The writing of and teaching strategies for students from the Horn of Africa

KAREN SLIKAS BARBER – Adult Migrant English Program, Central TAFE, Perth

ABSTRACT
Students from the Horn of Africa studying in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at Central TAFE who enter the program with a 1- to 1+ ISLPR (International Second Language Proficiency Ratings) in writing are often prevented from pursuing their educational and vocational goals because of their inability to pass compulsory writing competencies in Certificates II and III in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). The Horn of Africa students can often have considerable fluency in their spoken English, which is not mirrored in their writing. From the teachers’ perspective, it has seemed as if there is little discernible improvement in their writing upon completion of their 510 hours of English entitlement in the CSWE. This study describes the writing of CSWE II and III students from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, describes what they were able and not able to do in their writing, and explores possible reasons for their difficulty with writing and learning writing. The study also describes some strategies that are being used in the classroom to address the writing and learning needs of these students, and identifies strategies that appeared to be the most useful.

Background
In the AMEP at Central TAFE, (a college of technical and further education), a significant proportion of students now come from the Horn of Africa. That is, they come from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Students enter the CSWE (Certificates in Spoken and Written English) courses with a minimum ISLPR speaking level of 1+ and a maximum writing level of 1+, with 1+ being approximately equivalent to a lower intermediate level. In fact, Horn of Africa students’ levels in listening and speaking are usually higher than this and can range from 1+ to 3. Many of the Horn of Africa students have entry level listening and speaking levels of 2 and 2+, which are approximately equivalent to intermediate/upper intermediate levels. Their reading levels range from ISLPR 1 to 3 while their writing levels range from 0+ to 1+.

Generally speaking, students in the AMEP with an entry ISLPR of 1- to 1 in writing study the CSWE II, which is considered to be an elementary level course. Students with an entry ISLPR of 1+ in writing study the CSWE III, which is a lower intermediate level course. (The students’ ISLPR levels in
listening and reading as well as their background are also considered when determining their placement in the CSWE).

It has been observed over the past few years that Horn of Africa students who had commenced study at a writing level of 1- to 1+ and had completed their 510-hour entitlement of English available to migrants who are below functional English (ISLPR 2 in speaking, listening, reading and writing) did not make any noticeable progress with their writing. While they passed their listening, speaking, and reading competencies in the CSWE II and III courses, these students were very often unable to pass a compulsory writing task, which, for example, includes being able to write a short report which meets set performance criteria and range statements. Therefore, they were unable to complete a certificate and were thus often barred from studying in the next level English course.

This study looked at the writing and the writing and learning needs of Horn of Africa students and how teachers are addressing them in order to understand their needs more deeply, and as a means of improving writing outcomes for this group. As writing difficulties are also experienced by students in the AMEP from other backgrounds, it was anticipated that the teaching strategies identified as effective with Horn of Africa students might also enhance the learning of other students studying the CSWE.

The aims of the study were:

- To describe teachers’ initial perceptions of students from the Horn of Africa as learners of writing and as writers;
- To describe the writing strengths and weaknesses that students from the Horn of Africa studying Certificates in Spoken and Written English II and III have in common;
- To describe strategies that teachers could use and the strategies that teachers are trialling in an effort to address the writing needs of these students;
- To detail teachers’ observations and reflections on Horn of Africa students as learners of writing and as writers;
- To describe students’ perspectives on their writing; and
- To explore possible reasons why these students have difficulty with writing.

Review of literature

To direct the literature review for the 10-week study and to raise our awareness of perceptions of, and perhaps prejudices in relation to the students
before the study, the five teachers participating in the study and I detailed our perceptions of Horn of Africa students as learners and as writers without reference to any writing samples. The learning characteristics and the characteristics of the learners’ writing on which we agreed are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

**Table 1: Learning characteristics**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning characteristic</th>
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<td>1. Lack familiarity with classroom moves and classroom interaction;</td>
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<td>2. Lack understanding of the purpose of tasks and activities;</td>
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<td>3. Have difficulty following instructions, particularly written ones;</td>
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<td>4. Have difficulty with tasks such as sequencing;</td>
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<td>5. Have difficulty with formal assessment;</td>
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<td>6. Have difficulty acquiring computing skills;</td>
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<td>7. Be uncomfortable taking risks in their learning;</td>
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<td>8. Like routine and repetition in their learning;</td>
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<td>9. Need a slower pace of instruction and learning;</td>
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<td>10. Rely on the teacher to direct all their learning;</td>
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<td>11. Have health problems;</td>
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<td>12. Be easily distracted and lack concentration; and</td>
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<td>13. Come and go in class due to family and other priorities.</td>
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**Table 2: Characteristics of writing**

- Poor spelling
- Very long sentences with lack of use of full stops
- Inappropriate use of capitalisation
- Repetition of ideas in writing
- Attempts to express complex ideas so that the writing can seem convoluted
- Indirectness in expression
- Similarity to speaking (stream of consciousness)
- Lack of organisation of ideas.

With these learning and writing characteristics in mind, a review of literature was undertaken to identify recommended teaching practices and strategies for ESL writing that would:

- Make use of the learners’ higher oracy skills;
- Give the learners a lot of support with the learning of writing;
- Address the learners’ ‘stream of consciousness’ approach to writing;
- Address the learners’ spelling errors; and
• Equip the learners with skills to assist them in improving the coherence, cohesion and accuracy of their writing.

The reasons why ESL students generally have difficulty with writing were also noted as these could provide insights into the teaching practices that would help these learners.

A summary of the strategies compiled from this literature review can be found in Table 6 in the findings section of this article, which shows the strategies that teachers found useful.

Many of the strategies were taken from the ‘teaching-learning cycle’ proposed in Burns (1990: 209–10). Also, teaching strategies were adapted from ‘good’ learning strategies. For example, according to Rubin and Thompson (1983), good learners learn chunks of language to perform ‘beyond their competence’ (Nunan 1991: 171). Also, skilled writers are said to plan (Nunan 1991: 90). Skilled writers also spend time reviewing their writing and revising ‘at all levels of lexis, sentence and discourse’, while unskilled writers spend little time reviewing what they have written and revise primarily the ‘mechanics of grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary’ (Nunan 1991: 90). Strategies thus include teaching students how to plan and revise their work, so they can develop in their writing in English.

Thornton (1980) suggests strategies for teaching children punctuation (1980: 50–1) and spelling (1980: 42–6) that might address the needs of Horn of Africa students. He recommends using what learners know about the language in the spoken form to improve their written form, for example, the use of full stops could be taught through intonation. He also recommends showing, rather than teaching, students how to spell using techniques such as the noticing of patterns. For example, he suggests that teachers can help students relearn the way in which they spell words by ‘drawing attention to similarities between the visual pattern of words which the pupil gets right and the target words’ (p 43).

Conferences and mini-conferences are proposed in order to talk to students about their writing and to find out why they are writing what they are writing (Nunan 1991: 87). These could include ‘think aloud’ tasks to gain insight into the learners’ skills and language learning strategies (Ellis 1994: 534–5). Learners could thus ‘think aloud’ with their teacher as they are revising their writing and making corrections. These strategies would seem appropriate for these learners with good oral skills.

Joyce and Burns (1999) encourage teachers to look at students’ writing strengths as well as at their weaknesses in assessing students’ grammar needs (1999: 69). They also recommend focusing on specific genre-related grammatical features in students’ writing (1999: 68). Reliance on metalanguage in
instruction was a strategy perceived to be unsuccessful by the teachers inter-
viewed in Sangster and Nichols’ (1996) study on the literacy difficulties
experienced by seven female CSWE I students from Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In a study of first-language literacy development of children, Hammond
(1990) argues that ‘a more conscious, deliberate and analytic effort is involved
in learning to read and write than in learning to speak’ (1990: 51). Learning
to write is a complicated and demanding process for all students. Hammond
also states that children write as they speak in the early stages of writing develop-
ment as they are unaware of the differences between spoken and written lan-
guage. Also, children regress to an earlier stage of language development when
developing control of the written mode (p 49). These insights appeared also
to be relevant to the developing literacy of our Horn of Africa students.

The strategies described above and in Table 6 were introduced to the five
teacher participants for trialling in the study, and the insights on why students
have difficulty learning to write were also provided to the teachers for their
consideration during the study.

A description of the research methodology

The research methodology was broadly speaking interpretive in nature with the
informants of the study, the classroom teachers and the students, providing
the bulk of the data.

PHASE ONE

Before the fourth of four ten-week CSWE classes, the five teacher participants
and I described our perceptions of Horn of Africa students as learners of writing
and as writers, as described in the previous section (see Table 1 and Table 2).

The teacher participants were informed of the findings of the literature
review and were given the list of teaching strategies that were hypothesised as
being useful on the basis of the literature review (see Table 6 in findings section).
The teachers were then asked to trial the suggested strategies as well as detail
other strategies they used to address the students’ learning characteristics they
had identified in Table 1.

PHASE TWO

Over a ten-week term, the five teacher participants recorded the strategies,
tasks, and activities they used in their full-time CSWE class to teach writing,
including pre-writing activities, using a daily observation/reflection form. They
also recorded their observations and reflections on whether or not the listed
strategies ‘worked’. Teachers were asked to assess the strategies as working if the
students were able to understand, do, and complete the writing tasks with a
fair degree of accuracy, fluency and satisfaction and show some transfer of the language and skills presented in the pre-writing stages of the lesson to subsequent stages of the lesson.

During the term, the teachers also noted the features they found to be characteristic of Horn of Africa students as learners and writers for comparison with the list in Table 1 of their initial preconceptions.

Three of the teachers were teaching CSWE II to students in their second, third or last terms of the their 510-hour English entitlement. In these classes there were respectively four, five and five Horn of Africa students. The two other teacher participants were teaching the CSWE III to students in their second or last term of the certificate course. In these classes there were respectively four and seven Horn of Africa students.

In the five classes there was a total of 25 students from the Horn of Africa. Twelve of the students were from Sudan, nine from Ethiopia, three from Somalia and one from Eritrea. Client summary lists were used to obtain student background information. These lists were retrieved from the Adult Migrant English Program Reporting Management System (ARMS), which records students’ details as fed in at their entry interview for the CSWE course. The information on the lists includes: date of birth, date of arrival, country of birth, language, years of schooling, and ISLPR levels.

PHASE THREE

The teacher participants and I assessed the strengths and weaknesses in the students’ writing using an assessment instrument I had developed based on CSWE II and III performance criteria for writing a recount. The performance criteria included: appropriate staging, paragraphing, supporting sentences, sentence variety, conjunctive links, referencing pronouns and articles, appropriate vocabulary, noun groups, appropriate tense, adverbs and prepositional phrases, punctuation, spelling, and other comments or constructions of interest.

This assessment instrument was used to assess a writing task completed by each of these students in a previous term and given to all students at the end of each term. The task was to write, in a single sitting of 40 minutes with 10 minutes of the time designated for ‘thinking’, one page (200 words) about an enjoyable or interesting day. Fifteen of the twenty-five student participants had writing samples for assessment. Seven of these students were from Sudan, six from Ethiopia, one from Somalia and one from Eritrea. The other ten students did not have samples in their files, most probably because they were absent on the day the writing task was given.

I interviewed 12 of these 15 students (three students were absent on scheduled interview dates). Five of the students were from Sudan, five from Ethiopia,
one from Somalia and one from Eritrea. I conducted the interviews in English and took notes. The students were asked questions about their educational background and their learning of writing before they came to Australia. They were also asked general questions about their writing sample, including questions such as: Did you use the ‘thinking’ time to plan your writing before you began to write? How did you decide when to stop a sentence? The students were also asked to talk about and give a verbal report about their writing sample.

It was anticipated that the verbal report data could provide insights about the students’ writing, their use of their languages, and the processes to which the students might have had conscious access (Cohen 1991: 136). During the verbal report phase of the interview, I asked questions of the student based on features which appeared in the writing sample. For example, the questions included: What is this word? What are you writing about here? Is there a word missing here? Why did you skip a line here? Why is there so much information in this sentence? Could you have written about this day using more than one paragraph? If yes, could you show me where you would start a new paragraph?

At the end of the interview each student was asked to read his/her writing sample aloud and correct any errors they found.

Student writing profiles were developed using CSWE performance criteria to analyse the students’ writing sample in terms of the presence and accuracy of a range of writing features as detailed. These profiles were compared to the teachers’ and researcher’s initial perceptions of these learners’ writing.

The students’ perspectives on their writing and on why they find writing difficult were compiled from the verbal report/interview form.

I then detailed possible reasons for students’ writing difficulties based on the literature review and the student interviews.

**The findings**

After the ten-week term, the teachers reviewed the list of learning characteristics compiled before the term began (Table 1). They confirmed that these characteristics did indeed characterise many of the students. They then detailed strategies they had used in the classroom to address these learning characteristics and described the insights they gained as to why these students had certain learning issues. Table 3 describes these strategies and insights. Each numbered strategy in Table 3 relates back to the learning characteristic with the same number given in Table 1 (see literature review section).

Generally speaking, the five teacher participants considered that the greatest barrier to learning was the students’ lack of familiarity with the classroom, classroom practices, classroom activities, and the requirements of the classroom and of assessment. This lack of familiarity with the classroom encompasses
many of the other learning characteristics listed in Table 1. Teachers needed to be clear and explicit in their teaching practice and to find ways of bridging the apparently significant cultural divide. Recycling, repetition, and reinforcement of material were vital as well as the use of content the students could relate to and find relevant.

**Table 3: Strategies and insights**

1. Discussion of the classroom in the Australian context and in the contexts of the students’ homelands;
2. Explicit explanation of how to do activities, why tasks are being done and the communicative purpose of activities;
3. Concept check of instructions before and during task or activity, modelling and demonstration of how to do task, with oral instructions to reinforce written;
4. Hands-on approach for sequencing activities including using cut-up sentences or paragraphs that can be moved to determine logical sequence;
5. Explicit explanation of, and instruction in, all the requirements of assessment tasks, including the cultural requirements such as valuing quality above quantity;
6. Revisiting learned computer skills on a regular basis;
7. Group and whole-class involvement in tasks rather than individual;
8. Repetition of task types that work and tasks that students are familiar with;
9. Providing sufficient time to complete tasks and designing tasks that are achievable within the time constraints;
10. Introducing and practising ‘learning how to learn’ skills and discussing the role of the teacher and the students in learning;
11. Allowing for health problems, including problems with eyes, so use of larger print activity sheets at times;
12. Continual monitoring of task and activities and one-on-one progress checks; and
13. Taking into account that settlement, family and financial issues may take priority over English lessons and can distract from studies.

In analysing the 15 writing samples of the students in the study using CSWE writing criteria, it was discovered that, while the writing of many students could be characterised by the characteristics listed in Table 2, these students also had strengths in their writing. Table 4 is a summary of the students’ writing strengths and weaknesses based on their writing sample from a previous term.

**Table 4: Writing strengths and weaknesses**

**Appropriate staging**
Most of the writers had appropriate beginnings and endings.

**Paragraphing**
Most of the accounts of an interesting day were written in one paragraph of a page or more in length with only a few writers using appropriate paragraphing.

*Continued*
Table 4 – Continued

Supporting sentences
Good use of supporting ideas and sentences.

Sentence variety
Considerable sentence variety with students writing simple, compound and complex sentences with varying degrees of success.

Conjunctive links
Generally widespread use of links including: and, so, if, by, because, therefore, on the other hand, after, first.

Referencing pronouns and articles
Writers were able to use pronoun references and articles with some accuracy including: she, he, we, their, my, our, they, us, it, his, an, the, a.

Appropriate vocabulary
Overall, vocabulary was suitable with some words misspelt.

Noun groups
Writers were able to use noun groups.

Appropriate tense
Only partial control of the past tense was evident. A common feature was a tendency to lapse into the present instead of the past tense when describing the day. There was evidence of the correct use of the past continuous in some samples.

Adverbs/prepositional phrases
These were used quite often and with considerable variety.

Punctuation
A common thread throughout was the inappropriate use of capital letters and full stops. Some students had all their work capitalised throughout, while others had very few capital letters or full stops. When there was evidence of full stops, full stops were not always followed by a capital letter. In some cases, however, full stops were used instead of commas and vice versa. A feature was the use of a capital letter halfway through sentences and at the start of new lines.

Spelling
In some samples there were few spelling errors, but generally there were problems with phoneme discrimination and with the English grapho-phonics system. For example, a common error was the confusion between p and b as in boor for poor. There was also poor letter formation, which made spelling unclear. The letters e and i were often omitted.

Other comments or constructions of interest
Many of the students tried to express complex ideas or situations in their writing so there was a great opportunity for a lack of clarity and for making errors. There did not seem to be any use of avoidance strategies.

Sample constructions of interest
1 On the middle of last June, I arrived Australia for the first time, I was very excite and worry, because of many things. first I was alone and with very boor English, second I was carrning with me over load bages. third, I don’t have any idea about the Australian law particular in goods and materials that tolerated to enter or not.

2 TO BEGIN WITH MY ENJOYABLE DAY IN AUSTRALIA WHEN I ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA WITH MY FAMILY WE WERE RECEIVED PEACFULLY AT THE PERTH AIRPORT BY CATHOLIC MMIGAREN CANTRE AND THEY TOOK US TO RECEPTION AND THY GIVE US ACOMMIDATION.
In the teachers’ reflections and observations of their students’ writing work during the ten-week term, all five teachers noted that the Horn of Africa students in their class had difficulty with punctuation, particularly with the use of the comma, full stop and the rules of capitalisation. The teachers also noted that many of the students had difficulty with spelling and used a script that was hard to read. The analysis of the writing samples also revealed that these students had difficulty with paragraphing, punctuation and spelling when writing their recount. They also had only partial control of the past tense and lapsed into the present, which might parallel the so-called ‘historical present’, a feature of oral uses of language. The students also had writing strengths which might be related to their higher oracy skills. For example, their use of referencing pronouns and articles, vocabulary and noun groups was quite good.

A review of the client summary lists (CSL), the literature on why students have difficulty learning writing and the students’ verbal report and interview on their writing sample (SVR/I) yielded a list of the possible reasons why these students have difficulty with writing, which is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Reasons for difficulty with writing

- Interrupted education (SVR/I)
- Sporadic/informal EFL learning (some in refugee camps) with gaps in their learning of up to 11 years (SVR/I)
- A grammar rather than writing focus in their English study in their homeland (SVR/I)
- Oral rather than written focus in their use of their first language and other languages including English (SVR/I)
- Writing is often the last language skill to be acquired, so these students might be at their beginning stages of writing
- Trauma, psychological barriers, and thus a lack of concentration (SVR/I)
- Lack of awareness of differences between spoken/written discourse; learners write as they speak (Hammond 1990: 43)

As noted above, a list of teaching strategies that ‘worked’ for all five teachers was compiled. Convergent strategies, that is strategies that all five teachers trialled, and which all five rated as successful, are indicated with an asterisk (*) in Table 6. It should be noted that not all of the strategies compiled from the literature review were trialled by all five teacher participants due to the number of strategies. In the course of the ten-week study, teachers selected strategies based on their students’ most pressing and immediate needs. Thus, strategies with no asterisk warrant trialling in future research.
The teachers all asserted that time spent on pre-writing activities was time very well spent. They also found that a faithful following of the ‘teaching-learning cycle’ (Burns 1991: 209–10) including modelling, joint construction and independent construction with plenty of time given to oral work related to the writing yielded positive writing outcomes. The teachers also emphasised the success of writing activities that included a visual, oral or hands-on component, for example, writing on a post card, watching a short video clip on a city before doing a report on a city or sequencing cut-out sentences and paragraphs from a text of a certain genre. The teachers also noted that whole-class and group work was greatly preferred to individual work.

While the use of model texts of the same genre and model paragraphs and sentences was found to be effective, teachers said that students needed to understand that the use of models was not ‘cheating’ and whole-class practice of how to use the models when the students were using their own information was vital.

The teachers found that mini-conferences with each student were very effective in finding out why the students were writing what they were writing
and in helping them improve their writing. The teachers also found the students were not successful in using correction keys. That is they were not able to correct the errors in their writing using the keys. The five teachers noted the students’ preference for whole-class error correction of typical errors with the use of overhead transparencies. This was seen to be enjoyed by the students and was found to be beneficial as the students were then able to correct similar errors in their own writing with some degree of success.

The interviews and verbal reports of 12 of the 25 students revealed students’ prior learning experiences and some insights about their writing process and their learning of writing. It was found that the students had varying prior learning experiences in their study of English. Nine of the students, one from Somalia, four from Ethiopia and four from Sudan, said they had studied English in middle and high school (years 7–12) for 45 minutes to one hour per day but there was then a gap in their study of up to five years due to time spent in refugee camps. Very few of these students studied English in the refugee camps. One of these students said he had not studied English since 1989. All of the nine said their study of writing consisted of grammar exercises.

The other three students, one from Ethiopia, one from Sudan and one from Eritrea, said that they had used English as a medium of study for all of their subjects in high school, and therefore had often written essays and reports in English. The Ethiopian student mentioned learning how to structure compositions and letters in Amharic, his first language, and English based on a ‘diamond’ structure of organisation. The student from Eritrea, who had trained in journalism, said that in university he did all his research and research-writing in English. He thought Arabic written discourse was similar to English in organisation, but that when writing in English a stricter following of the generic structure was required. He commented that Eastern writing was ‘more spirit, moral and feeling’ while writing from the West was more ‘material’. He said when he wrote he tried to write so that people could tell it was his writing and no one else’s.

Eight of the students said that they planned in their head what to write before writing, while the four other students said they just wrote down ideas as they thought of them. Several of the students said that for the assessment task they wanted to write down as much as possible so they did not want to spend too much time on planning. There were varying responses to the question on how they decide when to end a sentence and start a new one. Two said they ended sentences when they took a breath. One said he ended a sentence when he stopped to think. Four of the students related ending sentences to the pauses they took when speaking. One student said ‘it’s an inside feeling like when speaking’. Another student said he used a full stop when he was going to write about another idea, and a comma when he was giving more
information. Interestingly enough, when the students read their writing sample aloud at the end of the interview, all but one student was able to add full stops to their writing sample with considerable accuracy.

When reading aloud, the students were also able to correct some of their errors, including errors in word choice, tense, prepositions, capitalisation, spelling and paragraphing. One student crossed out a sentence in his writing sample because he noticed it was a repetition of an idea. Another student was able to provide missing information. When asked why there seemed to be some words missing, he said that while he was writing, he started thinking about problems in his homeland, so had been distracted from his writing.

When the students were asked why they were able to correct some of their errors, many of them said it was because they had learned about that particular feature in their class that term. As one student put it, ‘Oh, now I know about ‘if sentences’. In this case, the correction was not appropriate. Another student changed a word in a phrase from ‘hire a house’ to ‘rent a house’ because he said, ‘it sounds better now’. Several of the students said that they had been spending a lot of time learning how to write in class, and that they had learned a lot about how to write in the term. They also believed their writing had improved in the ten weeks since they had done the writing task at the end of the previous term. As one student said: ‘My teacher is really concentrating on writing’, so this student thought her writing had improved considerably because of this.

**Conclusion**

While the findings of this study are not generalisable to all students from the Horn of Africa and to all teachers teaching students from the Horn of Africa, the study does give an emerging picture of these students as learners and writers, and of some teaching strategies that can enhance their learning of writing.

‘Many problems faced by our students stem not so much from the syntactic difficulties of the English language itself, as from the difficulty creating meaning in the writing task that has been set’ (Taylor 1986: 145). In this study, the teachers found they could help their students from the Horn of Africa to make meaning through written discourse and to make meaning in their own writing. They found that explicit instruction and explanation of activities and assessment tasks were required to develop shared understandings of the classroom, classroom practices and tasks, and that these enabled the learners to complete writing tasks successfully. Teachers agreed that it was important to do a range of whole-class and group oral activities at the pre-writing stage to prepare the students for the writing task. Mini-conferences with students proved to be both an effective and efficient method of discovering individual students’ learning and writing needs and in helping students improve their writing, and they were considered to be an essential teaching strategy for these learners. As
the students were able to revise their writing while reading aloud, this is a strategy that could be included in mini-conferencing. Spending class time on revision of writing was considered a very worthwhile activity.

It was evident from this study that these students were learning and were making progress with their writing. Their writing had characteristic strengths, for example, good use of conjunctive links and vocabulary, as well as characteristic weaknesses, including lack of paragraphing and appropriate punctuation. Further study is required to trial strategies which can address these writing weaknesses and enhance the development of fundamental writing skills among these students.

The study also raised issues that I have yet to resolve. In conducting this research and reporting on the findings of the research, there were inherent difficulties in considering this diverse group of individuals with their unique life and learning experiences, and strategies and English proficiency as a discrete group.

There is also the issue of whether the compulsory written assessments used for the Certificates in Spoken and Written English are appropriate. A teacher at the AMEP conference in 2001 suggested that the CSWE could be construed as ‘a kind of imperialism’ imposed on students. The requirements of the compulsory writing competencies could be disadvantaging these students and discouraging them from pursuing their educational and vocational aspirations.

NOTES
1 The ISLPR is a set of sub-scales for speaking, listening, reading and writing which describes language as used by learners in real life (Wylie and Ingram 1999).

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