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# Adults learning to write: exploring alternatives to functional writing

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**2011-10-04**
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10478

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### 3.5 Data collection

Data collected included:

- writing done in class;
- writing done at home;
- final interviews;
- a questionnaire;
- my observations of student responses and behaviour during classes.

#### 3.5.1 Triangulation of data

Data triangulation has been described as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point." (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, quoted in Freeman 1996:146). Data may be triangulated in a number of ways:

- Data triangulation, which makes use of several sources of data.
- Methodological triangulation uses multiple ways to collect the data.
- Theoretical triangulation, which uses more than one perspective to analyse the data.

(Denzin, 1978, quoted in Freeman ,1996)

Freeman also adds a further idea, that of triangulation in time, i.e. collecting the same form of data over a given time period.

In this project, data was triangulated in the following ways:

a. writing done under differing circumstances was collected: (writing done alone, at home, and writing done in class, with initial motivation and discussion, in company);

b. writing done over a period of months was collected;

c. students' responses were obtained, in the following ways:

i. I kept records of my observations of learners' reactions and responses during classes;
ii. I conducted an interview with the students at the end of the intervention;
iii. Students wrote answers to a questionnaire, at the end of the intervention, on their own, at home.

d. The data were examined from the perspectives of:

i. learners' engagement with the writing intervention;
ii. writing content;
iii. fluency and accuracy of writing.

### 3.6 Data analysis

I have chosen to make use of what Freeman (1996) has described as a 'grounded approach', in which the researcher evolves her analysis and understanding of the data as it is collected, rather than imposing a priori categories on the data. In a grounded analysis, meanings, connections and relationships surface as the data is examined.

### 3.7 Limitations of the research project

The small size of the group of students means that this study is highly specific. Although I was able to gather detailed data from each learner, generalisations cannot be made on the basis of this study.

# CHAPTER 4

# PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter I present and analyse data from the following sources:

- Writing done at home: the journals
- Observations made during class time
- Writing done in class
- The questionnaire
- The final interview

## 4.1 Journal writing

As described in Chapter 3, the students wrote in their journals on a daily basis (or attempted to) and recorded events, thoughts and feelings in them. They were willing to make the effort to do so and continued to write regularly in them throughout the intervention, even though they sometimes found it difficult to 'dig for the news', in Lettie's words.

Both women expressed reservations when I told them that I would not be correcting their journal writing despite my explanation that this was personal writing. The teacher, they felt, should correct the mistakes.

I will present extracts from the writing as it was done, without alteration to the spelling, punctuation or word order. Each entry is dated, by day and month.

### 4.1.1 Examples from Lettie's journal

The bulk of the writing collected from Lettie came from her journal, in which she wrote regularly. The length of the entries did not increase noticeably over the months that she wrote. Rather, the length was related to having something to say. There were two- and three-line entries throughout this time period. But there were longer entries too, eight or nine lines when she had more to express and one long entry of twenty-one lines when she had something very important to communicate.

She commented on writing in the journal a number of times during the course of doing so, frequently expressing her irritation:

*19.4.*
*My day on Monday, I start the same things again, which I cannot write that because is the same thing every day, by the way I think is boring to write about all the time. But is very nice to write different way.*

*26.4*
*I had nothing to say just do my work as I do all the time.*

*29.7*
*Same things that happen everyday I think I really get bored about this because I must be honestly there's some of the things you cannot write in this diary, if you had brain to think carefully. Because there some day you want to write in piece of paper.*

*1.8*
*Same things that is happening again as usually, write the same thing every day. Seems like is coming to the end now. I cannot do this every day.*

*9.8*
*I am writing my diary I know I can not write my diary everyday but I sit down and write what happen in my week and I started to like my diary again. And it help because that can show me how quickly I can write.*

*21.8*
*I write my diary again, but today it make me sick, "really sick". Because sometimes you feel you don't know what to write and you must write. For sure today this diary really get to my nerves. But I push myself to write it because this is to help me nobody else.*

*2.9*
*I am really getting tired about writing this I had nothing to say any more.*

*3.9*
*I have nothing to say but keep on writing as I do not know what to say.*

*5.9*
*Another day to dig up the comment; What I'm going to get?.....I like my diary but sometimes I fight with my diary, because someday I don't know what to said. "Then I come to be horrible", that motion you know.*

*14.10*
*I really think from now on I will start to talk about the story that I see in the T.V. or radio because some of the day I have nothing to speak about.*

*16.10*
*It is a beautiful day today, but the samethings happening all the time. I find I am very cross to write the diary today I have nothing to speak about but I push myself to have something to say.*

*21.10*
*This is what I mean I'm starting all over again with my days, What? could I write I'm really getting cross to write a diary.*

*8.11*
*I will keep writing my diary and think about stories that is in the books and write about it. That is only way I could learn the spelling and read, because that is my future not my teacher she's there to help me, if I play with that time is my problem not the teacher. She is finish to learn so that is up to me to choose what I need.*

Despite the annoyance that Lettie expressed about this writing task, there were times when she valued the journal as a place to express herself. After one class

in October, I took Lettie's journal home with me to read and only returned it to her a few days later. When I gave it to her, she told me that she had been 'quite cross' not to have it: her daughter had been accepted at a nearby high school and she had wanted to record this. The journal had become something that she wanted to use, for certain purposes, at least.

Lettie frequently recounted what had been happening, often adding a comment about her feelings or the weather:

*23.4*
*Wednesday afternoon I watch the soccer at the school field, it was very nice for the change.*

*27.4*
*Saturday: Was holiday we went to the sowing lesson but the lady that opening the place did not arrive, but because we walk and look around the shop was nice.*

*10.7*
*I did not have lots to do but I am back to work again and is very nice to be back, starting all over again and what a day. Joburg is cold is not like Pretoria is warmer in Pretoria.*

*14.7*
*We had a church all night, there we lots of people but was a very sad funeral. The minister stop the church about 5 a.m. and every ones started to wash their selves and they gave us some tea. We talk there we some of her relative come from the place called Umlazi the were very friendly people make you fill you at home. The funeral took place about 2 pm. until 3. pm and we left the about 4.pm. I get home about 10. p.m.*

*28.9*
*I got up and do what I wanted to do, then I went to school. "It was a fun day" and was a very nice day I enjoyed to work in there, I didn't see a lots of things that happend because I was so busy.*

*29.9*
*I wen't to church as usually, and it was very nice day, I enjoyed that. And to walk that long way and bumped to the people you know is great.*

Lettie used her journal to express opinions:

*25.4*
(on Mark Shuttleworth:)
*I think is very nice to see and think in our countries we have clever man like him. But to think is going to be up at the "Space" for ten days is unbelievable, but I said good luck for him.*

*1.6*
*but the sad thing is about Hansie, if he knew what was going to happen he had not asked the lift, if he wait for the next flight. But because you can't guess what is going to happen. I am sorry Hansie.*

*12.6*
*Bafana bafana lost the game but they play a very good game. I take my hat off for bafana-bafana they play a good game.*

*18.7*
*We had nice day today and was the birthday of Mr Mandela he's Eighty Four years old. And he's twelve years been release in jail, I hope he can live for hundred years.*

Lettie sometimes offered opinions on the content of her own writing:

*13.6*
*...the world cup steal carry on but is too much soccer in my diary I'm going to stop writing about it.*

(After describing the multiple frustrations of dealing with bureaucracy)

*6.7*
*I think I been talking about this for long time is boring now. I am not going to talk about that any more.*

Lettie often wrote about the adult classes and her own learning:

*26.7*
*..but I'm still saying I love my classes I improved a lot in my adult classes but I can said there's no organize in that school.*

*1.8*
*I went to the adult's classes. Donald gave me my certificate. I was grateful, I can not express myself how excited I was.*

*8.8*
*From now on I have lots to learn, read and write, If you come to my cottage you go to find this pile of books, on the table you can never believe this.*

*15.8*
*My day to do the washing, iron and get ready to go to my classes. I am looking forward to go in my classes because of writing a test..... I'm very excited and happy.*

*24.8*
*I didn't go anywhere, I clean up my cottage.... Then after that I took out my books and read and look for the words in the dictionary.*

*7.9*
*I wake up and didn't feel like going anywhere, I sat and look for the spelling and read and write what ever I feel like to read, it was a cold day but I felt very happy.*

*13.9*
*I went to adult's classes today.... I am very cross because I couldn't write the spelling of University, instead I writed this way (Yunivisity); wrong.*

*19.9*
*My day today, I am very happy is my day of going to adult classes. I always feel very happy when is Thursday.*

*3.10*
*Jenny teach me about the present tents and past tents. I learnt that when I started the school but it was very nice to revise them again.*

*10.10*
*In the afternoon I went to adult classes it was nice. Jenny teach us about verbs. Base and the stem, past tense and present tense and the future tense. From now on I always think when I write and speak a lots to everybody.*

*17.10*
*In the afternoon I went to the adult classes it was nice. I learnt a lots of words with Jenny she is a good teacher I like her.*

Lettie was preparing to write the ABET examination and she often wrote about it:

*6.9*
*On Thursday Donald fill up the form for us to write an exam. I hope to do better not like my test.*

*26.9*
*I get up and thinking is school today, I wonder what we going to do today. I hope we going to learn, we had six weeks from today and we are going to write an exam, I hope we learn something that is going to help us when we writing our exam. I hope and praying to God about that.*

*27.8*
*...I just don't want anythings to disappoint me.*

*1.10*
*We only have five weeks and we going to write an exam, but I'm looking forward for it, because mourning is not go to help me. Only thing I must do is to push myself and learn a spelling and write little bit quick when I writing at home.*

*24.10*
*I went to classes. Jenny said Lettie you are going to write your exam on the five and six November, I didn't know I'm going to write two exam. but I accept that I know I have not see how is the other paper look like.*

*31.10*
*Donald came to our group and tell us when I was going to write and told me I wasin going to write to exams. That was like a big stone been move on my shoulder. Because I was very upset about the other paper.*

*5.11*
*Today is a bit shilly but I didn't fill it because I am boilling myself thinking about an exam, I kept telling myself to come down because if you scared then you forgot everythings, and I try my best I can.*

Lettie also wrote in class about her feelings when she passed her previous examination. I had asked the students to write about a happy memory. Lettie wrote:

*When Donald tells me I passed my exam I felt very happy because I know what had happened when we were supposed to write, something that happen I can't said, to know I had passed my exam was a very very big things to me, even today I am still feeling very excited. I will never forget the day April 25-2002, I thank God for that.*

Lettie frequently commented briefly on how she was feeling that day:

*18.4*
*When I get up today I was very happy.*

*19.4*
*...in the afternoon I went to my sewing lesson, it was very excited day for me because I learn to measure myself.....*
*Then on Sunday I went to church, it was very nice I enjoy the day.*

*(May)*
*Wednesday: it was the workers day, lots of people there were not working. I am not happy about this holiday because I know was called Ascension Day.*

She was also able to explore her feelings in depth. She described, in a moving way, events and her responses to them when her son-in-law was killed:

*18.5*
*Saturday morning I had a phone call coming to my daughter crying. they shot her husband, I ask where is he now, she said in the mortuary he's died. I didn't know if I'm still sleeping or awake, I felt like I am somewhere, you know? I mean somewhere which I did now know where too. Gregory take me to the C. station to caught a train, I was there about 12 o' clock, she's also staying at Winterveld.*

*19.5*
*I came back very late on Sunday, the family were coming to say sorry. A different church came and his choir came and sing the song for us it was very sad, they have three children fourteen and eleven and one years, one boy and two girls. That is my grandchildren, going to grow with no father because of the stupid guns everywhere. I hate this chriminal, but is all I can said "please God" help us in this world, people have knolegde of killing no more hope for other people.*

*20.5*
*I was feeling like something, I don't know I am going or coming, but I just kept saying please God. help me to think positive not nagative. I know we are going to go in this world in different way. but it was a big shock for me.*

*21.5*
*I am waiting for them to tell if is going to be a funeral on Saturday. It is very awful to think about it, but can't run away I must accept that.*

*22.5*
*On Friday I did not work, I left early in the morning to be with my daughter. Saturday: I was there and we had lorts to do. Sunday was a funeral, we are lots of people because we had the church all night. I am sorry there's lots to say but I don't (unclear) to write.*
*Tuesday: I get up about 5 o' clock and write my diary but it was still not (unclear) to write my comment. Why? I don't know, what you mean you don't know? (Ask) me if you want to know that, because it is very funny to writed down.*
*Today is Wednesday: It was a cold day but not that bad. I started to write diary about half past five but it was not easy again. My mind was very interrupted and even more about something I won't even tell, I learnt something today and how can I stop this, this is very funny, I like to ignore but still very hard for me to do that. What is in my mind is that last year May 25-05-2001 my sister was shot, then this year same date my son-in-law he was also shot, and his funeral was the same weekend 26-05-2002. Then I cannot attend the sportsday, at school for two years things happened at the same time, but life must carry on mourning won't help. There is no need to (unclear) and mourn because the person you think is good died, because God also need good people too come and stay with them.*

*Today is Thursday nothing much happen I can just say time fly. and I need to hold on it. learn movating (motivating?) then I can movate other people when they have problem because sometimes you can hear things wrong.*

Lettie also wrote in detail about the frustrations of sorting out her house plans and dealing with bureaucracy:

*27.6*
*All this week I try to ask if I can buy this place it can be mine name, first I went to my stand then he said no I cannot buy the stand, I went to the office they also said no. They said the government bought this place and they go to build the house and move us in that house, and when they move us in this place they go to build the house in here other people can come in. Then if you think about that is going to take a years to do that. I dicide to find another place. Then I find a place in extention ten so I am going to move in this place because if you think about building a house is like you wasting your money there. I went to the office and they gave me my number of my place from now on is up to me what I'm going to do.*

*28.6*
*I am very disappoynted today, things are very mixup and seems like is to much because I do not want to put foundation and build but now is very easy if I had somebody that can stay in the other place until we finish to build. All I do in this week is up and down but I know is going to come to the end. I went to the office they called that city of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. for the phoment.*

*1.7*
*I wake up very early today to go and clean up where I am going to put my shark and when I get there they said I must come back on Wednesday because that place is not a right place. now we must waite again for Wednesday so I am waiting to go ther on Wednesday.*

*3.7*
*I started to go to Soshanguve as they sed I must come back today. when I get there the municipality people they go on strike they can't give the stand, now at least I ask for the phone number insteat of going there I can phone and find out if we can come or not.*

*4.7*
*I keep on praying, please God help me to find the stand at Soshanguve. I don't want to stay in this place anymore. I had that now is enough, there is too much guns in this place. They shooting the gun all night.*

*5.7*
*What a day today? little bit cold but every boday is happy and I phone Soshanguve, they still on strike. But some of them came and show the other man where we must build, in this place is not easy to find the place. You going to walk up and down befor you get your own place but I start that and I am not going to stop now, but to look for the place need to have about more weeks because they promise and you think you go to get there and you get to them and they tell you another story so you must be pansion. (patient)*

She concluded with,

*I think I been talking about this for long time is borring now. I am not going to talk about that anymore.*

Two months after I began this intervention, Lettie wrote a long communication to me in her journal. Although it was a journal entry, she wrote it in the form of a letter, signing her name at the end:

*Tuesday 18-06-2002. My motions*

*Comment. I write my exam on the 6 November 2001, they tell me on the 25 April 2002, they need an oral project and I done that the same day. I look in the paper they write to tell me I past my exam, they mark our paper and send back the results in the 14 December 2001. I can't beleave even today I'm still waiting for my certificate, 1999 and the year 2000 we never waite so long for our results, what is going on in that department? I can remember we waite two weeks then Donald gave us our certificate. They said we going to write our exam in June and is the end of June nobody tell us if we going to write or not, and the way we learning from now on we can never write the exam. We need some book for adult to learn or do the notes like Greg and Donald they use to do. I like to write my diary I learnt lots of spelling but we can not do that at home and in the classes in the exam is lots of tricky thing they ask us, and we need one teacher because we start to think we can't understand the other teacher, Is only two people there is know need for two people to teach, I am sorry if you go to hear this wrong. Is just to said I do not want people stop coming to our group which is happening allready they don't understand they don't get anywere. I'm still saying we need notes or adult book. We need to have home works and if the spelling is wrong the teacher must mark that and tell us if is wrong. We there to learn if is wrong or right, please help us we are confused and I don't want to live (leave). I like to attend adult classes I improved a lord in that Thursday classes.*

*Thanks*
*help ask*
*Lettie*

After reading this, I brought the matter up in class and we discussed it together. Lettie seemed relieved to bring her concerns into the open, and had probably found it easier to write about them than to speak directly.

Lettie's letter supports Vygotsky's idea, that: 'The teaching of writing should be organised in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something' (1978:117). Although I had not 'organised' this piece of writing, Lettie used her journal writing here for a real purpose: to communicate her dissatisfaction to me, in order to bring about change. The journal writing did not remain simply a class requirement. It was something that Lettie was able to put to use for her own purposes. She made use of literacy in the way that Staton describes it, as: '....communicative competence in *using* written language..... (which) involves..... actively expressing one's experiences and intentions in writing to accomplish personally meaningful goals' (1981, quoted in Street, 1984: 224).

### 4.1.2 Examples from Florence's journal

Florence was not as fluent in English as Lettie, and generally wrote less in her journal, although in class she wrote for the whole time allocated and sometimes continued after it was time to stop.

The length of her journal entries did not increase; if anything, the last few pages of her journal consisted of somewhat shorter entries, usually two or three lines each. Her early entries were usually two to four lines each. The journal writing was also sometimes interrupted by journeys home, a few days of illness or tiredness because of overtime and other work demands. Florence did try to catch up and would sometimes try to fill in a few (missed) days at a time. Journal writing did not seem to come readily to her and she often felt she had very little

to say. She did not usually explore her thoughts in detail, as Lettie did; feelings and events were often understated. However, when something out of the ordinary had happened, she wrote about it at more length:

*14.8*
*On the 2nd of September (date?) early in moning Monday. The two man come to the house when Father was come to the church when father open the do he see the two Black man with the gun they push him inside the house. that time I was outside to heng the washing.*

*One man come to me he say to me father calling you I didn't say nothing I go in, I saw Father siting on the chair, one man talk to father he asking money he say where is the money fathe tell them.*

*They take as to up in father office were Father put money in, they took all the money and wine for father for the Church. When they finish other man ties father hand at the back and they went with all the money.*

This was the longest entry in Florence's journal.

Florence also briefly described two other incidents:

*13.5*
*On (N.) road I see the two black man point the two ladys with a gun they highjacking the car for that ladys.*

*14.5*
*The man work with me he owing lot of people, the people coming in and out they looking him they talk very bad the make me scard.*

Florence also wrote about the repetitive nature of her job:

*30.4*
*Today I did not do so much I do always I do*

*6.5*
*Nothing so much I do always I do on Monday*

*24.6*
*Monday I do same thing I always doing every Monday*

*28.6*
*I didn't do nothing no happy no worries*

*8.7*
*Monday I didn't do nothing I do always I do*

*20.9*
*Today I do always I do every day after 3 o' clock I went to my piece job*

She commented about writing in her diary from this perspective:

*12.7*
*I like to write my diary but sometime I do not know what can I say because I do the same thing every day.*

*13.7*
*To do the diary is a good work because it's remind me some things I don't want to forget.*

Later, she apologised for not writing regularly:

*29.10*
*I am very sad because I forgot my diary because of my problem I forgot to writing*

Sometimes she resolved the problem of what to write by talking about the news on television, or books she was reading:

*I was read a book Jenny gave to me to read I was read about Margret from Tanzania making a nice pattern She make T-shirt*

*4.11*
*I read about Chameleon a Hare. God wanted to give message to the first people*

*5.11*
*I read about Arwe the Dragon it was the Arwe stayed away from the people Arwe is a wild animals*

Florence also recounted ordinary events, such as visits from friends, what she cooked, hospital visits and going to church. She mentioned her feelings without elaborating much:

*9.6*
*Sunday I went to the church I like church so much*

*1.7*
*I was back home it was very nice at home but I was upset but not so much because we was do the stone grave for my daughter*

*17.10*
*Thursday I was very cross because I didn't go to school other lady ask me to come and help her, her lady works for her she is sick*

*28.10*
*I went to x-ray doctor tell me I have no problem no cancer*
*I am very happy*

Her relationship to her mother was obliquely mentioned:

*22.4*
*Monday today I phone my sister, when I talk he I hear my mother coughing I feel bad when I hear her*

*11.10*
*I start to fix my mother's stuff because she going back home*
*She missing home so much*

*13.10*
*I was take my mother to the taxis she going home today I missing her I wish she come back to stay with me*

*1.11*
*On the 14th December I will go home I am so excited when I am going home to see my grandchildren and my mother*

Florence also wrote about the forthcoming ABET examination:

*31.7*
*I am happy when I'm going to write exam I want to try my best*

*4.8*
*I am pray day and night to pass my examination on December I like to talk good English and writing a good spelling I wich I succeed and all of us*

*5.8*
*I want to keep my certificate for my grandchildren to see what I was doing when I was at Johannesburg I was working.*

*15.8*
*I am happy because I pass my test I think on December I going to pass my examination*

*26.10*
*I am thinking about exem I couldn't sleep I keeping thinking all the time I woke up I never sleep after that*

Florence wrote the examination but did not comment on it in her journal. There were entries for that week but it may have been one of her 'catch up' times.

Florence wrote about literacy classes:

*23.7*
*I like when our teacher give us a home work*

*17.10*
*Thursday I was very cross because I didn't go to school*

*21.10*
*I phone Lettie what she was doing on Thursday because I didn't go to school. She tell me and she tell me what I must do.*

Florence sometimes wrote memories in her journal, possibly because we had been writing down memories in class:

*28.5*
*I remember when I was work for Mrs W.*
*I start in 1978 October my pay is R35 it was very hard to me*

*30.5*
*I was working 4 years Mrs W. she still pay me R35. I say to madem pleas mam that mony you pay me is not enogh, she say she going to pay me 45 I say still not good that time I was cros I say it's better when I look another job*

*31.5*
*Mrs W. she talk to Mr W. Master he say she must pay me R65 that day I was happy*

*21.6*
*In 1976 I was work in the flat next to Pick & Pay. One day I visit my aunt in Soweto it was Satday I saw the people muching in the street the children were also muching, they hit the cars pass and a lots of police. I didn't look nice everything happened I was scard*

Occasionally Florence used her journal for some planning:

*30.7*
*My grandchildren next year they going to grade 8. I think I must start to buy eunform I must start now then going be easy end of the year on January I want to pay school fees*

### 4.1.3 Comments on the use of journals in this writing intervention

Despite the complaints about the lack of anything to write about, Lettie's journal contained a wide range of subject matter. She narrated events, explored her feelings in some depth and grumbled about frustrations. She expressed opinions about a number of subjects, described articles she had read that made an impression on her and wrote about television programmes and her opinions of them. She wrote about the adult classes, her hopes and anxieties about her own learning and the forthcoming examination. She considered her own writing, described the experiences of writing in a daily journal and thought about strategies to extend the possible subject matter. She also used her journal as a way to communicate with me. She was able to make a much wider use of her journal writing than Florence was.

Florence did not take as easily to writing a journal. Her entries were shorter and less regularly written. Often she simply recounted, briefly, what she had done that day. Sometimes there were longer entries, such as the one about the church robbery. Like Lettie, she felt there was nothing to write about but the repetitive work she did every day. She mentioned her feelings but seldom elaborated much. She would also sometimes write about what she had seen on television, or what she had been reading, but would seldom offer an opinion or a response. Sometimes she would write about some memories from the past, perhaps because we had written about memories in class. Once she used the journal to begin planning for the future. Florence tended not to elaborate or explore details of her feelings or events in her journal but simply wrote them down. She seemed to find it far more difficult to write on her own than to write in class. The lack of 'scaffolding', or support from the teacher or classmates (Vygotsky, 1978, Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) is probably the most important reason for the difference between Florence's writing in class, done after discussion and

listening and the writing she did at home. On her own she seemed to struggle for things she could write about and she did not explore the events or her feelings in any depth, as Lettie was able to. She appeared to find journal writing a somewhat frustrating exercise. This contrasted with the way she wrote in class, which was often quite prolonged: she would sometimes write for up to half an hour, with little hesitation.

Personal journals have been in use for a long time in writing classes, in both first and second language contexts (Calkins: 1991; Staton: 1991). There are a number of reasons why I chose to use them:

- They allow for regular practice in writing;
- The emphasis is on communicating content rather than on correct form;
- They may allow for time to reflect on one's life. An extra message is carried: that my life, my thoughts and experiences, what I notice, are important (Calkins, 1991);
- Journals are self-generated and the student is on her own, writing what and how much she wishes to;
- The informal nature of the language used in journal writing is seen to be the sort of language we use to make meaning of the world (Britton, 1970; Emig, 1977).

One question that arises is: in view of the repetitive nature of much domestic work, is there value in asking domestic workers to keep a journal? Both women complained several times about the lack of something to say, and expressed frustrations and sometimes anger at the thought of writing down the 'boring' details of their work (and many people, even in a first language context, do not enjoy writing a journal every day.) However, each woman sometimes mentioned valuing the journal, Florence seeing it as an aid to memory, Lettie wanting to

record an important event in her journal. Both seemed to agree with the idea that regular practice in writing would improve their fluency. Both managed to keep writing for the length of the intervention, although Florence skipped a number of days when she was sick or anxious about a medical report. Lettie was able to respond creatively in her journal writing. Both took their journals home with them in July, when there was a two week break, and wrote quite extensively in them, using them to express frustrations, pleasures and sadness. For me as their teacher, the journals had value in providing a window into the lives of my students, which helped me to know them better.

Another possible difficulty with the idea of a journal for these learners is: for whom is the writing done, and for what reason? Writing in daily life generally has a clear purpose. A letter, a shopping list, a form to fill in, a telephone message or a record of one's expenses: in all these cases, whether the intended reader is oneself or someone else, the reason for writing (and reading) is obvious. Because I was reading the journals every week, I was an audience, sometimes clearly present while the writing was being done, as when Lettie wrote her letter to me. In another entry, she wrote, 'Ask me if you want to know that' (22.5) when she was struggling to express herself at the time of her son-in-law's death. Otherwise, the women themselves were the readers of their own writing, appearing to write with a fair amount of freedom to express themselves honestly.

Both women enjoyed reading published excerpts from other women's journals. They could identify with some of the issues written about and they gained ideas about what was possible and why one would want to write about one's life. They were also able to recognise features of the genre and identify the writing as 'journal writing', pointing out the use of the first person ('I'), the thoughts

and feelings described by the writer and the daily events of the life being written about.

Florence, as mentioned earlier, used her journal to write down memories from the past, such as the events in 1976 which she witnessed, or her experience of working for R35 a month for four years. She remembered how she confronted her employer, refused the inadequate increase offered and was successful in getting a more substantial increase to her wages. In this 'autobiographical act' (Brady, 1990) she remembered an occasion when she was able to counter her powerlessness, at a time when domestic workers had very little bargaining power. Perhaps this is also a piece of her history that she can show to her grandchildren, as well as the certificate she wants to show them.

Despite the difficulties the women experienced and the reservations they expressed, my impression is that there is value in using journals in this context. Perhaps I could have exploited the possibilities further, for example by inviting students to read some of their journal writing to each other in class. I could have extended the idea of 'remembering' which both had mentioned, by bringing in the idea of journals contributing to our knowledge of history, for example with excerpts from Anne Frank's diary. I could also have set some more directive 'tasks' to complete in the journal, such as writing a personal response to some of the reading they had done, in class or at home. The use of dialogue journals may have been helpful in providing motivation to write. I began writing comments in the journals but neither woman responded in writing and I did not persevere. In retrospect, it may have been helpful to provide more 'concrete' input, at least some of the time, for the writing they were doing at home, without support.

## 4.2 Writing done in class.

In this section I present texts that were written in class. I begin with students' feelings about writing at the start of the intervention, discuss their responses to classroom activities and then present and comment on their writing.

### 4.2.1 Students' initial feelings about writing

At the start of the intervention I asked students about their feelings about writing. For both women, their perception was that spelling is a very important part of writing. Lettie wrote the following:

*I like to write in English, but to write the spelling is very difficult, I won't mind to do the reading and writing, is very good but I get very cross sometimes when I know the word and I been writing that word about five times, and forget when I must write that in three day time, in my mind I always tell myself because I been writing that word so often I must know it but is not like I think sometimes. As I am writing now my opinion said take thinks easy don't rush you will get there slowlly.*

Florence wrote:

*I am very happy to my writing, I like to understand the spelling because sometime is very difficult to me to understand, to read propely the words. But I like tray hard.*

Both women had spent a number of years at school as children (Lettie until Std 3 (Grade 5) and Florence until Std 4 (Grade 6)) and had developed a framework of expectations of what schooling involves, from their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Bailey, 1996; Lortie, 1975, cited in Mendelowitz, 2000). Their experiences at adult school, while a great deal more interactive than school had been, did not contradict many of the assumptions they brought with them. Both women found spelling difficult and Lettie wrote about her frustration when she forgot how to spell a word she had spelt correctly on previous occasions.

Anxiety in writing is common among second language writers (Zamel, 1987; Tsui, 1996) and a major reason for this is concern for grammatical accuracy. A second-language writer does not only have to consider what to say, but to make use of linguistic resources which may not be fully mastered. When attention to form becomes the 'dominant and absorbing activity' (Emig, 1978: 62) it is not possible to use writing as a process of discovery.

### 4.2.2 Student responses to classroom writing experiences

Activities used in class and the rationale for using them, have been described in Chapter 3. In this section I briefly describe the students' responses to the different activities.

In class, discussion would always take place before the students began writing, so that they could work out their ideas by talking them through first. This idea is suggested by Michelson (1992), Calkins (1991) and many others who teach 'process writing.' For Lettie and Florence, listening to one another's ideas proved to be helpful in generating ideas of their own. When the discussion was lively it provided an impetus for writing. I joined in the discussions and wrote as well, both to extend the size of the class and the amount of input, and to remove my 'observer' status as teacher. Usually after talking, the women would start writing immediately and there would be few pauses for thinking. Sometimes a student would write for longer than the allotted time, as she still had more to say. After writing, we often read aloud what we had written and listened to one another's writing. I suggested that the students should not be unduly concerned about making mistakes and did not need to erase them, but they continued to erase mistakes frequently, especially Florence.

We began by discussing memories and then writing them down. The women listened intently to each other as they spoke and then wrote, without hesitation, for the allotted time. A memory from one person would remind the other of something she had experienced. Each could identify with the other as she described events from her life, especially difficult or amusing ones. Some of the written memories are presented on pages 81 and 83 (Lettie) and 87, 88 and 90 (Florence).

A list proved to be a genre in which both wrote easily. Making a list of excuses to explain why, for example, you were speeding, or didn't telephone your friend on her birthday, elicited a great deal of creative thinking and laughter as we listened to each other's excuses. On one occasion, we read out the lists we had made. After Florence heard what Lettie had written, she was inspired to write more on that topic. She ignored the next topic and continued writing her original list.

We discussed early literacy experiences, including stories they had heard as small children. I asked who had told them, when they had done so, and whether they themselves still tell these stories to their children and grandchildren. Both women then told a folk story. Each was willing to take up 'the role of knower, or entertainer or producer' (Toolan, 1988: 3) as the narrator and provided entertainment for her audience with enthusiasm. Lettie, in particular, exploited the dramatic potential inherent in the story. She made use of a number of 'performance features', such as direct speech, repetition, expressive sounds and sound effects and gestures (Wolfson, 1982, cited by Toolan, 1988). In the middle of her story she sang a short refrain, in Zulu. She used her face, her voice and her hands to convey her meaning.

After telling their stories, the women wrote them. They began immediately and wrote without pauses. Both women included direct speech and descriptive detail in their written stories. However, there were significant losses in moving from the oral to the written mode. The oral narration was a dramatic performance, far richer than the written version, both linguistically and in prosodic and paralinguistic features, and in this case, in musical features as well.

Traditionally, of course, these stories were oral and the oral performance was well-developed. Story tellers would tend to 'live and act' the stories, rather than just telling them (Finnegan: 1970). Songs would often be used, marking the structure in a clear way, adding enjoyment and making audience participation possible for the hearers. Paralinguistic features would, of necessity, be lost in writing them down.

Stein (2000) has also described the way a story changed as a schoolgirl told it, first orally, in rich and embellished language and then in writing, this time as a bare recount of the events. For Lettie and Florence, the losses in moving from one mode to another, although significant, did not seem to be as extensive as those described by Stein and they were able to write successfully in the 'folktale genre'. The written versions are presented on pages 80 and 85.

Zulu proverbs were another oral literary form that we discussed in class. The women were not familiar with the English proverbs I used as examples, but knew the Zulu word for proverbs (izaga) and could think of some Zulu examples, albeit with some difficulty. They were able to explain the meanings of most of the Zulu proverbs I used as examples and also to think of possible occasions when one might want to make use of each one. I chose proverbs which I understood were in fairly common usage and also selected some from Nyembezi's collection of Zulu proverbs (1974). The women then chose a few

proverbs, wrote them in Zulu, translated them into English and explained (in English) when they would be used.

The difficulty they experienced recalling the proverbs suggests that proverbs are not in very wide use in an urban context. More research would need to be done here, to find out to what extent urban dwellers make use of them and whether they are a useful genre in an urban literacy class. Formerly proverbs were widely used and would be brought into matters such as a court case, to add weight to the argument (Finnegan, 1970).

When I had collected enough writing from the students, I edited it and 'published' a small book, printed with a computer. My intention in 'publishing' was to let each student read what she had written, in print, and see herself as an author. The book could also be shown to other people, extending the audience for the writing (Calkins, 1991). Each student was given a copy and both read them with interest. Each spoke positively about the book in the questionnaire. Lettie later gave hers the title, 'Adult's hope.' Both showed the book to family members and friends, suggesting that they valued this text.

### 4.2.3 Samples of writing done in class.

For reasons that have been described on page 44, the students did not make use of drafting.

I include several samples from each student. Each text is dated by day and by month and is followed by my comment. Students' writing included a story they were told in their childhood, a description of their family, their memories of having their first baby and a memory about learning English.

### 4.2.3.1 Examples of Lettie's writing

***Jackal and Rabbit*** **9.5.**

*This is the story of Jackal and Rabbit, the were good friends. One day they were sitting have nothing to do, They dicide to play a game. Jackal was to cleaver than the rabbit, he's the one who dicide wich game their going to play. Jackal said we are going to make a big fire, then we go to boil the water in the pot. When the water is boiling then we are going to play the game. Jackal said to the rabbit, you go to go inside first. When you think is (unclear) then you must screame grandfather! grandfather! I am cooked, let me out! then I let you out. Then they play this game about two times each. rabbit think it was the nice game and he wanted to play this game, he never tought Jackal was a evil to him, until when he start to said grandfather! grandfather! let me out! then the Jackal startend to said the old grandfather can't be cooked so quickly. Jackal did that until rabbit was quiet because he was died and cooked. What a friend can do that, he wanted to eat his friend. You are terrible friend Jackal.*

**Comment**

Lettie was familiar with Zulu narrative genre and was able to bring this knowledge into her English speaking and writing. Her narrative included many of the features of this genre described by Derewianka (1990). She began with an orientation, where she introduced the readers to the main characters, who were animals with human characteristics:

*This is the story of Jackal and Rabbit, the were good friends.*

Jackal was further described as the cleverer of the two, the one who chose the game, and the rules of the game were outlined. All of these details had implications for the way the story was to develop. The complication/problem arose when Rabbit wanted to get out of the pot. Instead of letting him out, Jackal said:

*the old grandfather can't be cooked so quickly*