Dialogue Journal Writing: A Tool for Critical Reflection in the Adult ESL Learner

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Abstract

This study attempted to determine whether or not dialogue journal writing encouraged critical reflection in the adult ESL (English as a Second Language) learner. According to research in adult education and anecdotal evidence, the process of dialogue journal writing can facilitate critical reflection in the adult learner. However, little research has been conducted to examine whether or not journal writing can facilitate critical reflection in the second language learner. As a result, ten low-intermediate level adult ESL students from Brock University's Intensive English Language Programme participated in a dialogue journal writing programme in their writing class. The participants wrote journal entries over a 10-week period, and were interviewed once throughout the process to determine their perceptions of the journal writing experience. They also were observed by the researcher throughout the journal writing sessions to establish whether any behaviours or intrusions might affect the participants' writing processes. After the content of the journals and the interviews, and the observations made by the researcher were analysed, it was confirmed that, for these participants, dialogue journal writing did not necessarily encourage critical reflection. Moreover, the participants' perceptions of journal writing were that it helped them to practise the syntax, vocabulary, and rhetorical patterns of English; nevertheless, it did not foster critical reflection or thinking.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The intent of this study is to investigate the dialogue journal writing process and its role in the adult ESL (English as a Second Language) learning context. The hypothesis is that dialogue journal writing is beneficial to adult ESL learners as a tool which promotes critical reflection in their second language. In other words, it is proposed that the first purpose of dialogue journal writing in an adult ESL learning context is to facilitate critical reflection, which in turn may promote transformative learning. The fact that the learners are practising the linguistic and rhetorical forms of English is secondary.

Background of the Problem

Recently, dialogue journal writing has become popular in a variety of educational contexts. The purpose of incorporating dialogue journal writing into a programme or curriculum varies according to the contexts in which it is used. For example, in the adult education context, dialogue journal writing or journal writing is used primarily as a tool to facilitate critical reflection, which ultimately may lead to some form of transformative learning.

Dialogue journal writing has also found its way into the syllabi of many ESL practitioners. Usually the ESL facilitator includes dialogue journal writing in the curriculum as a method of encouraging the learners to manipulate and practise the grammatical, rhetorical, and vocabulary structures taught in the classroom. Dialogue journal writing in this context also provides a non-threatening situation in which the second language learners can communicate with their facilitator or peer without fear of being graded or ridiculed for language errors.

Frequently, dialogue journal writing is automatically included in the ESL context without due consideration regarding its purpose because it is seen as a popular technique

that does not require much planning or organization on the part of the facilitator. As a result, dialogue journal writing is not always successfully used or accepted by adult ESL learners.

Statement of the Problem Situation

The area of concern addressed in this study is the purpose and use of dialogue journal writing in the adult ESL context. As mentioned previously, according to anecdotal evidence, dialogue journal writing has been used in the adult ESL learning context primarily as a means of facilitating learners' language use. Nevertheless, dialogue journal writing may have another purpose for the adult ESL learner. This purpose may be to facilitate adult language learners' ability to reflect critically on their life experiences in their second language in order to achieve some form of change in their established beliefs or in their way of thinking about the world around them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine whether or not dialogue journal writing encourages critical reflection in the adult ESL learner. As a result of this study, it is hoped that ESL practitioners will have a deeper understanding of the role of the dialogue journal writing process, and will therefore be better able to determine whether this technique has a place in their particular learning environments.

Questions to be Answered

The following questions were asked in the developmental stages of this qualitative study:

1. Does dialogue journal writing encourage critical reflection in adult ESL learners?
2. What are the adult ESL learners' perceptions of the purpose and use of dialogue journal writing?

3. What behaviours actually occur while learners are participating in dialogue journal writing?
4. What is the content of the journal entries?
5. Should dialogue journal writing be incorporated into the adult ESL learning context? If so, how should this be done?

Rationale

This problem should be investigated because of the popularity of dialogue journal writing in the adult ESL learning context. Many ESL practitioners are using dialogue journal writing as a learning technique, and it is necessary for them to understand the nature and purpose of this technique before they decide to incorporate it into their particular curriculum.

Importance of the Study

This study is important because it will help adult ESL practitioners determine whether or not dialogue journal writing is an appropriate tool to use for their particular purposes. It will also help ESL facilitators to understand the students' perceptions of the dialogue journal writing process. If a learning technique is to meet with success, it must be seen as valid by the learners who use it.

In addition, this study will be important to adult educators in general. Because dialogue journal writing is a technique which is used frequently in the adult education context, the study of its use by second language learners can lend some insights into its effectiveness as a tool for critical reflection and the dialogue process.

Definition of Terms

1. Adult Learners - These learners have reached the standard age of legal adulthood - 18 years of age.

2. Critical Reflection - This type of thinking refers to the challenging of the truthfulness of preconceived ideas in prior learning. It involves the questioning of established or habitual patterns of an individual's beliefs , goals, or expectations.
3. Dialogue Journal Writing - A dialogue journal is a written conversation between a facilitator and a learner or a learner and another learner. This conversation is completely private, and it takes place regularly and continually throughout a school year, semester, or programme. Students write as much as they want on whatever topic they wish, and the facilitator responds to the journal entry. The facilitator does not grade or correct the writing, nor does he or she respond with evaluative comments such as "good work." The facilitator responds to the ideas in the learners' journals and becomes a partner in conversation.
4. ESL (English as a Second Language) - This term refers to the subject of English as a Second Language. The learners who participated in this study were native speakers of a variety of languages, but they were not native speakers of English. They were studying or learning English in a setting in which English was the lingua franca or official language of communication.
5. Transformative Learning - Transformative learning occurs when learners critically assess the content, process, or premise(s) of their efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience. In other words, transformative learning occurs when learners give new meaning or perspective to their experiences. It is a goal of adult learning.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study examines the use of dialogue journal writing in a low-intermediate adult ESL writing programme. Its primary focus is whether or not critical reflection in adult second language learners is encouraged through the use of the dialogue journal. The

study does not examine whether or not dialogue journal writing improves adult ESL learners' writing fluency or language use.

Similarly, it also does not determine the usefulness or purpose of incorporating dialogue journal writing into ESL programmes at the primary or secondary education levels. This examination of the dialogue journal writing process is limited to its use in an adult learning context, particularly one in which the learners ' primary goal is to learn English intensively.

Outline of Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two includes a review of the relevant literature for this study. The literature review focuses on adult education and its goal of critical reflection and transformative learning and the uses of dialogue journal writing in a variety of educational contexts, including the adult ESL context.

Chapter Three outlines and describes the methods, methodologies, and procedures that were used to collect the data necessary for this study. This chapter includes descriptions of the research methodology, the research design, the selection of subjects, and the instrumentation. A brief examination of the data collection and analysis procedures as well as the limitations of the methodology will also be presented.

Chapter Four includes the findings of the study and the interpretation of those findings. This chapter encompasses an overview of the findings, specific details, and explanations of the findings with regard to each instrument used, and includes a brief yet comprehensive summary of the chapter.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the entire study, conclusions that can be drawn from the analysed data, and the implications of the findings. These implications include implications for practice and implications for further research. Finally, recommendations or practical suggestions are made for implementation of the findings or for additional research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organization of the Present Chapter

This chapter examines two main components of the study: adult education and its principles, and dialogue journal writing and its uses in a variety of educational contexts. The primary focus of the adult education section is on the concepts of critical reflection and transformative learning, often viewed as the goals of adult education. The primary focus of the section on dialogue journal writing is how journal writing has been used in a variety of settings, but most importantly, how it has been used as an educational tool. Little empirical research on dialogue journal writing has been undertaken, probably because it is a difficult concept to analyse and measure. Therefore, most of the research presented on dialogue journal writing is anecdotal in nature.

Adult Education: Theoretical Framework

Recently the number of adults who have chosen to return to schools or other educational institutions has increased greatly. Whether they are attending colleges and universities or self-help groups, self-improvement seminars or general interest courses, adults are immersing themselves in a variety of adult learning contexts more than ever before. In order to provide appropriate learning experiences for adult learners, some examination and understanding of the theoretical foundations of adult learning and education are necessary for the adult educator.

For the past twenty years, adult education has been known as andragogy. Andragogy, a term made popular by Malcolm Knowles (1970), is the art and science of helping adults learn. Knowles coined this term to differentiate between pedagogy or the principles of teaching children and andragogy or the principles of teaching adults. At first, Knowles saw andragogy and pedagogy as opposites, but later he realized that the two operate on a continuum of learning (1980). In other words, the assumptions which

underlie andragogy can be used along with the assumptions which underlie pedagogy. Knowles' model for learning is based on a set of four crucial assumptions about adults. As a person matures, his (her) self-concept moves from that of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being; he (she) accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; his (her) readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his (her) social roles; and his (her) time perspective changes from one of postponed application, and accordingly his (her) orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centredness to one of problem-centredness (1970, p. 39).

From Knowles' principles, one could summarize that adult education requires learners to take an active role in considering what they are about to learn, how they might best learn it, what they plan to do with the learning, how they will have learned, and how the learning experience has changed them. Thus, according to Knowles (1980), adult education is mainly concerned with providing resources and support for self-directed inquirers which will encourage adults to be life-long learners.

Self-Direction Through Critical Thinking

The concept of life-long learning is at the core of adult education. Self-direction, which enables life-long learning, is thus the goal of andragogy, according to Mezirow (1985). To become self-directed, adult learners do not simply attend adult classes or continuing education courses. They must be motivated and committed to the independent and critical thinking or the intellectual function most characteristic of adult life (Mezirow and Associates, 1990). Critical thinking enables the adult to examine and question the preconceived notions and beliefs learned in childhood. In addition, it is necessary for adults to interpret their actions and scrutinize the validity and accuracy of the assumptions and organizational principles of the workplace and life in general (Brookfield, 1990). Critical thinking, then, is or should be the process underlying all educational activities and

is not a separate subject. In fact, the most appropriate goal for college teaching is the development of critical thinking (Brookfield, 1990).

According to Brookfield, there are four components of critical thinking: "identifying and challenging assumptions; recognizing the influence of contexts on thoughts and actions; considering alternatives to existing ways of thinking and living; [and taking appropriate action based on one's critical analysis]" (1987, p. 8). This interpretation of critical thinking is evident in Bowers' (1984) summary of the sociology of knowledge. As Bowers writes, socialization involves the internalizing of definitions and assumptions given to people as children by their parents and mentors. However, as adults, the formerly acceptable sources of authority and knowledge provided by socialization and early schooling become inappropriate. Thus, adults require new outlooks and principles to achieve both a more complete understanding of the changing events in their lives and a higher degree of control over their lives. As a result, the formative learning of childhood becomes the transformative learning of adulthood. Bowers (1984) continues by stressing the importance of adults learning to negotiate meanings, purposes and values critically, reflectively, and rationally. An adult should not passively accept the social realities determined by others. According to Brookfield (1987) , this critical reflection necessary for adults and endorsed by Bowers is closely linked to the critical thinking he feels is necessary for healthy critical (adult) scrutiny (1990).

The Act of Critical Reflection

Critical *thinking* or reflection is one route to adult learning. Learning, according to Mezirow (1990), is the process of making new or revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience, which ultimately directs subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. Meaning is making sense or giving coherence to our experience. In other words, meaning can be viewed as an interpretation. Dewey writes that "only when things about us have meaning for us, only when they signify consequences that can be reached by using

them in certain ways, is any such thing as intentional, deliberate control of them possible" (1933, p.19). Reflection, a technique for achieving meaning, is generally viewed as a synonym for higher-order mental processes. These processes include making inferences, generalizations, analogies, discriminations, and evaluations. Reflection also involves feeling, remembering, and solving problems. Reflection, too, can mean using one's beliefs to make an interpretation or to analyse, perform, discuss, or judge perhaps even unconsciously (Mezirow, 1990). In simpler terms, adult learning means using the meaning we have already made to guide the way we think, or feel about what we are experiencing now or the way in which we respond to current experiences.

Critical reflection, though, refers to the challenging of the truthfulness of presuppositions in prior learning (Mezirow, 1990). It means questioning the established and habitual patterns of a person's expectations and meaning perspectives which include one's theories, beliefs, and goal orientations (Mezirow, 1990). This reflection is central to intentional learning which is comprised of "the explications of the meaning of an experience, the reinterpretation of that meaning or the application of it in a thoughtful action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 99). Such reflection is also the key to problem solving and validity testing (Mezirow, 1990).

Critical Reflection and Transformative Learning

The concept of critical reflection and transformative learning is by no means a new discovery. Plato's doctrine that knowledge is "recollection" has a significant place in teaching and learning, particularly in the adult learning context. The technique of familiarization or "contextual elaboration" as outlined by Norton (1973) uses old knowledge or what we have learned before as the basis for new knowledge. Dewey (1933) also put forth the widely accepted definition of reflective thought as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p. 9).

Dewey's "reflection," viewed in the context of problem solving, is what transformative learning theorists would today call validity testing.

Finally, it must be noted that critical reflection in the context of learning is not the same as introspection (Mezirow, 1990). All reflection involves critique. Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of a learner's efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience (Mezirow, 1990). On the other hand, introspection involves our thinking about ourselves and does not involve the validity testing of prior learning.

In summary, learning occurs when we attribute old meaning to new experiences. Transformative learning occurs when we reinterpret an old or new experience from the perspective of a new set of expectations. Thus, we give new meaning or perspective to an old experience. As Norton (1973) explains, a learning experience occurs for the adult when "an experience casually considered transforms into an experience critically considered" (p. 55).

To conclude, adult learners have rich resources for their learning in their own life experiences (Knowles, 1980). These life experiences provide them with a firm foundation to which to relate their new experiences. Adults derive their self-identity from their experiences and ultimately define themselves in terms of the accumulation of their own unique sets of experiences. Brookfield's and Mezirow's examination of critical reflection and its effect on adults' ability to "transform" their learning has indeed expanded on Knowles' belief of adults' resource of life experiences as learning tools. As a result of these contributions to the field of adult education, the adult educator recognizes that he or she must accommodate and facilitate the critical reflection which enables adult learners to assess, interpret, and understand the experiences that life offers. For adult learners, life is their education, and their education is a transformational journey.

Journal Writing in Education

If the goal of adult education is to encourage critical reflection which may then lead to transformative learning, the adult educator must provide experiences and learning tools for the adult learner in order to foster this process. One method for encouraging transformative learning, which has been accepted with increasing favour by adult educators, is journal writing.

Definition of Journal Writing

Journal writing refers to the private, self-expressive, reflective writing one does as a way of understanding oneself or one's world. Journal writing is a form of expressive writing which usually takes shape in diaries, letters, or first drafts. Expressive writing is characteristically unstructured and is typically language written for oneself. According to Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod and Rosen (1975), expressive writing is the matrix from which other forms of writing come. Expressive writing is the writing which is closest to thinking; thus, it should be included in any educational context in which learners are encouraged or expected to think and speculate. Janet Emig's (1971) research parallels that of Britton and colleagues in that she has discovered that expressive writing is essentially a way to encourage thinking.

Journal Writing: An Historical Perspective

The personal diary or journal has been used by children and adults for centuries , yet little is known about it. The most familiar form of journal is the chronological record of personal or historical events. Another common form of the journal is the travel or project log in which one records events or steps of a trip or process. Finally, another form of journal, which emerged in the twentieth century, emphasizes the writer's feelings and reflections on life events and experiences. It is this type of journal which is relevant to the adult lifelong learner.

Diaries and journals have frequently been practised in a variety of contexts, including religious life, when an individual uses the journal as a means of measuring progress along a particular religious path, or in the creative arts, when the artist wishes to record feelings and interpretations to be used later in a particular art form. Similarly, the pioneers of modern psychology, Freud, Jung, and Adler found the personal journal useful for patients to record dreams, fantasies, and inner thoughts and feelings.

Journal researcher Tristine Rainer (1978) identifies four pioneers of psychology and literature who helped to conceptualize modern journal writing: Carl Jung, Marion Milner, Ira Progoff, and Anais Nin. Of the four, Ira Progoff, psychologist and founder of Dialogue House in New York City, has perhaps made the most significant contribution to the concept and structure of the journal writing experience.

Progoff (1975) sees the personal journal as a tool which allows writers to tap into their valuable inner resources by recording dreams, inner imagery, intuitive writings, and even drawings. According to Progoff, journal writing frees people to explore and develop their potentials and abilities. These goals of journal writing are in fact the foundations of self-directed adult learning. For the adult writer, the journal is a resource which encourages and enhances self-reliance and self-awareness.

There are a variety of ways to maintain journals; however, perhaps one of the most thorough and concise frameworks for journal writing was developed by Progoff. His approach to journal writing is based on ten years of research into the study of adult development. Progoff also drew upon experience and experimentation with the use of journals both for himself and in his therapeutic practice. Progoff's method, named the "Intensive Journal" (1975), allows people to start writing about wherever they are in their life process and to begin to bring focus and clarity to their experiences.

Nevertheless, Progoff is critical of the spontaneous method of journal work. In other words, he feels that a writer should use the contents of the journal to bring about new self-understanding and change. Progoff believes that a journal can be limiting when it

is used only to reach a pre-decided goal which is not related to the larger development of one's life (1975). Rainer (1978), on the other hand, is less critical of spontaneous entries. She sees the journal as a place for any ideas or thoughts that a writer may have.

Journal Writing as a Learning Tool

In recent years, the journal has become a popular learning tool in a variety of educational settings. The primary reason for this popularity is that journal writing is believed by many educators to encourage thinking and critical reflection. If in fact the journal does so, it may represent a means of enhancing learner self-direction, which ultimately leads to the learner's greater self-awareness, and thus would be congruent in its function with one of the underlying goals of adult learning. In addition, journal writing can help the learner to recognize alternative ways of thinking or acting that may not have been apparent prior to the journal writing and thinking process. Journals are also favoured by educators and learners because they offer a risk-free environment in which learners can react to life. Hence, their appeal extends to almost all levels of formal and informal education.

Journal writing, therefore, is used in many educational contexts because it is believed to promote critical reflection and learning. According to Lukinsky (1990), journal writing also aids the memory, brings lost potentials and ideas to the surface, and instigates retrievals of insights. Actually, journal writing, because of its reflective withdrawal and re-entry processes, can help adult learners break habitual ways of thinking, enabling them to change their life direction. In other words, journal entries may become the objectification of an inner search (Lukinsky, 1990).

In the educational setting, a student may use journal writing before learning something new, as a means of reflection while learning, perhaps as a pause in the learning activity; and as a form of post-reflection (Lukinsky, 1990). The reflective nature of journal writing may be instrumental to the learning process since learning occurs only

through reflexive thought (Dewey, 1910). The stages of journal writing noted directly above parallel to some extent Dewey's outline of the three stages of the learning process, which extend from the concrete to the abstract. The first stage focuses on what is occurring at present (the task). The second, more abstract stage expands the learner's thoughts to other areas indirectly related to the original activity (the application). The final stage has the learner moving away from the practical to make abstract or general inferences from the original task or concept (Dewey, 1910).

Unlike diaries, journals are not primarily about self, although for adult learners, personal experiences and observations make up much of their substance. Often adult learners record their personal reactions by responding to discussions, relating subject matter to another subject or experience, stating an opinion, asking a question, or making a prediction. As a result, the journal offers adult learners the opportunity to connect new knowledge to their memories and understandings to find real meaning (Voss, 1988).

The Dialogue Journal

In the educational context, journals can be either personal records of learners' goals, ideas, and interpretations, or they can be shared recordings which constitute written dialogues between learner and peers or learner and instructor/facilitator. The latter form of journal writing has come to be known in the education field as dialogue journal writing. According to Shuy (1987), dialogue is necessary for successful interaction in our social world. According to Vygotsky (1978), dialogue is central to learning. A person's greatest learning feat, learning his or her first language, is accomplished through the dialogue process. Conversational or dialogue writing allows learners to build on their knowledge by participating in an interactive, functional, and self-generated activity (Shuy, 1987). Dialogue journal writing is interactive because facilitators or peers respond to the comments or ideas of the learner/writer. This exchange of opinions encourages the continuous process of dialogue or thinking. This dialogue process is also functional as it

encourages the learner to use language to accomplish a goal. In fact, dialogue journal writing encourages the higher-order thinking modes favoured by academics: observing; speculating; confirming; doubting; questioning; being self-aware (a necessary pre-condition for higher-order thinking/reasoning and social interaction); seeing connections; digressing; engaging in dialogue; acknowledging information; revising ideas; problem posing and solving (Fulwiler, 1989). This higher order thinking is also parallel to the transformative theory of adult learning posed by Mezirow (1990). Finally, one of the most significant aspects of the dialogue journal is that the topics chosen for it are entirely the choice of the learner/writer. The respondent might choose to raise a topic in his or her response to the learners' musings, but the control of the journal is completely in the hands of the writer. Most writers or learners enjoy writing about those topics which are familiar or known to them because they then can interact with and structure that which is meaningful to them (Lucas, 1990). The choice of personal topics also encourages critical reflection.

Dialogue Journal Writing Across the Disciplines

Most often educators and learners believe that expressive writing, like journal writing, belongs in the domain of English Composition courses. In fact, many teachers and learners look at journal writing suspiciously because it is too personal, unstructured, and informal to have any pedagogical or andragogical value (Fulwiler, 1982). Besides that, the quality of journal writing is too difficult to measure for grading purposes. Nevertheless, facilitators in all subject areas and in fact at all levels can incorporate journal writing into their curricula. Keeping a journal of class experiences can help learners express their understandings of concepts learned and how they relate to their lives. Journal writing in class can also stimulate learner discussion, clarify issues, reinforce learning experiences, and stimulate thought. Journal writing is equal to individualized learning as the process of silent writing helps to generate personal ideas, observations, and

emotions (Fulwiler, 1982). Through journal writing, learners can examine their individual ways of learning.

Because journal writing encourages learners to examine their individual learning styles, this form of writing can be interdisciplinary and thus a primary source for educational growth (Hanson, 1978). For example, journal writing has been used in high school mathematics courses in which students were expected to summarize their classroom experiences and raise questions or concerns about the class content (Pradl and Mayther, 1985). Keeping this type of journal helped students to express their understandings of concepts learned and how they related to them. Similarly, dialogue journal writing has also been used in the foreign language classroom (Popkin, 1985). A lack of vocabulary and fear of making grammatical errors can prevent many foreign language learners from expressing their ideas spontaneously in the classroom. In addition, many times the learners may not have any opportunity to practise the language outside of the classroom in authentic language contexts. Thus, the self-expression these language learners experience through the dialogue journal writing experience can be extremely rewarding. Moreover, the dialogue journal enables the teacher to know students as individuals and to become aware of the background and experiences which shape their attitudes (Popkin, 1985). According to Popkin, writing journals gives students the confidence they need in order to use their new language in a meaningful way and to make this language a part of their personality (1985).

Another subject area in which journal writing has met with great success is in the area of college study skills and more specifically college reading skills. In a college level reading skills programme, learners were asked to keep a journal on their responses to readings and their own reading process (Frager and Malena, 1986). By reading the student journals, the reading instructors were able to identify possible student reading and study problems that would not have been diagnosed through normal standardized reading tests (Frager and Malena, 1986). While the diagnostic hypotheses based on statements in

a student journal must be tested, the students' own observations of their learning can be helpful. In fact, metacognitive and reflective awareness gained from introspection into one's process of learning has indeed been linked to better reading comprehension (Fitzgerald, 1983) and more success in school (Hounsell, 1979).

Journal Writing For Students With Special Needs

Not only has journal writing been used across the curriculum in a variety of subject areas, but it has also been used with learners who have particular learning needs. For example, dialogue journal writing has been used successfully with secondary level learning disabled students (Johnson and Hoover, 1989). In this learning context, the focus of the dialogue journal was on the process of writing as a communication tool. According to Johnson and Hoover, the meaningful exchanges the learners had with a known partner seemed to encourage language fluency, an area which these learning disabled students needed to develop. As stated above, the main focus of this dialogue journal writing programme was the writing process as opposed to the written product.

In a similar manner, journal writing has also been used as a counselling/learning tool with gifted secondary level learners (Hall, 1990). In this context, journal writing was used to help students understand the common problems of being a gifted learner. It allowed learners an emotional outlet that enabled them to reflect openly and confront issues such as relationships with people with which gifted learners must deal. Despite the seemingly successful nature of this journal writing experience, Hall notes that there is no practical way to assess what part journal writing has in students' success. As in most cases of journal writing experiences, there are only subjective judgements and anecdotal evidence to support the value of journal writing. Hall also realizes that it is difficult to measure social adjustment, self-understanding, and other affective adjustments which learners appear to make through the ideas and understandings in their journals. Moreover, Hall suspects that these gains which students make might be only temporary (1990).

Finally, dialogue journal writing has also been used with deaf students in order to promote awareness of language through reading and writing. Margaret Walworth (1990) uses dialogue journal writing with deaf college preparatory and freshman-level students whose hearing loss has interfered with their natural acquisition of English. For these students, dialogue journal writing is used to gauge their reading techniques and to provide a means for conversation about the readings between instructor and student entirely in the target (English) language. The dialogue journal in this context encourages the interactive approach to teaching reading in which students' background knowledge and personal involvement with the text is crucial. Participating in a written dialogue about reading can make the course content more meaningful to the student. In the journal dialogue, the teacher and the student can determine more clearly what schemata (background knowledge) the student is using and then work together to make the schemata more appropriate. This is especially important for the deaf student whose own schemata may be quite different from the hearing author's schemata (Walworth, 1990).

According to Albertini (1990), journal writing can also be used to promote coherence in deaf students' writing. Dialogue journal writing not only provides students with control over the topic of this interactive process, but it also provides students, in this particular case deaf students, with control over the structure or the coherence and organization of the writing (Albertini, 1990). In Albertini's study, coherence and organization of writing were examined in terms of the "given-new contract" which refers to an expectation, hypothesized for listeners and readers of English, that the speaker or writer will generally present old or given information before new (1990). According to Albertini (1990), deaf students in his particular study followed the "given-new" concept in their dialogue journals, thus showing that even though they lack control over specific English structures, these students could write coherent and organized texts.

Dialogue Journal Writing in the Adult ESL Classroom

Research Relevant to Study

In recent years, dialogue journal writing has begun to gain acceptance in the English as a Second Language classroom for a number of purposes. Most language instructors and instructors from a variety of disciplines would agree that the act of writing facilitates the acquisition of thought and the shaping of ideas (Taylor, 1981). Second language learners/writers, like native speakers, require practice in both language skills and thinking skills. In fact, the type of writing most ESL learners are expected to produce is academic, expository, or business writing. These types of writing, in particular, usually require higher order thinking and organization of ideas. Nevertheless, according to a study conducted by Perl (1979), the focus in a writing class, at least at the early stages, should be on personal writing. Perl found that students wrote longer, more grammatically correct essays on personal topics.

In addition, Vanett and Jurich (1990) have found that journal writing appears to enable ESL learners to put complex ideas and emotions into words. Journal writing also allows the learners to recognize their writing abilities, develop new ones, and transfer to their academic writing skills used in journal writing such as summarizing information, explaining point of view, and writing persuasively. Similarly, having personal experiences, beliefs, and opinions - or those ideas usually written in journals - readily available can be an invaluable asset to the "blocked" writer or to the writer who has difficulty accessing and expressing ideas (Elbow and Clarke, 1987).

Dialogue journal writing, though, is not simply a way for students to practise their writing skills. It is also an effective context for language acquisition (Kreeft Peyton, 1990). According to Krashen (1982), there is a "set of requirements that should be met by an activity or set of materials aimed at subconscious language acquisition" (p. 62).

Briefly, some of these requirements are as follows: the activity focuses on meaning rather than form; it is not grammatically sequenced; it is not overtly corrected; it has a continuity of dialogue; and it is conducted in a non-threatening and supportive context (1982). Needless to say, dialogue journal writing encompasses these requirements, and as a result, could be used as a tool for language acquisition.

The amount of literature on journal writing is vast and generally positive. The amount of research on journal writing in the adult ESL context, however, is much smaller. Spack and Sadow (1983) used dialogue journal writing as a means of enriching student/teacher interaction and improving group awareness and exchange of ideas. This journal writing programme was used in an ESL freshman composition course where the focus of the journals was on issues relating to the ESL writing class. Spack and Sadow and their students perceived the dialogue journal writing programme as beneficial in enriching student/teacher interaction and improving group awareness. Moreover, they perceived some changes in the students' writing skills that might have been attributed to the journal writing experience. Nevertheless, Spack and Sadow make no claims about journal writing's effect on students' writing improvement, one of the goals of the study.

In a similar manner, Tamara Lucas (1990) conducted a project in personal journal writing in an adult ESL writing class. Lucas sees the personal journal as a genre, following Ferguson's definition of genre as "a unit of discourse conventionalized in a given community at a certain time, having an internal sequential structure and a set of features of form, content, and use that distinguish it from others in the repertoire of the community" (1986, p. 208). Lucas found that the ESL learners' responses to this "genre" of the personal and reflective journal were influenced by such factors as previous writing experiences, life experiences, and cultural and personal values regarding written reflection on personal experiences (1990).

Summary

Most educators and facilitators would agree that journal writing seems to be beneficial for the learner in a variety of educational contexts. Journal writing indeed appears to encourage critical reflection and thought, the underlying foundation of transformative learning and ultimately adult education. It also seems to allow learners an opportunity to examine their personal learning styles in the context of academic disciplines. Dialogue journal writing in particular seems to encourage the interactive nature of learning and language use, thus making it appropriate for learners who have particular needs to manipulate and practise language structures and discourse patterns. It would seem that, according to the literature on journal writing, most of which is anecdotal in nature, journal writing is an effective learning tool in any educational context including the adult ESL context, the area of focus of this research study.

While most ESL practitioners use dialogue journal writing in the ESL context as a means for students to practise language structures and vocabulary and as a means for students to develop fluency in English, dialogue journal writing is perhaps more beneficial to the adult ESL learner as a tool which promotes critical reflection in their second language since these learners are adults first and language learners second. In other words, dialogue journal writing's first purpose in an adult ESL learning context is to facilitate critical reflection which in turn may promote transformative learning. The fact that the learners are practising the linguistic and rhetorical forms of English is secondary.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This chapter covers the methodology and procedures that were used to complete this study. A description of the methodology, research design, selection of subjects, and instrumentation is presented. An outline of the data collection and processing is given as is that of the methodological assumptions and limitations of the methodology.

Description of Research Methodology or Approach

This study is an example of a qualitative research design using a naturalistic model of inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to this model, there are no human characteristics or processes from which generalizations can be made. Thus, each subject or action is different and must be studied holistically. Since the total setting for the phenomenon under study is never the same, it is doubtful that control will ever be achieved. Nevertheless, some understanding of the phenomenon can occur. Therefore, because of the inflexibility of quantitative instruments of measurement, human observation and interviews were used to examine the complex phenomena involved in this study.

The approach used was the case study approach which involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon (Borg and Gall, 1989). While this approach has been rejected in the past by many educational researchers as unscientific, mainly because of its lack of research controls, it certainly does have a place in educational research and has been used extensively not only in education but also in areas such as clinical psychology in the study of individual differences. Most case studies operate under the premise that a case is typical of many other cases, and it can be seen as an example of an event or a group of individuals. Once a case or event has been discovered, then in-depth observation, collection of data, and analysis can provide insights into the situation (Borg and Gall, 1989).

The case study approach was justifiable in this study because a process of writing and participants' perceptions of that process were being examined. According to Borg and Gall (1989), frequently the most obvious aspects of everyday life in educational settings tend to become invisible or forgotten because they are so habitual. These aspects need to be reexamined and rediscovered in order to understand the significance of them. Thus, qualitative research and the case study approach can provide the details needed for understanding situations or processes like journal writing. They can also examine the relationships between the concept being studied and the broader context in which the concept or phenomenon occurs. Qualitative research and the case study approach can also lead to formulations of new hypotheses and theory about the concept being studied. Because little empirical research has been conducted on dialogue journal writing, it is not clearly defined or understood. As a result, an in-depth study using the case study approach can provide the best means for describing the concept and developing an understanding of it (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Research Design

As previously mentioned, due to the subjective nature of this study, a qualitative research design was the most appropriate method to use. Often in qualitative research the investigator begins with a very tentative design or no design at all and develops the design as the inquiry progresses. This allows the investigator to include variables that were not considered prior to the beginning of the observations. Nevertheless, the investigator of this qualitative design did begin with a hypothesis in order to help guide the observations made. This hypothesis was that dialogue journal writing does encourage critical reflection in the adult ESL learner/writer.

Context

The Intensive English Language Programme

The programme in which this study took place was the Intensive English Language Programme (IELP) offered by the Department of Applied Language Studies at Brock University. This programme offers five levels of English proficiency from a beginner level to an advanced level. Each level is composed of five skills including writing, reading, listening, speaking, and grammar. Each skill is offered once a day for a total of five hours of English instruction for five days of the week. The students in the programme also participate in sociocultural activities which provide them with opportunities to practise their English skills.

The students in the programme, who come from all over the world, attend the IELP for a number of reasons. Many of the students hope to study at Brock University or at another North American university. Thus, they often need to improve their English skills. Some students also want or need to learn English for professional or social reasons. Many of these students will return to their native countries or will travel. Finally, some of the students in the IELP are landed immigrants or Canadian citizens whose first language is not English. Nevertheless, the majority are visa students. This programme is designed to suit the needs of these different types of students; however, its primary focus is English for academic purposes.

The Course

The particular course in which this study took place was the Level 2 writing course of the IELP. The Level 2 students met each day for 50 minutes for their writing class. This course emphasized the process approach to writing in which learners/writers focused on the thinking and the various steps involved in the writing process. In this course, peer

revision of student work was encouraged, as students learned to become aware of writing for an audience from this activity.

Rhetorically, the primary focus at this level was the paragraph and its development. Some emphasis was also placed on practical writing skills (i.e., business letter writing), according to the needs of the students.

Sample

The participants in this study were ten Level 2 students in the IELP. Level 2 is considered a high-beginning or low-intermediate level of English proficiency. Each of the students had successfully completed Level 1, the first level in the IELP.

The participants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and included five Japanese, one Hong Kong Chinese, one Taiwanese, one Korean, one Saudi Arabian, and one Mexican. There were six females and four males who participated in the study. They ranged in age from 19 years of age to 32 years of age (see Table 1).

Students at this level were specifically chosen for three reasons. The first reason is that dialogue journal writing, the phenomenon being researched, is frequently used with students at this level as it is believed that here learners often make observable progress in their second language acquisition. The second reason for choosing this group is that these students are usually able to understand a native speaker of English fairly well; thus, any explanations and/or questions presented to students as part of the study would probably be understood, eliminating possible misunderstandings and misleading results. Finally, the third reason for selecting this particular group of student is that there is generally a wide audience of ESL instructors who teach students at the high-beginning/low-intermediate level. Similarly, in many different types of ESL programmes, the majority of learners are at the lower levels of language proficiency. As a result, since this study examines the processes of students at this particular level, the data and their implications will be generalizable to a larger number of instructors and learners.

Table 1

List of Participants in the Study

CODE NAMES	GENDER	AGE	CULTURAL BACKGROUND
Student A	Female	22	Japanese
Student B	Female	24	Japanese
Student C	Male	32	Japanese
Student D	Female	19	Hong Kong Chinese
Student E	Female	23	Japanese
Student F	Female	19	Korean
Student G	Male	24	Taiwanese
Student H	Female	21	Japanese
Student I	Male	19	Saudi Arabian
Student J	Male	25	Mexican

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this study included a triangulation of three methods: student journal entries, a survey interview, and participant observation.

Participant Journal Entries

The participants in this study wrote approximately two journal entries per week during class time for 10 weeks of a 13-week programme. Journal writing took place during the first 10 - 15 minutes of two 50-minute classes every Monday and Friday. Actually the students were initially given 10 minutes to write, but in the fourth session requested 15 minutes in each succeeding session to write as they felt that they needed more time to record their ideas. The journal writing began in the third week of the English programme. Starting at this point allowed the students time to feel comfortable in the class and provided them with an opportunity to develop some rapport with their teacher (the researcher).

Before the participants embarked on their journal writing programme, they were presented with the basic characteristics of dialogue journal writing. The students were also encouraged to choose their own topics for journal writing. Similarly, since the students produced two journal entries per week, they had the choice of handing in either one for instructor response. Thus, the participants were provided with some choice and control over what they wrote about and over which entry they shared with a reader. This control is important in the context of adult learning.

As previously described in Chapter One, a dialogue journal is written communication between two people; it is not a graded writing assignment. As a result, no explicit correction of students' errors or comments on students' writing abilities occurred. The researcher/instructor responded only to the ideas in the journal entries after which the entries were returned to the participants in time for the next journal writing session.

While students had the choice of topics for their journal entries, their final journal entry was guided by two questions to which the researcher wished the participants to respond: "Would teachers in your native country assign journal writing? Why or why not? " and "How would your journal entries be different if they were written in your native language?" The reason for posing these questions was that since these participants were from different cultures, it was necessary to understand the cultural bias that they might have had toward dialogue journal writing which is a technique used mostly in the Western educational context.

The Survey Interview

The survey interview in this study took the form of a personal interview conducted by the researcher in which the participants (students) responded to questions asked by the researcher. The questions asked during the interview were open-ended as these questions elicit more valuable qualitative responses. In this way, the interviewer was less likely to "shape" or influence the participants' responses. The interview questions were pilot tested in the first three weeks of the IELP programme with another group of Level 2 students. For the pilot test, the second group of Level 2 students were each given a typewritten list of the questions which the researcher had formulated. The students were told the purpose of the questions and were given a definition and an explanation of a dialogue journal writing programme. Most of the students were familiar with dialogue journal writing as they had participated in it before. These students were then asked to read the questions to see if they understood them. They were also asked to indicate if there was any difficult vocabulary that they could not understand in the questions. As a result of students' responses, the interview questions were later altered to make the questions less complex and the vocabulary less cumbersome. The following were the questions posed to the participants in the study.

1. Do you think that dialogue journal writing is worthwhile? Why or why not?

2. What topics do you usually choose for journal writing?
3. How does journal writing help you?
4. Do you think that journal writing improves your abilities in English?
5. Does journal writing help you to think about your life experiences?
6. Do you think that journal writing should be marked? Why or why not?
7. Do you think your learning in English is made better through journal writing? Why or why not?
8. If you had the opportunity, would you like to participate in dialogue journal writing again?
9. Would you be willing to participate in journal writing in a different class, such as a grammar class or a mathematics class?
10. Do you think dialogue journal writing is a good way to learn?

The survey interview was conducted with each student privately during the fifth week of the ten-week study. As mentioned previously, the researcher conducted the interviews and recorded the participants' responses on audio tape. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was given a written copy of the interview questions to read. The questions were then asked orally by the interviewer. The participants were given as much time as they needed to formulate their responses.

Participant Observation

The participant observation was done by the researcher/writing instructor while the students were participating in journal writing. An anecdotal record based on the observation was made by the observer. A checklist of questions was used to guide the researcher while she observed the behaviours of the participants. The following are the questions that were used on the observation checklist.

1. Do students eagerly participate in journal writing?
2. Do students spend most of their journal writing time writing?

3. Do students begin journal writing promptly?
4. Do students finish journal writing quickly?
5. Do students arrive on time to write their journal entries?
6. Do students display facial expressions or body language which suggest their pleasure at journal writing?
7. Do students express negative/positive comments regarding journal writing time?

The observation of the participants was done unobtrusively, and the participants were not made aware of these observations by the researcher. The researcher noted the behaviours as outlined on the checklist and recorded simply what was observed.

Data Collection

Before data collection began, each participant was given a code name (i.e., Student A) so that his or her work or responses would not be identifiable by a future reader. After each journal entry had been submitted, the researcher photocopied the entry and labelled it according to the code names. Each original journal entry and teacher response was returned to the participant. The copied journal entries were kept in a locked and secured location to ensure confidentiality.

As mentioned previously, the survey interviews were conducted in a private location (the researcher 's office) with each individual participant. The participants' responses were recorded on audio tape. These taped interviews were later transcribed by the researcher so that analysis could be more easily conducted. Again the taped interviews as well as the transcriptions of those interviews were kept in a secure location throughout the duration of this study.

Enough copies of the checklist questions were made so that anecdotal observations could be made for each of the twenty journal writing sessions. These anecdotal records of the behaviours of the participants were also kept in a secure location throughout the study.

Data Processing and Analysis - Qualitative

Since the purpose of this study is to examine the purpose of journal writing and more specifically to look for evidence of critical reflection, the primary form of data is the content of the participants' journal entries. The journal entries were analysed according to a number of criteria. The following were the characteristics which the researcher examined to help determine the content and structure of the journal entries:

1. topic of journal
2. length of journal
3. legibility of handwriting
4. paragraph structure
5. rhetorical structure (i.e., narrative; cause/effect)
6. maintenance of dialogue with teacher/researcher

Elements of rhetorical structure such as paragraphing, and organizational patterns were examined to determine whether or not the participants viewed or used journal writing as composition writing. Journal writing is usually seen as spontaneous and unstructured writing which parallels the thought process. If writers take the time to think about organizational patterns in a journal entry, it can be argued that the spontaneous flow of thoughts might be interrupted. Similarly, certain rhetorical patterns, like argumentative or comparison/contrast frequently result from some form of critical thinking or analysis. Finally, evidence of critical reflection was noted if the participants used any of the following in their entries: questioning; expressing opinions; comparing/contrasting; admitting a change in thinking; making conclusions about a situation; and predicting. If the participants used an argumentative, comparison/contrast, or a cause/effect pattern of organization, it was also noted as an indication of the evidence of critical thinking or reflection. During the analysis of the journal writing, the researcher examined each entry according to the aforementioned criteria. Notes on each of these characteristics were taken for each entry, and similarities, differences, and patterns between entries were noted.

Analysis of the content of the survey interviews was conducted in a manner similar to the analysis of the content of the journal entries. Participants' responses were transcribed and similarities, differences, and patterns of the responses were noted. These responses from the interview are important as they indicate the participants' perceptions of dialogue journal writing and its use as a learning tool.

In a similar manner, the anecdotal records of the participants' behaviours throughout the journal writing sessions were analysed to determine whether or not there were any behaviours which might indicate the participants' reluctance to write in their journals. It was also important to analyse the behaviour to see if there were certain physical conditions which impeded or encouraged the spontaneous flow of the kind of writing typical of journal writing.

Nature of the Analysis

In summary, the data collected in this study were analysed using a case study approach. The experiences, opinions, and writings of the participants in this study, therefore, serve as examples of ESL learners and their journal writing processes at this particular level of English proficiency.

Limitations

As in all qualitative studies, the major limitation of this study is the risk of researcher bias. Thus, the possibility of non-deliberate bias in a study of this nature must be addressed. Because the researcher in this study "expects" a particular outcome from it - mainly that dialogue journal writing encourages critical reflection in the adult ESL learner - she might have been influenced unconsciously to distort the data. Similarly, because the researcher was emotionally involved in the study (i.e., the subjects were her students), objectivity might also have been difficult to attain. Finally, any time that a teacher elicits feedback from a student, there is the risk that the student will not respond

truthfully. In other words, the student will respond in the manner which he or she feels the teacher/researcher wishes him or her to respond. Thus, there was the potential in this study for the data that was collected to have been invalid. To help eliminate this problem, the researcher assured the participants in the study that no negative consequences to them would result from their honesty.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The following analysis will examine the content of the participants' journal entries and of the interviews, and the notes recorded from the observation checklist. The journal entries will be analysed according to the characteristics noted in Chapter Three: journal topics, length of journal entries, participants' handwriting, paragraph structure, rhetorical organization, and maintenance of dialogue. These characteristics will be examined to help determine whether or not critical reflection is evident in the journal entries. The content of the journals will be examined holistically. In other words, similarities and patterns will be noted generally. Any significant differences or unusual patterns will be noted. When specific student examples are presented, the data will be identified according to the code name given to the participant. Nevertheless, the age, gender, and cultural background of the participants are included when specific examples are given as these characteristics have a significant effect on the participants' journal writing process.

Topics of Journal Entries

The topics of the participants' journal entries were noted and examined because a chosen topic often dictates the ideas and perceptions that a writer will divulge in his or her writings. Most of the participants in this study had specific topics about which they chose to write. Many times the participants gave their journal entries titles so that the reader knew immediately what the writer's focus was. Most often the participants chose topics which were familiar to them and which constituted their everyday realities. In other words, the participants frequently wrote about events in their daily lives. For example, Student B , a 24-year-old female Japanese student, chose the topic "Baby Shower" to discuss her first experiences at a traditional Canadian ritual. Similarly, Student E, a 23-year-old female Japanese student, described her brother's wedding, which she attended in Japan. Student J, a 25-year-old male Mexican student, also chose to write about a

particularly memorable event in one of his journal entries. He described the entertaining time that he had at a school-sponsored party in an entry entitled "The Soiree." The fact that these participants chose topics which were "close" to them illustrates how expressive writing or that writing found most frequently in journals naturally seems to reflect the experiences of the writer.

Another group of participants often used their journal entries as a diary of their daily events. Student D, a 19-year-old female Hong Kong Chinese student particularly seemed to view the dialogue journal as a record of her daily life. In each of the six journal entries which were analysed, she discussed what had happened to her either the day before or the week before. These entries usually revolved around her homework, her housemates, and her life as a student. None of these entries was titled. It is also interesting to note that this student was the only student from this study who chose to hand in journal entries outside of the study. In other words, keeping a journal seemed to have become a habit for this participant.

Student J, the 25-year-old Mexican, also seemed to enjoy writing about his daily events. Three of the six journal entries he submitted outlined and described the daily events in his life. When this student wrote about his daily events, the entries were untitled. When he focussed on a particular topic, he chose to give a title to that entry, for example "My New Roommate."

In addition to using the dialogue journal as a record or diary of daily events, many of the participants seemed to view the dialogue journal writing entries as compositions or writing assignments that they might normally write in their writing classes. The topics of the entries appear to indicate this. For example, a number of the participants chose to write about particular holidays or seasonal events which occurred during the study, such as "Valentine's Day," "Spring," and "Ramadan" (a topic chosen by the Saudi Arabian participant). Many of the participants also chose to write about the sociocultural events in which they participated as part of the IELP programme. These topics included trips the

students had made to a beer factory, to the musical "Phantom of the Opera," and to university basketball games. Again, these topics were familiar to the students, yet they did not necessarily stimulate critical thinking or reflection.

Despite the fact that most of the participants usually chose topics which did not call for critical reflection or reexaminations of life experiences or decisions, there were some entries by three participants in particular who chose topics which lent themselves to reflection and evaluation of life experiences or events. These included examinations of a participant's experiences at school and work in his native country. This individual reflects on the problems of the Japanese education system. He believed that the biggest problem in Japanese education is the way teachers teach. He wrote that "memorization is an important learning method, not creative ideas and imaginations [sic]." He also wrote that he "wants the Japanese teachers to change the way of education system [sic]." Moreover, this participant presented his opinions on the Japanese working style by stating that "it is not good for people, but it is good for Japanese economy, so there are advantage and disadvantage [sic] in Japanese working style." Through the journals, this individual was able to reflect on and express his ideas about aspects of his life in Japan. These ideas were also the result of some form of critical analysis, as he arrived at a judgement or conclusion in his entries. Another participant reflected on her language learning experiences and life in Canada. For example, she wrote that she needed to solve the problem of her lack of progress in English: "I will solve much problem [sic] about all classes. I know what I weak [sic]." By writing about her problems, the participant could recognize her weakness and commit to making a positive change in her progress. Finally, a third participant reflected on her "host mother" or the woman with whom she was staying while studying English. Through writing in her journal, she could come to a better understanding of her host mother's character. She described her host mother as being "tough" and even though "she is strict, she is kind." By reflecting and writing about the host mother's characteristics, the participant came to a new understanding of her. It was in these

particular entries that evidence of at least some reflection and critical analysis of life experiences was apparent.

In summary, the topics which these participants usually chose for journal entries were familiar to them. These topics usually involved their daily events and experiences and were generally reports or descriptions of activities. Based on the topics that were most frequently chosen, these participants tended not to indulge in critical analysis or reflection of their experiences. Nevertheless, as stated previously, some of the topics chosen by three of the participants indicate that dialogue journal entries were sometimes used as venues for reflection to some degree.

Length of Journal Entries

The second characteristic of the participants' journal entries which was examined and noted was the length in terms of the number of words that the participants chose to write or were able to write in the journal writing time allowed. The number of words which a writer can generate is often an indication of not only their fluency in a language, but also of their ability to generate and record ideas in a spontaneous and continuous flow. The longest entry, 271 words, was written by Student B. The topic of this entry was her "First Trip in Canada" which described her first experience travelling alone. The tone of the entry was nostalgic, and the writer appeared deeply involved in describing this event to her reader. The shortest entry, 24 words, was composed by Student I, the 19-year-old male Saudi Arabian student. This entry, comprised of 2 sentences, was about the participant's favourite sport, "Soccer." This particular student appeared to have great difficulty with the written mode, particularly the orthographic nature of English. This problem was probably due to the vast difference between the scripts of his native language, Arabic and English.

The number of words that the participants wrote in each of their journals fluctuated. There was no participant who gradually increased the number of words in

each journal entry. This phenomenon probably depended on the topics which the participants chose for their entries, and on the participants' emotional involvement in the writing task. The general mood of the participants during the journal writing session would also probably affect the amount which they wrote. The average length of a journal entry was 130 words.

Handwriting in Journal Entries

Very little is known about the connection between a writer's handwriting and their thought process. Nevertheless, some anecdotal evidence suggests that if a person is deeply involved in freewriting activities which encourage and result in critical reflection, the writer's handwriting becomes larger, less structured, and sloppier. In other words, the writer becomes so involved in the thinking and reflecting process that he or she no longer is concerned with orthographic details of structure and neatness. The flow of thoughts seems to translate into a more smoothly written and less rigid orthographic style. Since dialogue journal writing is supposed to encourage critical reflection and since it is usually considered a freewriting, expressive genre, one would suspect that if a writer became involved in the critical reflection process, the orthographic style might illustrate the uninterrupted, spontaneous nature of a person's thought patterns.

Therefore, the participants' handwriting was analysed according to neatness and legibility. It is assumed that if a participant 's handwriting is neat, legible, and double-spaced, the person was conscious of his or her orthographic legibility at the time of writing, and therefore might not have been able to become absorbed in the process of idea generation and ultimately critical analysis of those ideas.

Eight of the ten participants neatly printed each of their journal entries. One of the two participants who used handwriting wrote in a neat and legible manner. Nine participants also double-spaced their writing, indicating their concern for legibility. One explanation for the participants' concern for neat and legible handwriting lies in their

cultural background. Asian students (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) are often strictly trained in calligraphy, characters, or in handwriting. Thus, they usually take great pride in their ability to form written letters. This preoccupation with neatness might also explain the relatively short length of the participants' journal entries. The participants might also have been concerned with the neatness of their handwriting because they knew that their teacher would read it. This concern for their audience is a legitimate one, as a writer should always be aware of the audience.

The only participant's handwriting which frequently appeared illegible was that of the Saudi Arabian student. This particular student was noted previously as having illegible handwriting. This illegibility was most likely due to the different style of his native language's script. In addition, this student also indicated that he had difficulty forming the script of his native language.

The handwriting in the journal entries of this study would seem to suggest that the participants placed importance on the legibility and neatness of their handwriting. Presentation, therefore, was probably very important to these participants. Because the participants appeared to be over-occupied with the neatness of their writing, it can be said that their priority in writing their journal entries was not critical reflection nor the analysis of life experiences.

Paragraph Structure of Journal Entries

In order to determine the existence of critical reflection in student journal entries, it is necessary to examine the rhetorical structures and patterns of the entries. The way in which students construct their entries can indicate how they perceive journal writing and what the content of those journals is. The paragraph is the smallest unit of written discourse after the sentence. In order to construct a paragraph, a writer must be conscious of rhetorical organization and structure. In other words, when a writer chooses

to write in paragraphs, he or she has made a conscious decision to follow the patterns of written English which are generally accepted in composition and expository writing.

All of the journal entries in this study were written with structured paragraphs. Most of the entries were one paragraph in length. Many of these paragraphs included topic sentences which introduced the topics to the reader, and frequently they also included concluding sentences which summarized or gave the reader an indication that the entry or paragraph was finished. The only entries which did not follow this type of structure were those entries written in diary format.

The fact that the students structured their journal entries in paragraphs shows that the students see journal writing as a genre which requires some rhetorical structure. Perhaps because they knew that their entries would be read by their instructor, who throughout the course of the writing programme taught paragraphing as a rhetorical device, they felt that they had to maintain the established patterns of written discourse as set out by their teacher. Nevertheless, the manner in which the students presented the content of their journals is important as it indicates that they perceived dialogue journal writing as a particular genre which possesses certain characteristics and patterns.

Rhetorical Organization Patterns in the Journal Entries

There are a number of rhetorical patterns in English which writers, depending on their purpose, choose in order to organize their ideas. These patterns include narrative, descriptive, cause/effect, argumentative, and process patterns. Because journal writing usually has no established pattern or structure to which writers adhere, a variety of organizational patterns can most likely be found in journal entries.

In the journal entries of this study, the most common rhetorical patterns employed by the participants were, not surprisingly, narrative and descriptive patterns. A narrative pattern is usually a chronological reporting of events. Since many of the students chose to write about their daily events in their journal entries, it is not surprising that they chose the

narrative pattern to record these events. In journal entries which exhibited a narrative pattern, the writers used time expressions such as "last Thursday," "then," and "after that." Usually these narrative entries simply reported events without any critical commentary on them.

A descriptive pattern of organization was usually used in entries which described or explained different events or concepts. For example, one student, in an entry entitled "New Year's Day," described the events that took place when she celebrated the first day of the new year according to the lunar calendar. Another student chose to describe her host family's cats in an entry which could be labelled as descriptive. Frequently, the participants also chose to describe holidays and seasonal events like Valentine's Day and the arrival of spring. In these descriptive entries, descriptive adjectives and examples were used to illustrate the ideas of the participants. As in the narrative entries, little critical commentary or analysis was evident in these descriptive passages. The participants did, however, express their personal opinions of the described events as in an entry entitled "Phantom of the Opera" in which the writer emoted "it was so beautiful I could not say anything."

While most of the journal entries used a narrative or descriptive pattern of organization with little if any critical analysis, there were some entries which exhibited evidence of critical reflection and a more analytical approach to the organization of ideas. One student in particular, Student C, a 32-year-old Japanese male, demonstrated this pattern more frequently than the other participants. For example, in his fourth journal entry, he contrasted the university residences of his native Japan with the residences in Canada. He wrote that the largest difference between the residences of the two countries lies in the buildings in that Japanese students must all live together in one building. He continued his commentary by describing the Japanese students as being controlled and dependent. He believed that Japanese students lack the freedom that Canadian students have. The content of this journal entry was quite different from most of the other

participants' entries because it criticized a concept and presented the author's opinion on it. The fact that the author chose to contrast or examine the differences between two items demonstrated a higher level of thinking and analysis than simply reporting an event. This participant continued to use an analytical and argumentative approach in at least three other journal entries. These entries discuss his views on the Japanese education system, his work in Japan, and the Japanese working style. For each of these topics, the writer analysed and came to perhaps a new realization about events and situations relevant to his personal life.

In addition to entries which exhibit a narrative, descriptive, or an argumentative style of organization, there were some entries which did show signs of critical reflection, yet with no distinct pattern of organization. These entries would best be described as personal reflections on the writer's life. This particular writer, Student H, was a 21-year-old Japanese female. Her journal entries appeared to follow the usual patterns of personal journal writing noted anecdotally in the literature. In other words, the entries appeared to be spontaneous reflections on the personal feelings and concerns of the writer. Throughout these entries, the writer focused on herself and the immediate world around her (i.e., her schoolwork, her health, her ability to learn English). In many of the entries, the writer came to a realization about herself which could illustrate a self-awareness resulting from the process of critical reflection. For example, in an entry entitled "Study," the student made plans to study throughout the upcoming "reading week." She explained, "I know what I weak [sic]" when evaluating her progress in English, yet she also was determined to do better: "I hope that I can solve problem . . . I might need a lot of time for that, but It's [sic] good for me." By being honest about her abilities in English and by recognizing the existence of a problem with regard to her progress in English, this participant demonstrated an ability to reflect, analyse, and solve a personal problem. In another journal entry this same student reflected on her concern for her personal health.

After reflecting on and recording her symptoms, she concluded very perceptively that her lack of appetite was caused by homesickness.

In summary, the rhetorical patterns of organization most frequently found in the students' journal entries were narrative and descriptive patterns. In these types of journal entries, little if any critical analysis or reflection was observed. Nevertheless, in the entries of two participants the rhetorical patterns and content indicated that critical analysis and reflection can be attained through the journal writing process. In the entries of Student C, the 32-year-old Japanese male, the pattern of organization most resembled that of the argumentative style, and the content emphasized concepts and situations which affect him personally but are not necessarily personal. In the entries of Student H, the 21-year-old Japanese female, the entries were of a very personal nature, and the pattern of organization was spontaneous and reflective without any clear indications of rhetorical devices.

Maintenance of Dialogue in Journal Entries

Since the dialogue process encourages critical analysis, reflection, and learning, educators have considered it effective to include in journal writing so that this genre of writing could be used as a learning tool. Thus, when examining the process and effectiveness of dialogue journal writing, one must evaluate the use and maintenance of the dialogue process to establish whether or not this interaction affected the content or style of the journal entries.

In this study, surprisingly or not surprisingly, only one participant, Student C, maintained a dialogue with the instructor but only for two entries. In other words, this participant responded to the instructors' comments or questions only twice. Most often, he, like the other participants, ignored the comments of the instructor in their subsequent entry and usually began a completely new topic as if no response to the previous entry had been given. Usually the responses given by the instructor included questions or requests

for clarification which would elicit some response. An example of a question which did result in a response from a participant was "Do you think the Japanese working style is good for people?" This question led the participant to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the Japanese working style. Another example of a response given by the instructor was in the form of an affirmative statement which was intended to help clarify an issue: "Learning a language is a long and sometimes difficult task which takes some people longer than others to do." This was in response to a participant's frustrations at not progressing in English as quickly as she wanted. This response, however, did not prompt the student to write back. Perhaps the tone of the responses was inappropriate or perhaps the participants saw the comments as evaluative; nevertheless, they generally did not seem to view these responses as part of a continual dialogue.

There could be a number of explanations for this lack of maintaining a written dialogue with the instructor. First of all, the students might have been unfamiliar or were not used to dialoguing "on paper." This might have been awkward for them; thus, it was easier and more comfortable for them simply to ignore the instructor's questions and responses. Secondly, the participants might have been conditioned through their experiences with other writing assignments to begin a new topic on a new day. Thirdly, the participants might have become bored with one topic and wanted to begin a fresh and more interesting one.

Regardless of the reason for most of the students' not maintaining the dialogue, the fact is that they did not participate in the dialogue process, and therefore did not benefit from the written interaction possible in this type of activity. In fact, not participating in the dialogue process might have decreased the likelihood of the students' engaging in critical reflection in any of their journal entries.

A Summary of the Contents of the Journal Entries

After having examined the topics, the handwriting, the paragraph structure, the rhetorical organization, and the maintenance of dialogue in these journal entries, I can generally say that dialogue journal writing can encourage critical reflection in the adult ESL writer at the low-intermediate level, but only for certain individuals. For the most part, it did not in this study.

The organizational patterns and the content of the journal entries suggest that the participants seem to view dialogue journal writing as synonymous with composition writing. The topics, titles, rhetorical patterns used, and even the handwriting suggest that the students perceive journal entries as concise, self-contained compositions on risk-free topics written for the evaluating instructor. However, this does not mean that there is no possibility that dialogue journal writing cannot be used as a tool for critical reflection and learning as was demonstrated in the entries of Student C and Student H. I believe that a number of factors influence an ESL learner's ability to critically reflect in a journal entry, including language ability, age, and cultural background. These factors will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

The Participants' Perceptions of Dialogue Journal Writing

While the content of the journal entries provides the most significant and obvious evidence of critical reflection, the perceptions and opinions of the participants regarding dialogue journal writing are also of importance. A participant's concept of what constitutes dialogue journal writing can influence the content and process of this writing process. Whether or not a participant enjoys or finds journal writing beneficial can affect the journal entries too.

In order to understand the participants' perceptions of dialogue journal writing, I transcribed the contents of each interview with the participants. (The interview questions are noted in Chapter Three.) Again the interviews were examined holistically, and

similarities and differences in responses were noted. Any significant difference in opinion will be noted in the analysis, but, generally speaking, most of the participants had similar if not identical responses. Thus, some generalizations about students' perceptions of journal writing can be made.

For the most part, the participants enjoyed the journal writing experience and felt that it was worthwhile, because it allowed them an opportunity to think of ideas, present their opinions, and practise vocabulary and sentence structure. Some participants also felt journal writing was worthwhile because writing itself is an important skill to have. In addition to finding dialogue journal writing worthwhile, all of the participants said that they would like to participate in journal writing again in order to continue practising their writing skills.

In response to the question of how journal writing helps them, the participants replied with a number of different responses. First of all, some participants responded that journal writing helped increase their vocabulary and made them aware of grammatical mistakes that they did not notice in spoken English. Other participants stated that journal writing helped them to write more quickly and allowed them to think about ideas. One participant, Student C, replied that journal writing enabled him to express his opinions, something he had difficulty doing in spoken English. Finally, one participant answered that journal writing allowed her to work by herself, indicating that perhaps she valued independent tasks. Most of the responses to this question involved the act of writing itself. In other words, the participants found that journal writing helped them with regard to their ability to produce written language. Nevertheless, some participants did mention that journal writing helped them to generate ideas, and Student C, the oldest participant, did admit that journal writing helped him to express his opinions, a result perhaps of analytical or critical thinking.

In addition to being asked how journal writing helped them, the participants were asked whether or not journal writing helped them to think about their life experiences.

This question was asked to determine if the participants used the journal as a tool for reflecting on and analysing their world. The term "life experiences" is broad enough to include not only elements of their personal life, but also to encompass the participants' roles in their social context. Three of the participants responded that journal writing did help them to think about their life experiences because they were able to remember what had happened to them and to record events in their entries so that they would always have this record of their daily lives. Two other participants found that journal writing helped them to sort out and solve problems in their lives. For example, Student F explained that she had had a fight with a friend and was able to understand her role in it after writing about it in her journal. Two participants replied that journal writing did help them to think about their life experiences but were unable to explain how. I got the impression that perhaps these participants wanted to please me and gave me the response that they thought I wanted to hear. One participant admitted that journal writing did not help her to think about her life experiences. Nevertheless, Student C, who appeared to be the most reflective participant in this study, responded that journal writing "defined my opinion because I have a new understanding of my opinion of western culture, English, everything." The fact that he uses the phrase "new understanding" suggests that perhaps this participant has achieved some sort of transformative learning through critically reflecting in his journal entries. The use of the expression "defined my opinion" is also significant, as it implies that his ideas went through some process of clarification while he was participating in the journal writing process. This response seems to suggest that dialogue journal writing can encourage critical reflection in the adult ESL learner.

Finally, the participants were asked to respond to two questions which would perhaps implicitly reveal their perceptions of dialogue journal writing. The first question asked if they believed that journal writing should be marked for grammatical errors by the instructor. All of the participants agreed that journal writing should be checked for grammatical errors but not graded. The participants wanted to know what their

grammatical and mechanical errors were, but because journal writing was free-writing, they did not feel that a numerical or letter grade was appropriate for this type of writing task. One student suggested that if journal writing were checked by the instructor, it would have more value.

The second question, asked in order to determine the students' true perceptions of journal writing, inquired whether the participants would be willing to participate in journal writing in another class besides their writing class. I suggested that journal writing could be used in their speaking class, or in a mathematics, history, or other type of learning context. Four of the ten participants thought that they would like to participate in journal writing in another type of learning context because more writing practice would enable them to improve their language skills and become more fluent.

In addition to the interview questions, the participants were asked to respond to two questions in their final journal entry which might lead to an understanding of their perceptions of journal writing. These questions were the following: "Would your teachers in your native countries assign journal writing?" and "If you wrote your journals in your native languages, how would they be different?" I asked these questions in order to understand the cultural implications of journal writing and its effects on the students. In response to the first question, most of the participants believed that their teachers would assign compositions to them, not journals. However, some students did not seem to distinguish between journal entries and composition assignments. In response to the second question, all of the participants wrote that they felt journals written in their own languages would be grammatically correct, and they would be able to express their ideas and feelings in a more explicit way. Of course, these perceptions are significant, as they reveal the relationship between students' writing abilities and the content of their journals as well as some cultural implications which will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

In summary, the participants appeared to see dialogue journal writing as a beneficial learning activity in which they enjoyed participating. However, most of the participants felt that journal writing was primarily a tool which allowed them to practise and improve their abilities in the English language. The participants frequently stated that journal writing improved their vocabulary, grammatical and sentence structure, and fluency in English. In other words, these participants generally believed that journal writing was an effective tool for practising and acquiring English, not necessarily for critically reflecting and learning.

Participant Behaviours During Journal Writing Sessions

Perhaps the least revealing of the three instruments was the demonstrated participant behaviours observed during the journal writing sessions. The participants were observed during their journal writing to help the researcher ascertain their feelings about journal writing, which could be demonstrated in their body language, and to help the researcher consider whether there were any physical or outside disturbances which might inhibit the participants from becoming absorbed in reflection or critical analysis. As in the analyses of the journal entries and the contents of the interviews, the analysis of the participants' behaviours was examined holistically. Similarities and differences in behaviours were noted, and any unusual or inconsistent patterns of behaviour were monitored. The observation checklist used to isolate the participants' behaviours is outlined in Chapter Three.

Throughout the journal writing programme, no participant demonstrated any behaviour which might indicate that they disliked journal writing or that they felt it was an ineffective learning tool. The participants arrived on time to write in their journals, and from what I could observe, they displayed no facial gestures or body language which might indicate their displeasure at journal writing. The participants also began writing in their journals fairly promptly, and cooperated respectfully throughout the programme.

There were some behaviours, however, which might have influenced both the length and content of the participants' journal entries. First of all, some of the participants took a great deal of time thinking before they began writing. While this might have demonstrated that the participants had a great number of ideas that needed to be analysed and synthesized, I suspect that this delay was due more likely to an inability to express themselves in English. Those participants who did take a great deal of time getting started were usually the weaker students who struggled more with the written mode than the others did. This might also explain some of the shorter journal entries which were analysed. Moreover, some participants occasionally completed their entries before the fifteen-minute time limit was finished. These entries were frequently shorter than the average entries, and usually they included an introduction, body, and conclusion as a brief composition would. Again, this type of entry indicates that perhaps the participant viewed journal writing as a typical classroom writing assignment.

Perhaps the most significant behaviour that was noted was the almost constant erasing and checking of dictionaries that all of the participants did. Throughout the ten-week period of observations, the participants frequently checked their dictionaries for vocabulary and spelling and erased written mistakes or sloppy penmanship. This constant interruption of the spontaneous thinking process must have influenced both the length and content of the journal entries. The notion of free thinking and writing which leads to spontaneous thought generation and thought association was next to impossible for these participants since they interrupted the patterns of thinking by referring to dictionaries and by obsessively erasing errors and improperly formed letters. Since their thought patterns were interrupted so frequently, it is not surprising that the journal entries were relatively short and lacked the depth in thinking that can be possible in this type of thinking. Nevertheless, this group of students probably required their dictionaries in order to find vocabulary to express their ideas. Similarly, their preoccupation with neatness and

penmanship, as noted in the section on handwriting, might also explain their overuse of their erasers.

In conclusion, the behaviours of the participants indicated that they appeared to tolerate if not enjoy the process of journal writing. They also appeared to be overly conscious of the appearance and content of their entries with regards to correctness. Because the participants seemed to regard their entries in this way, they might have been inhibited from feeling free to express their thoughts and ideas spontaneously. In a similar way, they might have lacked the vocabulary with which to express themselves freely.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter probes the implications and significance of the findings of the study. It is organized according to the main sources of data collected: the journal entries, the participant interviews, and the participant observation. Implications for practice and further research are also explored.

Interpretation of Journal Entries

The two most significant questions which will be examined in this section are why dialogue journal writing did not encourage critical reflection in these participants and why the journal entries were structured as they were. According to my speculation, there are three main factors which might answer these questions: language ability, age/maturity, and cultural background of the participants.

Perhaps the most significant reason that the participants were reluctant or unable to critically reflect in their journal entries was their lack of English vocabulary and idioms, and their inaccuracy in sentence structures and patterns. If individuals have a limited vocabulary with which to express their ideas and feelings, then their written expression is likely to lack the sophistication or critical analysis that is possible with fluency in a language. Similarly, if writers are struggling with the forms and structures of a language, it is unlikely that their written expression will show evidence of depth of thinking because they will have had to focus not on the content of their written material but on the accuracy of its presentation. This preoccupation with accuracy and presentation was evident in the neat and precise handwriting in the participants' entries and in their frequent use of erasers and dictionaries, both of which were discussed in Chapter Four.

Thus, the level of language ability which these participants exhibited is perhaps not conducive to reflecting critically through writing. This certainly does not mean that this level of student is not capable of critical reflection or analysis. However, it is interesting

to recognize the relationship between fluency or at least accuracy and confidence in a language and the ability to think critically and express oneself in a coherent manner. As Britton et al. (1975) realized, expressive writing or that writing which is most frequently seen in journal writing parallels or closely resembles the pattern of thinking. Nevertheless, if the connection between a writer's thoughts and ideas is interrupted by the struggle to express those thoughts and ideas, self-expression will not occur. As a result, individuals who experience interference between thinking and expression may decide that it is impossible or at least too time-consuming and frustrating to try to express their self-reflective ideas and may, as a result, resort to writing about those topics or concepts which "recycle" vocabulary and structures with which they are familiar. In other words, because the participants in this study might not have had the vocabulary or complex structures available in their language "bank" to express their more personal or reflective ideas, they might have decided to write about neutral topics they had previously discussed or experienced in some way.

In a similar way, the participants might also have been unfamiliar with the written mode in English or even in their own language. Writing is a skill, and like all skills, it requires practice and a certain degree of talent to master. Some individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves in writing while others do not. Indeed, some individuals might not learn best through written expression. As a result, their ability to examine concepts and reflect critically through writing may be greatly hampered by their learning style and preference. Thus, individuals might not only have difficulty manipulating the linguistic structures and discourse patterns of a particular language, but they might also struggle to use written expression in general as a way of analysing and presenting ideas.

In summary, a person's ability to write and use a language fluently or at least accurately greatly affects the content and complexity of the writing. Therefore, if individuals are expected to demonstrate critical thinking or reflection in writing, it is

probably necessary for them to reach at least a certain degree of proficiency and comfort in the language. In this study, it was obvious that these participants probably had not yet reached the level of ability which would allow for free and unrestricted thinking and writing in the language.

Another factor which I believe greatly affected the content and lack of critical reflection in the participants' entries was the age and maturity of the participants involved. As was noted in Chapter Three, most of the participants were in their late teens or early twenties. Although these participants were legally adults, I would argue that they were "pre-adults" and had not reached the level of cognitive development which would allow them to reflect on and examine their experiences easily, nor had they many life experiences upon which they could reflect.

With regard to this examination of adult development and maturity, it is necessary to have an understanding of what the research says about adult cognitive development. Until fairly recently, most research that was conducted in human development and cognition concerned childhood or adolescence. Even the great figures in the study of human development, Piaget and Freud, have assumed that human development is largely complete at the end of adolescence. Nevertheless, according to Tennant (1988), there are some characteristics of Piaget's work which can extend into the years beyond adolescence. These include his emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative developmental changes in cognition; the importance attached to the active role of the person in constructing his or her knowledge of the world; and a conception of mature, adult thought (or the final stage of formal operations) (Tennant, 1988).

I propose, then, that adulthood itself includes stages of development which a person experiences depending on the life experiences that they have had. For example, while the participants in this study had formally reached adulthood, legally, and most likely cognitively, I would argue that many of the participants had not yet experienced situations and events which encouraged or triggered their reflective and analytical skills. Some of

the participants had just completed secondary school in their native countries and had never been away from the supervision or guidance of a parent. Similarly, one participant was living with grandparents while she attended school. Therefore, these individuals had not yet experienced the full range of adult responsibilities and events like working, being financially and morally responsible for others, making life-changing decisions, and being independent of parents or guardians in such a way that an individual is confronted with situations and concepts to be reflected on, analysed, interpreted, and synthesized into the "wisdom" of the mature adult. Many of the participants were perhaps not ready to reflect on their experiences.

Although most of the participants did not appear to participate in critical reflection during their journal writing experience, as noted in Chapter Four, one individual did so in some of his entries. Interestingly, this individual, a 32-year-old Japanese man, was the eldest participant in the study. This individual reflected on his work experiences and the education system of his native country and came to some significant conclusions about his preconceived ideas about these elements in his life. This example seems to support the notion that life experience and chronological age can determine a person's ability to critically reflect on and review the realities in his or her life. However, this is an example of only one individual.

The final factor which I believe influenced the outcome of the journal entries was the participants' cultural backgrounds. As noted previously in Chapter Three, most of the participants were from Asian backgrounds. Typically, these students are educated in a teacher-centred educational system which encourages memorization, rote learning, and learning for the common good. Independent thinking, creativity, and student-centred activities are not fostered. Similarly, critical thinking or activities which facilitate it are usually not the focus in Eastern education. As a result, many of these students are simply unfamiliar with learning tools which promote critical analysis and independent thinking. In other words, learners from Asian educational systems are often expected to listen to and

repeat the knowledge which is provided for them by the instructor who decides what the learners will learn. These students typically respect the teacher as "all-knowing" and believe that their task is to please the evaluating instructor. As a result of this attitude toward education, many times these students find it difficult to conform to the expectations of a Western educational system which encourages independent and critical thinking and a closer and more interactive relationship with instructors.

Because these learners were probably not familiar with learning tools that facilitate critical reflection, it is not surprising that their journals did not include many examples of it. Similarly, the participants were also probably unfamiliar with the genre of journal writing for the purpose of learning about oneself. Perhaps if the participants had been given explicit instructions as to how they were to construct their entries, or if they had been shown examples of typical journal entries, they might have been better equipped to compose journal entries which exhibited the free and expressive nature of reflective thought. Nevertheless, I did not want to provide guidance for the participants because I wanted to see what they naturally did when they were assigned the journal writing task. Similarly, they could have copied the models of journal writing that I provided them as a way of pleasing me and meeting my expectations.

The lack of familiarity with journal writing might also explain why many of the participants constructed their journal entries as they did. As was noted in Chapter Four, usually the participants composed their journal entries as they would a composition assignment complete with topic sentences, supporting details, concluding sentences, and neutral, impersonal topics. Perhaps the participants wrote their journal entries in this way because it was the only way in which they ever wrote in English. In other words, the participants simply applied the writing skills which they had learned in their ESL writing classes to their journal writing task. This application of learned skills is appropriate, if not desirable, and the participants should certainly be commended for their resourcefulness. Nevertheless, this transfer of structured composition skills to the unstructured and

expressive journal entry would illustrate that maybe the genre or style of the journal should be taught or presented to students so that they can be aware of the different purposes or styles of writing or the expectations that an audience might have. However, explicitly telling or teaching learners how to compose their own personal journal entries would defeat the purpose of a journal being in the control of a learner. It would also imply that there is a structure to the typical journal to which a writer must conform. After having done this study, I now believe, though, that a personal journal can be whatever a writer wishes it to be.

Finally, I believe that the participants' lack of maintaining a dialogue with me was also culturally bound. The purpose of responding to a participant's entry with questions or comments was to encourage them to reflect on what they had written and to allow them to see that different ideas and interpretations of their world existed. As noted in Chapter Two, dialogue is crucial for learning. Being able to interact with others is necessary for an individual to make sense of his or her role in the world. The comments and questions which I posed were intended to encourage the participants to dialogue with me and by doing so examine or reinterpret their perceptions of life. Despite my efforts to encourage dialogue and reflection, the students rarely responded to my comments and questions or incorporated my ideas into their subsequent entries. While this might have been due to inappropriate or ineffective comments on my part, I believe that there are two cultural reasons for this. First, these participants are not used to having interactive or personal relationships with teachers. When people have dialogues or share opinions and beliefs, they are frequently perceived as being equal partners by the people involved. They are either friends, co-workers, relatives, or peers. Nevertheless, in the classroom setting, teachers and students are not equal, according to many cultures. Therefore, conducting a casual, friendly, and non-evaluative dialogue with a teacher is not appropriate. As result, perhaps the participants felt uncomfortable interacting on a personal level with me because

I was their instructor. It would have been interesting to see if the students would have interacted more easily with another person who was not their teacher.

Because I was the teacher and the participants were the students, they might also have seen the comments or questions that I made as some form of evaluation that was not to be questioned. Although I made an effort not to include evaluative comments in my responses, because these participants are used to teachers as evaluators, they might have simply assumed that the comments were in some way a judgement on their writing abilities. Because I also made evaluative comments frequently on other writing assignments which they composed, they might not have been able to distinguish between the two types of comments. Thus, if they saw the comments as evaluative, they as students had no right to question or comment on the teacher's judgement. Again, this attitude stems from the belief that the teacher is all-knowing.

Analysis of Participants' Perceptions

The participants' perceptions of dialogue journal writing were evident from the responses that they gave during the interviews which I conducted with each of them. The results of these interviews were consistent in terms of the participants' attitudes towards journal writing and in their ideas of the purposes of it. The participants' behaviour during the journal writing sessions also indicated their perception of the task although perhaps less explicitly or reliably. I believe that these perceptions and attitudes find their roots in their cultural and educational backgrounds and in the students' purpose for attending the Intensive English Language Programme.

To begin with, all of the participants agreed that journal writing was a worthwhile activity. They all confessed to enjoying it, and all of the participants wanted to participate in it again. I believe that there are two possible interpretations for these responses. First, because the students rarely were able to choose their own topics and write freely on them in the educational contexts of their native countries, they might have enjoyed the

opportunity to be in control of their own writing. They might also have enjoyed the chance to write something to a real audience without receiving a discouraging grade on it. For these possible reasons, the participants might have felt enthusiastic about the journal writing experience. Second, the participants might have responded favourably to journal writing because they did not want to disappoint me. In other words, they might have simply given me the answers which they believed I wanted to hear. This explanation would again indicate the respectful and dutiful attitude toward teachers that students from these cultures tend to have.

During the interview the participants were also asked questions which were intended to probe their perceptions of the purpose of dialogue journal writing. Consistently, the participants responded that journal writing was important because it helped them to practise their sentence structure and vocabulary. In addition, all of the participants told me that they thought that journal writing should be checked for grammatical and mechanical errors. Based on these responses, I determined that these participants felt that journal writing was another way in which they could practise their English writing skills. This seemingly superficial view of the journal writing experience can be explained by the fact that the participants' purpose for being in the programme was to learn and improve their English. Thus, because they had this goal or objective in mind, any activity in which they used English would have been viewed as an opportunity to learn linguistically first, and perhaps critically second, if at all. As was previously mentioned, because the participants were most likely unfamiliar with the notion of critical reflection, it is doubtful that they would have believed that journal writing could foster this skill. Nevertheless, Student C, the eldest participant did respond that journal writing helped him to think about his life and see it in a new way.

Because the participants believed that journal writing helped them to improve their English writing skills, it is not surprising then that they chose to compose their journal entries as they did their in-class writing assignments. As I noted previously, the

participants appeared to transfer the writing skills and rhetorical patterns which they learned in class to their journal entries. Their purpose for writing in their journals was to improve their English skills, and their audience was their instructor. Thus, they decided to use in their journal entries the skills and structures with which I had made them familiar. Hence, the journal writing programme became a writing practice programme in which the participants could practise their skills in a non-threatening environment.

The participants' behaviours which I noted during each journal writing session seemed to reinforce their perception of journal writing as a means of practising and presenting their ideas in the English language. The most predominant and consistent behaviour which I observed was the participants' preoccupation with neatness and correctness. The participants frequently used their dictionaries to check on spelling and vocabulary, and they seemed to be constantly erasing possible mistakes or sloppy penmanship. This concern for correctness was most likely a result of the participants' awareness of their audience - their "evaluating" teacher. Although my task for this activity was not to evaluate them, the participants still wished to do the best job possible. This over-attention to penmanship might also be a cultural concern as was noted in Chapter Four. Regardless of the reason, according to their demonstrated behaviours, this group of learners was concerned primarily with the form of the language used in their journals, either linguistic or orthographic, and not the function of the journals themselves.

Interestingly enough, all of the anecdotal research and evidence which I have read about dialogue journal writing in ESL portrays it as an effective tool in which participants can practise their language skills. The notion of dialogue and the non-threatening, non-evaluative qualities of the journal writing experience make it ideal for language learners to practise natural, written communication skills. Similarly, in other educational contexts in which language is the focus such as hearing impaired programmes, programmes for the learning disabled, and foreign language courses, journal writing is primarily viewed as a tool which allows the learner to practise manipulating and using the structures of the

target language in a free and natural way. I, however, believed that for the adult ESL learner there must be more benefits from the journal writing experience than simply language and writing practice. Nevertheless, perhaps language learners first need to feel comfortable manipulating and using the language in a somewhat fluent way before they will be able to use it for higher order thinking tasks.

Implications for Practice

Since I have completed the analysis of this study, I believe there are a number of implications for ESL practitioners who wish to incorporate dialogue journal writing into their curriculum. These implications may be seen as suggestions for practice and use, or they may be used as simply ideas which one should note before embarking on a journal writing programme.

The first most significant implication which I believe ESL practitioners should consider is their purpose for including dialogue journal writing into their programme. It is necessary, I believe, for an educator to have a clear purpose or objective for including any learning task into a course of study. That objective should also be made clear to the learner so that both educator and learner are starting from the same point in the progression of an activity or programme. For example, if the purpose for including journal writing into an ESL programme is to promote language use and fluency, then the participants in that programme should be told so. I would also suggest that if the goal of journal writing is to facilitate correct and fluent language use, then the learners' language use should be monitored in the form of corrections. Telling learners that they will become more fluent in the written language by practising in their journals and then not correcting their lack of fluency is a disservice and an insult to the learner.

If ESL practitioners do choose to use dialogue journal writing as a learning tool in the classroom, they might also have to be prepared to provide some guidance for their students as to what constitutes journal writing according to the purpose the practitioner

has determined. Some of the participants in my study indicated that they would have preferred writing a journal entry if I had given them a topic about which to write. This might be necessary for some learners, especially those who are still somewhat dependent on the teacher for their learning. In addition, if I had provided them with models or activities which stimulated critical thinking, perhaps the participants would have been better prepared to reflect critically while participating in the dialogue journal writing process. Moreover, if the participants had been instructed to use their entries as personal letters complete with salutation, body, and closing, then they might have found the dialogue process or the interactive nature of the journal writing task easier. Similarly, if a student has a focus or a purpose for writing, for example to reflect on their learning in a particular subject area or class, he or she might find the journal writing experience more goal-oriented and rewarding.

In addition to having a purpose for using dialogue journal writing and to possibly providing some sort of guidance or focus for the learners, I feel that the adult ESL practitioner should negotiate with the students what the guidelines and procedures of the journal writing will be. The practitioner in conjunction with the learners should determine whether the journal writing should take place in the classroom or as an outside activity done at the learner's own leisure. I believe that because my learners wrote in their journals during class time their ability to reflect and feel comfortable with the task may have been affected. Nevertheless, I did wish to observe the behaviours which they exhibited in order to help to determine their possible reactions to and perceptions of the journal writing process. However, I believe that an activity like journal writing, which is highly personal, should be conducted in an environment that enables the writer to feel comfortable and unrestricted. Thus, the time and place for journal writing should be agreed upon by the facilitator and learners.

Finally, like any educational theory, concept, or learning programme, dialogue journal writing should not be accepted as the most effective tool for facilitating critical

reflection or for improving writing fluency in the adult ESL learner without any reservations. A practitioner must determine what the needs and abilities of his or her students are before embarking on a programme which might prove to be ineffective. Dialogue journal writing, I believe, can be a rewarding experience for some learners; however, I caution that it might not always be the best learning tool for all learners.

Implications for Further Research

Since I have participated in this study, a number of different possibilities for future research into the role of dialogue journal writing in the adult ESL context have come to my attention. One research angle which might prove to be of interest is the process of dialogue journal writing without the educator or instructor as the respondent to students' journal entries. I cannot help but wonder whether or not the results of my study would have been different if the participants had engaged in dialogue with someone other than their evaluator. The role of the instructor in the dialogue journal writing process is of great significance, and it is likely that it has an enormous effect on the topics, content, and form of the learners' entries.

Another interesting aspect of the dialogue journal writing process is the importance of the learner's personality type and its effect on the content and form of the journal entries and on the maintenance of the dialogue with a partner. While I did not examine this aspect of the learner, I am almost certain that a learner's personality type can affect the learning outcomes which he or she achieves. Perhaps certain personality types are able to reflect comfortably through a journal, while others cannot. A study which examines personality type and journal writing might prove to be a significant contribution to the literature. Of course, if one were to examine the personality types of ESL learners, one would have to be certain that the various cultural aspects of personality were taken into account.

In a similar manner, the effect that an individual's learning style has on the process of dialogue journal writing would be equally relevant. Each learner comes to the educational context equipped with a particular learning style. This style determines how a learner learns best. Perhaps there are some learning styles which adapt well to self-expressive writing activities like journal writing. On the other hand, there also might be learning styles which find the unstructured and expressive style of the journal to be ineffective and uncomfortable. Thus, the results of participating in dialogue journal writing would be significantly different for both types of learning styles.

Finally, because the participants in my study placed such importance on the practise and use of language structures in their journal entries, it would be worthwhile to explore whether or not dialogue journal writing can improve an ESL writer's language fluency. While such a research project might be difficult to conduct due to the great many variables which could affect the results of it, certainly this type of study would be a significant contribution to the fields of both second language acquisition and writing processes.

To conclude, I believe that dialogue journal writing does indeed have a place in the educational context and more specifically in the adult ESL context. However, it is the responsibility of educators, both researchers and practitioners, to determine how it can be used most effectively for the learner. Through more research and practice with dialogue journal writing, I hope that I, as a concerned educator, can make a significant contribution to the learning experiences of my students.

Summary of Study

After having conducted and participated in this study, I have discovered that dialogue journal writing does not necessarily encourage critical reflection in the adult ESL learner. Nevertheless, I learned valuable information about the process of the journal writing experience in addition to learners' perceptions of it as a learning tool. More

specifically, I learned that these ESL students treated the journal as another type of writing assignment in which they could use the rhetorical skills acquired during their writing class. The participants also believed that dialogue journal writing was important to them because it enabled them to practise their sentence structure and vocabulary. Based on their entries, they also did not find the dialogue component of the process to be of importance.

These results are important to the ESL practitioner who has used dialogue journal writing or wishes to use it as a learning tool in the classroom. I feel it is important for any educator to understand the process or patterns of an activity or programme which they wish to incorporate into their syllabi. Thus, by conducting this study and analysing and interpreting its results, I hope that I have been able to clarify and define somewhat the scope and limitations of the dialogue journal writing process for the adult ESL learner.

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