Responding in Writing: The Effects of Written Feedback on the Writing Skills of Adult ESL Learners

by

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Abstract
This study examined the effects of three different types of teacher written feedback on the writing of adults for whom English is a Second Language (ESL). Thirty subjects were assigned to either a Responsive feedback group, Corrective feedback group or Responsive/Corrective combined feedback group. Each of the feedback groups comprised 10 participants. Each of the participants corresponded through letter writing with the researcher each week, for a period of eight weeks. The researcher responded in writing to each of the participants using the feedback appropriate to the group to which they were assigned. Data were obtained on the quantity of writing each participant produced, the frequency of spelling mistakes, the development of a theme within a letter and the quality of the written work produced. Results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed statistically significant differences in the quality of written work produced, as measured on a standardised test and by teacher ratings, with all three groups showing improvements. Scheffé follow up procedures, however, revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups. There were no statistically significant differences in the frequency of mispellings and in the quantity of work produced (i.e., the number of words written) by participants. It was found that participants who received some form of responsive feedback developed a theme to their correspondence earlier than others. Social validation of the correspondence program revealed that students who received replies to their letters expressed a higher
level of satisfaction. Results of the present study provide support that the writing of adult ESL learners is enhanced by practice alone and that the use of such correspondence programs which involves teachers responding in writing to their ESL learners might be beneficial.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The present study was designed to examine the effectiveness of three different types of teacher feedback on adult English as a Second Language (ESL) students' writing, using a repeated measures research design.

Rationale

Second language teaching has undergone some radical changes in the last decade with the so-called communicative approach to teaching now being currently accepted by educators as the most effective way of teaching students to become proficient in a second language. For the purpose of this study, the term "second language teaching" is taken to be the teaching of English to non-native speakers who are resident in Australia. The communicative approach originated from speech act theory whereby Searle emphasised the importance of the meaning in the performance of a speech act (Searle, 1971). The work of British applied linguists such as Wilkins (1976), Widdowson (1978) and Brumfit (1980) on the theoretical basis for a communicative approach to language teaching became accepted in Western Europe. The communicative approach can be traced to Chomsky's use of Saussure's distinction between langue and parole. Chomsky applied this idea to distinguish between competence, which referred to knowledge of grammar, and performance, which referred to the actual use of a given language (Chomsky,
1965:4). Hymes (1972) and Campbell and Wales (1970) proposed broadening Chomsky's notion of competence into communicative competence. This term covered grammatical competence as well as contextual or sociolinguistic competence and became the goal which the communicative approach to teaching aimed to produce. In this, students are taught to speak English by responding to the message which they are trying to convey, not by correcting all the mistakes made. Increasingly difficult communicative tasks are set for students whereby they must use the target language in order to complete the task. The students' utterances are accepted as efforts to communicate, therefore the message is seen as more important than the way it is expressed.

This new approach may have important implications for the way that writing is taught. Whereas teachers have traditionally responded to students' writing in a corrective manner, now the importance of providing an interested audience and a real purpose for writing has been recognised (Brown & Hood, 1989).

The area of teacher feedback to students' writing has received a great deal of attention recently, with the majority of the literature now advocating responsive rather than corrective feedback (Gerngross & Puchta, 1983; Griffin, 1982; Jerram, Glynn & Tuck, 1988; Rinvolucri, 1983). However, much of the literature does not appear to support its stance with objective data. In addition to this there is a relative absence of objective based
studies in comparing different types of feedback on written language work, particularly for adult ESL learners with the main focus being on children in mainstream school settings. Zamel (1985) called for more investigation into the responses of ESL writing teachers, commenting that "Studies of teachers' responses in second language (L2) settings are practically non-existent" (p. 83).

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of three different types of teacher feedback, namely responsive, corrective and responsive/corrective combined, on the quantity and quality of adult ESL students' written language. Quantitative measures taken included the number of words written, the number of letters written and the number of spelling mistakes. In addition, the letters were assessed for quality according to an evaluation sheet devised by the researcher which was based on previously validated criteria suggested by Rizzardi (1989/90). Students' scores for writing were also rated on the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating (ASLPR) Scale immediately prior to and at the end of the research period. Qualitative data on participants' views of the study were also collected.
Key Terms

The meanings of key terms utilised in this study are as follows:

"ESL students": students who are learning English as a second language. Their native tongue is a language other than English and they are studying English in an English-speaking country.

"AMEP": the Australian Adult Immigration Education Program. The AMEP is a large, federally funded English language program, which has annual student enrolments of 130,000. These are taught by 1,500 teachers in 300 language centres throughout Australia.

L1: refers to a student's first language, his/her native tongue.

L2: refers to a student's second language; in this study, L2 will refer to English.

Other key terms, such as responsive, corrective and responsive/corrective combined feedback are defined in Chapter Three.

Structure

This dissertation begins with the introductory chapter which is followed in Chapter Two, by a review of the relevant literature. The concept of feedback is discussed and the findings from experimental studies are presented.
Chapter Three details the methodology adopted in the present study, while Chapter Four presents and analyses the empirical and subjective data collected. A discussion pertaining to the findings of this present study follows in Chapter Five. Discussion of the limitations of the study and the implications for future research are also included in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The Concept of Feedback

The concept of feedback is not new. Since the turn of this century, psychologists have postulated that rewards and punishments were primarily responsible for changes in behaviour. That is, behaviour that is rewarded will more than likely tend to be repeated, whereas behaviour that is punished will tend not to be repeated. However, it was Thorndike (1933), who formulated a systematic learning theory which attributed the selection of behaviour to the consequences or effects of action. The feedback concept is significant because it suggests certain basic characteristics of the structure of behaviour which can be seen as governed by results at all levels. Its importance is such that it has been claimed that the feedback concept seems to be able to account for a large proportion of the complexities of behaviour (Annett, 1969).

The concept of feedback is central in the literature concerning skill acquisition. It is recognised that, while there is a place in training for initial guidance in skill learning, there is also an important place for feedback. Johnson (1988) argues that we need to speak about feedback prior to retrial rather than just about feedback after a performance. Johnson claims that feedback contributes to the learning process by its effects on the subsequent performance.
Keh (1990) defines feedback as "input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision" (p.295). However, this definition is very limited since it excludes any feedback which is not provided for revision purposes. A definition provided 10 years earlier by Lamberg (1980), referred to feedback as, "information on performance which affects subsequent performance by influencing students' attention to particular matters so that those matters undergo a change in the subsequent performance" (p. 63). Extensive correction may be ineffective, he says, because students are asked to attend to so much that they attend to nothing.

The Importance of Teacher Feedback

The process-product research paradigm links teacher behaviour to student achievement. The importance of the effects of teacher behaviour in terms of feedback on student achievement has long been recognised. For example, three inter-related studies by Hughes (1973) attempted to conduct experimental studies of teacher effectiveness in the classroom setting. The experiments took place in five of the intermediate schools in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. The subjects were Form II pupils with a modal age of 12 years. Three 40-minute science lessons, which had been carefully planned to minimize extraneous teacher behaviour were taken by Hughes. During the lessons pupil responding and teacher reacting variables were experimentally manipulated. A posttest of achievement was administered
following the lessons and predicted posttest scores were calculated from the regression of a number of pretest measures (e.g., verbal ability, prior knowledge, attitudes) on this posttest. Residual achievement scores, calculated by subtracting predicted from obtained posttest scores, were used in analyses of variance to determine treatment effects. Results indicated that pupil participation, in the form of overt pupil responses to teacher questions, was a weak variable having little effect on pupil achievement. However, regular positive teacher reactions to pupil responses facilitated pupil achievement significantly more than minimal teacher reactions.

The first study involved three pupil participation treatments, namely random response (teacher questions addressed to students at random so the students were unable to predict or control when they would be called upon to respond), systematic response (teacher questions addressed systematically around the room on the basis of seating position, whether the pupil indicated they wished to respond or not) and self-selected response (questions directed only to volunteers). Three classes each from three schools were used in this study and class size was kept relatively constant (N = 24-27) by excluding pupils from large classes. Given the complexity of the experiment the research design is reproduced in Table 1.
Table 1

Design of Experiment 1 Utilised by Hughes (1973)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
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<td>Random Responding</td>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>Nb = 68</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 27</td>
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<td>N = 20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(2)</td>
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<td>N = 23</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N = 23</td>
<td>N = 22</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School Totals</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
<td>Nb = 65</td>
<td>N = 65</td>
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*a The numbers in brackets indicate the order in which the treatments were taken.

*a The pupils in this experiment were of approximately average ability. 80 to 90 percent of the pupils fell within the percentile band 30-75 and none fell outside the band 25-85.

The nine cells generated each represent a different class given one or other of the experimental treatments. Results showed no statistically significant differences between treatment groups and also no relationship between student rate of response (whether voluntary or involuntary) and achievement.

The second study involved a more intrusive manipulation, in which half of the students randomly selected from each class were asked all of the questions, while the other half were given no chance to respond at all. Statistical analysis of the results of the residual achievement scores revealed no statistically significant differences between achievement scores. Overt participation was not related to achievement.
The third study examined teacher reactions to student responses. Students were randomly assigned to a "reacting" or a "no reacting" group. The students in the "reacting" group were given frequent praise by the teacher for correct answers and support, along with occasional urging or mild reproach when they failed to respond correctly. On the other hand, students in the "no reacting" group received little more than a statement of the correct answer, whether they were right or wrong. An analysis of variance showed that the two treatment groups differed significantly on their mean residual achievement scores.

The pupils' answers to the posttest items were analysed. The "mean responding total" for the "reacting" group was 123.11, while the "mean no responding total" was 122.55. The respective scores for the "no reacting" group were 117.36 and 117.47. It is clear that the "reacting" group scored higher than the "no reacting" group both on the posttest items relevant to the lesson questions they responded to and were given positive reactions for, and on the posttest items not relevant to these questions. In summary, the findings from Hughes' data suggest that by the age of 12 years students can learn effectively without overt participation in lessons; their learning can, however, be affected by teachers' reactions to the responses of those students who do participate. That is, teacher reactions to student behaviour appear to have had a positive motivational effect on student performance.
The Importance of Teacher Feedback on Writing

Teacher feedback is important in all areas of education, but particularly so in written language where there is a lack of an immediate audience. No matter who the ostensible audience may be, it is usually the teacher's response that counts (Cazden, 1988).

Written language is a different kind of activity from the spoken word. Kress (1982), for example, discussed the "two distinctly different modes in which language occurs: speech on the one hand, and writing on the other" (p. 17). There has been considerable discussion of what fundamentally distinguishes writing from oral communication (Olson, 1977; Rubin, 1980). It is not simply the medium of expression. A body of research conducted in the 1980s puts forward the view that competence in written composition does not consist merely of special knowledge and skills added to those of oral language ability. Rather, it involves radical conversion "from a language production system dependent at every level on inputs from a conversational partner to a system capable of functioning automatically" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982, p. 783). Thus, writing is seen as a complex decoding task performed without the physical presence of the addressee. Indeed it is regarded as a cognitively complex task where the non-presence of the addressee affects the nature of the task. The cues are not immediate, therefore, it is necessary to build in other devices to convey the message effectively.
It has been suggested by Glendinning and Mantell (1983) that writing is "the most difficult skill to acquire" (p. 5). According to Byrne (1984) this difficulty is, in part, due to writing being perceived as a solitary activity without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback. Another reason why individuals might find writing aversive is because of the way they were taught to write (Florio, 1983; Phillips, 1985, 1986; Vargas, 1978). Indeed the idea that individuals write in a vacuum is reinforced by a system of marking which communicates to them the sense that marks are the only reason for writing (Hamp, Lyons & Heasley, 1987).

The importance of the communicative aspects of writing was emphasised almost 30 years ago by Arnold (1964) who defined written expression as "an arrangement in writing of that which is experienced, read or imagined and is primarily intended for communication" (p. 10). However, teachers' responses to student writing have not always recognised the importance of the message. In fact, teachers' inappropriate responses to writing may have compounded the difficulties experienced by students learning to write.

Teachers read and respond to what students write and thus implicitly affirm the belief that their written comments will be of value in aiding students to improve their writing (Olson & Raffeld, 1987). A study conducted by Scriven and Glynn (1983) illustrated the gains that can be made by under-achieving students
as a consequence of delivering frequent and consistent, simple, immediate feedback. Their study examined the educational impact of introducing a systematic performance feedback program for low-achieving Form Four students on regularly assigned classroom writing tasks, and monitored the concurrent (unprogrammed) effects upon on-task behaviour and teacher behaviour. Nine low-achieving students (aged from 13.5 years to 14.5 years) from a class of 27 students in a large suburban multicultural secondary school in Auckland, New Zealand participated in this study.

For the purpose of the study, a variety of written tasks were divided into three categories:

a) **Written prose tasks.** These tasks comprised all written work of one sentence or longer and included paragraphs, essays, letters, stories and notes.

b) **Skill tasks.** This category of task included constructing and labelling tables, graphs, diagrams, maps, and making summary notes. Components of a skill were named sub-tasks. Examples of sub-tasks included a small title, a small key, a frame or outline, and two place names or labels.

c) **Items tasks.** This category consisted of tasks requiring answers of less than one sentence, such as true/false questions, fill in the gap, complete the sentences, matching two lists, cloze tests, and tasks with single word or number answers.
There were three measures of academic performance on each type of task - rate, accuracy, and completion. For prose tasks, rate was measured in terms of the number of words written per minute, and accuracy was measured in terms of the percentage of total words correctly written. For any one subject, completion was measured in terms of the number of words written by that subject expressed as a percentage of the mean number of words written by all subjects. This was a crude indicator of how much a particular child completed on a given day, allowing for varying length and difficulty of task, and varying amounts of time available for task completion. For skills tasks, rate was measured in terms of the number of sub-tasks attempted per minute, accuracy was measured in terms of the percentage sub-tasks attempted that were free of errors (whether in fact, design, spelling, grammar or setting out), and completion was measured as the percentage of sub-tasks assigned by the teacher that were attempted. For items tasks, rate was measured in terms of number of items completed per minute, accuracy was measured in terms of the percentage of items assigned that were completed correctly, and completion was measured as the percentage of items assigned that were attempted.

A within-subjects multiple baseline across tasks design was employed in which repeated measures were taken on writing performance during all available class periods over two school terms. After Phase One (baseline), performance feedback procedures were introduced sequentially and cumulatively to
each of the three types of task, so that by Phase Four, performance feedback was applied to all three types of task. Writing data were collected for all 27 pupils at the end of each session. However, detailed analyses were carried out only for the nine target subjects. Time sample observations were conducted for the whole of every session throughout the study.

Feedback data concerning students' performance on writing tasks were posted and displayed on a chart, according to the multiple baseline design. Daily feedback data obtained from the rate measures were displayed the day following each writing session. Students' highest daily scores to date were also displayed on the chart in a separate column. Weekly feedback data obtained from the accuracy and completion measures were also posted and displayed, but this occurred mid-week and at a separate time from the posting and display of rate data. Weekly data represented the mean percent accurate and mean percent completed over the previous five days. Students' highest weekly scores to date were also displayed on the chart in a separate column.

The delivery of daily and weekly feedback was paired with social reinforcement for those pupils who had improved their individual highest daily or highest weekly scores. All tasks were explicitly timed by the teacher, who informed students when half the time had elapsed and when approximately one minute was left. When time was up the class was instructed to stop working and a new activity was begun. Students who finished before time
entered the number of minutes taken in the margin of their work. These students either wrote more or read over and checked their work until the rest of the class was finished. Once timing instructions were issued and the students began working, the teacher reminded the class that their performance was scored on how much they did in the time given and that these scores would be displayed the next day. Students were consistently cued by the teacher to monitor their own performance scores each day and challenged to improve their own individual highest scores.

Results show that the sequential introduction of performance feedback resulted in clear increases in the rate of performance on each type of task. On Written Prose Tasks the mean rate of words written per minute increased from a baseline level of 3.4 to 9.1 in Phase Four. On Skills Tasks, mean number of sub-tasks performed per session was 0.69 and 0.59 during the two baseline phases for this task type, increasing during feedback conditions to 1.39 in Phase Four. On Items Tasks, the mean number of items performed per minute was 0.55, 0.71, and 0.87 during the three baseline phases for this task type, and 1.16 during the feedback phase.

The sequential introduction of performance feedback also resulted in clear increases in the accuracy of performance on each type of task. Accuracy on Written Prose Tasks increased from 84 percent during the one baseline phase to 92, 92, and 86 percent for the three feedback phases. Accuracy on Skills Tasks increased from
54 percent to 78 percent in Phase Four. Accuracy on Items Tasks is presented in two ways: percent accuracy of items assigned and percent accuracy of items attempted. Accuracy of items assigned was 52, 43 and 50 percent during the three baseline phases, and increased to 65 percent during the feedback phase. Accuracy on items attempted was 61, 51 and 53 percent during the three baseline phases, and increased to 73 percent during the feedback phase.

Data indicated that both the total number of tasks assigned per week by the teacher and the mean total number of tasks completed by the students clearly increased across phases. The number of tasks assigned per week increased from 5.5 during baseline to 6.8, 7.2 and 7.7 during the feedback phases. The mean number of tasks completed per week increased from 3.5 during baseline to 4.6, 5.6 and 5.8 during the feedback phases. By Phase Four the mean number of tasks students completed per week exceeded the mean number of tasks the teacher assigned in Phase One. There was a proportionate increase in tasks completed from 64 percent of tasks assigned at baseline to 68, 75 and 75 percent of tasks assigned during the feedback phases, despite the steady increase in number of tasks assigned.

This study demonstrates the potential gains for secondary teachers in providing low-achieving students with greatly increased opportunities to receive specific feedback on performance of academic tasks, and for teachers displaying this
feedback in a form that allows students to observe changes in their own performance over time. Specific feedback can be presented in terms of rate, accuracy and task completion provided that teachers maintain consistency and frequency of feedback over substantial periods of time for each separate type of task. In Glynn's study accuracy of performance on prose tasks was maintained or slightly increased where it was already at high levels. On Skills and Items Tasks accuracy was markedly increased by the performance feedback programme, despite concurrent marked increases in rate.

Whereas there seems to be universal agreement that feedback is an important component in writing, there is no such agreement, however, on the form that the feedback should take. As interest in teachers' response to students' writing has developed, there have been numerous suggestions as to which type of response is the most effective. The major question confronting any theory of responding to student writing is where teachers should actually focus their attention. According to Griffin (1982), the assumptions made about the nature and function of writing will determine the focus.

The comparative merits and demerits of various types of feedback is a very contentious issue. It is argued that most teachers see the comparative failure of the feedback measures they employ. A typical scenario in ESL teaching is described by Johnson (1988), as "Our students leave the 's' off the third person singular of the
simple present tense, we put it back on, at the next opportunity they leave it off again" (p. 90).

**Traditional Feedback on Students' Written Work**

During the 1980s, traditional corrective approaches of responding to students' writing were attacked both in mainstream and in ESL contexts. Teachers' attitudes that errors must be corrected directly and immediately were challenged by leading educators. Traditionally, teachers have attended to the structural or formal properties of English language composition, such as grammar, spelling and handwriting (Logan & Glynn, 1989). They have responded only to the structure of the language, ignoring its communicative function. According to Glendinning and Mantell (1983), the typical sequence of events appears to be that work is submitted to the teacher whose response is to return the work, highlighting errors of spelling and grammar, thus disfiguring it with corrections. This corrective feedback tends to demonstrate teachers' obsession with errors (Vargas, 1978). Related to this is ample evidence that red-pencilling students' literary efforts achieves mostly negative effects. Indeed, Glynn (1982), Hopman and Glynn (1988) and Vargas (1978) suggest that attending prematurely to structural features may be detrimental to the development of fluent writing. Young writers may become afraid to take chances and write with a view to avoiding errors, attempting only the words they know they can spell correctly. This
view is supported by Christie (1990) who argues that error correction tends to have an inhibiting effect on communication.

It has also been suggested that teachers tend to cancel their 'real' response to a piece of writing and replace it with a 'professional' response. This negative feedback can be interpreted as very discouraging by beginning writers which, in turn, might reduce their motivation to write. When teachers ignore the communicative function of writing and respond only to its structure, writing can become an arduous and meaningless task (Florio, 1983). It may be said that contemporary theory now believes that there is something profoundly wrong in measuring progress by measuring the reduction of errors. Doggedly reading for errors keeps the reader from seeing anything else. Indeed teachers have been greatly criticised for their narrow focus and emphasis on technique at the expense of content (Robertson, 1986) and also for their preoccupation with surface errors in ESL essays (Cummins, 1985).

Krashen and Terrell (1981) developed the Natural Approach to second language teaching with its emphasis on meaningful interaction, where errors are tolerated as a natural product of the language acquisition process. The view that second language teaching should mirror parental 'teaching' of the first language, where parents are more interested in finding out what a child has to say rather than in how he/she says it, resulted in a diversion from corrective feedback in ESL contexts.
Alternatives to Traditional Feedback

As the importance of providing an interested audience and a real purpose for writing has been recognised (Brown & Hood, 1989), alternatives to traditional feedback have been sought. For example, greater emphasis and importance have been directed to the interpersonal context (Goldman & Rueda, 1988). Consequently, many researchers have advocated establishing a written dialogue between teacher and student (Davis, 1983; Jenkins, 1987; Staton, 1980; Valcourt, 1989). Tape-recorded feedback has also been advocated as a worthwhile good natural response to writing. The unit of writing as a whole rather than the sentence, clause or sub clausal level has become the focus (Patrie, 1989).

The area of responding to student writing is a challenging one for teachers mainly because there are so many options available and teachers must decide what roles to play in their comments; for example, to coach, judge or doctor. Much recent research has suggested that negative attitudes are fostered by negative criticism. Consequently, teachers are being urged to focus on meaning, on the meaning of the text and the meaning of the errors (Fairbanks, 1988). Furthermore, the idea that content comments seem to help students write better essays is suggested (Olson & Raffeld, 1987). This study investigated the effects of two types of written comments on student compositions and learning of course content. One type of comment, the content comment, was designed to encourage students to view their papers as
readers, to add and delete content, and to restructure content as needed. The other type of comment, the surface comment, focused on problems such as word choice, spelling, punctuation, and/or language usage. The comments occurred after students' first drafts which they then revised. Significant differences among groups for holistic scores and for learning course content were revealed. The treatment group that received content comments wrote significantly better essays than the other treatment group or the control group. The treatment group that received content comments and the control group received significantly better scores on the course content test.

Responsive Feedback

Whilst the idea of providing responsive feedback is not new, it has received relatively little attention, and most of that has focussed on its effects on children in mainstream settings. Responsive feedback was first advocated in an ESL setting, in 1977 by Kohl, who wrote letters in English to his fourth and fifth grade Puerto Rican pupils who in turn replied in English. Kohl wrote personal letters to his pupils, and they replied. The only rule was that each letter should offer the reader some new bit of personal information about the writer. Kohl felt no desire to correct the English of the letters he received from his pupils, but he found, over a period of time, that the children began using the letters he wrote to them as linguistic models. Rinvolucri (1983) further developed Kohl's technique with a class of six elementary adult
ESL students with whom he established an on-going correspondence for the duration of a two week intensive course. He wrote a letter to his students on the first day of the course offering some personal information about himself and asking them to tell him about themselves. Rinvolucri neither returned the students' letters to them nor did he correct them. Instead he entered into an adult correspondence with his students and found this to be "a more wholesome, positive way of teaching them language than covering what they wrote with red ink" (p.18). He found that students modelled their writing a lot on his letters, borrowing vocabulary, phrases and grammar structures, thus enriching their own texts. Another positive effect of the letter-writing exercise was that it forced Rinvolucri to spend an hour or more each day thinking about his students as individuals, both humanly and linguistically. This led to a deeper level of trust and intimacy in the language group which Rinvolucri felt had a positive effect on the students' language learning. The importance of this study is that it is one of the few documented cases of responsive written feedback being successfully used with adult ESL students. However, it appears that Rinvolucri gathered no objective data to support his claims of success which were based, primarily, on his subjective reporting.

Two studies have recently examined the effects of responsive written feedback on mainstream children's writing. Jerram, Glynn and Tuck (1988) carried out a study as part of the routine language
programme of a Grade Five class at a suburban primary school in Auckland, New Zealand. There were 12 boys and 12 girls in the class ranging in age from nine years seven months to 10 years 10 months at the start of the study. Experimental procedures were applied with, and data were obtained from, every child in the class.

The study extended over 29 weeks and, as the second and fourth phases were interrupted by school holidays, these phases were continued after the breaks to allow for the effects of the holiday period to be assessed before a new phase was introduced. Fifteen minutes 'writing time' was utilised four days a week during the mornings.

An ABAB design was used although the withdrawal or second baseline phase was restricted to just three days, as once the written content feedback was withdrawn there was a marked drop in motivation and performance. During baseline Phases One and Three, the children were given the opportunity to write on their individual topics for 15 minutes. No written feedback was supplied by the teacher. The only feedback provided during baseline was interested verbal comments from the teacher to randomly selected children as she gave out the books before each day's writing. Throughout Phases Two and Four the teacher responded to the children's writing each day by supplying interested, written comments on the content of their writing.
The quantity of the children's writing was measured as the total number of words written during each daily session of 15 minutes. The quality was rated by randomly selecting a piece of writing from each phase for each child. These pieces of writing were rated blindly according to the content of the story ("interesting ideas, the fluency of the writing") by a group of educators and parents.

Results showed a dramatic lift in the overall writing rate with the introduction of the written content feedback in Phase Two of the study. The number of words written increased from a mean of 71.63 in Phase One to a mean of 91.00 words in Phase Two. There was an even greater dramatic drop in the overall writing rate to 39.54 words in Phase Three of the study when the written content feedback contingency was withdrawn. An increase in writing rate occurred again in Phase Four of the study when the written content feedback was restored by the teacher to each child; the mean being 79.33 words for this final phase.

The data on quality of work showed a similar trend to the data on quantity of work with average performances being significantly higher during the written content feedback conditions than during baseline conditions. The ratings by educators of the quality of the writing differed significantly across the four phases, with the average across the two contingency phases being significantly higher (M=40.42) than the average across the baseline phases (M=33.29). The ratings by parents of the
quality of the writing also differed significantly, with the average of the two contingency phases (M=45.76) being significantly higher than the average across the baseline phases (M=35.19). Jerram, Glynn and Tuck concluded from this study that the teacher's written response had functioned both as a powerful antecedent for the generation of further writing for the children and also as a natural reinforcer for writing already completed.

In the second study Logan and Glynn (1989) carried out a similar program with a class of 11 to 13 year olds, in which they tried to replicate the findings of Jerram et al. (1988). They allowed the children to choose not only their topic but also whether or not they wished to write. Fourteen girls and 17 boys who were first year students at a small rural High School in New Zealand participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 11 years to 13 years 4 months (mean 12 years 5 months).

This study replicated the four phases repeated-measures intra-subject design from the Jerram et al. (1988) study previously discussed. The study extended over 34 school weeks from the second week of Term One to the eleventh week of Term Two.

As in the Jerram et al. study, the writing rate, which was taken to be the number of words children wrote each session, was recorded for all four phases of the study. In addition, Logan and Glynn recorded the number of times each child chose to write.

Measures were also taken of the quality of the children's writings in a similar way to the Jerram et al. study. Six educators
were asked to rate blindly random samples of children's written work from all phases of the study. These educators were asked to rate their sample stories on the basis of their reaction to the general quality of the writing. Quality was loosely defined as the level of general interest and reader impact of the content of each story.

The effects of the feedback on the actual writing rate (the number of words written) was not as clear-cut as in the Jerram et al. study. The mean number of words written during the two baseline phases were 79.3 and 63.6, and during the two written content feedback phases, 78.5 and 75.3. However, the percentage of opportunities taken to write by all 31 children over the four phases of the study yielded a statistically significant phase effect (F, 3.90=6.50, p < .001). The mean percentages of opportunities taken to write during the two baseline phases were 52.2 and 54.7, and during the two written content feedback phases 59.9 and 67.1. These data suggest that the children were more highly motivated to write when provided with written content feedback than when they were not.

The mean ratings of quality from the six independent raters for stories written by each child in all phases of the study yielded a statistically significant phase effect, (F, 3, 27=5.4, p < .005). The mean qualitative ratings for the two baseline phases were 19 and 15, and for the two written content feedback phases were 23 and 23. It can thus be seen that the positive effects of written content
feedback on the quality of the children's writing was demonstrated twice.

These studies claim to support the powerful effects on children's writing of regular, responsive written content feedback by the teacher. However, these studies examined the effects of responsive feedback only with no comparison to other types of feedback on written expression.

**Corrective Feedback**

The movement away from corrective feedback is not unanimous, although it does reflect the current trend of responding to children's writing rather than being over critical and correcting every mistake. Research on language acquisition provides evidence that older children and adults are more cognitively oriented than young children acquiring a first language. Sensitivity to grammatical distinctions increases with age and the evidence suggests that rule-based presentation and correction have a more important place in the classroom for older children and adults (Gadalla, 1981).

The view that the goal of second language teaching is communicative competence which includes both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence was adopted by Canale and Swain (1980). They argue that although certain learner errors are the same in first and second language acquisition, others are clearly not. Therefore, not all grammatical inaccuracies a second language learner makes are necessarily those that a native speaker will
overlook. Canale and Swain also make the point that not all adult second language learners are willing to put emphasis exclusively on getting their meaning across. Many adult learners will expect their errors to be corrected and will lose motivation if they are not. Finally, if grammatical inaccuracies are not corrected initially in adult learners, some of these inaccuracies may fossilize and persist over time in spite of further language training.

The view that unless students receive feedback about their mistakes, they will continue to make them is supported by McLaughlin (1986). It is also argued by Graham (1987) that the English teacher encountering a student of English as a second language (ESL) with significant writing problems must find an appropriate way of responding, finding a balance between being overly sympathetic and being overly concerned with correctness. ESL students are learning English from many sources, not just the teacher, and the teacher's job is less to teach English than to coach students as they modify their own idiosyncratic versions of the language to approach the standard form. Responding effectively to ESL writing is similar to responding to native English writing, with some important differences. Some are cultural and involve the student's background knowledge, internalized rhetorical patterns, and assumptions about the world. Most significantly, ESL writers need more help with the language. Written feedback should not overemphasize grammar. The feedback should be short, focused, positive, and corrective. Error correction should
treat errors as a natural part of language learning and should be clear and neatly written to help rather than confuse the student.

Hyland (1990) advocates adopting feedback methods that encourage students to rewrite their work after it has been assessed. He suggests minimal marking by teachers as a way of encouraging students to think about what they have done and lead them to improve upon it. Hyland suggests that marking should always provide a platform from which students can reassess and redraft their work.

He argues that corrective feedback has often failed because the correction of the final draft by the teacher has been seen as the final stage in the classroom writing activity. The rewriting of work which has already been corrected by the teacher should prove more rewarding to the learner, the corrected piece of work might then become a springboard to further writing practice. Moreover, comments made by the teacher would be more readily assimilated by learners if they had to rewrite the work incorporating the corrections (Powell, 1988).

**Studies of Teacher Feedback on Written Language Work in ESL Settings**

Although much has been written about the ways in which teachers respond to student writing, particularly in native-language settings, very little empirical based research has been conducted in this area. Similarly, studies of teachers' responses in ESL settings are practically non-existent (Zamel, 1985). Of the
existing limited research, an interesting study was conducted by Semke (1984) over 10 weeks with 141 first-year German students at the University of Minnesota. This study compared the effects of four methods of teacher treatment of free-writing assignments: writing comment and questions rather than corrections; marking all errors and supplying the correct forms; combining positive comments and corrections; and indicating errors by means of a code and requiring students to find corrections and then rewrite the assignment.

The students were divided into four groups, each group receiving a different teacher treatment. All groups were given pretests and posttests. These consisted of a timed, free-writing sample and a timed, multiple-choice cloze test which yielded three measures of competence in German: accuracy; fluency and proficiency. The same tests, with the same testing procedures being used, were administered both as pretests and posttests. The test results were analyzed using an analysis of covariance, a statistical technique which adjusts posttest scores for initial differences, as demonstrated by pretest scores, thus permitting an examination of the mean achievement of the experimental groups.

The statistical analysis revealed no significant differences among treatment groups in terms of writing accuracy, although the written work of all four groups improved. However, the results of the writing fluency test revealed that Group One, who
received comments and questions rather than correction, was significantly ($p < .001$) more fluent than the other three groups. Group Four, who received their errors indicated by a code enabling them to self-correct, was significantly ($p < .004$) lower in fluency than the other three groups. It would thus appear that, although the type of feedback provided does not affect the accuracy of the students' written work, it does affect the fluency. Comments only seem to be more beneficial to fluency than any form of corrective feedback.

The results in Semke's study indicated that student progress was enhanced by writing practice alone. Semke argues that since correction does not appear to promote competency, teacher responses should be based on acceptance, encouragement and understanding.

Another study conducted by Robb, Ross and Shortreed (1986) attempted to evaluate the effects of four different types of feedback on error in the written work of second language writers. A total of 134 Japanese college freshmen were alphabetically assigned to four sections of English composition. Students attended a total of 23 classes over the academic year from mid-April until mid-January, with a summer vacation of two months and a winter vacation of two weeks. Each class meeting lasted for an hour and a half for a total of 34.5 hours of classroom instruction. Classroom activities for the four groups were identical, the independent variable manipulated by the investigators was the type of feedback learners
in each group received. The correction group (n=30) papers were completely correctly by the instructor. The students in this group needed only to copy their original compositions, carefully incorporating the instructor's corrections. The compositions of the coded feedback group (n=37) were marked in an abbreviated code system in which the type of error was indicated on the student's papers. Students in this group revised their compositions by using a guide to decipher the instructor's markings on their papers. The compositions of the uncoded feedback group (n=37) were highlighted in the places which needed editing or revision but no specific indications were given of the type of errors. The compositions of the marginal feedback group (n=30) were marked with the least salient method. The number of errors per line were totaled and written in the margins of the student's paper. Students had to search for the places in need of revision.

The students wrote five narrative test compositions at equal intervals during the academic year. Three raters blindly graded the five sets of narrative compositions. Results revealed no statistically significant differences between the four groups but that practice in writing over time resulted in gradual increases in the mean scores of all four groups when compared with the initial pretest scores, regardless of the method of feedback they received. The ratio of error-free T-units to total T-units increased from .343 to .426 in group one, who received corrections; from .367 to .404 in
group two, who received coded corrections; from .362 to .435 in
group three, who received uncoded corrections and from .312 to
.419 in group four, who received marginal corrections. The
findings of this study are in line with those of the Semke study
that improvement was independent of type of feedback. While
this is an interesting study in that it compared four types of
corrective feedback, it did not compare corrective with responsive
feedback.

Summary

As has been highlighted throughout this review of literature,
considerable attention has been given to the type of feedback
which is most effective to improve the quality of written work of
second language learners. Whereas articles advocating the use of
one or another type of feedback to students' writing are evident,
there still appears no consensus on how teachers can best respond
to students' writing. In the majority of the articles, there is little or
no objective data to support claims made for the superiority of
one particular type of feedback over another. Indeed few empirical
studies have been designed to evaluate the effects of different
types of feedback. The present study therefore attempts to address
this by comparing the effects of three different kinds of feedback
on the written work of adult ESL students. Consequently, it is
hoped to determine whether the findings of this experiment
support the majority of the literature, which advocates responsive
feedback, or whether, as indicated by, for example, Semke (1984) student progress is independent of type of feedback.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study examined the relationship between types of teacher feedback on ESL adult language learners' writing performance. The information was collected by means of continuous letter writing and sought to test the following hypotheses:

1) There will be statistically significant differences (i.e., improvements) in the mean quality scores of written language produced in each treatment group.

2) There will be no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the scores on the criterion variable, that is, the participants' quality of written language as rated by trained assessors.

3) There will be no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the number of spelling mistakes made by participants.

4) There will be no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the quantity of written language produced (i.e., number of words written).

Subjects

The sample of participants comprised 30 adults selected from a total available population of 53 adults attending three separate English classes conducted by the Adult Migrant Education Program. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The ages of the 30 participants ranged from 22 years to 54
years, with a mean age of 31.6 years in Treatment Group One, which received responsive feedback, 32 years in Treatment Group Two which received corrective feedback only and 38.7 years in Treatment Group Three, which received responsive/corrective combined feedback. The participants' period of residence in Australia averaged 15.5 months for participants in Treatment Group One, 20.7 months for Treatment Group Two and 19.3 months for Treatment Group Three. In the three classes from which the participants were selected, there were approximately 50% males; however fewer males than females volunteered to take part in the study. Females outnumbered males by six to four in the responsive feedback group; eight to two in the corrective feedback group and by seven to three in the responsive/corrective combined feedback group.

Table 2 describes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The three teachers who taught the classes were also involved in the study. All were female and experienced part-time teachers of approximately the same age who had been employed by the AMEP for approximately 10 years.
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<th>Residence months (a)</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>ASLPR Level (b)</th>
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(a) Months of residence in Australia
(b) Writing level on the ASLPR scale
Settings

The research was carried out in three separate part-time classes run by the AMEP. These basic adult English language classes comprised of individuals of comparable ages and period of residence in Australia who had attained an intermediate level of proficiency in English (see Table 2). Of the classes, two were conducted at a tertiary institute in the metropolitan area of a large city in Western Australia, whilst the third class came from an outer suburb of the same city, in a low socio-economic area with a high migrant population. The lessons for this third class were conducted in a church hall. All of the classes met twice each week, with each session lasting for three hours. The first two classes in the tertiary institute were conducted on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 9 am until 12 noon, whereas the remaining class was held in the Church Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12 noon until 3 pm.

Operational Definitions

In the research program the effects of responsive feedback, corrective feedback and responsive/corrective combined feedback on students' written language was examined.

For the purpose of this study, the terms identified to describe the feedback given to participants in groups were operationally defined as follows:

i) **Responsive feedback** was defined, as suggested by Graves (1983), as "the teacher responding to the meaning of the
students' writings" (See Appendix A). Students assigned to the responsive feedback group received no corrective feedback to their work, but instead received replies from the researcher to their letters in the style of a normal informal letter-writing correspondence. Participants in this group did not receive their original letter back.

ii) Corrective feedback was defined as "the teacher correcting up to 50% of grammatical and spelling errors made by participants. No written correspondence was made between teacher and student". It was envisaged that approximately 50% of the mistakes made would be corrected. It should be noted that the exact number of mistakes corrected would be dependent on the standard of correspondence produced by each individual. Letters were returned to participants in the corrective feedback group with the researcher's corrections only.

iii) Responsive/corrective combined feedback was defined as "the teacher responding to the meaning of the students' writing as described in the first (responsive feedback) group and in addition (as in the corrective feedback group) correcting up to 50% of grammatical and spelling errors".

In summary, class one became the responsive feedback group receiving replies to their letters written by the researcher in the format of normal letter writing. Class two became the corrective feedback group receiving each of their original letters back with
up to 50% of any errors corrected. Class three became the responsive/corrective combined feedback group, having their original letters returned with up to 50% of errors corrected, depending on the teacher's judgement as to how many errors needed to be corrected. In addition, a reply was written to their letter.

Essentially, the present study comprised a repeated measures research design over an eight week period.

Instrumentation

Measures of the dependent variables of language proficiency were undertaken on each participant. Pretest and posttest measures of language were obtained using the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating Scale (ASLPR) prior to and following the research program. The ASLPR describes language behaviour at nine proficiency levels along a continuum from zero to "native-like" (sic). That is, from someone who has no knowledge of English at all to someone who uses English as a native speaker would. Three more intermediate levels are available for use at 2+, 3+ and 4+. Each macro-skill, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening is described separately so that the ASLPR actually consists of four separate, but conceptually related scales. Testing using this scale allows a language learner's proficiency to be stated in a profile indicating proficiency in each separate macro-skill, e.g. S: 1+, L: 2, R: 1, W: 1. A person with scores like this would be able to satisfy all survival needs and limited social needs in their
speaking ability. They would be able to understand more than they could speak in that their listening skills would be more highly developed (L=2) than their speaking skills (S=1+). They would, therefore, be able to understand all routine social situations and limited work situations. Their reading and writing skills (1) would be limited to the level of minimum survival proficiency i.e., they would be able to satisfy basic survival needs, for example, can read place names, street signs and can write personal details.

The assessment in the present study was carried out by a teacher trained in the administration of the ASLPR scale who was independent of this study. The assessment took the form of an individual interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes. There are three parts: first, an exploratory stage in which the interviewer gains an approximate idea of the learner's proficiency level; second, an analytic stage in which the interviewer explores all of the features of the learner's language behaviour and leads him/her to his/her linguistic breaking point. Finally, a concluding stage in which the interview is rounded off and the interviewer reverts to activities well within the learner's ability e.g., general chat about the weather or the learner's family.

The ASLPR has demonstrated acceptable levels of validity and high levels (in excess of 0.91%) of inter-rater reliability and intra-rater reliability (Ingram, 1984).
For the purpose of this study, students were assessed on the ASLPR scale the week prior to the program, i.e., in week one of Term three, and the week after the program finished i.e., week ten of Term three. Data obtained permitted a comparison between these assessments of writing skills to be made. A detailed account of the ratings is presented in Appendix B.

As can be seen in Table 3, the writing levels for participants in the present study, as assessed on the ASLPR scale, ranged from 1- to 2+ at the beginning of the study. Of the sample, three participants had writing levels of 1-, nine participants had writing levels of 1, 13 participants had writing levels of 1+, three participants were rated as 2-, one participant was rated at 2 and one participant had a writing level of 2+. 
Table 3  
ASLPR Scores for Students' Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Pre Intervention (a)</th>
<th>Post Intervention (b)</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1+</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Corrective</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Responsive/Corrective Combined</td>
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<td>1+</td>
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<td>2+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Pre Intervention - writing level on ASLPR scale as at 25/07/90.
(b) Post Intervention - writing level on ASLPR scale as at 26/09/90.
An additional measure of the quality of the participants' letter writing was obtained by three teachers who rated the students' letters. None of these teachers taught the participants involved in the research, although all were experienced teachers. An evaluation sheet based on criteria developed by Rizzardi (1989/90) was devised, a copy of which can be seen in Appendix C. As suggested by Rizzardi, all letters were rated according to: a) message which is concerned with the communicative competence of the piece of writing; b) text which is concerned with the structure and format, and c) language which deals with the grammar, vocabulary and spelling.

Scoring was as follows: message accounted for 60% of the total mark; text for 25% and language for 15%. A detailed explanation of the scoring will be provided later.

In addition, information was gathered on whether participants continued writing along the same theme (weekly), the number of words misspelt, how often each student chose to write and the number of words written in each letter. Data were collected over the duration of the study which was conducted over an eight week period. Students were asked to write once a week; the maximum number of letters that each student could write being eight.
Procedure

A language proficiency level sufficient for subjects to be able to carry out a correspondence with someone, but not so high that they would not be error free was a pre-requisite. Thus, it was decided to focus the research on classes in the lower-intermediate ability range as categorised by ASLPR scores. A computer search of all the metropolitan part-time classes run by the AMEP in Western Australia was undertaken to obtain a sample of three classes as near as possible to the aforementioned criteria. Seven classes from a sample of approximately 70 classes were identified by the computer search as meeting the criteria for participation. Random sampling of these classes was not possible as the supervisor of the English classes suggested three of the seven classes on the basis of the class teachers' willingness to participate in a research project. Volunteers (i.e., participants) were obtained from the three selected classes by the researcher who visited each class during their first meeting of the second week of the third term in 1990. Fourteen adults volunteered from each of the first and second classes, while 15 were obtained from the third class. Volunteers were told that they would be required to write one letter a week as a homework assignment over a period of eight consecutive weeks. It was then explained that the letters would be helpful in studying student writing and would be beneficial to the students in their written language work.
The three participating classes were then randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups. This was done to bring some degree of randomness to the study.

i) Participants in the Responsive Feedback Treatment Group were told that the researcher would send a written reply to each of their letters. In effect the students would become 'pen-friends' to the researcher;

ii) Participants in the Corrective Feedback Only Treatment Group were told that each letter written would be returned to them corrected, in the normal manner, for grammar, spelling and vocabulary.

iii) Participants in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Treatment Group were told that they would receive a reply to each of their letters and in addition their original letter would be returned with vocabulary, spelling or grammatical errors corrected.

At the start of the research program, an identical standard letter was given to each of the 53 volunteers (a copy of this letter is reproduced in Appendix D). The participants were asked to reply to this letter as part of their homework and to hand their written reply to the class teacher at the next class meeting, (i.e., the second class of week two). Whilst no limit was specified, participants were told that they should take no longer than the regular homework time of 30 minutes writing their replies.
The teachers of the three participating classes agreed to collect the letters each week; this being Wednesdays for classes one and two and Thursdays for class three. The class teachers then brought the letters to the researcher's office at the headquarters of the AMEP following the conclusion of each class. The feedback appropriate for each of the groups was supplied and the letters returned to the class teachers immediately before the following week's lessons. This procedure was repeated each week for the eight weeks of the research program.

Although 53 students corresponded, only those participants from each group with the highest correspondence rates were used for this study. The reason for this being that a number of subjects, after volunteering to participate, subsequently wrote only one or two letters. Because a number of students in each of the group did not write it was decided to include the ten participants with highest correspondence levels. In cases where more than one participant in a group had the same rate of correspondence, but only one was required to complete the sample of 10, a random selection was undertaken. The letters written by the low responding participants were utilised to train the three teachers in rating the quality of the letters, as described in the section "Rater Training".

Rater Training

Three teachers were trained in evaluating students' letter writing according to a standardised instruction sheet provided by
the researcher. (A copy is shown as Appendix C). This training took the form of one two-hour session in which the researcher explained the procedure described on the evaluation sheet and demonstrated the method of evaluating students' writing. This comprised taking the teachers through the stages providing explanation and examples. Teachers were told that each letter was to be evaluated on the basis of three main criteria, namely message, text and language. The message (60 marks) related to the meaning of the text, whether the writer had a sense of purpose, a relevant message which was conveyed effectively and appropriately and a development of ideas. The text (25 marks) related to the lay-out and structure of the piece of writing and included such items as the sequencing of ideas and cohesive devices. The final criterion, language (15 marks), related to grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. Thus a score represented as a percentage was reached for each piece of writing in the following manner: Message = 60 percent, Text = 25 percent, Language = 15 percent. The weighting reflected the importance attached to the communicative competence exhibited in the written text rather than to its grammatical accuracy.

In the second stage of rater training the researcher asked the teachers if they understood the procedure; all responded affirmatively. The teachers were then given copies of the evaluation sheet and were asked to rate some examples of students' letter writing and encouraged to discuss their evaluation
with each other and the researcher; feedback on ratings was provided by the researcher. When the researcher was satisfied with the teachers' performance (i.e., when the teachers were confidently using the evaluation sheet and showing consistency (i.e., above 85%) in their ratings, the marking of the letters progressed to the next stage (i.e., individual ratings) with no discussion.

One week later, the teachers were asked to individually rate 16 of the letters written by students who were not participating in the main study. The teachers did not have any knowledge of who had written the letters or which group the letters were from. Each letter was marked as a percentage according to the message, text and language by each of the three raters. The obtained percentages, which are recorded in Appendix E, were then analysed to obtain a measure of rater reliability. Using the STATVIEW Statistical Package (Feldman & Gagnon, 1986) a repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated and a value of 0.97 was obtained which is deemed highly satisfactory for the integrity of the raters and objectivity of the marking procedure.

When the research program had concluded (after eight weeks), the three independent raters were asked to rate a 50% sample of letters written. This comprised each alternate letter written by all students participating in the research. This occurred one week after their training. The students' first, third, fifth and seventh letters were all rated according to the guidelines provided during rater training. It should be emphasised that the letters were
randomly assigned to the raters who were unaware of the order in which the letters were written (i.e. first, third, fifth or seventh). They were also unaware of the group to which each letter belonged. The raters received photocopies of the students' original letters to assess, the photocopy being taken before any corrections were made.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The ASLPR scores for all participating students' writing, as rated by independent assessors, prior to and at the end of the research study are shown in Table 3 (see p. 44). The ASLPR uses broad categories whereby it would generally take students attending a twice-weekly English class about six months to achieve an improvement of one point.

Four participants in each treatment group achieved a gain in their ASLPR score. It is interesting that only one participant achieved a gain of two points; this being in the responsive feedback group. The other participants achieved a gain of one point.

Fourteen participants stopped corresponding by the seventh week so the sample size was considered too small for an appropriate statistical analysis. Therefore, it was decided to use letters 1, 3 and 5 only for the statistical analyses conducted.

Table 4 shows the mean percentage scores for the quality of written language in the letters written in the first, third and fifth weeks in all three treatment groups. The quality of each alternate letter was rated blindly by three trained assessors as described earlier.
Table 4

Mean Percentage Quality Scores of Students' Letters as Rated by Trained Assessors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feedback Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive (n = 9)</td>
<td>Corrective (n = 7)</td>
<td>Responsive/Corrective (n = 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.93</td>
<td>53.24</td>
<td>57.70</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>66.82</td>
<td>54.53</td>
<td>62.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>71.18</td>
<td>58.11</td>
<td>64.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Totals</td>
<td>66.64</td>
<td>55.30</td>
<td>61.38</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean of the percentage scores was taken for each letter. As can be seen in Table 4, the mean percentages for the Responsive Treatment Group were greater than those in the other two groups in each of the letters. The overall mean percentage was 5.26% higher than the Responsive/Corrective combined Feedback Treatment Group which in turn was 6.08% higher than the Corrective Feedback Treatment Group. Factorial analysis of Variance revealed statistically significant differences $F(2, 21) = 20.23, p < 0.001$. Hypothesis one which stated "There will be statistically significant differences (i.e. improvements) in the quality of written language in each treatment group" is therefore supported.

However, Scheffé follow up statistic revealed no statistically significant differences between the three groups. Therefore, hypothesis two which stated, "There will be no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the
scores of participants' quality of written language as rated by trained assessors" is also supported.

Table 5
Mean Percentage Scores of Individual Students' Letters as Rated by Trained Assessors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Responsive Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>60.7</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>58.0</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>72.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>69.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>607.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>60.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the mean percentage scores of each participant's alternate letter in the Responsive Feedback Group as rated by the three assessors. As can be seen, all participants except one (Number Nine) improved their score. The mean improvement overall was 13.33%, with the smallest mean gain being 7.30% and the largest being 29.40%
Table 6

Mean Percentage Scores of Individual Students' Letters as Rated by Trained Assessors under Blind Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Corrective Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>60.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>53.76</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows the mean percentage scores of each student's alternate letter in the corrective Feedback Group as rated by the assessors. Six of the 10 students in this group improved (subjects 11, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18) with the mean overall improvement being 10.74%; the largest mean gain being 15.3%. In four cases, there was a deterioration in performance which ranged from 0.7% for Student 12 to 3.0% for Student 20. It must be pointed out, however, that only two of the original 10 students were still corresponding by the seventh week. It appears (from Table 6) that the two students who continued to respond were the two who most benefitted from corrective feedback. That is, Student 13's
score increased from 63.0% to 78.3%, whilst Student 17's score increased from 41.0% to 50.7%.

Table 7

| Subjects | Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback |  |
|----------|----------------------------------------|--|---|
|          | Letter 1 | Letter 3 | Letter 5 | Letter 7 |
| 21       | 75.3     | 80.3     | 80.3     | 85.0     |
| 22       | 51.7     | 64.0     | -        | -        |
| 23       | 52.7     | 61.0     | 65.7     | -        |
| 24       | 63.3     | 71.3     | 74.7     | 75.7     |
| 25       | 72.7     | 68.0     | 70.3     | 75.0     |
| 26       | 22.0     | 28.3     | 28.7     | 40.7     |
| 27       | 51.3     | 55.0     | 62.0     | 58.6     |
| 28       | 58.3     | 66.7     | 62.3     | -        |
| 29       | 66.0     | 68.7     | 68.3     | -        |
| 30       | 61.0     | 62.3     | -        | -        |
| Total    | 574.3    | 625.6    | 512.3    | 335      |
| Mean     | 57.43    | 62.56    | 64.08    | 67       |

Table 7 shows the mean percentage scores of each student's alternate letter in the Responsive/Corrective combined Feedback Group. All of the students improved in this group with the mean improvement being 9.57% (range 1.3% to 18.7%).
As shown in Table 8, the overall mean number of spelling mistakes made was lowest in the Corrective Feedback Treatment Group (3.02) and most in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Treatment Group (4.98).

Table 9
Number of Spelling Mistakes made by Students in the First Five Letters in the Responsive Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Letter 1</th>
<th>Letter 2</th>
<th>Letter 3</th>
<th>Letter 4</th>
<th>Letter 5</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 shows the number of spelling mistakes made by participants in the Responsive Feedback Treatment Group in the first five letters. As can be seen in Table 9, nine students from this group wrote five or more letters.

The overall mean number of spelling mistakes made by the students in the Responsive Feedback Treatment Group throughout the study was 3.51. No major changes in the frequency of spelling mistakes made occurred during the study. At
individual student level, the frequency of spelling mistakes did not change in the course of the study. There were variations (e.g., Student 6) but generally there was a consistent pattern across letters.

Table 10

Number of Spelling Mistakes Made by Students in the First Five Letters in the Corrective Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Letter 1</th>
<th>Letter 2</th>
<th>Letter 3</th>
<th>Letter 4</th>
<th>Letter 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 22 19 13 28 24

Mean 3.14 2.71 1.86 4.00 3.43

Table 10 shows the number of spelling mistakes made by participants in the Corrective Feedback Treatment Group in the first five letters. As can be seen in Table 10, seven students from this group wrote five or more letters.

The overall mean number of spelling mistakes made by students in the Corrective Treatment Group throughout the study was 3.03. Changes in the frequency of spelling mistakes did occur during the study as can be seen in Table 10. For example the mean number of mistakes ranged from 1.86 in letter 3 to 4.00 in letter 4.
In addition Students 13, 15, 16 and 17 all showed considerable variability in the number of spelling mistakes made across letters.

Table 11

Number of Spelling Mistakes Made by Students in the First Five Letters in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Letter 1</th>
<th>Letter 2</th>
<th>Letter 3</th>
<th>Letter 4</th>
<th>Letter 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total    | 35       | 51       | 36       | 44       | 33       |
| Mean     | 4.38     | 6.38     | 4.50     | 5.50     | 4.13     |

Table 11 shows the number of spelling mistakes made by participants in the Responsive/Corrective combined Feedback Treatment Group in the first five letters. As can be seen from Table 11, eight students from this group wrote five or more letters.

The overall mean number of spelling mistakes made by the students in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Treatment Group was 4.98 and the mean number of spelling mistakes per letter throughout the study showed little variance (range 4.13-6.38). The lowest mean number of spelling mistakes made
occurred in letter 5 with most spelling mistakes occurring during the second week of the study in letter 2.

At individual student level, the frequency of spelling mistakes showed little variability in the course of the study, the only real exceptions to this being Students 24 and 29.

Table 12
Mean Number of Words Written by Students in all Three Treatment Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Responsive (n = 9)</th>
<th>Corrective (n = 7)</th>
<th>Responsive/Corrective (n = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>129.89</td>
<td>84.29</td>
<td>184.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>135.22</td>
<td>207.57</td>
<td>178.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>124.78</td>
<td>115.86</td>
<td>151.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>130.22</td>
<td>95.86</td>
<td>207.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>105.22</td>
<td>100.57</td>
<td>174.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>125.07</td>
<td>120.83</td>
<td>179.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 shows the overall mean number of words written per letter by participants in their first five letters. As can be seen, the mean number of words written per letter across the three feedback treatment groups was variable. It is interesting that the overall mean score shows the Responsive/Corrective combined Feedback Group wrote considerably more (mean) words than the other two groups, followed by the Responsive Feedback Group and Feedback Corrective Group respectively. A Factorial Analysis
of Variance revealed no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups, \( F(4, 2) = 1.54, p < 0.1981 \). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis which states "There will be no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the number of words written" is supported. The number of words written by individual subjects for each letter is shown in Tables 13, 14 and 15.

Table 13

Total Number of Words Written by Each Participant in Each Letter in the Responsive Feedback Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 shows the total number of words written by each participant in the Responsive Feedback Treatment Group. Five of the 10 (3, 4, 7, 8 & 9) participants showed an increased trend in the number of words written, although it can be seen that the number of words written during each letter varied, in some cases considerably.
Table 14

Total Number of Words Written by Each Participant in Each Letter in the Corrective Feedback Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 shows the total number of words written by each participant in the Corrective Feedback Treatment Group. Five of the 10 participants (11, 12, 13, 15 & 18) showed an increase in the number of words written. Of the five students who showed a decrease in the number of words written, the biggest descending tendency was shown by Student 19 whose number of words declined from an initial 91 in the first letter to 29 in the sixth letter. This student subsequently ceased to correspond with the researcher.
Table 15 shows the total number of words written by each participant in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Treatment Group. Four of the 10 participants (22, 23, 24 & 25) showed an increased trend in the number of words written although, again it can be seen that the number of words written during each letter varied.

Table 16 shows the number of letters written by each student in each of the treatment groups. The research was conducted over an eight week period and the students were asked to write one letter a week. The maximum number of letters which could be written by each student was, therefore, eight.
Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Feedback Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that subjects receiving responsive feedback wrote most letters (total of 69 out of a possible 80); this gives a mean of 6.9 letters per session. Students receiving responsive/corrective combined feedback wrote a total of 62 letters, giving a mean of 6.2 letters per session. This is less than the Responsive Group but more than students receiving corrective feedback only, who wrote 56 letters in total; a mean of 5.6 per session.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(No theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(No theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(No theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>(No theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(No theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive and Corrective</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x indicates the letter in which a theme was identified.
Table 17 shows the letter in which a clearly identifiable theme was first recognised. A theme can be defined as "a central idea or a frequently recurring topic" (Abrams, 1957). In Treatment Group One (Responsive Feedback), nine of the 10 students developed a theme as early as the second letter. The tenth student developed a theme in the third letter. In Treatment Group Two (Corrective Feedback) only 50 percent of subjects ever developed a theme. Two students developed a theme in their second letter, one in the third, one in the fourth and one in the eighth. In comparison, in Treatment Group Three (Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback), the development of a theme was identified in the second letter of seven of the ten students. Two students started to develop a theme in the third letter and the remaining student in the fourth letter.

Social Validation of the Procedure

Efforts were made to obtain the views of participants regarding the value of the experiment. Information for this was obtained in two ways: anecdotal evidence gathered verbally by the class teacher and written evidence which was volunteered through participants' letters. A number of randomly selected examples will be presented from each of the treatments groups to provide as representative and as balanced a perspective as possible.
1. **Responsive Feedback Group**

   (i) **Anecdotal Evidence from the Class Teacher**

   The level of enthusiasm overall was very high with many students requesting a continuity of the letter writing exercise at the end of the eight week period. Several students from this class, who had not initially volunteered to participate in the project, also expressed an interest in becoming part of it while it was ongoing. These students expressed regrets that they had not originally decided to participate. A typical reaction given by a number of the participants was, "It's great! Can we do this every term?" However, it must also be said that two students expressed regrets that they did not also receive corrective feedback to their letters, one of them feeling very strongly about this.

   (ii) **Written Evidence Quoted Directly from Participants' Letters**

   The following comments were selected to indicate the students' reactions to the study.

   "Practising writing a letter I find this a good idea."

   "I find this way of writing very interesting and every time I was looking forward for the reply to read it and write again."

   "Thankyou very much for yours letters. Your last letter had a very beautiful and very large. I give any answer on your question."

   "I'm very happy when I readen your letter. Today I write a letter for you."
"I am glad to write for you. In your letter, I can learn some grammar and some word."

"I'm very please when I writ this letter."

These comments (quoted as written) were typical of the overall comments being written and appeared to show that the students enjoyed writing the letters and particularly enjoyed receiving replies to their letters.

2. Corrective Feedback Group

(i) Anecdotal Evidence from the Class Teacher

The students in this group were, generally, not happy. They constantly requested replies to their letters both verbally and in writing, also indirectly by writing questions in their letters. The overriding feeling was one of frustration, perhaps summed up best by a Lebanese student who asked her class teacher,

"How can I write another letter? I haven't had a reply to my last one yet."

According to the teacher, the students complained that it was difficult to think of something to write about, because they did not receive any comments on what they had written. The majority of the students were glad when the research period was over and were relieved that they did not have to continue writing letters.

The class teacher reported that only one student stated that she enjoyed writing the letters and felt that she had improved her writing ability. She, alone, wished to continue writing. The others reported letter writing to be a chore and those who continued for
the eight week period did so only out of a feeling of duty rather than from enjoyment.

**Written Evidence Quoted Directly from Participants' Letters**

(ii) "Sometime I don't know how to write a letter."

"Thanks to you for correcting me my false, but I think if your correct and replay that's better. You know why?? because you asking a question, we can response. We can find the subject to write. It is to hard to write and you don't receive an answer."

"Could you please correct the next letter to my pen-friend?"

"How are you? I really don't know what to talk about."

"I have to write for you then now I'm thinking what about could I write."

"I'm interested write letter to friend and relation. Sometimes they are too lazy to reply to me."

"Thank you for repair letter for me."

There were numerous complaints about the difficulties of finding a topic to write about. One student stopped writing to the researcher and, instead, submitted the letters which she had written to her pen-friend for correction.

3. **Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group**

   (i) **Anecdotal Evidence from the class Teacher**

   The level of enthusiasm was initially very high, although the class teacher felt that about half the participating students lost their initial enthusiasm. However, the students who did continue
writing enjoyed it and were reluctant to stop writing at the end of the research period.

Indeed, two of the students from this class continued to write to the researcher for a few months after the study finished. Some of the students mentioned the value of having an Australian contact whom they could ask advice about such matters as schooling, social security and job seeking. Others said that they found letter writing easier now, both in English and in their own language.

Written Evidence Quoted Directly from Participants' Letters

(ii) "I am glad to have this opportunity of write letters, but I worry I can't write good enough."

"I was very happy when I read your letter."

"Lastly, I hope I can write to you later on continuously."

"I think I'm very sorry about the letter you can't tell me something and me can't tell you anymore about story. I think this letter the last one."

"I'm glad you wrote a letter for me. I try to replay for it."

"This morning my teacher told me, 'would you like to write a letter to Maura? I said 'yes' I very like that because I think that way will help my English better. It makes me remember the word, how to make the sentence and for the grammer get well."

"I hope that we can keep in touch in the future. I am very happy to know you and can write the letters to each other."
These comments are representative of the comments written by students in this group. Overall, the students seemed happy to correspond, reluctant to finish corresponding at the end of the study and saw the benefits in the exercise. It is interesting to note that not one of the students made any reference at all, either positively or negatively, to the corrections they received.

With particular reference to the researcher, she found it was most rewarding to write to the students in the Responsive Feedback Group and least rewarding to correct the letters of students in the Corrective Feedback Group. Some of the students in the latter group so obviously longed for a reply that it was unfulfilling to be able to only return their letters corrected. It was more enjoyable to reply to the students in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group than it was to correct their letters. It is also worth noting that a number of students in the responsive feedback treatment group sought counselling in their letters. To this end the researcher found herself responding in some instances, as an 'agony aunt' to students' personal problems. This however, was most rewarding.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The present study has demonstrated that all three treatment groups improved their writing skills as a result of the letter writing procedure. This supports Semke's (1984) findings that writing performance is enhanced by practice alone. There were no statistically significant differences between the overall improvements in the written work obtained by the three treatment groups, but a closer examination of the data reveals that the quality of the writing of the Responsive Feedback Group improved more than that of the other two groups. This group recorded a five point overall gain in ASLPR scores compared to a four point gain recorded by the other groups. While a one point advantage may appear relatively small, it must be explained that this is regarded as a large gain on the ASLPR scale. Similarly, the scores pertaining to the quality of writing, as assessed in accordance with the evaluation sheet, (Appendix C), of the Responsive Feedback Group improved the most, with the mean improvement being 13.33% compared to 9.57% in the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group and 10.74% in the Corrective Feedback Group. These differences were not statistically significant, but there is a danger in adopting a null hypothesis because the small sample size in the study affects the power of the statistical test to detect any statistically significant
differences. It is possible that, with a larger sample, such differences may have been statistically significant.

The students who received responsive feedback used the researcher's letters as a model, often using the same vocabulary, grammatical constructions and phrases. This was the case in Rinvolucru's (1983) study. He also found that his students borrowed components and structures from his letters, using them as models. Logan and Glynn (1989) found a distinct change in the written work of the children after they had been receiving written content feedback for several weeks. They began to use writing not merely to produce factual or imaginative stories but to communicate directly with the teacher. Children took the initiative in their writings to ask for help or information or to share personal information. Students in the present study who received responsive feedback also used writing in this way, i.e., to communicate directly with the researcher. Many asked for help or information and all shared personal information.

There were no statistically significant differences between the three treatment groups in the number of spelling mistakes made. Furthermore, the number of mistakes made did not diminish as the study progressed. It is interesting to note that two of the three treatment groups were receiving corrective feedback to their spelling mistakes, and that this correction did not lead to improved spelling accuracy.
The number of words written is a simple, yet somewhat crude method of analysing data. However, it was selected because it had been used in several previous studies (e.g., Jerram, Glynn & Tuck, 1988; Logan and Glynn, 1989). Jerram, Glynn and Tuck (1988) found that the number of words written by 24 children significantly increased when written content feedback was provided. However, Logan and Glynn (1989) found that the effects of feedback on the actual writing rate were not as clear-cut as in the Jerram et al. study. Only eight of the 31 children showed increases in the number of words written during each of the written content feedback phases. In line with Logan and Glynn, the present study found there were no statistically significant differences in the number of words written by students in all three groups. Because the letters were written at home there is no way of knowing whether groups spent differing times writing the letters (i.e., whether the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group spent more time writing than the others). All three groups displayed a tendency to increase the length of their letters as the study progressed which may be a function of the feedback given and the possibility that writing became easier.

The Responsive Feedback Group wrote more letters, on average 6.9 and in total 69, than the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group (mean = 6.2) who in turn wrote more than the Corrective Feedback Group (mean = 5.6). Although these differences are relatively small, they may indicate that correction
of students' work has an inhibiting effect on communication. It has been suggested by Vargas (1978) that red-pencilling students' literary efforts achieves mostly negative effects; the findings of this study tends to give general support to this viewpoint.

All students in the Responsive Feedback Group and the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group developed a theme, i.e., a central idea could be identified in their written work. The development of a theme was identified earliest in the Responsive Feedback Group, with all students having developed this by the third letter written. In the Responsive/Corrective Combined Feedback Group, all students developed a theme by the fourth letter, whereas, in contrast, only half of the students in the Corrective Feedback Group ever developed a theme at all. This indicates that responding to a student's message greatly facilitates the development of a theme. This is in line with Logan and Glynn's (1989) observations that providing written content feedback produces a change in the use of writing, i.e., it became used for direct communication purposes. Indeed, it has been claimed (with relatively little empirical support) that responsive feedback is more motivational than corrective feedback. Anecdotal evidence obtained from the students in this study would seem to support this assertion and suggests that the students enjoyed receiving responsive feedback, whereas students in the Corrective Feedback Group were frustrated at the lack of responsive feedback. Jerram, Glynn and Tuck (1988) suggested that
a teacher's written response functions in two ways: Firstly, as an antecedent for the generation of further writing and secondly, as a reinforcer for writing already completed. Students in the present study who received corrective feedback suggested there was a lack of reinforcement for their writing and this may have been an important factor in this group's feelings of frustration. It is, of course, an unusual situation to write letters without receiving a reply and this should be recognised. Perhaps the students were conditioned to expect a reply to letters and therefore became frustrated at not doing so. The written evidence obtained from the participants' letters confirms both the enjoyment experienced by the students receiving responsive feedback and the frustration experienced by the students who did not receive replies.

Contributions of the Present Findings to the Existing Literature

The present study has contributed to the existing literature in that it substantiates Semke's (1984) findings that writing is enhanced by practice alone, independent of the type of feedback provided. This is also in line with Robb, Ross and Shortreed (1986) who found gradual improvements in the written work of four groups of Japanese students who received different sorts of feedback on their writing. No differences were found between the four groups.

In contrast to Jerram, Glynn and Tuck (1988) and Logan and Glynn (1989), the present study did not find that the provision of written content feedback significantly improved the quality of
written work. However, it must be pointed out that the students who received responsive feedback were, in general, much happier about the correspondence program than the students who received only corrective feedback. As Christie (1990) points out, it is very important that affective factors, such as student satisfaction, are taken into account, particularly in the case of adult second language learners who may feel themselves to be vulnerable and threatened by having to learn another language.

Limitations of the Present Study and Implications for Future Research

It must be recognised that the initial sample size was restricted and that this became smaller as the study progressed since some students ceased to correspond. The reason for this was twofold: Firstly, some students dropped out of the English class; and secondly, the letter-writing exercise was set as a homework task and homework is not compulsory in Adult Migrant Education Program classes. Consequently, the reduced sample size impaired statistical analyses of the results. The letter writing would perhaps be more successful if undertaken in class-time rather than as a homework exercise. Another limitation which must be acknowledged is the relative non-randomness of the sample. A computer search of all the part-time metropolitan class who could participate in the study revealed seven matched classes. The three classes selected from the seven generated by the computer search for this study was done so on the basis of their
availability by the authorities concerned. This is a particularly
difficult problem to address given the restricted nature of the ESL
population and the attitude of the authorities concerned. While
future studies should seek to use randomly selected samples, the
problem outlined above is one which will always be present.

With reference to the instrumentation used to measure the
quality of the students' writing (the ASLPR test and an evaluation
sheet devised by the researcher) again consideration needs to be
given. The ASLPR, whilst the only test available, is a broad-based
test and is probably not sensitive enough to detect small
incremental changes in the performance of participants given the
nature of its objective measurement type. Future research should
seek more appropriate instruments to measure the quality of the
written work.

Summary

Despite the limitations of this study, some positive effects
were found. For example, given the positive views of the
participants who received responsive feedback, this type of
exercise might be beneficial in addition to the type of work
currently being undertaken by adult ESL learners. Indeed, since
the conclusion of this present study, several teachers within the
AMEP have approached the present author seeking assistance in
setting up correspondence-type programs identical to that
described in this dissertation.
Another beneficial effect which should be mentioned was that one of the children of one of the students receiving responsive feedback spontaneously wrote to one of the researcher's daughters, on discovering that she was in the same school grade. A correspondence has subsequently developed between the two children. The letters of the student's child have also shown improvement and the modelling process was even more apparent in the child's letters that in the adults' letters.

In summary, the results of this investigation offer support to the conclusion reached by Semke (1984) that the writing of adult ESL students is enhanced by practice alone, as evidenced in all three treatment groups. Findings also support Semke that correction does not improve accuracy and that the level of spelling accuracy did not increase in the two groups which received corrective feedback to their spelling mistakes.

The argument put forward by Christie (1990) that error correction tends to have an inhibiting effect on communication is supported by the fact that the group who received corrective feedback wrote the least number of letters (56 in total). Conversely, the motivating effects of responsive feedback, as advocated by Logan and Glynn (1989), may have been responsible for the fact that the group who received responsive feedback wrote the most numbers of letters (69 in total).

It should be noted that the results of this present study differ from those of Semke in one important aspect. Whereas Semke
found no differences among treatment groups in terms of writing accuracy, the present study revealed a difference in the quality of the written work between the three treatment groups. The quality of the writing of the students as measured by the evaluation sheet (Appendix C) in the Responsive Feedback Group improved more than the other two groups. This improvement was not, however, statistically significant.

In conclusion, while this present study has demonstrated the beneficial effects of writing responsive and responsive/combined feedback on ESL adult language learners, future research or replications of this present study should seek larger samples and undertake the letter writing in class time, rather than as a homework assignment. This might reduce the drop-out rate and provide further evidence as to the effects of feedback on students' writing. Furthermore, future research might reveal if the greater improvement observed in the Responsive Feedback Group became statistically significant, or if, as in the Semke study, there continued to be no statistical differences between treatment groups.
References


APPENDIX A

Elements of the teacher's written feedback, with examples

1. **Identification with characters**
   "These flowers all have very definite personalities, don't they Sarah?"

2. **Identification with a theme**
   "It's very puzzling to me how these messages keep appearing ..... this one is covered in blood, Maria!"

3. **Anticipation of the development of a theme**
   "Phillipa, I would love to see Katrina as the only kina (sea urchin) to walk along the bottom of the ocean to the Antarctic."

4. **Sharing an experience**
   "It is always great to have a lovely warm bath when the weather is cold at Taupo, Natalie ..... I always love the steam!"

5. **Expressing empathy with the writer**
   "Nicola, you describe the devil so well, I can understand how frightened you were! What a terrible dream to have on such a scary night."

6. **Conversing with the writer**
   "..... I'm not sure what I'd do, Phillipa! I'd go my own way, I think!"

7. **Expressing enjoyment of content**
   "Janine, I am enjoying this story very much ....."

8. **Personalizing of each piece of feedback**
   e.g. through the inclusion of the child's name, and the teacher's own initials at the end.
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<th>Level</th>
<th>General Description</th>
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<th>Description Levels of the Australian Second Language (Writing) Proficiency Ratings Scale</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Can handle all tasks he/she normally encounters and has native-like flexibility in new ones; can handle humour as efficiently as a native speaker.</td>
<td>&quot;Preferred&quot;</td>
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<td>Can convey his/her meaning precisely and accurately, unaided by lexicial, syntactic or stylistic devices.</td>
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<td>Can write in all forms used in daily life without errors introducing a need for correction.</td>
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<td>Can write with sufficient accuracy in structures and vocabulary to meet all social demands and basic work needs.</td>
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<td>Able to write simple letters, orders and notes to school colleagues.</td>
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Examples of Specific Tasks:

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Appendix B
APPENDIX C

Evaluation Sheet for assessing student's writing based on criteria suggested by Maria Rizzardi, University of Milan

Message

A maximum of 10 marks are to be awarded for each of the 6 criteria. The maximum score for message will thus be 60.

1. Has the writer something to say (sense of purpose)?
2. Is the message relevant to the assigned topic? Does it follow on from the reply?
3. Is the writer's intend conveyed effectively?
4. Is the overall register appropriate to the topic and the reader?
5. Are there all the relevant aspects necessary to convey the intended message?
6. Is there a development of ideas?

Text

A maximum of 5 marks is to be awarded for each of the 5 sub-headings. The score for text will thus be out of 25.

1. Is the lay-out/format appropriate?
2. Is the text structured in paragraphs?
3. Are the paragraphs well structured into main and subordinate themes?
4. Is the logical sequencing of ideas effectively conveyed by means of textual devices?
5. Are transition/cohesive devices used effectively and appropriately?

Language

A maximum of 5 marks is to be awarded for each of the 3 sub-headings. The score for language will thus be out of 15.

1. Is the grammar accurate and complex enough according to the students' linguistic level?
2. Is the range of vocabulary good?
3. Is the use of conventions (e.g. spelling, punctuation, layout) appropriate?

A percentage will accordingly be obtained. The message part is deliberately given more importance in order to achieve a measure of the communicative competence of the writing rather than of the grammatical competence.
APPENDIX D

Standard letter given to each student at the commencement of the study

64 Oban Road
CITY BEACH
WA 6015

30.07.90

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to write to me this term. I would like to get to know you so perhaps you could write me a letter introducing yourself and telling me a little about you and your family.

I came to Australia in 1982 from England so I am a migrant too. I have been teaching English to migrants for $4\frac{1}{2}$ years and I love my job. Please tell me about yourself. Maybe you could give your letter to your teacher at the next class.

Best wishes,

Maura Rhodes
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<th>Assessor Three</th>
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### Appendix E

Raw scores (with total percentage of the 16 letters used for ranking tables in the scoring procedures.