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Adults learning to write: exploring alternatives to functional writing

Alison Sher

A research report presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of a writing intervention, in an adult literacy class which focused on content and meaning, rather than formal features of texts.

During the seven months of the intervention I worked on a weekly basis with two students, the remnant of an initially larger class, both domestic workers in their early fifties. Both had spent a number of years at primary school in a rural district of the current KwaZulu-Natal. Subsequently, they came to Johannesburg as young women to find employment. Although each had learned a limited amount of English at school, they had largely acquired English informally once they were working in Johannesburg.

A key principle underpinning the intervention was that writing is essentially a communicative act. Here my approach to teaching differed from that of many of the teachers at the Centre, whose focus was mainly on the formal features of writing. I chose not to focus on features such as grammar and spelling, instead using activities where the communication of meaning was central, such as autobiography or oral forms from the students' primary language, such as proverbs or narratives. I also asked the students to keep daily journals, so that they were involved in regular, self-generated writing.

In some ways, the findings of the project were surprising. On the one hand, the students showed involvement and enjoyment in class discussions and their resultant writing was frequently extensive, vivid and detailed. On the other hand, they expressed their dissatisfaction at the neglect of areas they perceived to be important, such as explicit grammar and vocabulary teaching and error correction. Despite this neglect, the grammatical accuracy of one student's writing showed a significant improvement.

The study highlights the importance of learner beliefs about schooling, the way these beliefs may affect their learning and the need for the teacher to be aware of them. The study also points to the value of sustained and regular writing, of the use of scaffolding in a writing class, and of the value of the learner's personal resources, such as her life experiences and her primary language in a literacy class.

Declaration

This research project is my own original work, unless specified to the contrary in the text. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

.....

Alison Sher

..... 2003

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will discuss the questions that have guided this research project.

'You think of the past, the time you didn't have. Now you sit in your desk and learn.'

Lettie M.

1.1 Aims

In this study, I intend to explore learners' responses to a content- and meaning-focused approach to teaching writing to a group of adult students at a literacy centre in Johannesburg.

1.2 Rationale

Over the last twenty-five to thirty years a great deal of research has been done on the teaching of writing, with the emphasis moving from the finished product to the process which a writer uses in writing. Support for the 'process movement' has come partly from research into the cognitive processes underlying writing, and from a renewed awareness of the connections between writing, learning and thinking (Hayes and Flower, 1989). Researchers such as Elbow (1981), Hayes and Flower (1989) and Murray (1987) have found that writing tends to be a recursive process, that writing is a way of thinking and of discovering meaning and that it is a social activity, addressed to a real audience, for a real purpose. Within this 'process' approach to writing, the ideas and content of the writing come first and form the primary focus. Editing is done

later, once the ideas have been generated. Rather than simply correcting the finished products, the teacher plays a collaborative role from the start.

However, little of this thinking has had any influence on adult literacy classes in South Africa. Many literacy teachers have themselves received minimal training in teaching adults and often resort to teaching in much the same way as they themselves were taught at school, following their own 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975; Bailey et al, 1996). Much of the teaching that I observed in different classes at the centre at which the research was conducted and in other classes elsewhere, has been centred on formal aspects of the language, such as correct grammar and spelling.

When asked to write about how they felt about writing, at the beginning of the research intervention, the students wrote about their anxieties about making mistakes in their writing. This is similar to what Tsui (1996), Zamel (1987) and Raimes (1984) have found about anxieties expressed by ESL writers, which are frequently associated with formal correctness. 'Good writing' has often been equated with 'correct writing', nothing more (Shaughnessy, 1977). Production of grammatically correct sentences has been seen to be of paramount importance and 'basic writers' (Shaughnessy) are frequently obsessed with error.

I accept the argument that there is a place for formal instruction in a second language (Ellis, 1990; Lightbown and Spada, 1993) and that learning to write involves the use of a code. However, having correct grammar and spelling as the main emphasis of writing instruction seems to ignore the reason that most people write. I wanted to find out whether shifting the focus away from correctness would help to reduce students' anxieties. In a broad sense, the question that guided this research was: If the students learned to think of their

writing in terms of what they wanted to communicate, rather than the correct way to say it, how would this shift affect the content of their writing? This led to other questions: Would their enjoyment of writing increase? Would they grow in confidence and motivation to write? Would they write more frequently, and produce longer texts? Would a changed approach to writing have an impact on their long-term motivation to learn?

The issue of motivation is an important one to consider in the context of adult basic education in South Africa. Statistics vary widely (Oxenham, 1990; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996), but it would seem that fewer than one percent of potential learners attend any of the programmes on offer and frequently attendance rates are low and drop-out rates are high. Many reasons have been suggested for this state of affairs, a world-wide as well as a South African phenomenon. One of these is that is takes a long time to learn to read and write, to the level where it makes a positive difference to a learner's life and motivation needs to be maintained for an extended period of time. If the learners were personally engaged with their learning, if it was relevant to their lives, perhaps motivation would be enhanced (Vella, 1994; Wlodkowski, 1993).

The students with whom I worked are domestic workers who had not completed primary school when they were children. For people who have been silenced and 'written out of history' (Stein, 1998: 523) it seems especially important to realise that they have a voice and something to say. In this research project, finding 'something to say' involved discovering the resources that each student already possessed: her memories and experience of life, her first language and oral resources such as childhood stories or proverbs and sometimes her sense of humour and her ability to improvise verbally in a tricky situation. Learning 'a way to say it' involved discussion of ideas in class before writing them down, regular practice of writing, such as the daily use of a journal,

and regular reading, in class and at home. The audience included me as the teacher, the other student in the class and sometimes a wider audience of family and friends.

Much of the research into process writing has been done within a context of first-language speakers. The students I have worked with are Zulu speakers who are learning English as well as English literacy. Working in a second language context raised a number of other theoretical issues, such as whether or not to include explicit grammar teaching (Ellis, 1990; Krashen, 1987; Weaver, 1996) and the value of error correction (Ellis, 1990; Bartram and Walton, 1991; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). Traditionally, language teachers have done both. For the purposes of this project, I chose to make minimal use of either explicit grammar teaching or error correction.

Because the students are second-language English speakers and because they were novice writers, I considered the use of 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986) to be important in providing support for their writing. 'Scaffolding' has been described by Graves (1983) in the context of a mother-infant situation, where the mother makes use of temporary structures to adapt to the child's language and activity. I wanted to explore something of the relationship between speech and writing, a relationship which has been described by a number of researchers (Emig, 1977; Stein, 2000). In my view, dialogue and discussion of ideas before writing is an important part of gathering and expressing thoughts and ideas. Because writing is a social act, beginning with the experience of dialogue and ending with the experience of a real audience is also important (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Another question related to the students' grammatical control of English. Although I wanted their focus to move away from the 'correctness' or

otherwise of their writing, I was interested to see what effect, if any, this way of writing might have on their grammatical control of language. Some researchers (Flynn, 1993; Oye, 1993) have noticed that when attention was paid to 'higher order' thinking skills, such as writing (in the context of writing conferences between tutor and student), there was also a considerable improvement in the 'lower order' thinking skills, such as correct spelling or grammar, as the students grew in confidence in their ability to write. Wales (1990) suggests that many errors will disappear as competence in literacy increases, if the teacher attends more to the intended meaning than to the technical accuracy.

My personal motivation to begin this study was twofold. Firstly there was my own positive experience as a student in the Writing, Theory and Practice course in 2001, taught by Dr Pamela Nichols as a module for the MA degree in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As students, we experienced the sometimes difficult and painful process of learning to write and saw how unconfident writers gained motivation to write and pleasure in doing so.

Secondly, I wished to investigate the ways my own practice as a teacher could be improved and extended by using a content-focused approach to teaching writing to a group of learners in an ABET class.

I have chosen to include substantial examples of learners' writing in Chapter 4, rather than in the appendices, to facilitate discussion and analysis.

1.3 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I review literature of relevance to this research project in the following areas:

2.1 The process approach to teaching writing;
2.2 The genre approach to teaching writing;
2.3 The process-genre debate;
2.4 Research into the use of journals as an aid to writing development;
2.4.1 Dialogue journals;
2.5 The use of autobiography;
2.6 The relationship of speech to writing and the pedagogical implications of this relationship;
2 7 Learning to write in a second language;
2.7.1 Formal accuracy in L2 writing;
2.8 Debates within second-language teaching;
2.8.1 The teaching of grammar;
2.8.2 The treatment of errors;
2.8.3 Assessment;
2.8.3.1 The I.E.B. A.B.E.T. examination;
2.9 Research in adult literacy education;
2.10 Research into adult education in general.

2.1 The process approach to teaching writing

Approximately twenty-five years ago, a major shift began in the way that writing was taught in schools, in English first language contexts. Prior to this, writing was taught in a way which Britton (1983) has termed the 'current-

traditional' method, which emphasised correct usage, grammar and spelling. Clark and Ivanic (1997) describe this approach as the 'linear model', an implicit model, based on assumptions that writing progresses logically and sequentially through a discrete set of stages, to produce a final 'product'. Researchers such as Murray (1978) and Rose (1984) began to challenge these assumptions and published studies that showed what it was that writers actually do when they write. Hayes and Flower (1980) made a model of the process of writing, finding that a more recursive or cyclical approach is closer to what writers do while composing (Clark and Ivanic: 1997).

Because the process of writing, rather than only the final product, was considered important, 'process writing' became the name given to this approach to the teaching of writing. Teachers such as Murray (1987), Atwell (1987), Calkins (1986,1991), Graves (1983) and Elbow (1976, 1981) have taught writing in this way. The assumptions and ideas associated with this approach include the following:

- students learn to write by writing frequently;
- creating and collecting one's thoughts and ideas is a different process from editing and the two should be separated;
- premature concern with correctness can inhibit finding out what one wants to say. Writing more than one draft allows a student to express meaning first, and subsequently to correct errors or edit;
- freewriting or brainstorming may be a useful beginning activity, which helps to bring ideas to consciousness;
- writing is a social activity, addressed to a real audience and for a real purpose;
- when students are personally engaged with their writing, they tend to write more, and with greater involvement and motivation;

- content is the focus of the writing, rather than form;
- writing is a process of 'creating, discovering and extending meaning' (Tsui, 1996); The act of writing helps the writer to find out what she has to say;
- the actual process of writing is important, rather than just the final product.

Within this approach, the *why* of writing is important. The social nature of writing is acknowledged and the audience extended from only the teacher, to include peers in the class (with encouragement to listen supportively) and possibly outside the school as well. 'Publishing' of final texts allows for wider reading, as well as allowing the author to see her/his work in its final form. Some teachers hold writing conferences with their students, listening to the work and giving feedback.

2.2 The genre approach to teaching writing

Since the mid 1980s an alternative approach to writing pedagogy has gathered momentum, especially in Australia. The 'genre approach' draws heavily on Halliday's work in functional linguistics (1985). Halliday argues that we have developed very specific ways of using language in relation to how certain things are accomplished within our culture and that different language purposes are associated with different registers, or genres of language (Maybin, 1994). Within particular genres specific language structures encode knowledge and relationships in particular ways. So learning within a specific subject discipline will also involve learning about specific ways of using language. The proponents of the genre approach argue that making the features of the genres explicit will enable learners to use the genres, at school and in the adult world, with better understanding of how knowledge is constructed within different academic disciplines (Maybin: 1994). Ultimately, they claim that this approach

will empower students, granting them greater access to resources and power in society (Kress, 1993; Maybin, 1994).

2.3 The process-genre debate

There has been extensive debate between the advocates of the 'genre' and 'process' approaches to the teaching of writing. Kamler describes this debate in Australia as 'a volatile and bloody struggle' (2001: 21). Those who favour the process approach have been accused of neo-romanticism (Kress: 1993) and of being culture bound, favouring children from a middle-class child-centred culture, those whose voice is closest to that of the teacher and so continuing to reproduce educational inequities (Cope and Kalantzis: 1993). The teacher's role in a process writing classroom, according to the 'genre' proponents, is reduced to that of a manager, rather than a professional with valuable skills to offer. Genre proponents argue that the 'natural' literacy learning associated with the process approach involves an inefficient use of time and resources. They are also critical of the limited range of genres used in some cases by the students, who have often simply produced personal recounts of a limited range of topics (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Martin, 1987).

However, Atwell (1987) presents a very different picture of a process writing classroom when she lists the types of writing in which learners engaged in one school where this approach was used. The list is extensive, covering two columns of a page. As well as narratives of various kinds (personal, fictional, children's books, autobiography etc.), many other types of writing were done, including essays, research reports, editorials, advertisements, jokes, riddles, instructions and advice. Correspondence of many kinds was written: friendly letters, letters to the editor, letters to complain, enquire, apologise or offer sympathy.

The question that arises is why the range of writing in Atwell's school is so different from the limited range described by Martin and Cope and Kalantzis. Does 'process writing' in fact privilege the middle-class children, whose voices are closest to that of the teacher (as the 'genre' proponents suggest)? Or could the quality of the teaching be a major factor in the range and quality of the writing that the children produce? If students are simply producing a limited range of personal recounts, perhaps they have not been required, or assisted, to extend the range of writing they do.

Calkins (1986) encourages students to immerse themselves in a wide range of literature, suggesting that reading widely is very helpful in learning the techniques of written language. She compares this 'immersion' in books to a child 'immersed' in a foreign language. Rosen (1994) also stresses the importance of appropriate (and enjoyable) reading for writing students, as exposure to the writing of other people - peers, teacher and 'literature' - is helpful to those learning to write. Atwell (1987) describes how her students would try out new genres after reading. Students wrote about their reading and were helped to see connections between the author's writing and their own. I have heard small children who are familiar with the 'fairy tale' genre use some of the formulaic 'chunks' of the genre in their own story telling. Perhaps reading provides, in a less directive way, some of the 'modelling' that the 'genre' proponents claim is essential.

Calkins (1986) does not hesitate to teach specific items, such as quotation marks, when students have difficulties. She also holds 'editing conferences', where students look at formal aspects of their work, such as punctuation and spelling and are helped to learn language conventions.

Process writing has been successfully used in a prison context (certainly not a middle-class or 'mainstream' environment), with a group of women prisoners in Canada, sentenced largely for drug-related offences (Stino and Palmer, 1999). The researchers saw process writing as an instrument for 'learning strategic and critical thinking skills, clarifying values and enhancing self-esteem' (1999: 283), considering that self-esteem would develop through building confidence with language, expressing thoughts and feelings, gaining insights and developing motivation to talk, read and write about their own lives.

The women wrote about issues that were meaningful to them. They read drafts of their writing to each other which led to more discussion of their personal history. Together they wrote a handbook for newcomers to the programme and were very proud of the final product. The researchers believe that the writing was empowering to the women, helping them to take charge of their lives and improving their self-esteem.

With reference to language across the curriculum, the Australian advocates of the genre approach argue that denying pupils access to particular genres means denying them access to the subject, leaving them stranded and cut off from what history, science, etc., are all about. This argument is almost directly opposite to that of Britton and Rosen in the 1970s, in Britain. They advocated allowing students to use more personal and expressive language across the curriculum. For them, subject genres could set up unnecessary barriers which *prevented* students from engaging with subject knowledge (Maybin, 1993).

To the genre theorists, pedagogy is a central concern. Modes of learning are as important as the kinds of content that are taught (Kress, 1993). The 'genre' proponents do not seek a return to the prescriptive pedagogy of the traditionalists. Kress acknowledges the positive and 'liberating' effect that

process-oriented pedagogies had in reaction to the 'authoritarian decades' after the second world war. However, as circumstances become even more difficult, socially and economically, students leaving school will need skills of analysis and critique and 'a developing understanding that textual forms - genres- are always the result of the realisation in linguistic form of a complex set of social factors'(1993: 31).

Advocates of the 'genre' approach note that different types of text should not be 'reified'; generic form is never totally fixed but is always in the process of change (Kress, 1993). Nor should certain discourses simply be handed down, with the implicit assumption that these are intrinsically more worthwhile than others (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993). The discourses of the community should be respected and valued. Nevertheless, students need to learn discourses outside their own experiences and to understand that not all discourses are equal, whether for success at school or for social mobility (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993).

There have been criticisms of the 'genre' approach in turn. Barrs points out that it is not just knowing how to write that matters, but being able to ensure that the writing reaches an audience and is noticed and read. According to Barrs, being able to write certain powerful genres, such as high level memos, would not necessarily increase our access to power at all (1991: 2).

Rosen (1994) opposes the use of form as the starting point of writing. This, for him, denies the 'existential, cultural and ideological purposes of writing' (1995:196). For him, the primary task of a teacher of writing is not to induct children (or inexperienced writers) into form, but rather to help students discover the purposes and uses of writing: 'as satisfying ways of interpreting, preserving and sharing experience and imagination' (1994:196). Writing, he claims, is only important if there are things you want to write about.

The process and the genre approaches to writing are derived from different theoretical constructs. Maybin summarises them succinctly:

> '....the first treats language as a personal resource, and the second, language as a social construct. In the first, learning to write is seen as a natural process supported by the teacher who creates a motivating working context with real purposes and audiences. In the second, the teacher's responsibility is to equip students with linguistic skills so that they can read and reproduce the genres which will give access to subject knowledge and power in the outside world. Criteria for good writing in the process model emphasise personal creativity and effectiveness in terms of audience and purpose while genre teachers, although also wanting to ensure effectiveness, assess this through how successfully students have managed to reproduce particular genres of writing.
>
> Both approaches claim to 'empower' students, the first through giving them ownership of their writing and the second through equipping them with important linguistic skills'
>
> (1994: 193-194).

Maybin suggests that the two approaches could be seen as complementary rather than oppositional:

> 'There is a need to build motivation and learning opportunities into the process of writing, but also to ensure that students understand and can work with the linguistic structures needed for specific genres'
>
> (1994: 194)

She stresses that metalinguistic activity is essential to intellectual development and that work with students learning to write should include critical reflection about both the structural aspects of the writing and its content and values.

Both approaches stress the important role that oral language plays in the process of learning (Derewianka, 1990; Rosen, 1994). Using speech, we can explore our purpose with more speed and ease than we can in writing. We can try out ideas, hypothesise, ask questions, make mistakes, change our minds and start to form connections (Derewianka, 1990).

Genre proponents such as Derewianka have produced useful summaries of text features of various genres and in Chapter 4, I make use of her description of narrative.

Despite the use of these two approaches, the 'traditional' way of teaching writing is still in use in many contexts (Tsui: 1996, Zamel 1987, Clark and Ivanic, 1997). Many teachers continue to teach very much as they were taught (Freeman and Richards, 1996) as the implicit and frequently unexamined models of teaching still exert power over them. Kennedy describes these as making 'seemingly indelible imprints' (1990: 17).

2.4 Research into the uses of journals as an aid to writing development

Fulwiler suggests that in the academic world, journal writing starts off 'on the other side of the tracks' (1987:1). He contrasts 'clear' and 'objective' academic prose with the frequently rambling, colloquial personal writing of journals. Teachers with formal academic training may find it hard to give legitimacy to such language.

However, research suggests that the informal language of journals is important. Language scholars, such as Vygotsky (1962), Britton (1970,1975), Emig (1977), Elbow (1973, 1982) and Shaughnessy (1977) have argued that people find meaning in the world by exploring it through language, their own informal and everyday language, whether oral or written. Fulwiler views journals as a place to use informal language for critical thought, speculation or exploration. So journals have been used in subjects as diverse as mathematics, music, history and science, to explain, reflect and respond to what has been learned. Students are generally encouraged to express their personal opinions, take some risks with their thinking and write in their own voices (Fulwiler, 1987). The assumptions

about language and learning are that when people articulate connections between new information and what they already know, they understand the new information better (Bruner, 1966); when we learn things, we use all four language modes to do so; each mode helps people learn in a unique way (Emig, 1977); when people write about new ideas, they learn and understand them better. (Britton, 1975).

Personal journals have been used in writing classes since the late 1960s, for a number of reasons. They give practice in self-expression, allowing students freedom to express their thoughts and feelings. They allow for regular writing practice and practice in fluency. Students may become more aware of themselves as writers. Journals provide an opportunity to reflect on one's life (Calkins, 1991). Another benefit, according to Calkins, is that they 'validate a child's existence. Notebooks say, 'Your thoughts, your noticings...matter' (1991:35). This supports Shaughnessy's idea that writing is 'an act of confidence, an assertion of the importance of what has gone on inside the writer, an exhibition of his thoughts or experiences' (1977: 85).

Personal journals are largely self-generated; students themselves decide what to write about and for how long. The language used tends to be informal. By nature, journal writing is generally closer to the language of thought, rather than speech or writing, reflecting the private ways our minds 'dart and meander just under the smooth surface we let the rest of the world see' (Stillman, 1987: 78). Content, rather than form, is important. Journals are generally not corrected for spelling and punctuation, nor graded for ideas (Fulwiler, 1987).

Summerfield (1987) comments on what happens to the writer in the process of writing a journal. He describes Trollope, who in middle age, dismissed the journals he had written as a young man as 'rubbish'. But he also admitted that it

was 'in those pages that writing had become for him 'second nature' (1987:35). Writing the journal helped him to form the habit of writing.

Personal journals are also a good place to store things that may be used in future writing. Journal entries may provide a writer with ideas and possibilities to draw on and develop. (Stillman, 1987; Marshall, 1983).

2.4.1 Dialogue journals

Dialogue journals offer a way of extending the uses of the personal journal. They have been used since about 1980 in a variety of different classroom settings, including ESL contexts. They have been described as 'written conversations' between teacher and student (Britton, 1987), bringing them into purposeful language interactions and providing a form of scaffolding to the students in expressing feelings and ideas. Students using them are encouraged to express a wide range of language functions (Jones, 1991). Staton (1991) argues that they can meet some of the needs that arise in adult literacy education: students do not remain passive but generate topics that are of interest to them and are thus relevant to their lives; literacy learning is transformed into a more dialogic process; the literacy activities which are used are both complex and functional (rather than a simple set of 'basic skills' which can be relatively quickly learnt).

2.5 The use of autobiography

There have been many arguments for the use of autobiography in education (Abbs, 1974; Brady, 1990; Bailey et al, 1996; Stein, 1998). Brady (1990) argues for its importance as a means of facilitating adult learning and development. This means more than simply recollecting past events: he considers autobiography a

critical element in the search for, and construction of meaning in human experience. It provides a 'conscious consciousness' of experience (1990: 43). As they engage in a 'second reading' of their experience and consider the meaning of the events, adults are enabled to build order in their present day lives.

Stein considers that the use of autobiographical narrative as a pedagogic practice can be a powerful device for 'interpreting, renaming and validating one's experience' (1998: 523). In apartheid South Africa, many adult learners were marginalised and silenced, 'written out of history' (1998: 523). For these learners, as for others, there is value in what Brady (1990) terms 'autobiographical acts', acts of recording one's personal history.

Stein describes the process of remembering as 'not merely an act of repetition of the past but an act of remembering or collecting together one's 'members' - one's prior selves and the figures and events that belong to one's life story - in a purposeful and conscious way' (1998: 523). She mentions the complex emotional, linguistic and cognitive associations that occur in the process of recovering (in the cases she describes) a literacy history. In remembering and using drama to present their literacy histories, the performers would often change their perceptions of events which previously may have seemed uninteresting to them. These acquired a new identity when seen in a different light.

Abbs (1974) speaks of the 'discipline of autobiography' in the context of teacher education, where, he claims, the students are usually filled with knowledge and techniques. However, knowledge implies a knower and Abbs stresses that education cannot take place without reference to the condition of

the individual, because of the intimate relationship between being and knowing, the self and the culture and the time in which we live our lives.

Bailey et al (1996) argue for the use of autobiography in teacher education to examine the 'apprenticeship of observation', the often implicit values and beliefs we hold about teaching because of our many hours in the classroom as learners. As these experiences are examined students may begin to realise how their concepts of learning and teaching have been shaped by them. As students discover why they believe what they do, they can make conscious choices about how they will teach, rather than simply continue to teach as they were taught. To do this is a first step in becoming reflective teachers. Autobiography is a 'powerful tool for reflection' (1996: 27).

In addition, Bailey et al found that, because each person is unique and different, the autobiographical task provided a 'great sense of individuality' and ownership of their memories for the student teachers with whom they worked (1996: 27).

2.6 The relationship of speech to writing and the pedagogical implications of this relationship

Writing and speech are both modes of representing and communicating in language 'what we know, remember, read, sense, feel and believe' (Stein, 2000: 2). There are some important differences between the two modes, although as Barton (1994) points out, there is much overlap as well.
Emig (1977) has noted some differences between speech and writing, which have implications for the ways we learn and use each mode. Some of her points include the following:

- writing is learned behaviour; talking is natural, organic and earlier;
- writing is a technological device; it is mostly slower than talking;
- writing must provide its own context; the audience is usually absent;
- writing usually results in a visible graphic product, some*thing*, rather than an event.

Emig argues that talk is a valuable part of pre-writing and that when we learn something, we use all the language modes to do so: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Judy (1987) concurs, claiming that students need the opportunity to talk about and re-examine their experiences before they write them down. Less proficient writers, in particular, can find this a helpful way to begin.

Vygotsky considered writing to be closer to thought than to spoken language. Writing, for him, represents an expansion of inner speech, the mode with which we talk to ourselves (Emig, 1977). He claims that: 'written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning' (1962:98).

Halliday (1985) has described some of the differences between the two modes of speaking and writing. Writing can not incorporate all the meaning potential of speech. The prosodic features, such as intonation and pauses, and the paralinguistic elements, such as loudness, speed, or facial and bodily gestures, will be lost. The two modes are often used in different contexts, for different purposes. 'Writing creates a world of things, talking creates a world of happenings.' (1985: 93) Structurally, writing tends to be more lexically dense, spoken language more grammatically dense. Each mode is complex, in a different way. All language involves abstraction, but writing involves a further degree of distance from the event.