

Review Article

Using Counselling Approaches to Develop the Writing Skills of Non-Native Adult Speakers of English

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Article History

Received: 17.11.2021

Accepted: 21.12.2021

Published: 30.12.2021

Journal homepage:

<https://www.easpublisher.com>

Quick Response Code



Abstract: Writing is undoubtedly the most difficult skill to master by non-native adult speakers of English. The process of learning to write, by itself, involves invariably knowing how to string words and phrases together to form sentences that make sense and meaning to the reader. Other than the other modalities of learning in a literacy course, the single most complex component of a literacy course for any adult learner is learning the rudimentary forms of writing before embarking on more complex writing forms which may take much time, effort and practice to master over a fairly long time. **Aim of Qualitative Study:** To explore how some counselling approaches could be used as an alternative to hone writing skills from a basic to a more advanced level for NNASE in a classroom-setting. Writing activities need not be confined to psychological issues alone but can be expanded or extended to include any other matter or topic too without any restriction or parameters for greater autonomy and dynamism of the processes.

Keywords: NNASE, counselling, narrative, expressive, cognitive, behavioural, therapy, journal, modalities.

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INTRODUCTION

What makes one think that one could master writing skills within a few months of learning in a language literacy course?

It generally takes almost 6 years of primary schooling to be quite proficient in the use of a language to communicate with others well in the present system of education the world over. It would take another 4-6 years (up to pre-university level) to write like a scholar even and to attempt to write thousands of words thesis or dissertations for degree and post graduate level studies later in university. Mastering language skills depends very much on one's own use of it through life and in circumstances that allow its use; for example, home, school, community, society, etc and how much one is fully able to utilise its various forms to achieve desired results as effectively and efficiently as possible.

It is foolhardy indeed to even think that is possible to write well immediately or after a short stint at learning how to write until one has learnt the other modalities of language; it is relatively easier to learn to listen, speak and read. Writing skill is the ultimate stage in learning a language to be proficient in it, otherwise one can only be fluent in speech, understand and interpret listening to speeches and reading to stay quite literate to communicate with others without much

problem and effortlessly. However, when one has mastered the writing skill, then the sky is the limit as to what one can do to communicate at a much higher level and more effectively and efficiently than using the other three language modalities combined. To be able to write opens up a great vista for one to communicate even more and better and gives the writer a passport of sorts to greater freedom and expertise in language use overall.

Cautionary note

For learners who have very basic language skills like the NNASE, the mode of learning would prudently be through lots of examples with controlled and guided writing activities starting from words and phrases commonly used to string together sentences and not make them anxious and hopeless in their attempts to start writing. For the higher-level language learners, the counselling approaches mentioned would not be much of a problem but in fact give them more leverage to start at a higher level of expressing to pen their thoughts down on paper or key into a computer program too.

In this generalised qualitative study, I intend to explore how some counselling approaches could be used to hone writing skills from a basic stage to a more advanced level for NNASE over a shorter period of time compared to learning to write in a formal classroom setting with a formal run of the mill language

syllabus. When combined with a language class syllabus at any level, counselling approaches could aid learning how to write even more and put some fun in the learning process too to make it more meaningful and useful for the NNASE.

Counselling approaches most favoured for writing

1. Narrative Therapy

Narrating an experience is as simple as writing a story for others to read. From the time we grew up as kids in kindergarten and primary school we have been fascinated by fairy tales like Aesop’s fables, among others, that tell us stories about people’s experiences. We were brought into fantasy worlds and we had fun even dreaming we were part of the characters portrayed in them. Adult learners are no different actually as they also like to relive their childhood at times and fantasise the possibilities even as they grow old. When grouped together or even in conversations with each other, adult learners could be seen enquiring and sharing about each other’s health, hobbies, interests and experiences almost always in a casual and carefree manner. This is usually the norm in any adult education setting and they are self-directed, problem oriented, internally motivated, ready to learn and have life-experiences according to Malcolm Knowles (1975).



Diagram 1

Adult learners could be facilitated to learn to express and write simply in a classroom environment by giving them the basic words and phrases in writing sentences after explaining them in bite-sized amounts in sample sentences – a sort of controlled and guided writing way used in primary schools in writing compositions. They could be coerced to ‘tell’ their stories through writing them as they want to express freely their thoughts and feelings more rather than just discuss them in a reflective way. Mind-mapping could be used as an added tool to help them plan their narrative better too. In the case of people who have experienced traumatic situations, they could do simple mind-maps like the one below for discussions in groups or as a class before embarking on writing assignments later:

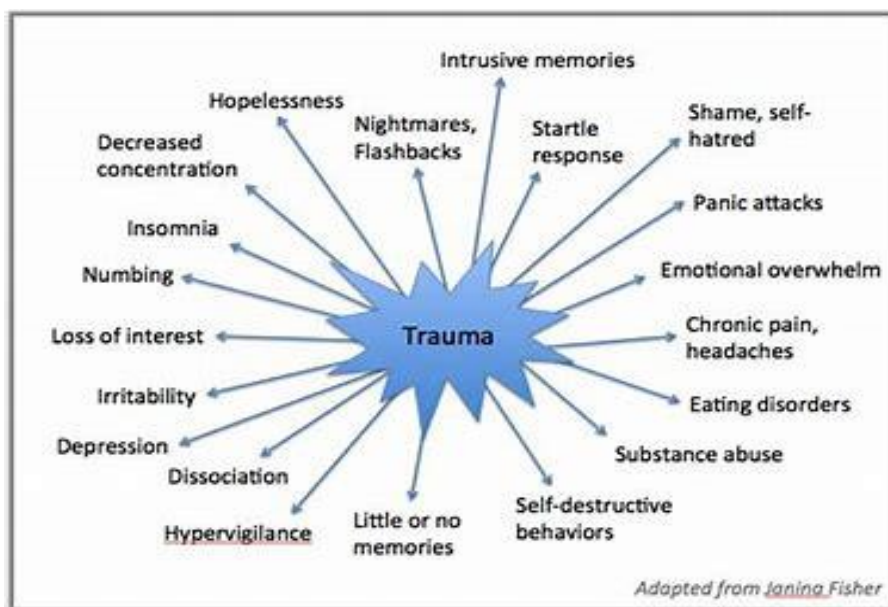


Diagram 2

A sample narrative could be shown and mulled over for adult learners to read silently, listen to and even read out aloud to get used to a narrative before embarking on sharing their experiences in a counselling situation or even as learners in a language classroom. The narrative could be objective as well as subjective in

nature and learners could start by writing a few sentences or paragraphs to be more confident in developing their narratives even more later as homework or in project work in class over time without forcing them or being judgemental about their write-up in any way related to spelling or grammar initially. This

is to give them the confidence to write and keep on writing and it could be therapeutic also in getting them to be focused on the writing forgetting their problems or stressors of life. Alternatively, they could use a trauma tree to discuss and write about problems at every stage of their lives as follows too:

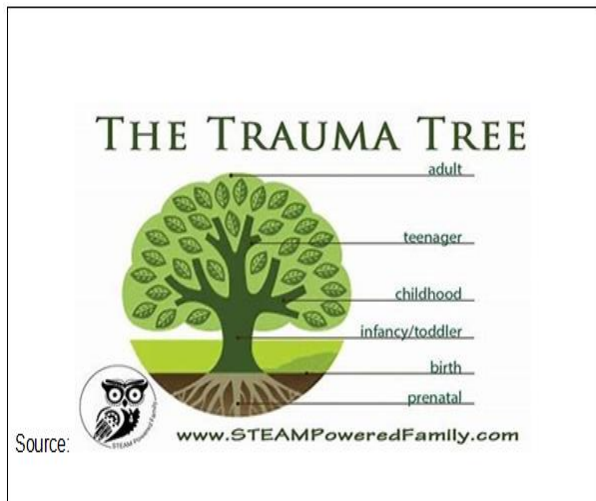


Diagram 3

2. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Counselling a client need not be just talk and more talk alone. It could also be done through writing and reflection of the writing before embarking on the talk sessions to fully understand the present situation viz a viz the actions taken and to be taken to resolve issues that are problematic or otherwise. CBT is a form of reflective expression of the antecedents being presented by the adult learner of some previous incidents that made the person behave or react later. The behaviour or reactions are interesting fragments of information for a person to face problems or deal with personal issues later which could be exacerbated by not addressing them earlier to solve them or nip them in the bud.

In the classroom, adult learners could be asked to write a journal of events over time in a diary or a note book. Any thoughts or actions could be written down for a period of time, for example, a week, before they examine the reactions to their thoughts or actions as objectively as possible; even rating on a scale of 10 their feelings before and after their thoughts or actions. An example is given below:

Thought Diary for CBT

Instructions:

1. Keep a note of when you feel any of the following: anxiety, fear, hurt, anger, shame, guilt, depression in the **FEELINGS** column. Rate how strongly you experience the feeling on a scale of 0% (low) to 10% (high).
2. Note what you were doing at the time in the **SITUATION** column.
3. Think about what you were saying to yourself about the situation and identify any unhelpful thoughts. Write these into the **THOUGHTS** column.
4. Try to generate more helpful, realistic and supportive thoughts in the **ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS** column. Helpful thoughts tend to a) promote acceptance of self, others and the world. b) state preferences, wishes or wants rather than making **absolute demands** like 'should, ought or must.'
5. Practise thinking these new **ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS** next time you are in, or entering a similar situation.
6. **MONITOR** what **NEW FEELINGS** you experience and rate these on a scale of 0% - 10%. More helpful feelings can include: annoyance, concern, regret, sadness, remorse, etc.

DAY	SITUATION What were you doing?	THOUGHTS Anxious, Negative, Pessimistic	FEELINGS 0 (low) - 10 (high)	ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS Helpful Thoughts	NEW FEELINGS 0 (low) - 10 (high)
Monday	We split up and my life is a complete mess.	I am vulnerable. No one will ever love me.	I feel so alone. (7/10)	I have a lot of people who love and support me.	I am loved and cared for (8/10)
Tuesday	I got a bad grade on my midterm.	I am stupid and will continue to fail.	I feel disappointed (9/10)	I can do better next time, this is just one grade.	I feel motivated (5/10)
Wednesday	I was on the bus and a man looked at me.	Everyone is judging me. I am indecisive.	I feel insecure (10/10)	People are more concerned with themselves than my appearance. People aren't judging my looks.	I feel comfortable (3/10)
Thursday	I dropped my books in the hallway.	I am so clumsy and awkward. Everyone is looking at me.	I feel embarrassed (7/10)	Everyone drops things, I am human.	I feel accepted (3/10)
Friday	I have a paper due that I haven't started.	I will never finish on time!	I feel anxious (10/10)	I can do this if I set my mind to it.	I feel determined (8/10)
Saturday	I tried to get dressed and looked how I looked.	I am ugly and everyone at the party will judge me.	I feel depressed (5/10)	I am my own worst critic.	I feel neutral (5/10)
Sunday	I slept in past noon.	I am lazy.	I feel guilty (6/10)	Everyone needs to rest sometimes.	I forgive myself (3/10)

<https://ediinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Filled-out-CBT-Thought-Diary-e1479396862813-1024x713.png>

Diagram-4

A journal of the events or problems and their solutions could also be kept thus for self-reflections and aiding the thinking process more:

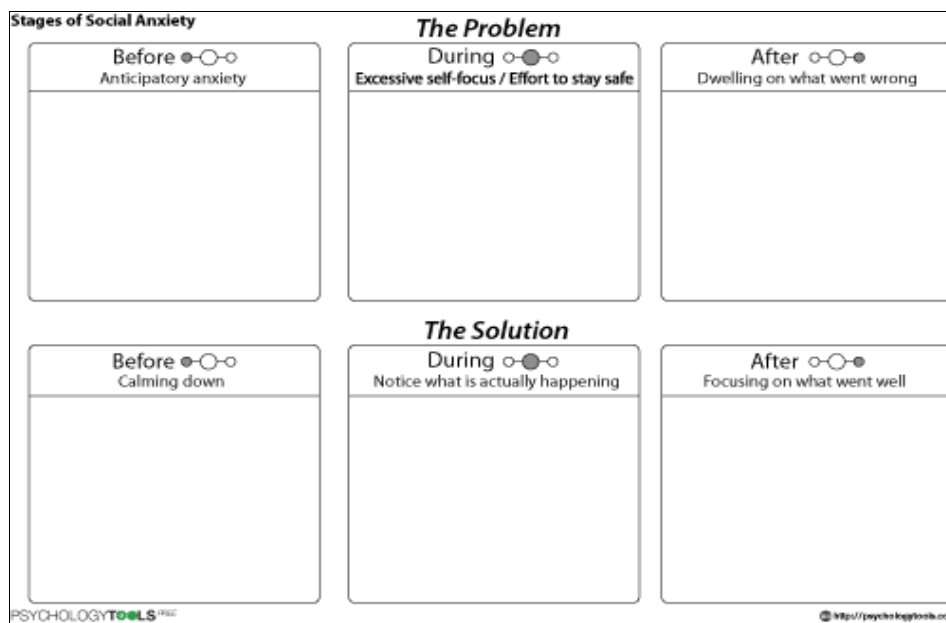


Diagram 4

CONCLUSION

Counselling approaches are quite versatile and can be used in various settings in education and teaching at all stages of learning even. Learning English using any modalities of learning, could thus use counselling approaches too and create a different and novel way at all stages in any setting in public or private educational institutions. Further research and practice will be done shortly to ascertain the practical use of counselling approaches to teach adults to learn to write better and more effectively.

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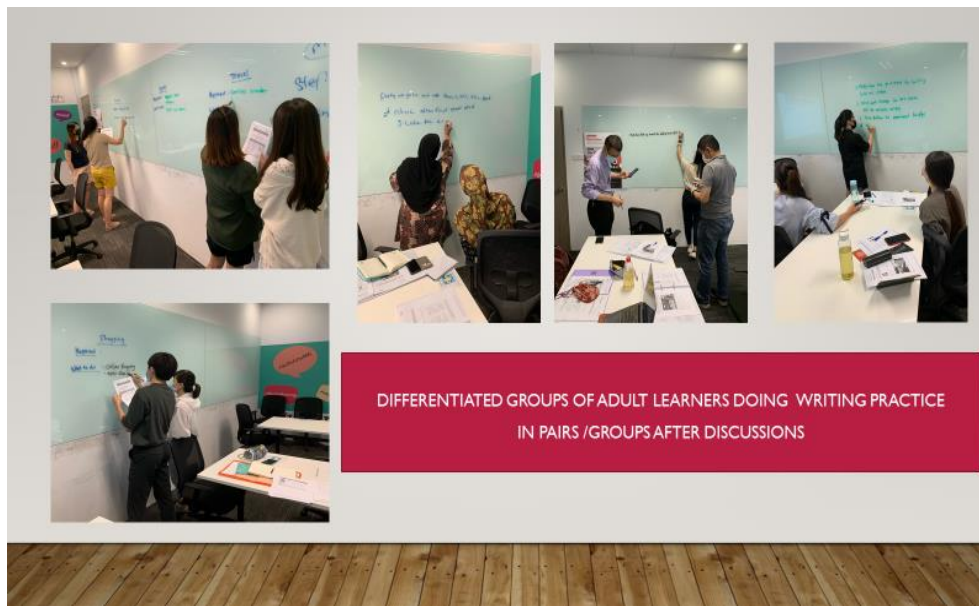
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Appendices





Cite This Article: Siva Mahendran (2021). Using Counselling Approaches To Develop the Writing Skills of Non-Native Adult Speakers of English. *East African Scholars J Edu Humanit Lit*, 4(12), 472-476.