plan

I went back to her

I said to her

She was afraid

I went back home

she came to me

she said (used three times)

my friend said to me

Incorrect use of inversion

I think what can I do

Lack of concord in singular/plural

she had a goats

you got a goats

we plant it again (referring to vegetables)

after two day

Incorrect use (or no use) of prepositions

when I am coming back church

on my garden

Correct use of prepositions

I went to church

I went to my friend

she did not even say sorry to me

you must make your fance around your garden

I went to her

I want to go to Police Station

you (do) not look after them

she came to me

the words I said to you

after two day(s)

Incorrect use of the negative

you not look after them

Correct use of the negative

She did not even say sorry to me

Incorrect use of the infinitive

we going plant again

Correct use of the infinitive

We start(ed) to urgue(ment)

I went to my friend to tell her about the goats

I like to urgue(ment) for nothing

I want to go(t) to police station

I am going to buy some more plants

Incorrect use of relative clauses

I went to my friend to tell her about the goats ate all my plants

I am sorry about... my goats ate up all you(r) plants

Correct use

I am sorry about the words I said to you

No use of the indefinite 'it' or 'that'

is the end of urgument

Letter to Mark Modjadji ***21.11***

Dear Mark Modjadji
I am very pleas to write this letter for you. I want to know about adult school,
I going ask you something.
If I am finish to school what can I do? what job can I do afte that? Can I d
computer or write the newspaper? Please tell me about it. I want to ask you. It
was easy for you when you start to go adult school?

Here at school we learn to write and read English is any job I can do Please
Vente I'll ask you to tell me more what can I do I like to know about the things
I can do, the things going help me I am going be exited if you tell me about all
my question
Yours faithfull
Florence

Syntactic features

Incorrect use of prepositions

to write this letter for you

If I am finish to school

when you start to go adult school?

Correct use of prepositions

Here at school

Please tell me about it

Incorrect use of the infinitive

I going ask you something

the things going help me

I am going be excited

Correct use of the infinitive

I am very please(d) to write this letter

I want to know

I want to ask you

when you start to go (to) adult school

we learn to write and read English

I'll ask you to tell me more

I like to know about the things I can do

Incorrect use of inversion

It was easy for you when you start to go (to) adult school?

is any job can I do?

I'll ask you to tell me more what can I do

Incorrect use of the present continuous

I going ask you something

No use of the indefinite 'there'

Is any job I can do

4.3.7 Comments on the formal features in Florence's writing

In Looking for a job, a text she wrote at the beginning of May, Florence produced a relatively long piece of writing. She generally used prepositions incorrectly. She only occasionally used the past tense, instead using the present tense to express past time. She did not manage to conjugate the verb, missing the 's' in the third person singular consistently. Some forms, such as the present continuous or the infinitive, she used both correctly and incorrectly.

To having my first baby is a text that Florence wrote relatively early in the writing intervention. She still struggled to use the past tense, often using the present tense instead and had difficulties using auxiliary verbs. She was able to use 'was' correctly, a few times.

In her later piece of writing, Me and my friend there is a strong sense of development in her use of the past tense. She had not mastered it fully yet. But in more than half of her clauses she used the past tense correctly. Her use of prepositions had also developed, showing only two mistakes and nine correct uses. She used the infinitive correctly as a rule. She was not consistent with concord between singular and plural nor with her use of negatives. Relative clauses still caused her difficulty, although she used one correct example. She did not make use of the indefinite 'it' on the one occasion that she needed to.

In her Letter to Mark Modjadji Florence still made mistakes when she used the infinitive, but in more than two-thirds of the writing her use was correct. In three out of four sentences she used the present continuous correctly. She was still not using inversion correctly, nor did she use the indefinite 'there'. Prepositions still caused her difficulty.

4.3.8 Concluding comments on the students' developing control of the grammar of standard English

Both women had been domestic workers in Johannesburg for approximately thirty years and had acquired English largely through daily use. To learn to alter incorrectly used forms when they have been in use for a substantial length of time, is a difficult task. Some researchers believe that certain incorrect forms will remain in learner speech permanently, no matter what the learner does to attempt their eradication (Schachter, cited in Selinker, 1992). However, there are arguments about whether fossilisation is always a feature of second language learning. It seems that most learners will find it very difficult, at many points, to change from their interlanguage forms to the expected target language form (Selinker, 1992). Schachter considers that incompleteness is 'an essential property' of the grammar of any language learnt as an adult.

For both women, there was some fluidity in their use of many grammatical forms. Neither used particular forms in an absolutely consistent way, but instead used both correct and incorrect forms, a similar phenomenon to what Shaughnessy (1977) noted in the writing of many ESL students, where frequently, certain forms such as the third person singular -s were only partially mastered by students.

Florence's control of language showed a marked development, particularly in her management of the past tense. Initially she used the present tense in most of her recounting of past events. Her use of the infinitive improved, as did her use of prepositions, although these still caused her difficulty. This improvement is similar to the findings reported by Flynn (1993), in a first-language context. Flynn reported a marked improvement in lower-order skills as student writers grew in confidence in their writing, despite the lack of attention to these lower-order skills. Raimes, in an ESL context, claims that when we emphasise composing, 'much of the necessary work on grammar, sentence structure and rhetoric begins to take care of itself' (1984: 83, cited in Gungle and Taylor, 1989: 239).

Lettie had been at classes for longer than Florence. She was more fluent in writing and was able to use it for a wider range of purposes. Her grammatical progress was inconsistent. In her letter to Rotary, written on the 2nd of October, most past tense verbs were correctly used. However, in her description of a strike, which was written later, she reverted to her more usual pattern, with approximately half the past tense verbs correct. In this passage, her control of concord between singular and plural was generally much better than it had been previously. For the most part she was also able to use relative clauses correctly. She still had difficulties with subject-verb agreement in the third person, both singular and plural. Sometimes her verbs showed agreement with their subjects but more often they did not.

Erratic progress in language learning seems to be a normal part of mastering a second language. Development is not linear, but often proceeds unevenly, with regressions happening after the construction seems to have been mastered (Shaughnessy, 1977; Bartram and Walton, 1991). In this way, language learning resembles other development and learning, which Vygotsky describes as:'a

complex dialectical process, characterised by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, ... (and) intertwining of external and internal factors and adaptive processes (1978: 121). Bartram and Walton have provided a description of the process of language learning which is encouraging to anyone who has struggled to master a new language: 'trying-learning-forgetting-re-meeting-understanding better-forgetting a bit-revising-forming a new hypothesis-trying again - *is* language learning' (1991: 55).

4.4 Student responses to the writing intervention

At the end of the intervention, students were given a questionnaire to take home and answer in their own time. I also interviewed them informally in class. Their responses follow and are discussed subsequently. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5. Interview questions appear as Appendix 6.

4.4.1 Responses to the questionnaire

Using a journal

Both women commented on the difficulty of writing when the same things seemed to happen each day:

Lettie
I didn't mind to write a diary. The only problem is to say we always do the same things in our work, as I work as a house keeper Monday to Saturday I'm doing the same things. Is only that time I find it difficult.

Florence
I like to write a diary every day but the thing confuse me if I didn't do nothing, What can I say, I jump the days because I don't know what I going to say.

Both said they would like to carry on writing afterwards, Lettie qualifying this, "if I could dig for the news."

Publishing

Both women said they felt happy to see their writing printed. Lettie was 'very happy. I will said that was great.' She showed it to her friends. Florence wrote: 'I show the book to anyone because I need help.' Both said they enjoyed reading each other's writing. Florence liked it 'because sometimes I learn something.' I am not sure whether the 'something' refers to something about the other person, or about more formal considerations. Lettie wrote: 'It is very nice to see our grammar rong because that can makes you think to learn more spelling and writing.'

Memories and life stories

Lettie said that she liked writing down memories: 'because I was learning and I learn lots of spelling for doing that writing.' Florence expressed more personal concerns about writing memories:

It is nice to put my memories down, but the memories not make me cross. When somebody make me very very cross, I don't want to put it down because I want to forget about it If I put it down when I am reading my diary I never forget and I never forgive he/she

Both enjoyed hearing each other's life stories. They brought up other memories of their own, although Lettie said: '..but some of them I couldn't write.'

Oral literature: children's stories

Lettie's granny told her stories as a child, at night, 'never in the daytime.' This fits the usual pattern of Zulu children's stories (Finnegan, 1970). She doesn't tell her own children these stories, 'because children watch T.V. these days'. Florence's mother told her stories when she was young, and she told them to her own children. Both felt that the stories were important for children and that the children would learn by listening to them.

Aspects that they did not enjoy

Lettie did not like having two teachers 'because everybody has got his way to teach.' Florence mentioned this later too, finding the different methods confusing. She also disliked not having her mistakes corrected: ' .....and teacher not correct our work I feel I waste my time because I don't know I'm right or wrong.'

Uses of writing

Both mentioned writing letters. Lettie mentioned filling in forms and also coping at the bank without asking for help.

How the student can help herself learn

Lettie saw reading as the way to improve her writing, and 'if they find words that they do not know write it down and look it in the dictionary for the meaning.' Florence wrote: ... 'write and read then I improve.'

The teacher's function

Lettie:

Give the homework and ask the homework when they come the other day and mark it, show the mistake about write it down.

Florence:

A teacher he/she must teach the students read and write and look past tense and the student she understand.

Learning when relaxed

Lettie thought that when people are relaxed, they learn more easily, 'because your mind could think better.' Florence wrote: 'I do not understand about relax when you want to learn.'

Having something to say

Asked whether they had more to write about now, Lettie wrote:

No. Yes.

Florence wrote:

I feel learn write and read.

4.4.2 Responses to interview questions

Students' responses to the interview are described below.

Both women attended school in KwaZulu, Lettie until Std 3 (Grade 5) and Florence until Std 4 (Grade 6). Both said they had spoken very little English at school. The only English activity they remembered was reading, which they had done with little understanding. Both came to Johannesburg as young women, to find work. Lettie could speak a little English when she arrived. Florence said she could not really speak English at all.

Florence started coming to adult classes in March 2001. Lettie began on the 4th of March, 1999. She told me the date without referring to a record, saying, 'I wrote that date down, that's why I remember it.'
When she writes, Florence usually writes in her room. Lettie writes in her room or in the kitchen of the house where she works. She keeps a pen there for her use only and no-one else is allowed to play with it, to the extent that her employer's son sometimes teases her about her possessive attitude to it.
Florence said she had read and written nothing on the day I interviewed her. Lettie had written in her journal in the morning and said she hadn't read much, just the description on a health drink, Vitathion, and a paper on cycling. At this Florence told me that she felt Lettie had an advantage working for a family, where there was more reading material available. She was working for a priest

and there was nothing to read at work. Her previous employer used to invite her to read and would offer her magazines and other reading material.

Lettie said that she was reading daily: books, magazines and newspapers and even high school textbooks, looking up words she did not understand in the dictionary. She found that reading was getting easier. She enjoyed reading and was reading frequently, especially at night, but also when she was walking or going up stairs. She laughed and told me, 'If I lose my job, it's you!' adding, 'You know what, don't read too much!' Florence was not reading every day but when she did read, it was usually after work. She read the weekly local newspaper and also mentioned books.

In preparing for examinations, Florence found going through old examination papers the most helpful activity. Lettie said reading in class and learning to read and understand the question was most helpful in this regard.

In terms of the classes' relationship to their daily lives, Lettie felt that coming to class was motivating in itself: 'The classes push you. You know that when you get home, you can learn.' She liked being able to do practical things outside of class, such as being able to read the school newsletter as a practice activity and being able to sign the return slip. Florence spoke of reading on her own, outside of class.

Asked about discussion before writing, Lettie found it helpful to do so when she didn't understand the questions. Talking could also generate ideas for writing.

For both women, the most enjoyable classroom activity was grammar. Florence mentioned apostrophes, proper nouns, possessives and compound nouns,

taught by a previous teacher. Lettie mentioned knowing about vowels and consonants, alphabetical order and knowing what an essay is and how to write one.

Both women agreed that reading was helpful in learning to write. As Lettie said: 'the more you read, the more words you know and can use.' Florence spoke of a grammar exercise that we had done earlier, first orally and then with a worksheet. She had not really understood it until she saw it written down, when she 'learned by seeing it on paper.'

Lettie does sometimes write when she feels strongly about something, although she said, 'There's some things you can't write.' But she added, 'I can be rude!' Florence said that she could not write when she was feeling angry. She preferred to wait till she felt calmer before writing.

Both women found that writing was 'coming easier'. Lettie said she had really improved in class, especially her spelling and grammar. She had found using the journal helpful and had used a dictionary sometimes to check spelling. Florence felt that writing 'starts to feel easier' and that she was writing better than she had before. Both felt that there was sometimes 'nothing to say' but Lettie also noted, 'There's such a lot of things you can write about.' Both saw writing as something important to them, rather than just something they had to do. Lettie used writing as an aid to memory, if she had a long list of jobs to do. She also found that answering questions on a story she had read helped her to understand it better.

Both mentioned 'counting money' when I asked if anything done in class had made their lives easier or better.

Asked whether they had any advice for people who are thinking about coming to an adult class, Lettie said, 'Never too old to learn!', quoting the title of an article on adult learners which they had read recently. Both felt that adult education made 'a big difference' to their lives. Florence found that doing her school work at home took her mind off other problems, so that she could forget about what was worrying her. Lettie commented, 'You think of the past, the time you didn't have. Now you sit in your desk and learn.'

4.4.3 Discussion and analysis of students' responses to the questions asked in the questionnaire and the interview

Learning, for Lettie and Florence, is very much related to learning correct spelling and grammar. This theme appears again and again. Responding to a question about writing memories down, Lettie wrote that she liked doing this, 'because I was learning and I learn lots of spelling for doing that writing'. Asked about reading each other's writing, Lettie's comment was: 'It is very nice to see our grammar rong because that can makes you think to learn more spelling and writing.'

However, she hinted at something different when she added, about her memories: 'but some of them I couldn't write'. Florence also expressed her reluctance to write when she was angry because the permanence of the written word made forgiveness difficult. These examples echo Kamler's ideas of the 'discomforting insights' (2001: 17) that writing may reveal, as students detail their experience in writing. Despite their experience of what writing can do, how powerful its effects can be, neither woman seemed to view the content of her writing as having anything to do with learning.

Both had clear views about the teacher's role. The teacher should give homework and mark it. Both disliked the lack of correction of their work. This is in accord with Bartram and Walton's view that teachers who are non-correctors, as well as those who are heavy correctors, face problems. Non-correctors may be seen as lazy or incompetent and if examinations are accuracy based (as these students believed theirs to be) students may become anxious (Bartram and Walton, 1991).

Another task for teachers is to teach about grammar 'and look past tense' (Florence). As well as being considered the most important learning content, grammar, punctuation and other formal concerns were the favourite activities in class, for both students. Florence mentioned apostrophes, proper nouns, possessives and compound nouns. Lettie spoke of vowels and consonants and alphabetical order. She also mentioned knowing what an essay is and how to write it. Her mention of an essay is a revealing choice because it is so related to 'school' literacy. There are few place one would use an essay outside of a formal educational context, unlike items such as forms or letters, which have a clear purpose in real life contexts.

This raises a number of questions. Why is grammar the favourite activity for these women? Is it simply enjoyed for its own sake? How much relevance does 'knowing about the rules' have to life and literacy outside the classroom? Is it valued because of the (mistaken) perception that this is the focus of the examination? Or could it be that grammar is valued because it *is* schooling (based on their 'apprenticeship of observation'): this is what you learn at school, this is what education is? Learning directly about grammar seems to be a frequent expectation of language learners worldwide (Thornbury, 1988).

It became increasingly clear to me that my views on writing contrasted strongly with the students' views. Both women had completed a number of years of formal schooling as children and had very clear ideas about what schooling and learning involved, based on their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975; Bailey et al, 1996). It seemed that they had unwittingly taken on something of the 'autonomous' view of literacy, as a discrete set of skills to master (Street, 1984, 1985). The involvement and enjoyment with which they wrote and the quality of the writing they produced contrasted strongly with the dissatisfaction they expressed, related to their thoughts about how one should learn and what writing is.

At the beginning of the intervention, both women had indicated that fear of making mistakes was one of the feelings they associated with writing. Florence, in particular, used her eraser frequently to correct mis-spelled words. I had hoped to 'lower the students' affective filter' (Krashen, 1987) and reduce their levels of anxiety, so that these fears would not inhibit their writing. One method was to correct mistakes minimally. However, when we discussed this, Lettie showed me a previous teacher's marking of her work. His liberal use of the red pen was shown to me with pride. To have many red marks on their work was not seen as daunting or discouraging. Rather, it was a sign that the teacher was doing a proper job of teaching and that the students were learning. In these students' thinking, as the teacher focused on the mistakes, they would make progressively fewer mistakes. This assumption, an implicit one held by many teachers, is questioned by Grabe and Kaplan (1996). Clearly, Lettie and Florence would have preferred to know the limits of what was correct or incorrect in their writing (Bartram and Walton, 1991). For Florence, uncorrected writing was seen to be a waste of time. Instead of reducing their anxiety, my lack of correction of their work increased it.

The IEB ABET examination was another important factor in the women's responses to classes. Both wrote frequently in their journals about preparing for it and their anxieties about passing. 'Today is a bit shilly but I didn't fill it because I am boilling myself thinking about an exam', Lettie wrote in her journal, shortly before writing her examination. Florence wrote in her journal about wanting to show her certificate to her grandchildren. When asked to write about a happy memory, Lettie wrote a detailed account of her delight when she received her previous certificate. The certificate was highly valued, the proof of successful learning. 'Learning for life' was not irrelevant: both women mentioned filling in forms and writing letters. But the examination was the focal point for them and preparing for it meant concentrating on spelling and grammar mistakes and correcting these.

This situation supports Rogers' claim that in adult learning, neither the teacher, nor the students, starts with a blank sheet (1986). A number of factors, both cognitive and affective are brought to learning by students (Ellis, 1994). Adults come with expectations about the learning process and already have their own set patterns of learning. Lightbown and Spada describe the 'strong beliefs and opinions' about how language instruction should be done, held by all learners, particularly older ones (2001:35). Students see all the new material they encounter through the lens of their existing experience, and evaluate it accordingly. The 'unlearning' is difficult as there is often an emotional investment in the existing patterns of experience and knowledge. Rogers considers the unlearning process one of the most difficult tasks facing the teaching of adults (1986:28). I had underestimated this difficulty and had not taken enough cognisance of their earlier knowledge nor how deeply it was embedded. In retrospect, I needed to do more to let the new ways of learning 'enmesh' with what they knew and valued already (Rogers: 1986).

In the next chapter I will sum up findings that emerged from this study and draw some conclusions about a content and meaning focused approach to teaching adult learners.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an overview of the findings of this study.

I began this research project with a question about the possible outcomes of teaching writing to inexperienced adult writers of English as a 'second' language (ESL), using an approach which focused on the meaning and content of the writing, rather than on its accuracy and correctness. While I accept that there is value in teaching grammar, I consider the *reason* for writing to be of primary importance and I believe that although writing involves the use of a code, it is essentially a communicative act. My goal in this research project was to investigate the way the students wrote and how their writing changed, if at all, when content and meanings were emphasised in the writing class.

It is as well to note Shaughnessy's reminder that there are very limited ways in which we can discuss growth in writing (1977: 275). Definitions of proficiency in writing vary widely and we have only the 'crudest of instruments' (1977: 276) whereby we may measure changes. She also points out the 'private timetable' of the student, who

> 'improves, often, in seeming indifference to outside schedules.....Some lessons bear immediate fruit, some fall by the way, and others lie dormant until one day the student.....produces a pieces of writing that moves him, seemingly overnight, to a new plane of competence'
>
> (ibid.: 276)

With this caution in mind, the main findings of the study follow.

5.2 Main findings

As mentioned, it is difficult to discuss 'growth' in writing and some areas are more easily observed and described than others. Areas such as grammatical control can be quantified fairly readily. Other areas are more difficult to assess. I start with what I consider to have been successful, move to aspects of the learners' writing that did not seem to change much and lastly discuss difficulties and 'failures'.

5.2.1 Successes

I would describe 'success' in the following terms:

- the writing showed the students' involvement, both in terms of the way they wrote it (as observed by me at the time), by the vividness and detail they included and the way they were able to use language to communicate their meaning, such as using direct speech, or creative repetition;
- the writing had value for the students themselves;
- the writing was used for reflection;
- the women were able to 'put the writing to use' for their own purposes;
- the structure of the writing was appropriate to the genre in use;
- the writing showed a development in their ability to use the linguistic structures of English appropriately.

Bearing in mind that they were novice writers in a second language, and that they did not draft or polish their writing, I consider that the women wrote well when:

- Their writing was scaffolded in some way, making use of different language modes such as discussion or reading to explore and generate ideas. (Emig, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). Other modes, such as the visual, or drama also provide a scaffold (Stein, 1998).

- They wrote about vivid feelings, experiences or memories. These gave a momentum to write as well as providing content, which was often described in detail.

- They wrote in a genre that was known and understood, such as the folktale genre. They were sometimes able to make use of narrative structure when they related memories, although these were not as tightly controlled as the folktales. However, they often started with an introduction and the story would be completed with a coda.

- They were able to reflect on their experience in their writing and perhaps to change their perceptions of particular events, (as, for instance, Lettie's new view of her grandmother's behaviour.) As adults do a 'second reading' of their experience, they are able to bring order to the present (Brady, 1990). Lettie, in particular, was able to use her journal writing to describe her feelings and work with them in her grief at her son-in-law's death.

- They were able to put writing to use for their own purposes, for example to express discontent to me about the course content, making use of writing to bring about changes.

- There was a clear and unusual event to write about such as a robbery. Florence, in particular, found it easier when writing on her own if she had something 'definite' to write about.

- In terms of grammatical control, despite the lack of correction, Florence's writing at the end of the intervention showed a marked improvement in grammatical control, reminiscent of that noted by Flynn (1993) and Oye (1993). This is despite the likely fossilisation and resistance to change of certain linguistic features in her English, which had been largely informally acquired over the past thirty years.

5.2.2 Areas of little apparent change

Journal entries did not increase in length over the time period but were more related to each woman's perception of having something to say. Florence's entries at the end were as brief as they were in the beginning, except where something out of the ordinary had occurred. Lettie's entries did not show an increase in length either, though she was more able to write on her own and by the end of the intervention was beginning to miss her journal when I kept it for too long.

The women's use of vocabulary did not seem to widen noticeably, although they attempted to use some new words that they had encountered in class and also used words that I assumed to be new ones, that came from television shows or reading that they had done. In this regard, the amount and variety of reading that was done could have been extended. I discuss this further in the recommendations.

The range of topics that the women explored tended to be wide if their writing was scaffolded in class. Lettie was able to write about a variety of subject matter on her own and her comment in the interview that 'there's such a lot of things you can write about' seemed to indicate that her range of topics was widening.

Florence, however, found it difficult to generate something to write about when she was on her own and she might have benefited by more scaffolding and specific tasks, such as responding to reading or a television programme. She was able to explore a wide range of topics with support and it is possible that she might have become more independent with time.

5.2.3 Failures and difficulties

Coupled with the sort of writing described above were the students' feelings that this was not real learning, that they were wasting their time writing if their work was not corrected, and that grammar, spelling and essays were what you learned about at school. Instead of becoming less anxious, they were becoming more anxious, considering that they were being inadequately prepared for the examinations. The certificate was prized and the value of schooling was largely seen in terms of success in the examination. Class content that was not geared to the examination might be enjoyed to some extent but was seen as counter-productive to the students' goals.

Although we discussed these dissatisfactions and I then included some grammar lessons, I realised that I had not taken enough cognisance of the students' expectations and wants (Vella, 1994; Knowles, 1977; Rogers, 1986), their importance, the difficulties involved in changing them and their effect on learning. Students could simply have left the class if their perceived needs were not being met.

I suggest that there are two reasons for the contrast between the students' enacted enjoyment of 'process writing' and their espoused preference for a focus on grammar. One reason was the students' perceptions of the sort of knowledge that was going to be tested in the ABET examinations they were to

write. They expressed anxiety that this approach to learning writing would not prepare them adequately, even though these examinations were communicatively based and they had worked through some past papers in preparation.

The other reason relates to their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975; Bailey et al, 1996), the five or six years of schooling that the women had experienced as children. This had formed their impressions of what schooling involves, what the role of the teacher is and what the content of the lessons should be. The women did not appear to shift in their views that the way to learn a language was to learn grammar and that all their mistakes should be corrected. Uncorrected work was perceived by Florence to be a waste of time.

Many writers on adult education have noted the strong influence of learner expectations about what they will be taught and how the instruction will be given, based on their previous experience (Lightbown and Spada, 2001; Rogers, 1986; Wlodkowski, 1993). Older learners in particular may find it difficult to accept different methods. No learning takes place in an emotional vacuum and the learners' thinking and feelings have an influence on each other (Wlodkowski, 1993).

5.3 Recommendations

Some recommendations could be made for teachers in adult education classes, even though this study involved the responses of only two students. Different teachers would obviously have their own differing approaches, for example to explicit grammar teaching and to error correction.

5.3.1 Explicit grammar teaching

There have been significant changes in the ways language teachers view the role of grammar. In the 1970s and 1980s, communicative language teaching focused on the communication of meaning and the trend was to avoid explicit grammar teaching, perhaps as a reaction to the heavy emphasis on grammatical content of the traditional 'grammar-translation' method. Mendelowitz (2000) has noted the negative feelings associated with grammar for many language learners. However, since the 1990s, there have been attempts to make use of explicit grammar teaching 'in creative and contextualised ways' (ibid., 2000: 4). Curriculums in Britain, Australia and South Africa have included explicit language knowledge as part of their content.

While I still do not believe that grammar should be the focus of the activities in a literacy class, there are two reasons I would include it in future classes. One reason is the perception of the students that this is an important part of schooling. The other is the assumption that 'creative and contextualised' grammar teaching does have a role to play in language learning. Lightbown and Spada offer a perspective on grammar inclusion:

> 'Research has demonstrated that learners *do* benefit from instruction which is meaning-based. .....The problem remains, however that certain aspects of the linguistic knowledge and performance of second-language learners are not fully developed in such programs'
>
> (1993: 104)

They reject an 'either-or' attitude to form- and meaning-based instruction.

Grammar practice games and activities could be used (see for example, Ur, 1988; Rinvolucri, 1984), which have the dual function of practising a structure that

habitually causes problems and of lowering the students' 'affective filter' (Krashen).

Another possibility is to contextualise grammar teaching by linking it with the writing and talking that has been done, for example to look at the past tense after the students have written narratives or recounts, or identify the past tense verbs after reading a story. This might have been helpful for my students, to 'enmesh' (Rogers) the new ways of learning with what they expected in class. However, it is important to remember that 'the teaching of writing is separate and distinct from the teaching of syntactic accuracy and the teaching of various text conventions (e.g. spelling, punctuation)' (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 423).

5.3.2 Error correction

Making mistakes is part of learning a language, whether the subject is a young child or an older learner of a second language. There is enormous variation in the extent to which teachers correct student errors and plenty of strong opinions among teachers (Ellis, 1990). Among learners, error correction is frequently not only welcomed, but demanded (ibid.). However, Ellis has argued that 'it is not clear yet to what extent, if at all, error treatment facilitates learning'(1990:74). Bartram and Walton consider that the teacher's attitude to correction is 'probably the most important issue in a language teacher's professional development' (1991: iii).

It is noteworthy that even without correction, Florence's writing showed a marked improvement, with far fewer errors by the end of the intervention. This supports the ideas of Weaver who suggests that an important part of helping students to improve their grammar is to engage them in 'writing, writing and more writing' (1996: 144).