UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Date: April 3, 2006

I, Sally Lamping,

hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Education Ed.D

in:

Urban Educational Leadership

It is entitled:

Dusty Windows and Urban American Dreams: Five African Journeys toward Literacy through Participatory Research and Program Development

This work and its defense approved by:

Chair: Dr. James W. Koschoreck

Dr. Nancy Evers

Dr. Mark Gooden

Dr. Jeffrey Timberlake

Dusty Windows and Urban American Dreams: Five African Journeys toward Literacy through Participatory Research and Program Development

A dissertation submitted to the

Division of Research and Advanced Studies
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (Ed.D)

in the Urban Educational Leadership Program
of the College of Education, Criminal Justice,
and Human Services

2006

by

Sally A. Lamping

B.A., University of Cincinnati, 1996
M.A., Columbia University, 1999

Committee Chair: James W. Koschoreck, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

When we talk about education, rarely do the faces of this research enter our minds. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs all over the United States, however, are familiar with these new faces. Over the past fifteen years, schools have begun to see a dramatic increase in the number of ESL students whose educations have either never been formal or have been disrupted by wars and socioeconomic issues in their home countries. Among this newer group of students are an increasing number of adult (high school and beyond) African immigrants who come from ethnic groups in which language and literacy have always been oral experiences. As a result, programs are consistently struggling to accommodate them in a country and culture that depends heavily on the printed word. Thus, classrooms and programs must seek new ways to educate them as they learn to read and write in English, without any written literacy in their native languages. This study was a collaborative effort with five African men from oral language backgrounds. It was an investigation into their journeys to read, write, and manage their own cultural transitions in urban America. The study found that their

success in this journey relied heavily on the profound role participatory schooling has had in their lives.

© Sally A. Lamping, 2006
This dissertation and its contents are the intellectual property of Dr. Sally A. Lamping, unless otherwise noted. Explicit written permission is required for any duplication. For further information, please contact Dr. Lamping at 513-226-7383 or sally.lamping@wright.edu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a high school somewhere in the urban American Midwest where students refer to Dr. James W. Koschoreck as “that man with the tie, you know, who came to speak at the assembly.” This brief introduction always unfolds into a comment related to: “Well, he taught me that I *can* do something about the world, even though I am only a teenager.” Dr. Koschoreck, my students do not remember you because of your tie, but instead, because of the few short hours in which you convinced several doubtful minds that yes, it is indeed possible for ordinary people to do extraordinary things. This dissertation would not have been possible without you: you knew, maybe even more than I did at times, how important this work is. Yet, it has been your constant questioning, thoroughness, and the deep respect you hold for me, that has kept me grounded in this research. All along, you have known that, ultimately, it is not the text that follows these initial pages, but my commitment to and love for this work that is paramount. You have made me remember that ordinary people do extraordinary things all of the time and, in turn, it is what we *do* because of our research that counts in the end. Like my students, there are few teachers in my life who

have really *taught* me about my life and you are, without question, one of those few. Thank you for putting yourself into this project and for coaching me into the world of scholarship.

To the men in this study: you have changed my life. You have become my most valuable teachers and coaches in the journey of this work. Toure, Amin, Saran, Lamine, and D'jeco, thank you for opening your worlds and hearts to me, for trusting me, and for being my African mentors: I am so proud of the work we have done together and of the friendship that you have given me. May your lives always be lucky.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members. Throughout this process, Dr. Nancy Evers, you have continued to pose the important questions and give the important hugs that are common in your classrooms: it has been these two pieces of you that have allowed me to feel both exhausted and nurtured in this process. Dr. Mark Gooden, your knowledge, suggestions, and standards have challenged me in this research and also made me want to be a better student and scholar. Lastly, but certainly not least, Dr. Jeffrey Timberlake, thank you for joining my committee. You have provided me with an intelligent and

rigorous outsider's perspective on my research and posed the questions that I hoped no one would ask: reminding me that the answers to such questions are often at the heart of good research. You have all taken the time to know me as an individual and a researcher and, because of this, you encouraged me to develop my strengths in this dissertation. You knew that this type of research required a different kind of writing and trusted me with this task. Without such trust, I would have been forced to conceal my voice and the voices of my participants for the sake of academic writing. Instead, I was charged with the task of writing this in a way that is both scholarly and human. Undoubtedly, I thank all of you for that gift.

To Dr. David Schaafsma of the University of Illinois at Chicago, who was my methods professor and my advisor at Columbia University, and is now a friend and a (sometimes) reader for this dissertation. I thank you for all that you have taught me about ethnography, narrative voice, and what it means to be a teacher who knows her students. I also thank you for the emails over the years in which you have always encouraged me and, lately, taken so much pride in the work that I have been doing. Thank you for getting it

and, in turn, for getting me as first a student and now a researcher.

To Carly Andrews, my partner teacher and friend, who has, during the course of this dissertation work, become once again connected with the adult ESL community. Your respect for and devotion to others is an inspiration to all who meet you. Without your advice, understanding, assistance, and dialogue, this work would not continue to grow.

I would like to thank my future husband Rob Geis whom I met on my birthday: the day before I became a doctoral student. Initially, you cheered me on as I wrote countless papers and read what felt like a million articles about education. Later on, you encouraged me to start working again with the adult ESL community, and, finally, you became a part of it too as a volunteer, mentor, and friend to the men who have shaped this study: being a good teacher has everything to do with being a good person. I know that you have lived this dissertation also and, even though you have heard the same sentence read out loud from across the room over and over again, you have still had the courage to say: “I think you need to rework that.” I am honored to spend my life with you.

I would also like to thank Otis, my dog, who sat next to this computer on countless afternoons with a toy in his mouth, waiting for this to be finished so we could go for a walk. You have reminded me that life is still going on around me.

DEDICATION

For my grandmother, for Carly, and for Rob- who see.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 13

LITERACY AS SACRED COMMUNICATION: AN INTRODUCTION 13

The School in the Urban Village: A Profile of a Resource that Binds a Group 23
Immigrant Students and Public Schools: What is the Answer? 28
Lives of Literacy: An Introduction to the Research Questions 30
Methodology: An Overview 35

CHAPTER 2 43

SA [RAIN] BAMBARA: A STARTING PLACE 43

Snow Meets Rain: An African in Search of the American Hyphen 44
Uneven Terrain 49
The Reality of a Changing Urban Village: Waves and Spatial Concentration 55
Crossing the River: The Socialization of an Illegal Alien 57
Survival in Numbers: Reasons for Spatial Concentration 63
Illegal Sustenance: Economic Impacts of Undocumented Immigrants 64
Access to Public Programs 66
The Possibilities of Citizenship: Knowing our Rights as Humans 68
Education and Transformation of Self 74
Seeing the Shore 77
Seeing the Self as a Stakeholder 82
Crossroads and Intersections: Moving On 89
The Future 92

CHAPTER 3 95

DHOOF: [TRAVEL} SOMALI: A DISPLACED MUSLIM SURVIVES IN A CHRISTIAN WORLD 95

African Refugees: A Profile of a Changing Group 96
Familial and Cultural Separation 98
Urban Islam 99
Refugee Economics 104
The Necessity of Employment 106

CHAPTER 4 114

TIGI [CHIEF] DIOULA, COTE D'IVOIRE 114

Report from Daloa: 114
A Daloa Bushman Finds His Urban Future 114
Disrupted Kinship Patterns: The Priority of the Invisible Family 116
Wari: Money [Dioula] 121

CHAPTER 5 127

TUNGI [WALK WITH ME] SONINKE 127

How to Follow the Rules *127*
Discourse: Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness *129*
Assumptions and Truth *132*
Multiple Realities: Cultural Literacy in Action *134*
Growing into My Shoes: Mistakes, Blunders, and Frustration on the Road to Critical Literacy *142*

CHAPTER 6 149

BIN NO D'JUMBAI [COME LET'S VISIT], CREOLE 149

Common Ground *150*
War and the Breakup of a Family Unit *153*
Post Colonial Literacy *156*
Navigating Meaningful Literacy *164*

CHAPTER 7 169

ACTION RESEARCH AND THE PATH TOWARD KNOWING 169

Blind Spots and Murky Water *172*
The Business of Relationships *176*
Starting Good Work *178*
Room for Expansion *182*
Knowledge and Ownership *183*
Missing Pieces *185*
When the Cover Story Isn't Enough *188*
How do We Teach the Difficult to Teach? *191*
Reflecting, Re-negotiating, and seeing what is Already There *197*
The Hopelessly Evolving Study *199*
The Method of Addressing the Research Questions *202*
Reflexivity *207*
Upper Class Living with Lower Class Rules *209*
The Republican Freire? *210*
Crossroads and Intersections: Revisited *211*
Disrupted Education *214*
Structural Deterioration *220*
Validating the Experience of Action Research *223*
Critical Literacy and the Push Toward Progress and Utility: Method or Madness? *231*
Initial Discoveries *234*

CHAPTER 8 238

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: JOURNEYS INTO OUR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPACE AND PLACE 238

Research Question One: The World and the Words *240*
Oppositional Forces: Place and Self *242*

Race, Place, and the Technology of Self *245*
Signification, Place, and Self *250*
Research Question Two: The Word and the World: The Processes by which a Facility Creates Change *252*
Freedom in Literacy *256*
Research Question Three: Participatory Processes and Program Change *262*
CHAPTER 9 278
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 278
REFERENCES 294
APPENDICES 305
APPENDIX A SAMPLE PARTICIPATORY ESL CURRICULUM 306
APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS 366
APPENDIX C SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 372

CHAPTER 1

LITERACY AS SACRED COMMUNICATION: AN INTRODUCTION

"It is possible that we have been brought together at this time because we have profound truths to teach each other" (Somé, 1998, p. 17).

D'jeco's arrival was a sign. On the very first cold evening of the year, he walked shyly into our program in an urban midwestern housing project where I was a tutor and researcher and waved quietly at the African students already seated in the class. He then turned to shake my hand. Tired from a long day as a high school English teacher in which everything seemed to go just a little sideways of how I had planned it, I was hunkered down in a chair, looking through a reading text intended for students who come from an oral first language background. I rose to shake his hand; to wave and say "hi" would have been a signal of disrespect. I received his hand warmly with both of my hands and asked him where he was from in Africa. "You would not know it" he said, "a small country: Guinea-Bissau." My facial expression changed as I rustily slipped into a familiar language of clicks and exaggerated

expressions. “Yo de, ke ku bu na fasi li? [What are you doing here?]” I said, surprised.

In a matter of seconds, we moved from a halted greeting in English to an exuberant discussion in Creole (an African dialect of Portuguese spoken only in parts of Lusophone Africa) about the places and people within a country that means so much to both of us. He reached his hand out a second time. “I fasi quinze anos qu n’ka papia nya lingua, obrigado [it’s been fifteen years and I haven’t spoken my language, thank you]” he stated.

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that Guinea-Bissau, a small country off the coast of West Africa, has an adult literacy rate of 59.7% (UNESCO, 2005). Undoubtedly, this number fails to convey the value that the written word has in Guinean culture. One year while living there, my grandmother had died suddenly, and I was preparing to go back to my home in the United States for her funeral. Because she had lived until she was ninety-nine and had been my primary caregiver after my mother’s death in 1985, my Guinean neighbors and friends found her funeral to be an important life event for me. The day before my departure I was led to the neighborhood medicine man carrying a package

of tobacco and Kola nuts as a respect offering and escorted into a small room in the back of his hut. He knelt before me, reciting passages from the Qur'an and calling on the spirits of the water and air to lead me home safely. He then rose to eye level with me and tied a woven string delicately inlaid with cowry shells and holding at its center a small leather pouch, sewn on all sides, around my waist: this was my first medicine belt.

The medicine pouch is a sacred gift within many West African cultures. Paul Stoller (2002) writes that it is given to warriors, mothers, new babies, and all others who need safe passage through a crossroads in life; it serves to protect and guide its subject throughout the world (Stoller, 2002, p. 149). Often, when attending baptisms or confirmations at the very prominent Catholic Church on the island I was living on, female participants in these holy ceremonies would be seen walking up the outdoor aisles, dressed in traditional white baptismal or confirmation clothing, with large pouches of medicine draped around their necks and wrists. Ironically, medicine pouches are also sold throughout markets in the United States and Africa as traditional jewelry, and many tourists and outsiders who wear them are unaware of their significance.

Their importance, however, not only lies in the power of the one who bestows it on a person, but on the inside of the pouch itself:

> If the cause of the physical ailment is determined to be spiritual, the marabout may write a sequence of numbers on the piece of paper, recite a corresponding passage from the Qur'an, spit on the paper, fold it into a tight bundle, and instruct the client to encase the paper in a leather pouch and wear it around his neck or waist. In Francophone West Africa, these pouches are called *gris-gris.* (Stoller, 2002, p. 149)

The act of reading and writing, in this case, becomes a sacred venture. The wearer of the medicine pouch believes in the words transcribed on the inside of the pouch, even if he or she cannot read those words. The pouch is not meant to be opened, but instead to be worn and believed in as a protective and sacred device (Stoller, 2002, p. 149).

The power, esteem, and tumultuous history of the written word within a culture cannot be denoted by its literacy rates. In Guinea-Bissau and other West African countries, the written word is often the sacred word and those who read and write are those who are clerics, marabouts, teachers, medicine men and women, or members of

the elite social class in the country. They are spiritual guides or people who have experienced forced literacy through colonial education systems (Somé, 1998, p. 15). Oral language is the language of everyday people: the language of the body and the face, interwoven words, expressions, sucks of the teeth, and shakes of the finger: the visual and auditory forms of language that can never be fully understood through transcription (Appiah, 2004, p. 245). Yet, as Kwame Appiah (2004), points out, literacy in Africa has often been a point of traditional and hegemonic tension (p. 269). The transition into literacy has not been easy for many African countries, but not because literacy is not valued by Africans in general. Instead, it is the process of writing down what was previously oral that brings about new questions:

> It [literacy] permits the kind of consistency that oral culture cannot and does not demand. Write down a sentence and it is there, in principle, forever; that means that if you write down another sentence inconsistent with it, you can be caught out. (Appiah, 2004, p. 267)

Literacy becomes, then, the act of making something permanent through transcription and, ultimately, for the

previously oral individual, it risks sacrificing the socio-cultural context that creates meaning for oral language.

As I stood talking to D'jeco that first day of winter this year, I began to remember how much is different in a language that is strictly oral. Immediately, our expressions changed and became more animated; we used words to indicate surprise and dismay that have no meaning in English, and we sucked our teeth and clapped our hands to show our excitement. This type of interaction in English would signify notions of the extreme or insane, but in Creole it is an everyday occurrence.

This study is an investigation into the path of five ordinary men on a journey into the written world. They are ordinary by African standards because they have all grown up in various African villages and ethnic groups (Dioula, Soninke, Wolof, Somali, and Bambara) in which history, traditional roles, and the transmission of cultural practices are achieved through oral format. They are extraordinary by the standards of the society in which they currently reside. All five men are living in an urban Midwestern U.S. city as refugees, political asylees, and undocumented African immigrants, and, because it has never been a necessity until this time, none can read and write

proficiently in a first language. They are participants in a GED/ESOL program run by the public school system in the area. They are also extraordinary in their journeys because their urban and educational experiences in America are dominated by their non-Western connections to spirituality, identity, and community within their own cultures.

My connection to these men is one of happenstance and luck. It is luck, I guess, because after working on a pilot study at the same facility with three of these men in which I explored the ways in which urban immigrants acquire a second language, I decided to expand the study into the larger ESL class at the facility. This time, I wanted to find out how urban immigrants participate in the transition toward literacy. I set out to answer questions that explored their lives as immigrants, evaluated the process by which they become literate, and proposed ways in which facilities could enact change on their behalf. I wanted to use the participatory and ethnographic methods that I had proposed in the findings of my initial study and see if they really would work with the ESL population at the facility.

I asked the teachers to announce the new study in their classes, I was open and available to potential

candidates for questions, and I whole-heartedly expected a diverse group of participants. Realistically though, the notion of literacy and of students who as adults may speak four or five different languages, live in strictly urban settings, and are emerging from oral lives into a written one in America lent itself to the African population in the classroom: the students who had oral language bases or whose educations had been disrupted by wars or poverty, and whose lives were built on narrative and oral traditions that were now housed in urban centers. As I found out later, I was lucky.

For the men in this study, luck is defined by the times in our lives in which we find strength in coincidence. When paths of individuals continue to cross, when we receive unexpected phone calls from relatives, or when the circumstances of our lives suddenly become easier, we find some examples of luck as the men define it. All of the men believe, in addition, that luck is determined by outside forces human beings cannot see and that such experiences are opportunities for us to learn from each other or from our spiritual beliefs. “We do not control all the things that happen in this world. The small things are easy, but the bigger ones, they are always controlled

by these things we cannot see” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 15, 2005). Protective medicine, gods and goddesses, marabouts, or medicine men and women can all play significant roles in good and bad luck. For the men, dismissing such circumstances as disconnected from the spiritual world would be arbitrary.

Thus, according to the men, I was lucky to have had the opportunity to work further with my initial participants and, in turn, to discover the lives of two new participants who joined the study when it expanded. I still sought to answer the same questions, but I had to do it with the population who most readily could provide such answers through the narratives of their lives. Ultimately, there were five African male participants in the dissertation study, along with one teacher, and a program coordinator.

I am also connected to these men through happenstance because, after living and working in West Africa for two years, I returned to the United States bent on becoming an English teacher. My life is grounded in the notion of the written. Unlike these men who find their guidance through the unseen and spiritual worlds of their communities and cultures, I have always found meaningful direction in life

through books and literature. I became a teacher because I was first a writer and a reader: a lover of the printed word. Nevertheless, because of my African students, who form part of a group that continues to appear more rapidly on the American educational landscape, my classrooms have always led me back, again and again, to oral and communal traditions: these particular students nudge me toward notions of literacy that trouble my affair with print. In general, my students come from a variety of oral backgrounds, yet my African students come from oral lives that are the basis by which they understand history, religious texts, spirituality, familial teachings, unspoken indifference, disgust, joy, and approval. So, their journey into the written is one that I will never fully understand. Equally, this journey, for them, is also symbolic of a post-colonial world in which written literacy is a necessary, if not demanded, part of global existence. And so it always seems that by coincidence I am led, probably consciously, back to the work that I have always done with African populations.

The School in the Urban Village: A Profile of a Resource that Binds a Group

Each one of the men in this study started out as an English as a Second Language student in the same multi-level class that is part of a larger public school system in an urban midwestern city. The class is a colorful one, bright African cloth mixes in with the western dress of the more outwardly assimilated students who are Dominican, Columbian, Mexican, Romanian, Ukrainian, Chinese, and Taiwanese, but one cannot help notice that the majority of students sitting in the class are African; roughly eighty percent of the classes are filled by African students, mostly men, and about seventy percent of them are refugees or political asylees. Some of them sit next to students from countries with whom their countries have been at war with for hundreds of years and others reunite with lost cousins and extended family just by coming to English class. They mirror the GED population of the program in their lower socio-economic and minority status; yet, they are also struggling because these statuses are, for the first time, an issue within their communities, schools, and workplace. In addition, they are in the process of learning English and the fundamentals of reading and

writing. Nevertheless, much like those of us who have entered and exited American public schools in our lives, these immigrants' one common, shared experience is public education.

How does one provide educational service to this group of people who differ so vastly in cultural background, literacy rates, and personal experience? All over the country, organizations are struggling to find these answers. Often teachers become parenting coaches, immigration specialists, networkers, job coaches, tour guides, and friends to the adult ESL community, much of which may be significantly older than the teachers themselves. Trusted organizations become an invaluable resource for such groups and the minute an agency oversteps a boundary or commits a cultural blunder, the enrollments and need for service decline.

For the past decade in New York City, service agencies have changed drastically to respond to the increase of African immigrants. Samantha Marshall (2005) states that hospital facilities have been the centers of struggle.

> Harlem Hospital is on a mission to find dozens of recruits . . . who can help doctors better communicate with the neighborhood's fast-growing cluster of

> African immigrants. Most new arrivals from Africa head straight for northern Manhattan, putting Harlem Hospital at the epicenter of the population boom. Many of them understand only West African languages and dialects, such as Bambara, Mambila, Wolof, and Jahanka, and they usually need translation assistance to get the treatment they need. (p. 2)

Schools and other agencies are not far behind this sudden wave of needed assistance. Just last year, Harlem opened its first drop in center for African immigrants, which serves more than ten thousand African immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in New York each year (“Growing African Immigrant Community Deepens Roots”, 2005, p. 1). In Houston, census data estimates that there are over 27,000 African born immigrants residing in the Tri-State Area (Mangum, 2005, p. 5). In Worcester, Massachusetts, the African Community Development Outreach Corporation believes there are at least 50,000 African born immigrants living in the area (Mangum, 2005, p. 5). The group focuses on health needs, English classes, work readiness, immigration, and even helps Africans to secure small business loans. The director of the group states that “We [Africans] love America, but when we come here, we cannot get ourselves

together” (Mangum, 2005, p. 2). He also states that many African immigrants who were doctors or engineers in Africa come here and cannot find work, so they end up working in factories or in the minimum wage sector (Magnum, 2005, p. 3).

In the past decade big cities like, Atlanta, Boston, Seattle, Minneapolis, and San Diego, as well as smaller suburban areas like Rochester, Minnesota and Fairfax County, Virginia have seen increases in African immigrant populations entering schools. Both larger cities and smaller suburbs are finding that their districts are largely unprepared for such students (Zehr, 2001, p. 31). Unlike other immigrant populations, African immigrant students often have issues that stem well beyond the language barrier. “They come here and it may be the first time they think of school as a building. They’ve never stood in a lunch line. They’ve never had to return a library book” (Zehr, 2001, p. 21). For children, it is often easier to make the transition into the written and spoken world of America; however, for adults it can be much more difficult.

The adult African immigrant community has an established culture, religion, and lifestyle, unlike that

of a young child. They also have children to feed and school, bills to pay, and employment to be concerned with. Often, these overwhelming aspects of life in the U.S. prevent such immigrants from attending school. In his discussion of West African street venders, Paul Stoller (2001) states: “Although some West African street vendors in New York City display various linguistic abilities, they must all confront the problem of cultural competence” (p. 673). Education can often be a route to cultural competence and some of the traders he interviewed had attempted to learn English or return to school but quickly became frustrated because of varying educational backgrounds and time. Ultimately, this caused them to rely more heavily on linguistically competent traders to speak with their customers about products, ultimately putting themselves in a place of compromise (Stoller, 2001, p. 673).

There is a growing need for educational and community resources for African immigrants in urban areas; however, in evaluating the best ways to provide such services, the agencies must tread cautiously. Because African immigrants make up such a diverse population within their own immigrant group, schools and resource centers must be able to meet such needs in a trustworthy and culturally

appropriate manner. In addition, such programs must explore the ways in which their services are accessible and reliable for such a population. In doing this, we will strive to better prepare such immigrants to be strong parents within public schools, to advance economically, and to ultimately find freedom within their chosen paths.

Immigrant Students and Public Schools: What is the Answer?

Contreras (2002) states that changes in immigration policies since 1970 have lead to an overwhelming increase of immigrant students in schools all over the country. “In 1990, there were more than 2.3 million immigrant students in U.S. schools and colleges, and that number has since increased” (Contreras, 2002, p. 150). Nevertheless, they are still not a priority for lawmakers and policy makers. Although not a significant portion of the U.S. school population, immigrant student populations are steadily growing in concentrated areas. As a result, they have become an unclear policy issue that is often overlooked and ignored. Because of this, immigrant students are largely dependent on the local resources their school system or community can offer them (Contreras, 2002, p.150). Clearly, public schools in concentrated urban areas (where

immigrant families come first) are more likely to see shifts in educational services and expenditures due to increased immigrant needs.

Greenberg, Macias, Rhodes, and Tsze (2001) found that younger students (typically under the age of twelve) often have a far less difficult time learning English and navigating the American cultural system than older students (high school age) (p. 9). A large number of the immigrant population is over the age of 18. “In 1990, there were about 25.5 million U.S. adults age 18 and older who spoke a language other than English at home, up from 17.9 million a decade earlier” (Greenberg et al., 2001, p. 42). All across urban areas in the United States, there are long lines for ESL classes and services for adults who know that their survival in the American economy is greatly impacted by their English proficiency and literacy levels.

It is primarily non-native English speakers with low levels of formal education who are truly disadvantaged by their lack of native English language skills. Non-native English speakers with little or no education, do not, on average, acquire high enough levels of English fluency and literacy to be able to obtain high paying managerial and professional occupations, or even to obtain jobs with

regular hours and paychecks (Greenberg et al., 2001, p. 17). As a result, the pressure on agencies both public and private to service adult ESL students is immense. Nevertheless, because such programs are often limited by funding, highly qualified teachers who would otherwise choose work in the non compulsory sector of adult education, choose more stable positions in public elementary and secondary schools.

Lives of Literacy: An Introduction to the Research Questions

Within the struggle that educators endure to service such students, the question of *how* still remains a constant. How do we serve students who are marginalized socially, culturally, and socio-economically, who are second language learners, and who, for the most part, are what we, in a written society, consider illiterate? It was with this initial question that I began to form my research questions in this study. Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) would argue that educators must first push to understand the world of these potential students before they enter into the collaborative nature of discovering the word (Freire & Horton, 1990). Thus, the study will cut a

slice of first generation, possibly transnational, but more appropriately, reluctant assimilators and examine the "world" they bring to an educational facility. It will first pose the question of exactly what is the "world" of a group of African men participating in an urban adult ESL program in the Midwest and how does that world potentially impact their reading of the word as emergent literate voices in American society?

The collaborative witnessing of how one's experience within the world influences the journey by which he embarks on a reading of the word is invaluable to an educational facility that works to meet the needs of various groups of learners within its walls. As a result, it is critical that such an inquiry seek to understand the processes by which such collaboration pushes a facility toward change. Thus, the study will also strive to answer the question: what are the processes by which we create such collaborative programs in adult immigrant education while still acknowledging and claiming our status as both insiders and outsiders in these divergent contexts?

It would be impossible to dismiss the community process inherent in participatory education and action. Thus, such studies have the potential to push us to

collectively discover ways to service this population by seeing them as valid resources and voices within our educational sector. As a result, how can these particular action research processes lead to the creation of public educational facilities that collaborate with these students to create new highly sustainable programs, materials, and literature that service transnational adult English language learners without first assuming literacy in a native language?

Paulo Freire (1997) states, “With progressive education, respect for the knowledge of living experience is inserted into the larger horizon against which it is generated” (p. 85). Thus, any type of progressive education, whether it be literacy or otherwise, according to Freire, must first explore the lived experience of its participants. Chapters two through six of this piece will explore the urban lives of each of the five men in this study and, as a result, answer research question one. Each of their ethnographies is based on extensive interviews, focus groups, field notes, and collaborative inquiry and strives to provide the reader with a context by which to view the foundations of critical literacy in an urban educational center.

Such a context will introduce what Norton and Toohey (2004) define as critical language learning: “From this perspective, language is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities of the future” (p. 1). Allan Luke (2004) writes that such practices endeavor “to engage in disruptive, skeptical, and ‘other’ social and discourse relations than those dominant, conventionalized, and extant in particular social fields and linguistic markets” (p. 26). The ethnographies that follow here are presented with heavy documentation of the men’s own narratives, my relationship with each one of them, and the multiple roles that each of us played in our relationships with each other.

Luke (2004) reminds us that such work is inevitably tied to the need for each person involved to recognize that in order to do this effectively, one must “self-position oneself as Other even in a market or field that might not necessarily construe or structurally position one as Other (that is, on the basis of color, gender, class, etc)” (p. 26). As an insider in the facility and an outsider or

other within the worlds of each of these men, I am called as a researcher to learn new ways of narrating the position of “other” that I hold within this study and the positions as “others” that each of the men hold within education and society. “It entails an epistemological Othering and ‘doubling’ of the world – a sense of being beside oneself or outside of oneself in another epistemological, discourse, and political space than one typically would inhabit” (p. 26). In truth, this study calls both me and the men within it to position ourselves in ways that challenge our notions of “typical” and “customary” in order to find truth within such an experience. Ultimately, the notion of critical literacy and language learning in this study will be defined as a process by which these five men began to use their own lived experiences as a foundation for literacy. In turn, the process became an impetus for reflection and change within their own lives and our facility. In the end, it was through this process that each man began to move forward, to work for change personally and communally, and to mitigate the tension between his own insider and outsider status in this country.

Methodology: An Overview

The methodology of the study, as described in Chapter 7, thus, was chosen based on this effort to critically examine the process by which educational facilities create programs and materials to accommodate students like those in my study. The methodology had to be one that was built out of the participants' articulated experience and, as a result, it had to respect their individual ties to community, the wisdom of elders, and spiritual growth. Equally, it had to respond flexibly to their specific urban lives, which are often transitory, passively resistant, and socio-economically in flux: it had to go where they went, visiting them at school, at home, and in their communities when appropriate. It necessitated what Luke (2004) identifies as a process that challenged normative practices with such populations.

Inevitably, I chose the methodologies of qualitative research and participatory action research for this study. Qualitative research allowed me to investigate the men's lives through field notes, interviews, focus groups, and personal communication in order to create the ethnographies that strive to communicate each man's life as a transnational African immigrant. Subsequently,

participatory action research allowed me to get close to the participants in the study through our collective endeavors as a group. It pushed me to listen to what my qualitative research was giving me and, in turn, to respond with the men as equals, in an effort to enact change within their lives and our program. It created a continuous cycle of dialogue, planning, action, and reflection that served to challenge normative educational practices for second language students and, as a result, build on the notions of community, spirituality, and elder wisdom that the men placed at the forefront of their experiences. Such a methodology, as Luke (2004) states, serves to challenge top-down models of literacy and second language learning and, in the process, challenges ESL programs that serve as "a technology for the domesticating the Other into nation, whatever its scientific and human pretenses" (Luke, 2004, p. 28). Thus, the methodology allowed us to reject classrooms and learning spaces in which ESL teachers decide the curriculum and present it to the student instead of first using ethnography as a way to create literacy and second language curriculums with and about the students in the class.

Participatory action research based in critical pedagogy provides us with a lens by which to critically observe the experiences, strategies, and relationships that formed throughout the time of this study. More importantly, it provides us with a process by which to push for change that focuses on the men in the study as both subjects and objects of their literacy journeys. It places them and their lives at the forefront of curricula and practices within a socially and culturally aware classroom setting.

The study is grounded in the literacy work of Paulo Freire (1997, 2001), Elsa Auerbach (1992), Victoria Purcell-Gates (1995), and John Dewey (1936, 1964). Equally, it is situated in theories that serve as lenses to critically engage in and analyze the experience of this study. Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt's (1999) discussions of transnationalism, Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) analysis of border cultures and identities, and Michel Foucault's (1993) identifications of the tensions between our technologies of self, production, signification, and domination all serve as methods of critical analysis for this work. In addition, I use Malidoma Patrice Somé's (1994, 1998) writings on African

philosophy and cultural practices, particularly with the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso, to frame the transitions the men endure in their processes of education. Subsequently, the majority of the men are rooted in the traditions of Islam, which I use parts of to reference the intersections of education and spirituality within this study.

In Appendix A, the document will provide a sample of the work that we did together. It will show parts of an extensive literacy text created by the men in the study with my coaching. The text is a document of their lived experiences in this country. It uses their lives as a basis for the discovery of reading and writing as methods of furthering personal freedom, while still maintaining cultural and spiritual traditions from their home countries. I would argue that such a text would not have been created had we not first delved into the experiences each man has within his own world. The text is representative of each individual within the study; yet, it could not have been produced without the intimate dialogue and ethnographic research that occurs in the middle six chapters of the text. Thus, in many ways, the curriculum we created is arbitrary. Although it gives teachers and programs a starting place for the process of critical

participatory literacy to begin, it is not at all intended to be a curriculum that can be reproduced and used with other classes in different contexts. Instead, it gives teachers and students a way into each other through a variety of access points and provides a place to build a curriculum tailored to their own classes. Undoubtedly though, it would never exist without the serious and rigorous ethnographic and action research that took place over the past year. As a result, it also calls for such research to be a part of the participatory ESL literacy classroom.

At first, aside from the text, the participants and I also set out to build a community garden, seek engagement from outside community members, and experience education through field trips and guest speakers. As winter set in, however, we became less focused on the immediacy of the above concerns and more focused on the needs of the collective group which were: first and foremost to learn to read and write, critically, within their current social contexts. Thus, the action of the research came with the text we created and the outside resources we found to assist in our endeavor.

As I began writing this dissertation, I was somehow overwhelmed by the task in front of me: to portray the lives of these five men collaboratively, honestly, and respectfully. Within the notion of collaboration came conflict, issues of ownership, and what I started to name and, subsequently, denounce as diversion. The honesty of this study has been its most difficult piece. Over the past eleven months, we have worked through resistance and into notions of brutal, and sometimes, heartbreaking honesty: notions that have troubled me as I pack up my backpack every evening with my expensive Mp3 player and go home to my white, middle class, life that is full of the comforts of love and the bonds of physically present family members. Their honesty has reminded me of the invisible pieces of our lives that we consistently take for granted: companionship, love, and collective histories. Ultimately though, such honesty produces a sense of reverence and respect for those who provide it and, with that, I was challenged by the potential for a white, middle class, American female to respectfully account for such honest experience. Yet, it was out of such respect that I began to open my own struggle to meet theirs and to admit to the gaps and leaks in my own education and the structures that

I work within and as a representative of in the process of schooling. Nevertheless, it was the exact notion of respect that led us collectively toward truth within this study and toward a deeper understanding of shared experience.

Ironically, it has been the effort to portray a very oral journey through multiple literacies and experiences by using the written word that has been nearly insurmountable. I am afraid that no amount of writing would ever completely tell about the experience of such an intense study. It could never communicate the laughter and the boisterous dialogue that emerged in our meetings. It cannot completely capture the bowed heads and the distant glances as some of the men opened the wounds of their travels. The human experience is often unjustified by the written word, and yet, paradoxically, we consistently use it to communicate the stories of our lives.

Inevitably, through the stories of Toure, Amin, Saran, Lamine, and D'jeco we are offered a dusty window into the lives of five African men, all of different educational, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds, yet who are lumped into the same category (African) by means of native origin and race. These men are all from dusty places in the

world. In their countries, the red dust of the earth covers everything; women spend hours sweeping it from their homes and off their porches, children wake up with its red grains still sleeping soundly in the corners of their eyes, and every dusty shoe shows its owner’s undeniable connection to the earth he walks over with each passing day. This study will not forget the dust as it endeavors to peer into the lives and the process of change for each man within it. Each man’s story helps us to understand the implications of their collective experience as potential students in urban adult education programs and, as a result, their stories assist us in our search for new and innovative ways to serve such a community. Nevertheless, each windowpane is dusty and, inevitably, reminds us that in order to even attempt to see these men clearly, we have to touch the earth that nurtures their spirits.

CHAPTER 2

SA [RAIN] BAMBARA: A STARTING PLACE

Roughly nine years ago, I was standing in the middle of my empty classroom on a small island off the coast of West Africa. It was only a few days before school would begin for the year and I had come to see my new room. The school was empty, but open. I remember that, to my horror, it was full of red dust, wads of paper from the previous year, and fleas that immediately attacked my legs when I entered the building. The blackboard was, literally, a board painted black. There were no lights and the school was slowly slipping off the edge of the island into the ocean.

As I stood wondering how I was supposed to teach in a country that, by the looks of its schools and semi-annual teacher strikes, had no investment in public education, the first rains began to crash down on the zinc roof overhead. Although the noise was deafening, I could still hear the echoes of laughter and pounding feet outside the school's stucco walls. I looked out of the window to find thirty or so little, naked, ebony bodies, shiny with the falling

rain, running and cheering through the schoolyard. Slipping and sliding in the new mud, they tackled each other, held hands, giggled, and celebrated the first rain of the year.

As I watched the children find irrepressible joy in the heavy rains that most Americans might consider an annoyance, my traditional schooling that boxed education, freedom, and the spiritual celebration of life, into tidy cardboard categories, began to grow soggy. During the following two years, my experience worked holes into these boxes as the contents spilled over into each other, and tumbled directly into the center of my shaky perceptions about what it means, globally, to be educated, to be free, and to be connected to the world around us. Rain, in Africa, is always the first sign of rebirth and renewal.

Snow Meets Rain: An African in Search of the American Hyphen

> "We have already noted that indigenous people see humans as born with a purpose, a mission they must carry out because it is the reason for coming to this world. In order to deliver the gift of their mission or purpose, certain conditions must be present, such as the community's recognizing of the gift that is being delivered to them" (Somé, 1998, p. 276).

In many West African countries, the rain brings a new sense of hope and sustenance for the coming year. It is a time of new beginnings and prosperity. So, when, in the middle of January in America, Toure Keita, a Malian immigrant, walked out of the shadows and into a small, urban, Midwestern, public school to demand its services, it was as if he had found his rainy season in the middle of a cold, snowy, U.S. winter. Dressed in baggy jeans, work boots, a red and white hooded sweatshirt, and matching fitted baseball hat, Toure represented a style and manner typical of the Hip Hop era in America. "I am interested in becoming a citizen," he proclaimed to a handful of new and recent, mostly African, immigrants and a dumbfounded teacher.

This man had no need for the tiny program's thousand dollar textbook budget with colorful photos of happy Americans telling time, dressing themselves, and marking off the days of the week on a calendar; nor did he need our sophisticated computer software with lifelike images and sounds of *real* Americans buying cars, pouring juice, and talking on telephones. Toure needed something much more specific, yet unimaginable to us Americans: he needed a

sense of place. Like many of his counterparts, he turned to the public schools in search of this place.

It was my first day as an intern in this program and the possible beginning of what, I hoped, would be a fruitful qualitative research study on immigrants in urban areas. As silence came over our classroom, I knew that my role would somehow become murky in this study. As a researcher, I knew I had the experience of both an insider and an outsider. My past work with adult immigrant education in the U.S. and with West African high school students in Guinea-Bissau had more than, I thought, prepared me to be an objective “observer”. Ultimately though, from Toure’s standpoint, my background did not separate me from my insider status in this country.

The state of Toure’s life when he entered our program is what Malidoma Somé (1998) characterizes as African initiation: “The serious troubles we face in life are nothing more than initiatory experiences” (p. 278). He defines an initiation as a period in life that Westerners would term as a crisis; yet, he uses the word initiation to indicate that this period of time is also symbolic of a passage into an altered life: “Initiation focuses on and is a response to some basic existential questions faced by

human beings since the dawn of time. Everyone wonders, Who am I? Where Do I come from? And where am I going?" (p. 276). He argues, "through initiation, a young person gains access to dynamic and purposeful living"(p. 276). Although initiation ceremonies and rituals, as they occur in African indigenous cultures, are not appropriate in Western culture, he comments, the West can still learn from these practices (p. 276). Toure forced us to learn how our program could play a positive role in this critical point of his life.

Although he entered our facility at a position in his life when such rituals would have been appropriate, because he was far away from the culture and familial practices he values, he had to seek other, Western, ways to navigate this crossroads. He was calling on us to recognize this crisis in his life and to help him maneuver within it through education. "At the core of these [initiation] rituals is the commitment to heal a problem that no other medicine can heal," Somé (1998) writes, but often, he denotes, a person cannot fully heal without first having a supportive "container" within which that healing can occur:

> The problem is not so much the nature of the initiation, but the absence of a supportive community

> functioning as a container, recognizing and acknowledging the person's initiatory experience, thereby giving closure to it. And even passing recognition is not enough to terminate an initiation. The person's patterns of life that support the experience of suffering must also be drastically altered. (p. 284)

Toure needed a "supportive community" that listened to his experience, respected his cultural and spiritual groundings, and could also provide him with the insider means by which to change his environment within the society he now lived. "I was so scared to come to school for so many years before. I want that this time was okay though. I didn't know what to expect really though. My friends told me I come here, immigration will get me. But I had to see" (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 15, 2005). He looked to education and literacy as a way of bridging his path. In order to adequately guide him through this initiation, however, his experience in our program had to differ from the experiences he had already had as an immigrant in this country.

Uneven Terrain

For the past seven years as an undocumented immigrant, Toure had been living in an undefined territory in the United States and, as a result, he had developed a keen understanding of the power systems that exist in America. “It’s almost like they don’t want us here. They are always trying to catch us doing something bad” he commented during a personal interview in February of 2005. “Like these tracking devices immigrants have to wear in Florida when they file. Why are we treated as criminals? We come here, we work, we send money to our families, and, eventually, we return to Africa. We pay taxes and bills, we are not criminals” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 25, 2005). Toure speaks frequently about what researchers term as his own transnational identity.

Portes, Gurarnizo, and Landolt (1999) describe the influx of immigrant communities who maintain dual identities between large urban centers in the U.S. and home countries as an essential quality of transnational migration (p. 217). The impact of such migration on urban centers in the United States has been evidenced by growing immigrant communities in major cities that continue to speak their first languages, practice cultural traditions

in pockets of U.S. cities, and maintain viable, if not prosperous, social and economic connections to their countries of origin (Portes et. al., 1999, p. 218). Throughout the history of the North American urban landscape, these types of immigrants have found ways to contribute substantially to their countries of origin through social, economic, and political ties that they often set up within the United States (Portes et al., 1999, p. 219). Although he fits some of the transnational predictors, Toure has not been able to fully support his family in Mali or maintain a viable transnational identity here in the United States because his immigration and educational status limit him socio-economically. “I just get by. There is only certain work I can do, so there are several times when there is nothing, no rent, no food, nothing. I gotta know who I can trust for working and so I can only work for other Africans. But they can’t help my family. I can only do that” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 11, 2005). Thus, his family goes for long periods of time without hearing from him or receiving money and he has had to learn English as a protective way of navigating the treacherous undocumented employment

system (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 26, 2005).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes of this “border” state as one comparable to a state of dark transition between cultures and place:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (p. 3)

Toure’s status as an undocumented immigrant placed him in this state of “transition” that Anzaldúa speaks of and, for some reason, I happened to be there when he began to find the strength to push through to the other side. He is not unlike the many that enter classrooms every day in search of this “place” that both, allows them to harbor a dream in this country while still honoring their own individual pasts. In order to begin to define a new territory for himself in this country and to begin the process of establishing a socio-economically viable transnational identity, Toure recognized that he had to risk trusting an insider. “I gotta let the schools help me. I can’t worry

about the trouble I could get in. I have to become educated" (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 25, 2005). Nevertheless, Toure's noncompulsory status as an adult African immigrant in America separates him from the millions of multi-national public school students who move in and out of noisy classrooms everyday as a part of this country's free compulsory education system. In both his demand of our resources and his refusal to be ignored, he brings into question the scope and responsibilities of American education as a valid resource for his initiation into an identity where he no longer suffers.

Toure's life as an African immigrant who sees education as an access point for a transformation of self in the United States will serve in this chapter as a framework for understanding other adults like him who enter public service agencies and schools every day. So much of his status as a student in our program rested on his experience as an urban African immigrant in a Western culture:

> I live in a tiny apartment with two other people. The place is so small we bumpin' into each other. But we friends. I used to worry about the neighbors when I first came here they ask me for money or yell at me

> when they hear me speak English, but now they don't bother me. When I first came here I was African boy. Only clothes I have were my African clothes. Now though, I don't seem so clear to everyone. People don't look at me for long time anymore. I think I changed so I could fit here. (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 11, 2005)

For Toure, the process of education was intricately tied to his own conflicted personal process: the one that landed him in our program initially. "I'm not sure if my life has the possibility to be better. Immigration will always be problem for me, but I wish so much that I could change this part. If I could do it differently, if I knew better then, things would be different for me" (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 11, 2005). For teachers and service providers of African clients like Toure, the ideas of the Brazilian literacy educator and activist Paulo Freire (1990) are a valid lens by which to identify the type of education that students like Toure need in order to address this point of initiation:

> We cannot educate if we don't start- and I said *start* and not *stay*- from the levels in which the people perceive themselves, their relationships with others

> and with reality, because this is precisely what makes their knowledge.(Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 66)

Toure's "reality" is often an unfamiliar one to our educational system.

> I'm not African-American. I never be African-American. I am African from Mali. Sometimes, I am treated like worse than black people in this country, especially by black people. Sometimes, I am treated better, like by the police. They hear me speak English and they feel I guess kinda sorry for me. They treat me okay. Then there are other people who just ignore me. I don't matter. I ask that people respect me, but it is difficult not to get angry. (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 15, 2005)

Toure's presence pushes us to find ways to bridge the knowledge that students like him introduce into educational programs. Seeking to understand the level at which he "perceives" himself, as Freire (1990) denotes, must be the first step in this process (Freire & Horton, 1990).

The Reality of a Changing Urban Village: Waves and Spatial Concentration

Quietly and steadfastly fleeing wars, socio-economic and educational strife, and political persecution, Africans have begun to emerge as one of the highest growing immigrant groups in the United States. John A. Arthur (2000) writes “Africans who have settled in the United States during the last twenty years represent the largest number of Africans in more than two hundred years to settle in America” (p. vii). It is estimated that the Ethiopian population in the United States has increased by 2000% over the past ten years and that the Nigerian population alone has increased by at least 900% (Gordon, 1998, p. 83). With their migration, new challenges come for urban landscapes, particularly in the past decade.

African immigrants tend to willingly migrate to cities where there are other Africans of the same ethnic background. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) term this pattern in relation to several immigrant groups, including Africans, as necessary spatial concentration. “By moving away from places where their own group is numerically strong, individuals risk losing a range of social and moral resources that make for psychological well-being as well as

economic gain” (p. 53). As a result, areas of the urban landscape that have seen recent influxes of African immigrants will probably continue to see this population rise in their communities; yet, because of their diverse cultural needs, the response to African immigration in urban areas has been intermittent.

Because no one country in Africa can truly boast a “national identity”, and, as a result, we cannot make generalizations concerning the African immigrant as easily as it has been for researchers and agencies in the past to categorize Hispanic or Asian immigrants, areas often have difficulties servicing this particular population. For example, a Malian immigrant to the United States is not simply Malian. He or she could also be Soninke, Bambara, Fulani, or Songhay, to name a few. Equally, although French is the official colonial language of Mali, he or she may speak fluent French or no French at all, depending on his or her family background and educational patterns. “I speak French, but my brother, he only speak Soninke and Bambara. I speak French because they let me in the schools. My brother, he not so lucky. He went to live with my grandmother for school. He went to village school” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 25, 2005). In addition,

he or she may also be Muslim, Christian, Animist, or be spiritually tied to indigenous traditions that vary from place to place within his or her country and continent. “My family is traditional in Mali. We not Muslim or Christian, but we have gods we offer things to. A lot of Mali is Muslim or Christian, but they still do some of the things my family do too” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 12, 2005). Despite a long history of colonial rule, ethnicity and religion, whether indigenous or otherwise, have remained strong forces of African life and dictate many everyday practices, including those carried out away from home (Stoller, 2002, p. 164). As a result, the impact of African immigration in these urban locations brings new and undetermined hurdles for the immigrant himself, but also for the public programs that offer support to such individuals.

Crossing the River: The Socialization of an Illegal Alien

In Toure’s home of Mali, there are numerous ceremonies that celebrate a man’s strength and initiation into the elder community. One of the most famous of these ceremonies is the annual cattle crossing held between December and March of every year. At this time, Fulani men who have

taken their cattle into the Sahelian step, northwest of the Niger River, in search of grazing fields during the dry season, return home to numerous villages in Mali by crossing the treacherous Niger River with their herds. It is a brilliant site to behold as hundreds of cattle begin swimming across the Niger River, herders behind them, into the welcoming arms of families, adorned women, and spectators, who have not seen these men for the entire dry season, which can last up to six months. The men are greeted with gifts and celebrations ensue upon their arrival. It is an incredible testament to the power of the male figure in Malian life and to the strength and endurance of the Malian family and community (Beckwith & Fischer, 1999 p. 44-49).

When he was seventeen, Toure Keita, who had already been initiated into the powerful adult male society of Mali, fled his country in search of a better education and life for himself. “I thought I had better chance if I left. Otherwise, I have same chance as everyone else. If I know someone famous, things get better, but my family don’t know people. I stay in Mali, I be like everyone else. I knew I was smart and I could go to school. I didn’t know how though” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 15, 2005). He

applied for a passport in Niger under a different name and false age and was granted both the passport and a legitimate visa to the United States. His family raised the money for him to go to the United States for six months.

Toure landed in The Bronx in New York City and took residency in a SRO (single room occupancy hotel): a common type of housing for newly arrived and transitory West African immigrants. “I got off plane and find African cabbie. He take me to hotel where I can find my uncle. My uncle knew I coming, but not when. The cabbie from Senegal. He knew where lots of Mali people live in New York (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). Paul Stoller (2002) writes the following about SRO’s in New York City. “Housing is a central problem for West African immigrants in New York City. . . Conditions are often deplorable. . .leaks, urine, feces, roaches, trash and garbage in public access” (p. 153). While living in the SRO, Toure worked with his cousins and uncles for the family business, which was as a Malian textile trader in the city. “It was good work and they needed me. I work all the time and I like it. But I wanted school so bad” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005).

Toure's experience socially thus far in America, speaks to both the "border" culture that Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) discusses in her work and the symbolic strength that the customary Niger River crossing holds for the people of Mali:

> At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. (p. 78)

For many undocumented immigrants, the decision to straddle the two "mortal combatants" and, in some way heal the open wound existing between the two is too risky, both culturally and socially:

> It was like I live in world that Americans don't know nothing about. We like little Africa up there. We eat African food, speak Soninke and Bambara all day, and we never really have to be in America except for when we talking to customers. School though would be

different. Lots of my cousins not go to school because they have to leave to go there with Americans. (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005)

Somé(1998) writes that this transition is profound for Africans: “For an African to come to the West while maintaining a devotion to ancestral wisdom is to invoke a program of challenges and adversity” (p. 12). As a result, many undocumented Africans forge a new path across this border in which they live in the shadows of the mainstream society and under the brick ceiling of economic advancement without papers.

This “disengagement” has allowed many to push their families forward into generational advancement through American education and opportunities to American born offspring. “One of my uncle’s kids, he in school. He will go to college and help his father, so my uncle no have to worry. I don’t have kids. I have nobody but me” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). As immigration laws begin to change, however, it becomes more and more difficult for immigrants like Toure to achieve this “disengagement” without several encounters with INS.

For many years, undocumented immigrants have been the most difficult group to assess among the immigrant

community. According to the immigration and naturalization service (INS), an immigrant must have resided illegally for one year before they are considered “illegal” by law. Commonly referred to as “illegal aliens”, this group of immigrants lives in an America that is somewhere between the borders of secretive and public. “I hate this word alien. Why they call us alien? We not alien. We people” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 25, 2005). Costanzo, Davis, Caribert, Goodkind, and Ramirez (2001) note that the 2000 U.S. Census estimated that there were at least eight million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (p. 27). They live in constant fear of the INS and, as a result, tend to only use government services when trusted individuals have referred them. “So many times, we go to English class or school and get scared. Alotta people I know scared of white people in this country. I am careful about the people I talk to, you never know about them” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 3, 2005). Socially speaking, undocumented immigrants have incredible hurdles to overcome if they want to live public lives in American society. As a result, many are often confined to small ethnically homogenous groups that serve as support units in the United States.

Survival in Numbers: Reasons for Spatial Concentration

The spatial concentration that Portes and Rumbaut (1996) discuss specifically applies to African immigrants because it connects with the role of community in African life. Somé (1998) writes about community's role in the African village: "In the village, the illness of any one person calls forth the energy of the entire community. If any individual is sick, then the village is sick. A community is healthy when everybody is healthy" (p. 183). Thus, African immigrants tend to have tight cultural networks in the United States that provide resources to other African immigrants without the involvement of public social service agencies. Because of this association with the group, makeshift clans or social networks have been created by Africans to assist each other while in the United States.

In addition, such communal organizations serve as ways to protect those who may be undocumented (Stoller, 2002, p. 164). These are not formal associations that require memberships, but instead "safe-houses" where one can go when difficulties arise. "We have a phone, they are the only ones who know where to find me, we also share bills, when you have money, you pay, when there is not money, you

don’t pay, it is our way” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 3, 2005). These “safe-houses” are sometimes located within Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SRO’s) or larger, lower rent, apartment complexes that may or may not provide adequate housing. Recently, Paris has seen two deadly SRO fires that have killed many African immigrants in France (“Woman Admits Causing Accidental Fire at Paris Hotel that Killed 22”, 2005, p. 1). “In New York at first sometimes people can’t live anywhere else. It is so expensive and it is not possible to be here and not send something to the family. People give things up for family” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 3, 2005). Thus, many West Africans will sacrifice standard of living in order to remain in the established social network (Stoller, 2001, p. 653).

Illegal Sustenance: Economic Impacts of Undocumented Immigrants

Economically speaking, Toure Keita will never advance until he has the ability to use his name in American society. “Tribal practices emphasize the discovery, before birth of the business of the soul that has come into the world. A person’s purpose is then embodied in his name, thus constituting an inseparable reminder of why the person

walks with us here in this world" (Somé, 1998, p.3). On that cold day one January, Toure did not announce to the teacher that he wanted to take the citizenship test, which the program he accessed has all of the materials to prepare him for; he asked them to help him *become* a citizen, which, from his perspective, was different than simply taking a test at the INS office. "I do not want to live as another name anymore in this country," he said to me during one of our first conversations. "I want to be educated, to work, to rent an apartment under *my* name" (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). Toure's name represents his Soninke heritage and his Malian roots.

Although he speaks both Bambara and Soninke, which are languages of two separate ethnic groups in Mali, he identifies more in the United States with Soninke, because it allows him to speak with other Soninke people from various countries in West Africa, whereby increasing the benefits of spatial concentration for him and providing him with the necessary community for survival in America. "I speak a little Pulaar too, but not many Fulani in this city. I speak Soninke mostly in this city. Bambara too sometimes. Most of my friends are speaking Soninke though" (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 10, 2005). This

and his heavy reliance on oral communication, has isolated him from the written Western world in which he now lives. “Most of the people I’m with do not write or read. We never had to before now. I can, but I don’t need it so I think my brain has forgot things over this time here” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 10, 2005). His desire to *become* a citizen rests more in his hope to transform himself through American education, while still being able to somehow return to the name and the heritage he has hidden as an undocumented person in the United States. “I think if I go to school, I can learn how to get in front of myself. I know school can help me and maybe even help with immigration” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 10, 2005). Nevertheless, accessing this system has been a long and difficult process for Toure and others like him.

Access to Public Programs

During the past decade, laws governing illegal immigration have changed drastically and, in many circumstances, barred such groups from attaining support from publicly funded programs, even if they chose to pursue it. In turn, this isolates their social experiences in America even more profoundly. “Title V contains amendments

to the welfare bill, the Social Security Act and the INA which are directed at limiting aliens' access to public benefits. Proof of citizenship is required to receive public benefits and verification of immigration status is required for Social Security and higher-educational assistance" (*Illegal Immigration Reform*, 1997, p. 1). In addition, in California, more severe propositions have been passed, but later thrown out by the courts (Wan, 2004, p. 1). Proposition 187 was determined unconstitutional, but did seek to require that all undocumented immigrants be barred from publicly funded programs (elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education and healthcare to name a few) (Wan, 2004, p. 1). Arizona has successfully adopted similar legislation that bars illegal immigrants from some publicly funded programs (Kelly, 2004, p. 1).

It was estimated in 1994 that immigrants, both legal and undocumented cost our social service programs over $52 billion (Borjas, 2002, p. 1095). Although this number is often disputed, it has given anti-immigrant groups powerful ammunition in their efforts to impact immigration reform in the United States. As a result, it makes undocumented immigrants' presence the center of political initiatives that further isolate them from accessing the freedoms and

education that many search for and, instead, focuses immigration reforms toward their contributions to cheap labor in the United States:

> The guest worker concept is rooted in the idea that illegal immigrants already hold many entry jobs that Americans don't seem interested in, especially in fields like agriculture, landscaping, and housekeeping. . . Immigrants would be eligible to work in the United States for six years but then would have to return to their home countries for one. No special citizenship deals. (Marek, 2005, p.50)

Sadly, such reforms have created incredible social anxiety on behalf of many African immigrants, including Toure, and only furthered their fear of public agencies, both urban and rural.

The Possibilities of Citizenship: Knowing our Rights as Humans

With citizenship or legal status, Toure hopes to advance socio-economically and become more connected to the society in which he now lives. “When I first came here, I worked with my uncles and cousins in New York, then at the car wash, the African market too” (Toure Keita, personal

interview, February 8, 2005). Toure speaks frankly of his experiences as an undocumented worker in the United States. For the most part, he has worked only for family members or other Malians, but he is not ignorant about the exploitation he has endured. “Last week, I was sick. I called my job and they told me I had to work. I said that I was sick and they said I am finished. They know I will do nothing because I do not have rights. But, they are Africans too only here everything is about making money” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 2, 2005). Frequently, undocumented immigrants find themselves in similar situations. Without the legal rights of citizens or residents, they are at the mercy of their bosses, which ultimately creates an extremely unbalanced and often difficult situation in the workplace. “My boss tells me I don’t have rights, so I never make questions. I just work and work until I can’t anymore” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). Likewise, an education level that is minimal by Western standards serves to compound Toure’s experience in America.

Toure’s situation is typical of uncommented workers throughout the country; however, there have been situations where changes have been made on their behalf. In January of

2000, Eliot Spitzer, the state attorney general of New York, filed a suit against the Food Emporium market and its parent company charging them with violating minimum-wage laws. The story made headlines in October of 1999, when a group of West African men picketed the store for paying them well below minimum wage for deliveries. On average, the deliverymen worked twelve-hour days six days a week. Instead of being paid by the hour, they were paid $1.25 per delivery. Mamadou Camara, one of the leaders of the picket said that the workers knew they were being abused, but they were hesitant to protest because of their fears of getting fired or having an encounter with INS (Perez-Pena, 2000, p. 1).

Toure speaks of similar instances in jobs he has had and not knowing his rights, he says, has a lot to do with cultural education, which often comes from written literacy. “In Mali, two dollars an hour is a lot of money. Here it is nothing, but I am afraid to complain and they know that about me, that is why they do this stuff to me” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 2, 2005). Many African immigrants arrive in America to find that it is not what they believed. Although they may be somewhat educated (Toure has a high school diploma and technical training

from Mali) they do not qualify for jobs that meet their skills. Arthur (2000) writes:

> Since the 1960's, large numbers of highly educated Africans have been arriving in the United States to pursue advanced learning. But also coming to the United States or already residing here is a growing number of Africans in their twenties who have yet to achieve educational credentials sufficient to provide them with access to quality jobs. For this group, the survey revealed, employment opportunities are limited. Though many are able to secure jobs in the service sector, increasingly, the seasonal nature of these jobs means that they face frequent layoffs. In addition, institutional discrimination rooted in color coding has restricted access to relatively high wages for African immigrants with minimal education. (p. 103)

Circular migration has increasingly become the way that undereducated or undocumented African immigrants have dealt with the difficulties of lower SES status. "When New York was too difficult, I had to move. I move to a smaller city where I can find work and no one will bother me. When things are too difficult here, I will move again" (Toure

Keita, personal interview, February 18, 2005). As Arthur (2000) points out, such migration disrupts family life, education, and any social networks that could be created by establishing longer residence in a city (p. 103).

Ultimately though, many Africans, like Toure, see education as their only means to overcome poverty. "In my country, if I am educated, even by GED in America, I will have a good life. I can't get the education though because I move so many times" (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). Arthur (2000) believes from his study that this group is highly committed to the transformation that Toure hopes education will bring him:

> Today, education continues to fulfill the function of introducing African immigrants to American values and culture. It provides access to social mobility and entrance into middle-class lifestyles while, at the same time, assisting in cultural integration. The majority of the immigrants who were surveyed viewed education at the only route to pursue to avoid being caught in the web of underclass status in the United States. (p. 103)

Toure realizes that education, however much it helps him to ease his suffering in this initiation, will not bring him

quick easy money. “It is so far away. I can imagine a day when I have the GED in my hand, but it seems so far for me. I have to be able to take care of myself too” (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 28, 2005). As a result, he divides his time working on his GED with the African American festival season in which he and two other Malian traders travel around the country selling products to mostly African American clients at reunions and festivals.

He studies for his GED and completes practice tests from the back of a van in between stops. “It is the only way. Otherwise, I will never accomplish anything here. I have to feed myself and my brain” (Toure Keita, Personal Interview, May 28, 2005). His experience in the United States has been one that Somé (1998) describes as a meeting between his African roots and his Western experience. “While the Third World is experiencing the immediacy of the people’s need for healing in the area of physical hunger, the West is awakening to a spiritual hunger so dramatic as to be almost frightening” (Somé, 1998, p. 15). Toure came into education with a sense of Spirit, as Somé describes, but must also make sacrifices spiritually and culturally in order to physically survive in a place based on material gain. Somé speaks of this transition in his own experience.

“Because education was a departure from home and all its values, because it meant forgetting the ancestral ways in order to survive, education fostered in me and my colleagues a serious crisis of identity” (Somé, 1998, p. 7). Socially and economically, Toure’s road has been full of hurdles, but his commitment to education, with all of its sacrifices, is both admirable and, somehow, a way to light his path and strengthen his journey across the river.

Education and Transformation of Self

When Toure arrived in the United States, his age at the time could have technically allowed him to attend public schools. “I didn’t know that information. My family never knew that I could attend school for free here” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). Because his family operated within the West African subculture of traders and street merchants in New York City, no one even mentioned or knew about his access to public education. From the beginning of his pursuit of an American visa, however, Toure’s dream had been to study in America. “In Mali, I was very good in school. I loved school, but school there only goes just that far- you know, don’t you?” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). In

this interview, Toure spoke of his opinions of the Malian educational system, which he believed was a good one, but did not provide him with the adequate facilities to go past secondary school and has left him far behind the norm in American GED programs. “We good in math. We better in math than Americans. But we do it the African way. My tutor in this program wants me to do it American way, he don’t understand I get same answers. Reading and writing though is difficult. If I went to university in Mali, this would be better, but I didn’t” (Toure Keita, personal interview, February 8, 2005). In New York, he began working for his family’s business while still wanting to apply to schools in the U.S. for college.

Because his family had little experience with American education, he was unable to access the proper avenues to begin legitimate studies in the U.S. or obtain a high school diploma. “They don’t know nothing about school. My uncle, he know about work. I help him make money that is why I came for him” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). Nevertheless, when his visa expiration date grew closer, he began to resist returning to his country. “I wanted to study. I was young and I thought I could do it by myself. I also wanted the American life. I couldn’t go back

to Mali with what I had" (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). He believed he could find a way to study in the United States. Against his mother and uncles' wishes, Toure refused to return to Mali and, as a result, his family, both in his country and in the United States, abandoned him.

As Nwadiora (1996) states, the family is the center of African life. For Soninke people and many other West African ethnic groups, the mother is at the center of this familial force. Often, Africans will allow elder family members, especially parents, to weigh heavily on personal decisions (Nwadiora, 1996, p.120). A Ghanan proverb states "I am because we are; without we I am not, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969). Thus, such a decision to go against the will of a family is an extreme personal sacrifice. "I knew what was good for me, but I was so young. I wanted to go back to Mali with an education, not with nothing to show for my work here" (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). As a result of his decision, Toure moved from place to place until finally landing in a small midwestern city a few years ago.

It has now been seven years since his arrival in America and only recently has communication with his mother

begun to improve. Throughout these seven years, he has lived on the outskirts of American society and in the shadows of the economic and educational sector as a form of self-protection and preservation. Going back to his country through deportation or arrest would be even more of a disgrace than the refusal to go back at all. “It is better to hide. What -will I go back in handcuffs to my mother and brothers? I will not do that” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). Thus, his arrival in our program was a significant moment in his life. “This is big for me. I have searched for so many years for a school that will take me. I didn’t know there was a place where I don’t have to pay” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). It was more than just attending English classes, taking a citizenship test, or learning to better read and write in a language that is not his own. His arrival signifies a series of risks and sacrifices that formal literacy brings for Toure and others like him.

Seeing the Shore

> “With the end stage comes, at last, a view of the shore. More often than not, the shore is as hard to reach as the middle stage is to endure. Sometimes one reaches the shore and finds it impossible to locate a safe harbor. The end

> is achieved through countless attempts to dock" (Somé, 1998, p. 286).

Toure's road has been full of pitfalls and circles. He has spent his years now in the United States as an invisible person, ducking and hiding from immigration, and trying to scrape by on seasonal employment. Until recently, he had not found a public program that would offer him the opportunity to study for his G.E.D. without paying a fee. As a result, he has remained socio-economically and educationally stationary. Paulo Freire (2001) would argue that Toure Keita's story shows that his coping skills thus far have done little to transform his situation in the United States. Ultimately, he claims, it is through risk that we acquire the knowledge necessary for true self-transformation. "Knowledge emerges through inventions and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 68). The knowledge he discusses must come from a source, educationally speaking, that allows transformation to take place, and he cautions us against methods of teaching that stifle personal growth:

> The more students work at storing the deposits

> entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (Freire, 2001, p. 68)

Coming from a colonial system where literacy and oral traditions are in constant collision, his steps toward reading and writing in an unfamiliar territory are profound evidence of the moments Freire (1990) describes as necessary on the path of human existence. “In fact, however, there is no creativity without *ruptura*, without a break from the old, without conflict in which you have to make a decision. I would say there is not human existence without *ruptura*” (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 38). This past year, however, Toure finally risked everything to join the educational sector. “I am worried. I am not afraid though. I cannot be afraid and do this – come to school you know. I have to trust these people with my life” (Toure Keita, personal interview, March 8, 2005). With this step, he began to intervene in his world on his own behalf through the process of education.

This intervention was not without its own issues and awakenings. Initially, Toure spent most of his class time in the ESL facility of the program he now attends. “That was really hard for me. I knew everything in that class. I felt like I was really for real starting over there” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Because he speaks with an accent and is an immigrant, he was immediately referred to the ESL program within the building for study. Nevertheless, for Toure, part of becoming an American, as he puts it, has to do with the process of education in this country and the knowledge of the insider culture. “I knew they put me in English class first because of the way I talk English, you know. But I didn’t know how to speak about that issue. I didn’t think I really could change that part you know” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Padilla (2003) defines this under the context of cultural competence: a term that psychologists have used to explain cultural transactions for the latter part of the 20th century. “Most simply, cultural competence refers to the learned ability to function in a culture in a manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, customs, mannerisms, and language of the majority of members of the culture” (p. 42). Literacy,

in a written society, is a large part of this cultural competency Padilla (2003) describes. Nevertheless, Freire (1983) would argue that such literacy, in Toure's case, had to be critical:

> When men lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments, which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (p. 95)

Yet, in order to "reverse" this "starting point" and access a clearer picture of the whole through the process of critical education, one must navigate an often complicated system of social service.

Managing the bureaucratic systems within a host society like the United States and the process of solidifying a material "identity" (through a driver's license, social security card, car title, etc.) is often frustrating, even for those of us who are considered

“insiders” in the American system. Ultimately, accessing such a system without a shared cultural foundation, language, written literacy, or even the proper identification, while trying to define and maintain a sense of one’s own culture is almost unimaginable. Inevitably, many immigrants choose the same path as Toure has and seek education as a way of navigating such a system.

Seeing the Self as a Stakeholder

Toure had to use education as both his tool in reading the “world” and his path for reading the “word” that Freire (2001) describes, even though that system had already passed its own judgment on him by labeling him prematurely (p.74). “I stayed in that class so I could learn about how to get out of the class. The more I come to class, the more I get to know the school and who can help” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Ernie Stringer (2004) describes the people who are involved in any organization as “stakeholders” (p. 28). When Toure arrived in the program he currently attends, there were several stakeholders involved in the decisions that would be made with and for him. Yet, his writing and reading ability, along with his marginal cultural competence initially

placed him in a subordinate position as a stakeholder. “If I knew at the time what I know now, I would not have stayed so long in that class. But I didn’t know” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). All of the stakeholders except him were what Padilla (2003) would consider “insiders” in the cultural system of the United States (p. 35-56).

First and foremost, Toure was not typical of the ESL population currently enrolled in the class. Having lived in the United States for a long period of time, he spoke English fluently. Nevertheless, because his linguistic and cultural background was “typical” of an ESL student, he was automatically placed in the ESL facility. Although the entire organization houses a GED program that is open to the public, Toure was seen by other stakeholders as an ESL student. He had to find a way to transform his “world” as Freire (1983) describes it and he did this, although culturally conflicted about it, by being extremely vocal about his educational interests. Thus, he made it a priority for the program to seek ways to place him in the GED classes with American students.

It is important to note that Toure’s cultural conflict arises from the passive relationship with authority figures

and teachers that African students often have. “In Mali, I would never speak up to the teacher or the school director. They are the authority in the school. Students have no rights. Out of respect, we never speak unless they ask” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Their views and role in education can be seen, in part, as a reflection of their historically subordinate role in the colonial or what Freire (2001) describes as the banking system of schooling in which knowledge is imparted on a student who is seen as a vessel and not an active member in its acquisition (Freire, 2001, p. 68). This role often unfolds as silence in American ESL classrooms that house African students. Often, for teachers, this silence is taken to mean satisfaction, but, in reality, it may not be. “One of big reasons my friends stop coming to class is they unhappy. We respect the teacher. Saying you unhappy tells them you no respect them. So, we just leave” (Toure Keita, personal interview, April 8, 2005). Thus, challenging the power system in the school, for Toure, was both culturally inappropriate, and also a sign of disrespect.

Although it was not easy for him culturally, Toure, because he is somewhat familiar with American interaction, began, unexpectedly, to voice his needs. He remained,

however, in cultural conflict because he worried about "hurting feelings" of other stakeholders involved (teachers, program coordinators, and colleagues who would believe he was "too good for them"), but still felt it was necessary to advocate for himself. "I had you though. You understand that this so hard for me. But our conversation give me power. I learn how to talk about what I want and so then the teacher not upset. I worry about my colleagues though that they think I too good for them (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). It was difficult for him to understand that what he was doing was not selfish, as he put it and, ultimately, that what he was doing would benefit other African students like him. "Once (other African student's name) started to do the same things I did to get into the GED, I knew I did a good thing. I help him. That is enough to keep talking" (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). When he began to understand the implications of "we" as Nwadiora (1996) puts it in the "I" that he was fighting for, his cultural tension eased (p. 118).

Toure and I spent a month together using his basic literacy as a building block for his journey into cultural competence. We made a list of personal goals for him that

required better reading and writing skills and slowly worked through that list together. We used immigration forms, job applications, letters to our program coordinator, email, and navigation of the internet as resources for his personal literacy journey and our tutoring sessions together. At first, it was frustrating and difficult as we spent long hours stumbling through immigration forms that I too had trouble understanding, but somehow, our shared insider/outsider knowledge coached us toward glimmers of success. “I remember those funny faces you make when I print off those forms for immigration. I knew at that time that even Americans not know everything, just like me” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). This process required not only for Toure to be a committed student, but also for me to reflect on what it means to be a teacher in such contexts. Paulo Freire (2001) writes of such a process as creating critical reflection among teachers: “Students’ restlessness, doubts, curiosity, and comparative ignorance should be seen by their teachers as challenges to them. Basically, thinking about all this is illuminating and enriching for the teacher as much as for the students” (p. 220). For Toure and I, our cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds were all pieces

that initially divided us in our work. Nevertheless, it was our shared ignorance and knowledge that seemed to guide us through the obstacles.

Finally, the GED program agreed to test Toure for his basic skills. Through his increased internet skills, he was able to gain an understanding of ESL students in GED programs and their status as “special needs” students, so he requested an untimed test through a formal letter to the director. Although the letter took us forever to write, and I spent a lot of time wanting to snatch the keyboard from his hands and write it myself, it eventually proved to be his tool in gaining an untimed test. His test scores showed significant background in math, but a more limited ability in reading and writing, due to the fact that English is not his first language and his first language is not a written one. The other stakeholders believed it would be better for him to stay in ESL until his English improved.

This was an incredible disappointment for both of us. “Aye, I remember that day like it is the only day in my life. I was so sad I thought I could cry at that time. I thought it was like I was so hopeful and everything turned out bad” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). As his tutor, I felt that I had given him false hope by

encouraging him and allowing him to believe that these changes were possible. For me, as an insider who knew his capabilities well, clearly the test scores were showing issues with literacy more than a language issue. Yet, to someone not connected to him, they showed that he needed to learn more English. I struggled with what Patti Lather (1998) identifies in her reflections on the writing of *Troubling the Angels* with the notion of both getting in and out of the way and the desire to work against the "easy categories of us and them, where the 'us' is concerned and voyeuristic, and 'them' are the objects of our pity, fear, and fascination" (p.214). I knew that I could not speak for him in this situation and that, to do so, would be to also do him a disservice and limit his power as a stakeholder.

A few moments after I told him of the news, Toure sucked his teeth. "You go with me to talk to the lady in the window office. I want her to see me and know who I am" (Toure Keita, personal communication, April 18, 2005). I let him know that I would not speak for him, that I would make the appointment, but I was attending because he asked me to and not so that I could intervene on his behalf. Toure came to the meeting knowing what he had to do and he asked the director pointedly, "If I were an American

student, would you accept me into this class with the reading score I have?" Clearly, her response was "yes". I sat in silence as he argued his case to her; the personal importance of his education was not to be missed by anyone in the room. Toure is now one of two African students in the GED program. Because of his efforts, the program has become more open to allowing former ESL students and immigrants into its classes.

Crossroads and Intersections: Moving On

All over West Africa, the symbol of the crossroads or initiation exists in a variety of aspects of African life. In Guinea-Bissau, when an animal is killed as sacrifice or for nourishment, it is customary to draw a cross in the sand and to allow the blood of the animal to drip into that cross and fill it. The blood is said to seep into the earth and re-nourish its lifeblood. The philosophy behind this stems from the West African belief in the meaning of a crossroads. Paul Stoller (2002) recounts this as it exists in Niger and Mali with the Songhay people:

> For the Songhay people of the Republics of Niger and Mali, crossroads are points of existential

> danger where decisions of depth and consequence are deliberated and made. Even carefully made decisions can have ramifications that threaten a person's very existence. From a West African vantage, one should never underestimate the difficulty of negotiating a crossroads; it requires courage, daring, and imagination. Courage is necessary to resist the very real temptation to turn around and embrace the comforts of the past. Daring is required to fight off the pull of false consciousness. It is easy to take the most direct- and painless- path into the unknown. Imagination is needed to avoid the pitfalls of a new terrain. (p. 24)

Toure not only believes in the crossroads: he embraces it, where Americans might choose to turn away. "I am not afraid. What will they do now? Send me home? Whatever happens to me now is supposed to happen. I will be okay and if I am not, then that is what the plan was always" (Toure Keita, personal interview, May 2, 2005). Inevitably, Toure's cultural background, from an American standpoint, can appear fatalistic. He sees the world in multiple realities of both the signs and signals of the

oral or unseen and now the physical signs and signals that lie in the written and visible.

Toure consistently embraces the “road” that Miles Horton (1990) refers to in his discussions of the path to *being* educated as opposed to simply being taught. “The way you really learn is to start something and learn as you go along” (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 40). Toure had a dream, but he looked to education to provide him with the ability to forge “the road” for his dreams. “I am a little closer now than I was in February. I know that” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Thus, it became a ritual by which he managed a period of initiation in his life (Somé, 1998). At first he was skeptical of his ability to read and analyze INS forms and procedures, write letters, and navigate standardized tests, but now he has the tools by which to move forward. In the seven months that I have known him, he has forced me, as Paulo Freire (1990) points out, to “step aside” and to learn as the process unfolds (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 139). He has learned to use the process of literacy as a necessary building block for self-transformation. As a result, everyday that he came to class, he moved closer to a full

understanding of the printed word, and, with that, he is now better able to map the journey ahead.

The Future

With all initiation though, comes a point of transition into the next segment. “The mature person therefore is, tribally speaking, the initiated responsible person fully aware of the reasons that brought him/her into this place, committed to carrying out his/her mission with the unconditional support of the village” (Somé, 1998, p. 277). Toure saw education as an opportunity and called on us to be a community by which he could navigate this initiation into another part of his current society. “I tell my mami when I call that I have found a signal here in this program. It is like what you would call a spirit a sign that this will be okay, you know” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Although his experience in the journey to literacy has provided him with a form of spiritual sustenance: a way of easing a period of suffering, it has not provided him with an immediate way of dealing with the physical hunger of his existence in a material society (Somé, 1998).

As his tutor and now his friend, I wanted him to stay in our program and finish his GED with us, but he cannot be a permanent fixture anywhere. He has to be transient in order to survive here. “I know this will affect my school, but I have to go on the road. I have nothing right now. I have to make some money so I can continue to study” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). The process of literacy taught Toure what he already feared, that his immigration status in this country couldn’t be rectified by education or cultural assimilation. Nevertheless, it helped him to manage the crossroads: what the village and elders would do in his own country. “I will finish my GED here. Then I will go back to Mali and apply to university with my American diploma. Someday, I will be back. I will work to change the way Americans use ‘alien’ to describe people like me in this country” (Toure Keita, personal interview, August 8, 2005). Now, he comes in periodically to attend GED class and prepare for the future test, but work and transportation often keep him from attending, so it is a long road ahead of him. He continues to be a reminder, however, that for people like Toure, education, even with its limited outcomes, is still a priority in fusing physical and spiritual nourishment.

As a researcher, I happened to be standing in front of Toure Keita and, later four other African men, when they reached a crossroads. Each man is slowly learning the ways of American culture, food, and life, but they have not had fair or equal access to American amenities: what we would also call, American *necessities*. According to the United States government, Toure literally and figuratively, does not exist in this country. In addition, their battles with moving out of an oral society into a written one are painstaking at best. All five men are a rarely documented estimate of the profound shift American education has begun to see because of immigrants like them. And so our work together began at the crossroads.

CHAPTER 3

DHOOF: [TRAVEL} SOMALI: A DISPLACED MUSLIM SURVIVES IN A CHRISTIAN WORLD

"One must ask why tears, the softest expression of grief, are not as acceptable in the modern world as anger and rage" (Somé, 1994, p. 219)

Amin Farrah wears his refugee status underneath his infectious smile and precisely ironed pants. He speaks English "not very well" according to him, but to an average English speaker, he is nearly proficient. He is a delivery truck driver in a midwestern city and has spent the better part of the past four months since his arrival being "very, very, lost" as he affectionately puts it. "But I am a good worker, my boss he knows that I am a good worker. I used to get lost every day, but now it is better. Please, could you tell me what is a route?" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 25, 2005). His former status as a truck driver in Somalia has not helped him beyond the logistics in the United States. "I was a truck driver in Somalia, a very big truck. You ask me, I could go anywhere, but here, no, everything is different" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, May 8, 2005). Amin's story, although bittersweet, is not unlike the stories of other

Somali refugees who have gained asylum in the United States over the past ten years.

African Refugees: A Profile of a Changing Group

Somali refugees have become one of the highest growing refugee populations in the United States, replacing Ethiopians and Eritreans after the United States Refugee Act in 1980. Between the years of 1982-1994, 43,427 African Refugees were admitted to the United States (70% came from Ethiopia and Eritrea), but by 1994, Somali refugees replaced both as the largest refugee population to resettle in the United States. Somali refugees are followed closely by Sudanese and Rwandan populations (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1994). African refugees, unlike other immigrant populations, bring a rising set of issues to the urban environment. Zehr (2001) estimated in 2001 that 1600 Somali refugees had enrolled in Columbus Public Schools and many had limited or no previous schooling (p. 30). They make up two thirds of the ESL program in the entire school system and the population is still growing. Sometimes schools take ten students a day and the district began seeing the students showing up with little or no warning (Zehr, 2001, p. 30).

Refugees come from vast socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Equally, they tend to experience a host of emotions and reactions to their new environment. “According to Dr. Paul Geltman, co-director of the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights, it is common for a refugee’s mood to fluctuate. . . he names depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as two possible manifestations” (Corbett, 2001, p. 3). Many refugees have lived most of their lives in a state of war or transition and, as a result, they are used to a very different way of life, sometimes in stark opposition to their American experience (Corbett, 2001, p. 3). “Oh, it was very different. In Somalia, our country was in big trouble. I was very afraid. You have to be very careful and many people I know are dead. I came here and it is difficult to forget that life” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 12, 2005). Yet, therapy often goes against traditional practices for African refugees who have relied on village elders to lead them in times of crisis and transition (Nwadiora, 1996, p.118).

Familial and Cultural Separation

Amin arrived in the United States four years after his wife and son became Somali refugees here. “I was gone on a trip to the city, when I came back, the war, and they were gone. I did not hear from them for months” (Amin Farrah, Personal Interview, February 25, 2005). He describes the day he heard from his wife, who had fled the country to Kenya as “the happiest day of my [his] life” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 25, 2005). When he finally arrived in the United States in 2005, his son, who had been three when he left Somalia, was now seven. “He speaks perfect English. He does not eat Somali food. He always wants hamburger. Is this okay for him to have hamburger?” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 25, 2005). Amin’s experience with his son, whom he is very proud of, has not been easy. “He tells me how to behave. For example, in Somalia, when we are in the restaurant, we are happy and talk loudly. But here, he tells me ‘Dad, quiet please’ I am afraid I embarrass him” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 25, 2005). Aside from the shock of his rapidly changing family, environment, and employment (Amin had never even considered moving to the United States before the war in Somalia), his biggest obstacle, but still

greatest center, he says, has been incorporating the traditions of Islam into everyday practice in the United States (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 15, 2005).

Urban Islam

David Hodge (2002) states that, essentially, Islam, is the submission to Allah that all Muslims practice. There are two forms of Islam, Shiite and Sunni and the majority of the world's Muslims, including many from Africa, are Sunni (approximately 90% worldwide) (p. 164). "We are Sunni. There is so much bad things about Muslims now, but we have been taught to love people, to love everyone. Most Muslims are so hurt by what has happened because there are bad people who say they are Muslim. This is not our way" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 12, 2005). Although the "true Muslim" identity is often debated in Islamic circles and conversations, there are a few aspects of Islam that are generally shared by all Muslim people.

These shared aspects originate from the teachings of the Shari'a and are denoted by most Muslims as the five pillars of faith. The declaration that there is no god but their God and Muhammad is His messenger is the first and

most important piece to the faith (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). The second is the requirement of ritual prayer (salat) in which the practitioner prays five times throughout the day facing Mecca (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). Almsgiving is the third pillar. A percentage of what one has accumulated is given to the community to promote general welfare. Where this is impossible, one provides service to the community as a means of assistance (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994, p. 43). The fourth pillar of Islam is the yearly fast during Ramadan. During this time, all able adults abstain from eating, smoking, drinking, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset in order to facilitate a closer relationship to God and empathize with those less fortunate (Altareb, 1996, p. 32). The final pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is to be taken at least once in a lifetime.

Amin continues to pray five times a day to Mecca, even though he works full time. “I find space. I park truck, I pray. Sometimes not so easy, but I do it. Also, if I arrive at school early, I can pray too in a special room the teacher lets me use” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 10, 2005). Equally, he continues to practice the third pillar, almsgiving, even though his financial

situation is difficult. “Every day, I see this woman walking, looking like she is going to work or the bus. Early in the morning and yesterday I see her running, like she is hurrying. I am afraid for her because city is very dark. May I ask you, can I give her a ride?” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). For Amin, being a true Muslim, in part, encompasses the ability to give, even when one has very little, which is how he explains his desire to forge a connection with the above stranger. “If you cook food and your neighbor is hungry, and you do not give them food, you are not a true Muslim” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). Suspicious Americans, however, often misinterpret these practices. Freely giving alms to people whom he sees in struggle is one of the pillars Amin has modified since being in America. “They do not understand when I offer assistance” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). Ultimately, he has had to adjust such practices in the much more private society America offers; moreover, living in an urban area makes such behavior sometimes treacherous.

In addition to the practice of the five pillars, Muslims also have a system of values by which they conduct their lives. Community, Family, and Sovereignty of God are

the three most important foundations of Islam. For Muslims, the community comes before the individual, so individual rights are often suppressed for the better of the whole community. Kelly, Aridi, and Bakhtiar (1996) note that, as a result, American ideals of self-advocacy, competition among individuals, and personal success do not hold much intrigue for Muslims unless they are for the better of the communities in which such individuals live (p. 211). Equally, the family unit is held in high esteem and can often extend into members of the whole Muslim community. Husbands and wives are of equal worth within the home, but have very different roles. Often, women stay home and tend to the family while men may hold employment outside of the home. “In Somalia, my wife stay home with our son and I work. One time when I’m out working, the war started, which is how we are separated” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 15, 2005). In the United States, many African Muslim families have both parents working outside the home. “We would not be able to live if both of us did not work. It is not our choice, so Allah will understand” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 15, 2005). As a result of this necessity, they often

rationalize such behavior so it adapts to their urban American lifestyle.

Perhaps the most difficult of the three common foundational aspects of Islam for Amin and other Muslims in the U.S. has been the Sovereignty of God. To many Americans, the idea that nothing happens in the life of a Muslim that is not God's will appears fatalistic. Although this belief often serves as a form of protection for immigrants living in the U.S. and a way to explain or understand harsh conditions, racism, and linguistic or religious struggles, Americans can often perceive it as laziness or a lack of desire to control one's own destiny and life in this country (Banawi & Stockton, 1993, p. 156). "I am not in control of this, Allah is and what will happen will happen, I cannot change it. There are some times where people do not like me and I must suffer, but I have faith" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, May 3, 2005). Often this belief causes great difficulties for non-Muslim Americans providing service to Muslim families. Such service providers are more common in cities because of increase social and socioeconomic needs in immigrant and ethnic enclaves. To these providers, it seems that Muslim families are often willing to suffer and appear passive in the face

of difficulties that non-Muslims can easily resolve (Marian Andrews, personal interview, August 16, 2005).

Refugee Economics

Amin considers himself lucky. Because there are other Somalian refugees in the city he lives in, he was able to secure employment rapidly upon his arrival. His work, however, has not been easy. “I am used to being very good at this. I know my boss, he understands me, but sometimes I make him very angry” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, March 11, 2005). To illustrate this point, Amin often recounts the story of his first few weeks driving the delivery truck. His boss, assuming that he understood how to load the truck, provided very little instruction in this area. “One day, very early in the morning, I call my boss and say I have very big problem” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). His boss arrived at the location in the business district of the city, only to find that the security bar in the back of the truck had not been lowered after the truck was loaded. As a result, the pastries, soups, sandwiches, and cakes that had been part of the delivery were now smeared and spilled all over the back of the truck. “My boss started yelling and saying terrible

words, people were coming to work and looking at me" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). Because of his desire to only do well in the eyes of his boss and his own embarrassment in front of strangers, Amin took this as a personal attack and was deeply hurt. "Ever since I was child, when something bad happens, I have heart attack" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). During this interchange, Amin describes feeling a great pain in his chest and asking his boss to call 911 as he proceeded to lie down in the middle of the street next to the truck. His boss, believing that he was having a heart attack, dialed 911 and the situation intensified rapidly.

Amin now understands the difference between heart attack and panic attack, the latter of which he experiences in times of stress. Because of his sometimes difficult command of English and misunderstanding of the ways Americans often deal with anger, which is very different from the Somalian Muslim way, he became overwhelmed. "I felt like I was in danger. I know my boss. I know he love me, but at that time, he seemed so angry" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 2, 2005). Luckily, he is still employed and Amin appears to be gradually improving in his stress levels at work.

The Necessity of Employment

Within the first eight months of arrival in the United States, refugees are required to gain employment (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1996). In addition, they are also required to begin paying the amount of their passage in U.S. dollars back to the government after the first four to six months of their arrival in the United States. “I am lucky. I find employment because of my friend who is Somali. We work for man who father was immigrant too, so I think there is special love there for us” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, May 11, 2005). Every refugee is paired with a refugee resettlement agency, which may or may not be religiously affiliated upon his or her arrival in the United States. For at least the first thirty days of their stay in the United States, the resettlement agency will assist the refugee or the family with housing, food, and cash. “They also provide us with instructions on how to write checks and open bank accounts. We have to know how to do this because we start paying the government so soon and they only take the check or the money order” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, August 12, 2005). In addition, refugees, unlike other immigrants, can apply for food stamps and public assistance in the United States, but

cannot do this if they are receiving assistance from a resettlement agency (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1996).

A cultural clash can often prove to be economically detrimental to refugees who gain employment soon after their arrival in the United States. Although refugees receive a lengthy information packet from the United States Government and their resettlement agencies upon arrival, this often does not secure their success in employment or social survival in the United States. “I don’t know what the best way is. I think I have an easy time because my wife come here first. If they are by themselves, they are so lost in the first few months that the classes do not really help them” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, August 12, 2005). In speaking of the Lost Boys of Sudan, one of the most famous groups of African immigrants to enter the United States in the past ten years, Sara Corbett (2001) states:

> That the boys are accustomed to receiving aid concerns some of those who have helped provide it. ‘They’re going from an environment where you’ve basically been given everything at the camp to an environment where you have to work, you have to produce’ says Steve

> Redding, who directs the Kenya and southern Sudan programs of International Rescue Committee (p. 5).

Corbett states that for some, the idea of working is not necessarily the problem; however, much more detrimental are the simple cultural aspects of the everyday in America coupled with holding down employment or the experience of public education in this country:

> I fully understood that these boys were lucky. . . but still I could imagine, painfully, the small indignities and cultural stumbling blocks that lay ahead. As petty as this seems, the feel-good power of American charity was lost on me the second I imagined Maduk showing up for his first day of high school dressed in government-issue white canvas boat shoes and a shirt better suited for a retiree on a cruise ship. (p. 3)

The same “small indignities and cultural stumbling blocks” that Corbett describes with the lost boys are often carried over into the adult immigrant population as they struggle through employment and social interactions in the U.S. “Yesterday, I get pulled over by the police, very very late at night, in my delivery truck. I get out of the car and police get out and yell to put hands up” (Amin Farrah,

personal interview, February 8, 2005). This scenario offers a glimpse of how a routine traffic stop can quickly escalate into a cultural disaster. “In Somalia, we do not ride elevators with the police, we do not shake hands with them, and when they stop us, we get out of the car and go to them. It is bad to let police come to you” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, February 8, 2005). Luckily, in this situation, the police realized that Amin was an immigrant; however, as we have seen with the shooting deaths of Amadou D’iallo in 1999 and Osmane Zongo in 2003, this is not always the case. In Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, and other African countries that have experienced internal wars and corruption, the police are not at all trusted to defend civilians and, as a result, civilians often try to defend themselves against police by fighting them (Flayton, 2005, p. 3).

Still, everyday, it gets easier for Amin and his family. “I need education, at first when I was here, I did not even know what was pork and what was beef at the supermarket” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, May 9, 2005). Because his family is here, he is employed, and he is a part of the growing African Muslim population in his

city, Amin's struggle has been less profound than some who have no families and have struggled to secure employment.

In his free time, Amin volunteers as an interpreter and cultural broker for newly arrived Somali families, many of which are women, children, and grandmothers. Amin's volunteer work is structured around the everyday practices of writing a check, opening a bank account, reading a bus map, turning on a garbage disposal and a whole host of other activities. "They do not know nothing. How will they get to work or English class if they cannot ride the bus or even the elevator and escalators at their jobs? They do not speak English and a lot, I'm saying a lot, of the women do not write and read in any language, so it is so sad to see them struggling here" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, September 29, 2005). This cultural confusion is not atypical of African refugees in the United States. In speaking once again of the Lost Boys, Corbett (2001) writes:

> Without an American host family or church organization to help buffer the expenses, the three brothers seemed to grow more despondent with each passing week. Resettlement workers were encouraging Peter to stick with adult education so that he could pass his G.E.D.

> before finding a job, but the bills were piling up. On a particularly low night in mid-March, Peter Dut told me he was lonely and wished he were back in Kakuma. 'We are not eating enough here,' he said, his voice weighted with sadness. 'My brothers are suffering.' I was uncertain how to take this. Amid waves of self-congratulatory media covering the resettlement effort, it seemed the ultimate paradox to have three boys claiming they were eating less in America than they had in their refugee camp. (p. 5)

As a student in our program, Amin uses his education as a tool in making his and other Somali lives in this city better: "I learn these items because they help me. I then tell my friends about these things I learn and it helps them. So, my school helps others also" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, July 28, 2005). Amin's reading skills are significantly better than his writing skills; yet, because he spends a lot of his free time translating presentations, maps, and documents for the Somali community, his writing has steadily improved since he arrived in the United States.

Through these activities, he has not only gained knowledge of the dominant Discourse here, but has also been

pushed to practice it in his everyday activities. James Gee's (1989) discussion of this socialization clarifies the reasons for Amin's continued progress:

> Each of us interacts with various non-home-based social institutions- institutions in the public sphere, beyond the family and immediate kin and peer group. . . Each of these social institutions commands and demands one or more Discourses and we acquired these fluently to the extent that we are given access to these institutions and are allowed apprenticeships within them. (p.8)

Not only has Amin been accessing these social institutions through his education, but he has also been practicing this Discourse through his volunteer work. When I asked him how it has helped him, however, he replied, "I do not do this to help me. I do this because it is our way. It is the Muslim way" (Amin Farrah, personal interview, July 28, 2005). Inevitably, our role as educators in Amin's life was complicated by how much knowledge he was gaining from outside of our classroom. As he grew socially and economically in this country, we struggled to keep up with him, to meet his varying needs, and to help him fill in the gaps in his education. "I am not sure what I will do with

my education here. I would like to be a truck driver, you know, with the license. That is what I am skilled in. I am not so interested in the university. My children will do that part though”(Amin Farrah, personal interview, July 28, 2005).

As a program, assessing his educational goals were difficult, because they did not fit into the typical categories of finding a better job, continuing education, or gaining citizenship. Instead, it seemed that Amin’s goals were personal and communal: to be a better parent, spouse, and advocate in his community. “School helps me to do the things I love better. I think I am okay with how I read and write, but I like to be here with my friends. I would like to be a good parent too. I like to help with the others. That is what school gives me” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, September 29, 2005). Amin has found that family, religion, employment, and his service to the Somali community in his area are the most vital pieces to his survival. “Oh, and Yahoo! Maps. I can go anywhere now from my door to my destination” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, July 11, 2005).

CHAPTER 4

TIGI [CHIEF] DIOULA, COTE D'IVOIRE

Report from Daloa:

> Shortly after the town of Daloa fell to government forces on October 14, bodies were scattered along the road and in the bush north of the town. It was the usual brutal scenario of bush war. One appeared to be a teenager, stripped of his clothes and brutally beaten before being shot. Another was a man whose torso was detached from his limbs. Another was already decomposing in the equatorial heat. . . . Daloa stands on the dividing line between the north and south of the Ivory Coast. It is an ethnic tinderbox: split between people from President Gbagbo's Christian Bete tribe and Dioulas from the Muslim north. . . . The Dioulas remain closeted in their quarter near the town's mosque. One Dioula man bravely ventured onto the street to find some food. He said that even though the government troops said they were in Daloa to protect all people, two of his brothers had been killed the day before. It is unclear how many people have died in Daloa. 'I think it could be more than 100 if you count those who died in the bush outside,' one official said. (Di Giovanni, 2002, p. 3)

A Daloa Bushman Finds His Urban Future

A dilapidated taxi cab blaring Dioula prayer songs coasts into a space clearly marked "No Parking Anytime" in front of a housing project in a small Midwestern city. Out steps Saran Ba, a tall (6'8") dark skinned Cote D'Ivoirian man wearing fatigue shorts, slip on water shoes, and a t-shirt that states in very large letters "Just Do Me." It

would be ignorant to believe at first glance or any glance thereafter that this man does not have a presence in the world: he is a man who is proud of his name. “Hello my friend!” he shouts to me from across the street where I stand waiting to explain the “No Parking Anytime” sign and the “Just Do Me” t-shirt before his teacher and classmates prey on him.

Saran has been in the United States, first in New York and now here, for the past five years. He is a mechanic, for all practical purposes, which was his trade in Cote D’Ivoire. He has no family or relatives here, but has a very large group of friends, who include many people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures (Saran Ba, personal interview, April 11, 2005). “In Cote D’Ivoire, my people don’t care about money money all the time like here. We live weeks or months with no money. Here I gotta make money. I gotta support my family, you know” (Saran Ba, personal interview, April 11, 2005). Saran’s disrupted situation and extended family have forced him more so than the other four men in this study, to be the most engaged socially with people outside of his own background.

Disrupted Kinship Patterns: The Priority of the Invisible Family

Saran is the oldest of thirteen children in his family. He spent a large portion of his late childhood and early teens "helping Mami" as he puts it, until he developed an interest in fixing cars. "Every car in Ivory Coast is about to be or is already broken, so it was good, you know, for me to learn how to fix cars" (Saran Ba, personal interview, April 11, 2005). In 1999 a military coup, the first ever in the Ivory Coast's history, broke out and Saran and his family fled to neighboring Mali, which for them became a very different existence than their rural livelihood in the Ivory Coast. With his family struggling, it was only logical that Saran, the first son, find a way to help them survive. "I knew it was just going to get so bad. Our town was destroyed a few years ago, so we can never go back" (Saran Ba, personal interview, April 11, 2005). Somehow, he ended up in the United States; however, his immigration status and his means of arriving in the United States are something he does not discuss, but he does speak of his family at length. "They are all in Mali. Ivory Coast not good right now, you never know what will happen. I send them money every week. Whenever I have

it. I send them money” (Saran Ba, personal interview, April 11, 2005). Socially speaking, Saran’s existence in the United States has a great deal to do with his resourcefulness and his deep commitment to supporting his displaced family in Mali.

Milan Vesely (2005) states that Africans living in the United States add over $1 billion to their family incomes in their home countries (p. 39). This number can easily be interpreted as a pattern of immigration that drains the U.S. economy and puts the money into the economies and families of Africans in Africa. In order to understand the importance of the monetary efforts many African immigrants make, one must also understand the African family unit. Arthur (2000) writes:

> Consciousness of their African identity and heritage sustains them in their quest for a better life. They are under strong pressure from extended family members at home to become successful. Their achievements are celebrated by pomp and festivity in their home countries, the social capital that accrues to their relations from their residence in the United States is very high. The immigrant’s experience is shared by the entire family. For the immigrant, this support

> creates a sense of both security and responsibility. This means the immigrant goals and aspirations are defined with the interest of the community of family members in mind. The knowledge of collective security assures immigrants that although they are far away from home, they are never alone in their daily struggles for a better life in the United States. (p. 142)

Emeka Nwadiora (1996) furthers this idea by discussing the idea that kinship within African society is paramount to all other relationships (p. 118).

Saran speaks to the ideas of African kinship frequently. “When I came here I had problems with my tooth. I went to see the doctor who said, you know, I should have it removed, but I told him he must wait” (Saran Ba, personal interview, February 17, 2005). The reason the doctor had to wait was because Saran, a thirty one year old man, had to ask permission from his parents to have the surgery. When asked if it had anything to do with money, he responded. “No, you do not understand. I do not do anything without my parents’ approval. It would be wrong to go against what they say” (Saran Ba, personal interview,

February 17, 2005). Nwadiora (1996) states that this is not an uncommon practice.

> Traditionally, when families in Africa have problems, they seek advice from an elder within the extended family. . . . To the African, to be old is to be greeted with honor. African elders within kinship and family systems are highly revered and respected. . . . In Africa, the elders are perceived as the repositories of knowledge, experience, and wisdom. (p. 118)

In addition there are other sacrifices Saran makes on behalf of his family. He lives very modestly in a one-room apartment in a large apartment complex housed in one of the city's most notorious neighborhoods. "I cannot live anywhere else, my family needs the money more than me" (Saran Ba, personal interview, February 17, 2005).

This past Thanksgiving he came face to face with the reality of his neighborhood. One evening directly after the Thanksgiving holiday, he arrived at our focus group session with the following story to tell as a part of the weekly "good news/bad news" discussion we conduct regularly:

> I went up to the store, you know, to buy a phone card to call my family. I'm coming out of the store and

> these kids who call me Mala say ‘Mala, Mala, give us some money.’ I reach in my pocket and get out a quarter and they put a gun to my head. I say ‘shoot me motherfucker. If you have the ability inside of your head to put a gun on someone else’s brain, then you must shoot them. So kill me.’ They ran away, throw the trash can at me. I call the police. Six-thirty at night. But, I am alive” (Saran Ba, personal communication, November 30, 2005).

The group reaction to this story was sincere and full of advice for how to operate in an American city as an obvious outsider, but it did not change Saran’s ideas that Allah had put him on this path and if He wanted Saran to die, then he would have. When Amin asked if he has looked for another apartment and inquired about the rent he was paying currently, Saran replied, “I can’t move. No social security, no paycheck or name of employer. The apartment is my friend’s who moved back to Africa. I can’t rent another apartment. I will be okay. Dish-Allah [God willing]” (Saran Ba, personal communication, November 30, 2005). Like Toure and Amin, he maintains a close protective circle to provide his sustenance, yet his immigration and employment status often push him to live in

compromised conditions. These same socioeconomic needs, however, have driven the broader social circle that he has created in order to do business.

Wari: Money [Dioula]

Saran can often be heard saying “I gotta make money, you know” because his existence in the United States revolves around two factors: economics and education. When he arrived in the United States, he worked for a long time at a Chinese Restaurant in New York City, upon moving to a smaller city, where he now resides, he began looking for work in his trade. “I had to make some friends first you know. I had to make sure the people know me, know I am good person, then they can give me some work” (Saran Ba, personal interview, March 28, 2005). Nevertheless, because of his educational background, he is often overlooked for positions that lie within his trade, which is auto-mechanics.

As remote villages are impacted by wars, violence, political unrest, and famine, Africa is seeing an exodus of highly qualified professionals who are moving to the United States (Veseley, 2005, p. 38). There are growing fears that this group of people will surpass African Americans in

earnings and education over the next decade (Veseley, 2005, p. 38). Because Africa remains unstable, the United States is also seeing an influx of populations coming from extremely rural areas where people have not had any need for education beyond the village or the Qur'anic school.

One evening, as I worked with Saran to compose a sentence using the verb to be, he looked up and shared a story from his educational path with the group.

> In my village we go to school you know, but only one person has a book. He is our Qur'anic teacher. He is old man who sits at the front of the class and reads the Qur'an to us. We must kneel because we cannot be above him in height. We recite the passages back to him until we memorize the whole book. That is my education. (Saran Ba, personal communication, September 29, 2005)

Rong and Brown (2002) report the following of African students who share Saran's experience, "In addition to their psychological trauma from the wars. . . many African students were not literate in either European languages, including English, or their native written language" (p. 259). This occurrence has made it especially difficult for

adult immigrants in America, like Saran, with little or no educational background.

Aside from these issues, adult African immigrants who have lived through violent wars and trauma are often mentally unprepared for life in the United States. With little or no experience with life beyond refugee camps or war zones, some African refugees have struggled immensely. Flayton (2005) writes the following about Peter Deng, one of the Lost Boys of Sudan:

> In his first year in Phoenix, Peter was beaten up, carjacked and wrongly accused of fathering a child. He was fined $1200 for driving without a license or insurance, which he had no idea he needed. He learned about the U.S. court system when he had to file a restraining order against a former girlfriend, who threatened him by saying, 'You are just a refugee here in America. I can kill you.' These days, Peter rarely goes out in public, especially at night, and he says he fears going to jail. (p. 5)

For younger immigrants, the public school system often provides a place where they are exposed on a daily basis to reading, writing, and introductions to American cultural norms in an educational setting. As a result, the

adjustment process for younger refugees is often less challenging (Flayton, 2005, p. 3). For adults maintaining employment, this is often not a daily possibility.

Until recently, Saran has not needed to read or write to gain economic advancement in his home country, but here in the United States, it is more difficult. “I fix cars. I cannot read or write so good, so here my boss brings me the book for the car with the pictures and shows me what is wrong in the picture. But I know to fix it better than him, so he does the reading and I do the fixing” (Saran Ba, personal interview, May 13, 2005). Often, Saran arrives at class an hour late and must leave early to attend to his customers. His colleagues in the study affectionately reprimand him for answering his cell phone during class time by calling him the “big African boss”; yet, he still sees no other way. He has built a livelihood from African acquaintances, taxi drivers, and other immigrant business owners who use him to fix their cars, but also have busy work schedules that require him to be flexible.

Nevertheless, he has not put reading and writing on hold. “I want a better job; I wanna fix the cars for the police” (Saran Ba, personal interview, May 13, 2005). In order to do this, Saran knows he will need to get a G.E.D.

and possibly a formal education for auto mechanics. The road ahead frustrates him, but his commitment to his spirituality, cultural heritage, and his family have forced him to focus his free time on education, which seems to keep him connected to his dream.

Two nights a week, Saran huddles at a back table of the classroom with the me and the other men in this study, sounding out words and writing the letters to the English alphabet, as he sprinkles in stories about his life and education. Unlike Toure and Amin, he does not have the basic literacy necessary to build upon within the classroom. “Sometimes I feel like, the road ahead is so hard, you know. The G.E.D. is so far away from this place I am in” he stated one evening this past fall. I asked him to draw the road on paper, beginning with his arrival from the Ivory Coast. He drew a long road and put several marks on the path. I began pointing to each. “What’s this one?” I asked in reference to a mark a quarter of the way on his path. “That is learning English, I think I have done that,” he said as he checked it on the map. In the end, Saran saw what I had seen already. “Wow, I’ve come so far. Look at this. I didn’t know nothing when I started. But that G.E.D is still here,” he pointed his pencil to the end

of the map, dramatically. “Did your teacher in the Ivory Coast read the Qur’an so that the class could finish it?” I asked. “No, he read it so we could learn about the lessons, so we could know it. Yes, teacher, I get you now, these are all lessons. I do not have to be finished to know the lessons” he smiled. Realistically, I knew that our job together had to always be rooted in the value of this journey.

CHAPTER 5

TUNGI [WALK WITH ME] SONINKE

> “With distances between countries narrowing, we have much wisdom to gain by learning to understand other people’s cultures and permitting ourselves to accept that there is more than one version of ‘reality’” (Some, 1994, p.8).

How to Follow the Rules

“I need you to help me read some papers,” Lamine, a soft-spoken and middle-aged Gambian man, stated to me during his second week in our group. He opened a makeshift briefcase busting with forms and letters and began sorting through a familiar lot: INS receipts, applications for spouse and families, tax returns, letters from lawyers and the National Visa Center. Within the contents of this pile, I managed to meet his family: a wife and two children whom he has not seen in seven years. “I will wait until July and if there is not a response. I will return. It has been too long,” he stated as he sorted through his personal paper trail. He handed me the first document: a folded letter from the INS with the hand-written scrawl “approved” at the bottom. “This is great”, I said, “They approved this application for family visas.” He looked at me and chuckled. “Yes but look at the date,” he replied. “September of 2001?” I was already exasperated when he

produced the second, third and fourth documents, all saying his applications had been approved or received by various branches of the INS. Nevertheless, he had nothing to show for it. “It says here you can call, have you called?” I asked. “Yes, they tell me to email them, but I do not use the computer. My lawyer says he is working on it, but has not got a response from them either and I cannot understand the forms. I do not read very well” (Lamine Kane, personal conversation, September 20, 2005).

Lamine does everything according to the rules; yet, somehow, he is still at the mercy of those who are insiders in a complicated system. He arrived in the United States on a legitimate visa, kept it current, applied and was approved for a work permit and social security number, began working twelve hour days, six days a week as a cook at a local chain restaurant, paid his taxes, and, after some time here, applied to become a permanent resident. Afterwards, he petitioned for his family to join him here in the United States. Explaining to him how all of this confusion and frustration is possible in a country that appears to be so efficient is difficult; however, it is the explanation that comes with his questions about how such

circumstances are possible, even for people who follow all of the rules in this country that is disheartening.

Discourse: Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Educationally speaking, Lamine's background is not much different from others in this study. He attended Qur'anic school until he was an adolescent and then began working in his family's business in the Gambia. "My father owned a store in the neighborhood. I worked in his store selling oil, cigarettes, canned things, and cookies. I did this until I came to this country, after I got my wife. I went to school like Saran: the Qur'anic school. I can read the Qur'an because I have all of the words in my head" (Lamine Kane, personal interview, September 20, 2005). In addition, he comes from a former British colony that boasts English as its official language. English is not his first language, however, nor is it a language he reads and writes. "We speak English in Gambia. But I didn't learn English in school or on the street. My family speaks Soninke. I don't speak English too much until I arrive in this country [the United States]" (Lamine Kane, personal interview, September 20, 2005). When he arrived in the United States, Lamine focused first on securing a job. For

several years he worked in the United States without any thoughts of attending school. As the prospect of his family's reunification grew more possible, however, he began to seek ways to become more educated.

Lamine's biggest barrier right now is what James Gee (1989) identifies as a struggle with dominant secondary Discourse: "A Discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (p. 7). Gee denotes that all of us have multiple Discourses, which are not taught in a classroom, but learned through experience and practice with those who have become masters in the Discourse (p. 7). Nevertheless, what he identifies as our primary Discourse is the one we have learned from being a part of a specific social group within our society (p. 8).

For example, I grew up in a middle to upper class white American family surrounded by readers and writers of English. Books and reading were a large part of the time I spent with my mother. As a result, when I entered school I already had begun to master a Discourse related to the printed word. I understood what Purcell-Gates (1995)

describes as storybook language, which is very different from the patterns of oral language. Although I wasn't reading beyond certain simple words, I could go back to the stories, look at the pictures, and "retell" the events in a narrative format similar to the printed words on the page. As a result, reading was easy for me and, in turn, writing words, sentences, and paragraphs was also grasped with little difficulty. According to Gee (1989) I had begun to form a primary Discourse upon entering school that shared similarities with what he calls the dominant Discourse used in schools and classrooms: there was little or no tension between my primary Discourse learned as a member of my particular family and the one reinforced by my scholastic experience:

> Filtering represents *transfer* of features from secondary Discourses into primary Discourses. This transfer process allows the child to practice aspects of dominant secondary Discourses in the very act of acquiring a primary Discourse. It is a key device in the creation of a group of elites who appear to demonstrate quick and effortless mastery of dominant secondary Discourses, by 'talent' or 'native ability,'

> when, in fact, they have simply *practiced* aspects of them longer. (Gee, 1989, p. 15)

As a result, for me navigating the environment of a school and the values that were inherently reinforced through the secondary dominant Discourse of the school itself was done so with no evident tension or struggle. In addition, as I grew older, understanding how governmental agencies, businesses, universities and the workplace operated took little effort because I had spent my life "practicing" the dominant Discourse both at home and out in the world.

Assumptions and Truth

During our initial discussion of Lamine's paperwork, I revealed my understanding of Dominant discourse immediately by first assuming that he read and understood the forms in his briefcase and secondly by asking him if he followed the appropriate protocols on the forms (calling or emailing); thus, I assumed that he had the resources and practice to operate functionally in this type of Discourse. My assumptions, as our dialogue later pointed out, were all wrong. Not only was Lamine struggling with learning a fifth language, he was also dealing with the perils of coming from a primary Discourse that operated in a

powerfully tense relationship with the secondary dominant Discourse in which he was trying to navigate with little or no practice.

> In Gambia, when I wanted to come to United States, I found a friend who knew someone in the Embassy. We pay him some money and he get the visa. This is how you do things in my country, with money. Money gets you alotta stuff. I didn't have to read and write for a visa. I had my friend fill out the form. I sign my name, take some pictures and it was finished. (Lamine Kane, personal interview, October 8, 2005)

Growing up in the Gambia, Lamine acquired several Discourses that allowed him to function well in the society in which he lived. Ultimately though, his primary Discourse was invested in the oral and spiritual.

For Lamine, the family, Muslim faith, and community are paramount to the individual:

> When you give someone money to do something for you, you are helping them out because they help you out. If your life gets better, their life should get better too. Sometimes though, everything has to do with this and people use it in wrong ways. Police will stop you so you will give them money or cigarettes or whiskey.

> Maybe you did nothing wrong, but they stop you anyway because they think it is their right. These people have no spirit. (Lamine Kane, personal interview, October 8, 2005)

This type of interaction or Discourse is not the dominant one in the country Lamine now lives. Instead, the dominant Discourse of business, government, and school is based in writing, reading, forms, letters, emails, fees, competition, individualism, and self-reliance.

Multiple Realities: Cultural Literacy in Action

So, Lamine, although he follows all the rules, works hard, pays his taxes, and comes to regular English classes, is still faced with obstacles that are comparable to Toure's life as an undocumented immigrant, Amin's struggles as a refugee, and Saran's issues with life as an urban African immigrant. At first glance, the primary struggle here could be surmised as an issue with what Ferdman (1990) defines as literacy:

> In a society tending toward homogeneity, it is easy to think of literacy simply in terms of specific skills and activities. Given broad cultural consensus on the definition of literacy, alternative constructions are

> either remote or invisible, and so literacy becomes a seemingly self-evident personal attribute that is either present or absent. (p. 186)

For Lamine and some of the other men in this study, it is evident that such skills as filling out or reading immigration forms, writing letters, reading notices, newspapers or books and pamphlets are all missing in their lives and therefore they are determined illiterate by Ferdman's above definition. Nevertheless, as Ferdman (1990) goes on to point out, in a society like the United States that is by no means homogenous, we cannot solely rely on the definition provided above:

> In a multiethnic context. . . literacy does not simply consist of a universally defined set of skills constant across time and place. Since cultures differ in what they consider to be their 'texts' and in the values they attach to these, they will also differ in what they view as literate behavior. An illiterate person is someone who cannot access (or produce) texts that are seen as significant within a given culture. That same person, in another cultural context, may be classified as being quite literate. When a number of cultures co-exist within the same society, it is more

> likely that we will encounter variant conceptions of what constitutes being literate. (p. 186)

In talking more with Lamine, I found out that several of the ways in which he operated in Gambian society and in the African community in America made him quite literate by Fredman's definition.

When I asked him about his daily practices involving words and print, he initially said that he spends no time during the course of a day outside of school reading or writing. "What about in the Mosque?" I asked. "Of course I read Qur'an, but I know Qur'an. I know the way it works, the phrases from my memory" he replied. He had already defined this for himself as not being literate; however, as I pointed out, it made him quite literate in the Muslim community he was a part of here. "I can't read the Qur'an." I replied. He looked at me with suspicion. "What you say you can't read Qur'an? You can read. You can read Qur'an. It is that easy." He replied. I pulled the copy of the Qur'an that I had borrowed from the library out of my backpack and opened it to a random page. I stared at the page. The letters were all foreign to me. I couldn't even sound out one letter or word for him. "Do you believe me now?" I asked. He pointed to the first passage. "You see

this. This say the Qur'an was not sent to us for it to make us feel worry, but as a warning for the people who are afraid of Allah" he stated. "So, now you are my teacher" I said after he continued to read me the passage. He looked at me with confusion. "No, you are *my* teacher" he replied.

In her book *Other People's Words* Victoria Purcell-Gates (1995) describes her own disbelief in finding that an adult Appalachian woman with whom she was working had lived her entire life in an urban American neighborhood and could not read. "Over the span of our time together, I confirmed Jenny's claim to nonliteracy. Outside the home, Jenny used physical markers to locate stores, offices, and items on grocery shelves. She noted the size of buildings, colors and shapes of signs, and logos" (p. 52). Purcell-Gates acknowledges this as being nonliterate; however, Jenny had functioned on a daily basis for years in her own community with these strategies. Likewise, Lamine, for his entire life had used his own literacy to function well in the Gambia. In the United States, he had managed to get a job, rent an apartment, buy a used car, and contact a lawyer with the skills he already had.

When we continued our discussion about his uses of reading and writing, he said the following about the Qur'an:

> The Qur'an is in Arabic. But I cannot read or write in Arabic either. I can understand it when the Qur'an is read to me and I can see the stories in my head when I look at the pages, but I cannot read the single words. If you put them somewhere else, I would not know them. I would know that it was Arabic, but I would not know the words.(Lamine Kane, personal interview, September 17, 2005)

Nevertheless, I was still curious about how he managed to survive in a dominant Discourse that relied so heavily on reading and writing. I wondered if he, like Jenny in Purcell-Gates'(1995) study, relied on logos, signs, colors, and familiar spots to navigate the city. "So, how did you get a job, an apartment, a car, figure out how to get to school, and all of these other things if you were not reading and writing?" I asked. "That is easy, Africans help each other. When I came to this city, I knew someone who lived in an apartment. I lived with him until I could get my own place. He helped me read and sign the papers. I pay my rent in the money order or cash. I had other

friend who worked at the restaurant. He get me the job. He also introduce me to Saran who helped me find my car and Toure who bring me to this school" he stated.

As he continued to talk I realized that Portes and Rumbaut's (1990) discussion of spatial concentration held true, but was only a surface explanation for the ties each one of the men in my study held with the African community in their city. Lamine found his way around without literacy through other African men living in the city who acted as cultural brokers for him in his transition. Somé (1998) describes this practice, which is common in African villages as mentoring:

> A mentor therefore is not a teacher in the strict sense of the term, but a guide who shows the way, working from a position of respect and affinity, addressing the knowledge within the young person. The pupil is not an ignorant person in the eye of his or her mentor. The pupil is seen as a storehouse, a repository of something the mentor himself has and knows very well. The mentor perceives a presence knocking at a door within the pupil, and accepts the task of finding, or becoming, the key that opens the door. There develops a relationship of trust between

> mentor and pupil, motivated by love, and without which success would be unlikely. (p. 102)

At first, I understood the mentoring that Somé speaks of in the sense that many Westerners imagine. A mentor is always someone older than his mentee and is commissioned by an organization in a time of need or is already working as in the field of social service. I wondered if Lamine felt uncomfortable with younger mentors. “Did you care that Toure and Saran are both a lot younger than you are?” I asked Lamine after he told me about their help. “Why should I? They have the knowledge. I am open to that” he replied. Somé (1998) reflects on the idea of youth in a mentoring relationship in the African village. “In indigenous Africa, knowing means becoming old. To say that someone is old is to say that this person knows something, or has experienced something valuable. Furthermore, the mature self is hardened in the field of experience by awareness” (p. 109). Thus, the men who had assisted Lamine were viable mentors for him because they were experienced. In this relationship, he was older physically, but younger in his own experiences here.

Upon arriving in school, Lamine began to realize that his mentors were still not old enough to help him with the

nuances of the dominant Discourse in American society. Gee (1989) states “Dominant Discourses are secondary Discourses the mastery of which, at a particular place and time, brings with it the (potential) acquisition of social ‘goods’” (p. 8). Lamine realized that although his primary Discourse brought him solidarity among his African mentors and sustainability in the U.S., it did not grant him the potential access to the social “goods” he needed. “I feel like these problems with my family are too difficult to trust the lawyer for. My friends here don’t know enough to do this. I have to learn it myself or else maybe I never see them in this country” (Lamine Kane, personal interview, October 2, 2005). School became an opportunity for Lamine to enter into an “apprenticeship” in the dominant Discourse of our society, but, according to Gee (1989), he could never truly master a Discourse by simply being instructed. “Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (p. 7). As we sat in front of his pile of papers late that summer, I knew he was positioning me to become his first Anglo mentor in America.

Because Lamine's major focus at that time was to learn to read so that he could manage his issues with INS and be better prepared to mentor his family when they arrived in the U.S., it was difficult to determine where we needed to begin our work together: in literacy or in INS paperwork. Freire (2001) states:

> The banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p.69)

Based on our dialogue together, it appeared as if Lamine was already "adapting" to the current system. He had done everything his lawyer and mentors had instructed, but to no avail. He had arrived here with his own passport and visa, kept it current, worked legitimately, paid his taxes and

bills on time, and had rented a large apartment for he and his family. Because of this “fragmented view of reality”, he was unable to critically assess the issues.

As a result, the system was not working for him in one crucial way. He did not know that with many government agencies in the U.S., we have to call and write frequently to get our questions answered and that lawyers, especially immigration lawyers, had lots of work to do and often could not keep up with cases like this as well as the individual could. He also needed to know about reading what we call the “fine print” and understanding it. He had to manage the loopholes that those of us who understand and use the dominant Discourse here had been navigating for most of our lives. Yet, as Gee (1989) reminds us, he could not be instructed to do this. He was different from Amin who had learned about these systems from his apprenticeship as a volunteer with the Somali community. Moreover, I could not just make a checklist of how he needed to operate, have him take a few notes, and send him on his way. Nevertheless, I was still confused on where to begin. If he couldn’t read, shouldn’t we start there?

I went to speak with my coordinator, the director of the adult education program where I was tutoring Lamine,

and asked for her advice. “Well, it sounds like reading is the main issue here. You need to start with the basic books we have to teach the GED students reading and go from there. Remember, these are all building blocks, so it seems like you may be starting small, but eventually they start to put the pieces together” (Marian Andrews, personal interview, September 29, 2005). What my school coordinator was discussing is what Purcell-Gates (1995) identifies as a skills-based approach to the teaching of literacy:

> Traditional skills-based reading instruction assumes that one learns to read by learning component skills separately and practicing these skills to mastery. In skills based reading instruction, the learner reads from materials especially written to teach the component skills of reading, which can be broadly summarized as decoding (through phonic and word analysis knowledge) and comprehension (including vocabulary study . . . the reading material is used for practice both in isolated skills and in using learned skills in. (p. 68)

She gave me a stack of books designed to do exactly what Purcell-Gates identifies in the above passage.

The first book we used started with pictures of familiar objects to American consumers: Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Exit, Entrance, Phone, Stop, Wheaties, etc. I opened the book and showed Lamine the first page. I pointed to the pictures and the words and he said all of them perfectly. He understood them from the survival literacy he had acquired since his arrival. I was excited because he was successful at this and began to think that this process would be easier than I had anticipated. Then, I turned the page.

The next page started with the letter A. He knew the letter well. I explained to him that all of the following pictures started with the letter A. I pointed to the first one, an apple: he understood. Then I pointed to ant, he understood that one too. But, as the page progressed, things got more complicated. I pointed to an arrow. He looked at me. “I do not know that word,” he said. “Oh, it’s an arrow, you know like this way or that way. It points,” I replied. “Awroh” he stated. “No, A-r-r-o-w, arrow” I refuted. I wrote it down, he looked at it. “Awroh” he stated. We moved on to the next picture. It was a picture of a woman. I pointed to the picture. “Now, remember, all of these words start with A” I said eagerly.

“Grandma” he replied. “No, grandma starts with a g.” I showed him on our alphabet line. “Gr” I said and he repeated the sound. I pointed back to the picture; he gazed out the window and around the room. I tapped the page like the school marm that I was rapidly becoming. “Mother” he stated. By the end of class, we had made it through four words: apple, ant, arrow, and aunt. He smiled. “Thank you teacher.” He said and gathered his books to leave. I smiled back and pretended as if he did not just thank me for the worst lesson I had ever taught in my entire life.

Much to my surprise, Lamine returned on the next class day. We got out a new book that focused more on writing. First, it asked him to circle or cross out shapes that did or did not belong with the initial shape in the row. I read the directions and he started circling and crossing out. I couldn’t understand what he was doing. It seemed like he was just blindly going through the page and circling or crossing out things at random. Then, I started to notice a pattern. He was going up and down instead of left to right. I stopped him. “Lamine, everything you read and write in English will go from your left to your right, not up and down” I said. “Ahh, teacher. Thank

you," he said, making me feel as if I had cured him of all his problems. He started circling and crossing out, this time in a different pattern. He was moving from his right to his left. Uh oh, I thought, the words left and right mean nothing here. So, I explained. Finally, by the end of the hour, we had completed one page of circling and crossing out.

At the end of every session, I had lengthy amounts of field notes and recorded interactions, but Lamine still had a briefcase full of unresolved questions about his family and INS. Nevertheless, for the next two weeks, he packed them up each night and took them home unanswered. It was no comfort to me that at least he had learned how to cross out and circle, how to identify a stapler, an arrow, an aunt from a random picture of a woman, a spider's web, and a host of other unimportant and isolated sounds and words in the English language. My coordinator's remarks were always meant to encourage me further. "Any knowledge that they take away is better than what they came in with at the beginning of the class. It is more than they knew two hours ago," she continued to say. Each time though, that phrase nagged at the core of my own teaching philosophy. I knew that it didn't matter to me if it was more, what

mattered was that they could use the knowledge they discovered in class to change their lives. Still, I hopelessly continued forward and, by the time D’jeco, the last man in this study, arrived in our class, I had developed a hodgepodge of lessons and strategies to teach isolated literacy to a group of African men who desperately needed a curriculum bent toward the practice of freedom. It took D’jeco’s arrival for me to finally realize that the literacy they wanted and needed did not start or finish with staplers, aunts, and arrows. It started with dialogue.

CHAPTER 6

BIN NO D'JUMBAI [COME LET'S VISIT], CREOLE

Seven years ago this past July, I was sitting in a canoe off the coast of Guinea-Bissau. Four of my students were rowing a Danish couple and I to an island further south from the one I was living on as a Peace Corps volunteer when a violent Coup broke out in the country. Amid sounds of shelling all around us, the canoe was eerily silent. Suddenly, two dolphins emerged from the water on either side of the canoe. My students smiled and the Danes stood up and began eagerly snapping photographs. The canoe shifted heavily to the left. The dolphins then playfully swam under the canoe to the other side. The Danes scrambled to the right to catch more action shots. My students grimaced. Typically, the canoe had no life vests and my students were not very strong swimmers, but they remained silent and calm, firmly planting their feet on the bottom of the boat for stability. By the time the dolphins finally swam away, our feet and belongings had been soaked in salt water. In seeing the dolphins depart, the Danes let out a small sigh. One of my students breathed out "kila i suerte [that right there is luck]," to the Creole speakers

in the canoe. We all clicked in affirmation. Yet, to this day, I am not sure if he saw luck in the presence of the dolphins or in the instance that the Danes finally sat down. It didn't matter though, because at that moment I felt like an insider.

Common Ground

> "Alienation is one of the many faces of modernity. The cure is communication and community- a new sense of togetherness. By opening to each other, we diminish the pressure of being alone and exiled" (Somé, 1994, p. 13).

D'jeco, a tall, thin man from Guinea-Bissau, sat quietly staring down a lonely piece of turkey at the annual Thanksgiving dinner that the teachers in our program prepare for the ESL class. "Entou, que ke ten? [what's up?]" I whispered quietly from my seat beside him. "N'medi que todo kil cosas tene porco [I'm afraid that all of those items have pork]" he replied, gesturing toward the host of traditional Thanksgiving items that the teachers had lovingly prepared. I tried to remember if I had ever seen my grandmother use pork products when making Thanksgiving dinner; I didn't think so. "I ka tene, [they don't have it]" I said resolutely. He sucked his teeth. "Par seis anos, n'prepara es comida par gintes na Cracker Barrel,

n’sibi ke i tene porco [for six years, I’ve made this food for people at Cracker Barrel, I know it has pork in it]” he stated, with more resolution than my previous claim. Whoops. I didn’t know if I should apologize for being ignorant or for the fact that during the past six years, he had spent the last Thursday in November making Thanksgiving dinner for a bunch of Americans at Cracker Barrel, but had never once sat down and eaten it with any of them. Instead, I yelped. “Saran, don’t eat that” I barked as he lifted a spoonful of stuffing to his mouth. He dropped it heavily on the plate. I glanced at Lamine, Amin, and Toure who were all wide-eyed. The teachers all glared at me in confusion. “Did you guys check to see if this stuffing has pork in it? What about the gravy? Did you use wine to make the cranberries?” I began whispering a line of questions, which were soon interrupted by an “opah” and sucks of teeth from various positions around the table. The teachers looked at each other blankly. No one, including myself, had thought about the fact that nearly every student in the class couldn’t eat most of the dishes on the table. Their trusting plates were piled high with all the questionable goodies that would go uneaten. Thanksgiving was ruined, thanks to a dialogue.

So, inevitably, the conversation began. It started months after Toure had begun to change his life and Amin had learned to use a map. Saran had changed jobs four times, been held at gunpoint once, and still was far away from a GED. Lamine was still circling, crossing out, and learning about arrows and aunts while he quietly carried his briefcase back and forth to class, still filled with papers: July moving closer and closer. Meanwhile, I was struggling and worrying that we would once again lose the African students that had been labeled by the program as the most “transient, noncommittal to education, challenged or at risk” students that we see (Teacher, personal interview, July 1, 2005).

The students who could read and write in their first language were flourishing in the English only classes taught by American teachers. They checked out books at the library, filled out job applications, watched T.V. with subtitles and arrived at class with the bounce and air of students who know success. My charges, however, were frustrated. The teachers and coordinators encouraged me and told the students that learning to read is difficult and takes patience. They kept coming, looking out the window while I tapped the pages in the book and watched

eagerly as they practiced writing the alphabet. On the nights that he needed to handle personal business unrelated to his GED classes, Toure would be in the corner of the room, clicking away at the computer screen in front of him, arguing with himself in English, and raising his hand when necessary, while the others glanced longingly in his direction, instead of at the pages of objects before them. Then, D'jeco arrived and opened a backpack full of sunlight from Guinea-Bissau. He unpacked the dialogue little by little in glimmers and rays until he had unwound the entire makeup of the group sessions. He was my cultural broker.

War and the Breakup of a Family Unit

When we met, D'jeco had not spoken Guinean Creole in years. Instead, he had gotten by on French, Wolof, Soninke, and English: the languages that he proclaimed to not speak, but that somehow provided him with a gateway into the African community in our city. His primary Discourse was in Guinean culture and in Creole, but he, like his counterparts had Discourses of survival that were secondary, tertiary, and so on. These Discourses helped him manage among a group of people in the United States who were not Guinean and who did not operate in the language he

acquired as a child. “It’s funny, I use Soninke more here than in my country. So many people in this city speak Soninke and not French. You almost have to know it” (D’jeco Camara, personal interview, November 17, 2005). They were his bridge into the mentorship that the African community withheld in the United States and his way of grazing the dominant Discourse in America.

D’jeco shares a similar story with Saran, Lamine, Amin, and Toure. He has been living in the United States since Guinea-Bissau’s Coup D’Etat in 1998, where the president was exiled to France. During that Coup, D’jeco fled the capital city of Bissau by canoe and then was transported overland to Guinea-Conakry. “It was a terrible time. I was only a baby during independence. But this war this was about greedy people. It was not about changing Guiné. It was about people who had the power wanting more power. The African bosses made this war” (D’jeco Camara, personal interview, November 11, 2005). When the revolution broke out, it was a surprise to everyone, including myself.

I was a teacher on an island off the coast of the country when the shelling began. I remember hearing the blasts from the capital and turning on my radio where they

were reporting the madness that had erupted during the past hour in the capital. The radio went dead and a somber voice came over the broadcast. The voice reported that Nino Viera had been ousted and that the radio station, the port, the airports, and all the major streets in the city had been taken over by Junta Militar: the rebel forces. The voice warned people to stay inside. He pointedly spit advice to members of the government: "Hide your children," he said, "we are coming." Then a familiar song by a renowned musician in Guinean-Bissau, one who had been jailed several times under the current president for his political lyrics, began to play. The title of the song was "Abri bu Olhos, Camaradas [open your eyes comrades]." At that moment, I knew it would be a long time before I would return to Guinea-Bissau.

While I was being rowed to a smaller, more southern island where a UNHCR plane waited to rescue me, D'jeco, a man I would meet seven years later, was saying goodbye to his mother, father, brothers, and sisters. "I knew I had to go because they would put me in the military. I was only twenty years old" (D'jeco Camara, personal interview, November 30, 2005). At that time, his family was preparing to evacuate to a more northern part of the country by foot.

“They had walked one hundred and fifty miles by the time they could be safe. I worried so much at that time that they would starve. Everybody was so hungry there, we had nothing” (D’jeco Camara, personal interview, November 30, 2005). D’jeco managed to secure a visa and passport in Guinea-Conakry. He arrived in the United States one month after the war began and two weeks later, started cooking meals at Cracker Barrel in a small Midwestern suburb. He has not been back. His family is now living in Senegal. “I do not believe they will ever return. Now that Nino is back. I don’t know what will happen. Everybody’s mad at him” (D’jeco Camara, personal interview, November 30, 2005). Nino Viera, the formerly exiled president of Guinea-Bissau, returned to Guinea-Bissau last summer for a “visit” just before the country’s first democratic election since he was ousted. Two weeks later, he was “elected” president of the country once again. “Many people are relieved. Many people feel hatred for him. I don’t know.” (D’jeco Camara, personal interview, November 30, 2005).

Post Colonial Literacy

When D’jeco began attending classes, his English proved to be his best coping skill. Because he was so

advanced orally, the teachers placed him in the class with students who were reading and writing well. One night, I decided to observe the class. The teacher was conducting a lesson on nutrition. Students were being instructed to read a passage and then answer the questions about the new vocabulary in the reading. D'jeco seemed to be reading the passage as the rest of the class read out loud. When it was time to begin answering the questions, I watched him closely. He picked up the pencil, made some imaginary scratches, and put it down again. He did this over and over as the teacher went through the lesson, cold-calling on individual students in the class. He answered her questions with ease, but I had the sneaking suspicion that his page was blank. When the class broke up into small groups, he motioned for me. "N'ka pudi toma es aola d'Ingles [I can't take this English class]." He pointed to his workbook page to indicate, without letting anyone else know, that it was in fact blank. I looked back at him. "A bo I ka so [you're not the only one]" I said. Soon, he began working primarily with the focus group to tackle his literacy issues.

Research on literacy often denotes that ESL students who are not literate must initially learn to be literate in

their first language before they can do so in a new language; hence, bilingual programs in the United States have proven to generate more successful students than English only programs (Collier, 1992; Ramirez, 1992; Krashen, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 1997). When an Anglo, mostly English speaking teacher, however, is confronted with a group of students who speak Somali, Soninke, Creole, Wolof, Songhay, and Dioula, it is not likely that she speaks any or all of these languages and therefore her potential to give first language literacy instruction is limited.

So, when D'jeco arrived in my focus group sessions, I was relieved that I had finally encountered someone with whom I shared a language. I thought that this sole component would make literacy instruction much easier because I was fully equipped to teach him how to read and write first in Creole and then in English. This prospect sounded both promising and attainable for my work with him. I believed that although Creole was an oral language like the others in the group, I could easily transcribe it so that D'jeco could practice reading and writing.

As I soon discovered, however, the differences between oral and written language are profound at best. The task

that I imagined in my head was impossible because the nuances of oral language are irrelevant in writing. Purcell-Gates (1995) eloquently relays this gap in her work:

> To grasp the significance of the emergent literacy research, one must understand a basic tenet: written language is not simply oral language written down. We do not learn to read and write speech. We learn to read and write written text. (p. 42)

She goes on to say that written text is different from oral text not only in the simplistic ways described above but also in its purpose, resilience, syntax, dialogue markers, and endophoric references (p. 44-45). My experiment with teaching D'jeco how to read by transcribing Creole could never adequately work because Creole is an oral language. So much of it lies in the gestures, grunts, finger waves, and movements of the people who use it daily. Patrice Somé(1994) found a similar issue in writing his spiritual autobiography:

> Modern American English, which seems to me better suited for quick fixes and the thrill of a consumer culture, seems to falter when asked to communicate another person's world view. From the time I began to

> jot down my first thoughts until the last word, I found myself on the bumpy road of mediumship, trying to ferry meanings from one language to another, and from one reality to another- a process that denaturalizes and confuses them. (p. 2)

The written language of Guinea-Bissau, the one that teachers and marabouts use is Portuguese. If he were going to learn to read in a first language closely related to Creole, it would have to be Portuguese. Nevertheless, delving into this type of instruction, for me, was a prospect that weighed heavily in my mind.

Paulo Freire (2001) describes his work on the literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau just after independence as one rooted not only in structurally freeing Guinea-Bissau's population by de-colonizing schooling, but also in the process of liberating colonialist thoughts through the adoption of Creole as the national language:

> Guinea-Bissau has about thirty different languages and dialects spoken by various ethnic groups. In addition, it has Creole, which functions as the lingua franca. Creole gives Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome an enormous advantage over Angola and Mozambique for example. Creole, a linguistic creation

> that combines African languages and Portuguese developed gradually in Guinea-Bissau. (p. 176)

In essence, Creole is the language that unifies the people of Guinea-Bissau and, for Freire, to use Portuguese, the language of the oppressors, to teach literacy to the people would be an incredible error.

> To continue to use Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau as the mediating force in the education of youth and to continue the practice of selecting students on the basis of their knowledge of spoken and written Portuguese would guarantee that only the children of the elite would be able to advance educationally, thus reproducing an elite, dominant class.(p. 178)

Nevertheless, as Freire states, the residue of colonialism was more than evident in the Guinean people’s feelings about Creole:

> The ex-colonialized in many ways continue to be mentally and culturally colonized. The colonized people were told either verbally or through message systems inherent in the colonial structure that they did not possess effective cultural instruments with which to express themselves. They possessed an ugly dialect, a bastardization of the colonial language.

> This language profile imposed by the colonizers eventually convinced the people that their language was in fact a corrupt and inferior system unworthy of true educational status. (p. 184)

The fight to adopt Creole as the official language of Guinea-Bissau and to, in essence, re-Africanize the country (much like the adoption of Swahili and rejection of English in South Africa) through its language was a failure. The "bastardization" was too prominent in leaders' minds, and, as a result, Portuguese remained the official language of the country. Creole remained frozen in orality.

So, school was left to the rich and elite in Guinea-Bissau, even after Freire's presence and work there. Students like D'jeco who spoke only Creole, Wolof, and Soninke didn't have a chance in the educational system. They did not have access to the dominant Discourse, even through the apprenticeship of schooling (Gee, 1989). When I arrived in Guinea-Bissau twenty years after the war for independence ended and sixteen years after Freire had finished his work there, I was confronted with the same conundrum. During my first week in the country, the Peace Corps gave me a crash course in Portuguese. I scored as fluent on the exit exam one month later, but I had never

spoken a word of Portuguese outside of my time everyday in training classes. The language of my friends and neighbors, the marketwomen, my students, and my colleagues was Creole. Attempts had been made to make Creole a written language by several Guinean scholars, but it came to little fruition because the Guinean elites refused to acknowledge its gifts and validity as a potentially unifying language.

During my second week as a teacher, I was called into the principal's office for a conference. He sat across from me at his large wooden desk and asked me in perfect Portuguese if I had been teaching my classes in Creole. Remembering that the Peace Corps had instructed us not to become politically involved in the country, which I guessed lying could have been a part of, I told him I had. He slammed his hand on the desk and demanded that I begin using Portuguese in my classroom and the school building in general. I told him that I could do that, but that my students did not speak Portuguese. He insisted otherwise and reiterated his request. So, the next day to the chuckles and smiles of my tenth grade class, I began speaking Portuguese. At the end of class, my students walked out laughing and heckling, and one commented that he

had always thought Americans were “Tugas” (a derogatory term for Portuguese colonialists). Needless to say, by the end of the semester, I was whispering to them in Creole again.

I would not teach D’jeco how to read in Portuguese. I knew this from his response when I first asked him. “Portuguese is not my language. I was not permitted in school because we spoke Wolof. When my mother registered me, she could not read or write in Portuguese, so they would not take me. No one in my family spoke that language. No one” he stated. “But, Creole is a little bit like Portuguese. It might be easier to learn in Portuguese.” I said, half-heartedly. “I do not want to learn that language. It is not the language of my people” he replied. Once again, I was stuck as a tutor and a researcher. D’jeco had come to us with a problem and I didn’t know how to fix it. So, he joined Saran and Lamine in the basic literacy exercises that the program was encouraging me to use.

Navigating Meaningful Literacy

During the following class, D’jeco looked at me and said. “Es ka na bai.” Which means, directly translated,

“this will not go.” He was referring to the literacy books we were using. Lamine and Saran both seemed to be suddenly revived. “I want to read this,” he stated in plain English. He produced a folded copy of Newsweek from August of that year. I knew that the magazine might be difficult for all three men, but I was open to something new. “I would also like to read the Qur’an. It is a text I know,” he added. “I would also like to review the Qur’an” Saran piped. Lamine watched in silence. “I would like to use the computer” he stated. D’jeco went on to say that although the literacy books were good, he did not enjoy them and he wanted to think and talk about the issues he was learning to read about. “These books are good. They show us how to write the words, but they don’t have what we need” he began speaking now for the collective group.

Elsa Auerbach (1992) identifies the above transaction as a call to participatory methods in a classroom that make literacy the practice of transformation and freedom.

> This radically transforms their relation to education, making them subjects of their own learning; at the same time, because literacy becomes a tool for addressing problems, it transforms their relation to the world, making them subjects of their own history.

> Education thus is part of a liberating process rather than a domesticating one. (p. 17)

Since my work with these men began, I had searched everywhere for texts that would meet their needs, but I had somehow overlooked what was right in front of them: the literacy that was a part of their everyday transnational experience in America.

For a long time, I had wondered what these five men really and truly needed from education. I knew from the stories they shared with me about their personal lives that their experiences in the U.S. had entered and exited various points of crisis over the years; yet, I was still cautious about questioning or prying into their experiences too much. Auerbach (1992) writes that the starting point of a participatory curriculum "has to be the building of trust through non-threatening activities that allow students to share something of their lives in a format that is familiar and comfortable . . . this means combining what we call conscious listening with catalyst activities" (p. 43). Auerbach goes on to discuss the meaning of diversions in the classroom and how teachers in participatory settings learn to read these diversions for clues into their students' lives (p. 44).

I remembered that one day, D'jeco had talked extensively about the isolation he continues to feel in the United States. "For so long, I didn't know anyone who spoke my language and it was so difficult here. Everything was difficult. Even the people who share my religion were difficult" (D'jeco Camara, personal conversation, December 8, 2005). I knew that these men had stories; they had shared many of them already, but I didn't know how to get them to share with each other: to become a community moving toward personal literacy. bell hooks (1994) writes "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions in which learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). I knew that collectively, we needed this type of initiation.

I put aside the shiny textbook in front of us and asked D'jeco to open his folded Newsweek magazine. As he flipped through the pages, Saran, Amin, and Lamine all crowded around him. D'jeco stopped in front of a picture of a man sitting plain clothed on a river's bank juxtaposed with a man sitting in a very expensive apartment building. The caption read "China's growing divide." Each of the men said something in Soninke about the picture they were

viewing. D'jeco translated for me in Creole/English. "He said ke i odja in United States, people too are poor and also very very rich. But also there are people in the middle," D'jeco stated. D'jeco then proclaimed to me and the others, "it is the same in my country. Some rich people, lots of poor people. But in America, it seems like everyone has what they need. They just think they have nothing. If you are poor in America, you still have house and television and food, in my country that is not true"(D'jeco Camara, personal communication, December 12, 2005). As I listened to the four men discuss poverty, I started to make a list: Poor, rich, food, house, family, feed, necessary. When the conversation began to lull I referred to the list; we said the words together. D'jeco reached for his pencil. "I will write these down," he said. At that moment, the others also picked up their pens and copied each word delicately into their notebooks, quietly whispering the pronunciation for each as he wrote.

CHAPTER 7

ACTION RESEARCH AND THE PATH TOWARD KNOWING

"'Let it breathe,' says this woman who knows/ my hand and tongue knot, but she guides and I dig the tip of my pen into that white./ I carve my crooked name, and again at night/ until my hand and arm are sore, / I carve my crooked name, my name" (Mora, 1994, p. 129).

The simple, yet powerful, collaborative act described in Mora's poem reminds me that my study has always been housed in the methodology and theoretical frameworks associated with action research. There are many teachers and researchers who have spent countless single moments with their hands placed delicately on top of a student's as they guide the process of literacy in action. Yet, the above excerpt recalls action research because the teacher has not only collaborated with Senora X in the process of literacy, but she has guided her toward the process of ownership in the journey of knowing and writing her own name. Action research permits us, as researchers, to be a part of this process. In fact, it does not allow any less of the researcher. For those of us who have always been teachers, and are now turning into researchers, the method of action research is one both we know and to which we are

drawn because our lifestyles thus far have permitted this type of collaboration and connectedness.

Kurt Lewin (1946) articulated the terms action and research as a viable way for pursuing answers in the difficult times during and after World War I and II. He believed action research could be a catalyst for change that both fostered and nurtured democratic communities. As the years progressed, Lewin stressed the necessity of fusing theory and practice through the methodology of action research. He viewed action research as a way of investigating problems within individuals, organizations, and systems through a process that called researchers to reflect on each element as depending on and connected to the others. Through this process, researchers were encouraged to observe, reflect, plan, and act in a cyclical process (Lewin, 1946).

As years progressed, researchers began to tailor the process of action research to fit the needs of groups with which they were working. Although Lewin (1946) defined the methodology ultimately as one based in social action, other groups began to use it as a method of seeking organizational change. Dickens and Watkins (1999) note this shift: “Action research from the Northern school tends

to be more focused on reform, particularly organizational reform, while action research from the Southern school is more focused on social change. . . these differing purposes have everything to do with approach" (p. 129). Regardless of the way in which it is approached however, action research undeniably seeks, as Kemmis and McTaggert (1988) point out, to create communities through the process of co-inquiry and the fostering of democracy positioned toward change:

> Action research aims to build communities of people committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action, and the consequence of their own situation and emancipating themselves from their own institutional and personal constraints which limit their power to live their own legitimate. . . . . values. (p. 23)

Thus, it is a method that has grown over time by responding to the specific needs of individuals, communities, and organizations through a cycle of dialogue, planning, action, and reflection in which all the members of the project collaborate in a democratic process of change. Nevertheless, because of its basis in democratic principles, continuing action and reflection, and the value

of communities, action research can often be a murky process in which researchers find themselves consistently in between the stages of search and discovery.

Blind Spots and Murky Water

The very first night that I met Saran Ba, he could not hold a pencil. “It is so difficult. My fingers are not in agreement,” he said as I placed the pencil in his hand. He sat, holding the pencil as he watched me write the letters of his name on a sheet of white paper. I wrote them syllable by syllable. He looked at the word and stuttered nervously with the first sound. “Sssss” I said. “Ssssss” he repeated with force. “Ssaa” I bounced back. He repeated. “Saarr” he moved on without me. “Sar-an” he said quizzically. “Sa-ran” he noted a little faster. “Saran. Opah! That is my name. Saran. Saran!”(Saran Ba, personal communication, July 5, 2005). During the time of this project, I have found myself, like Saran, trapped in a constant place between knowing and not knowing. I have seen the words on the page, heard them sounded out, but stopped and started again until they finally made sense.

Patti Lather (2001) describes this state as part of what happens when we blur the lines of researcher and participant:

> Problematizing the researcher as the 'one who knows,' is not enough, as Judith Butler notes, to focus on the limits of our knowing. The task is to meet the limit, to be open to it as the very vitality and force that propels the change to come. It is this outside that gives us to hear and understand that which is 'already coming'. (p. 6)

Before I named it, I was doing it, which is, according to Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson (2005) how action research often evolves:

> In naturalistic inquiry, there is a sense that the methodology may evolve as it is implemented in the field, depending on the conditions that greet the researcher as the study is being implemented. With action research and the assumption of the research spiral, this premise of and evolving methodology is a virtual given. While the steps of the action research spiral may remain the same- that is, iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect (Lewin, 1948)- these are

> broad categories or steps that will be translated into actions in the field. (p. 76)

Technically, I began this study as a pilot, bleary eyed from a year and a half of intellectually intense coursework, exhausted by a full time school and work load, and seeking refuge in an internship at a program that I both knew and loved dearly. Yet, over the course of a year, the pilot study grew and began to "name itself" as one that needed further investigation and action. It was a study that reflected my journey as both a student and teacher.

As a doctoral student, I spent a large portion of my coursework out of focus. When I began the program, I had high hopes for starting a public school in a community I was familiar with, but needed to *know* better. I spent a lot of time in courses designed to address intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; during that time, I was writing extensively about marginalization and outsider status. Unconsciously, I was learning the critical pedagogy that serves as the framework for action research and the lens by which findings are often analyzed. I was still, however, missing a piece. What I had always done as a part of every day that I had spent as a teacher was suddenly gone: I was not reflecting. I reflected in

papers for classes and orally in discussions, but, all the while, my journal became frayed and worn from being shoved to the bottom of my backpack by my textbooks, binders, and other officially academic artifacts. So, when the time came to find an internship, set up a study, and push it through the IRB: I was completely lost. I spent my time running back and forth with revisions, being intimidated by full board reviews, and withdrawing studies.

During that time, I was taking an action research course sequence, and my professor was working very closely with Somali refugee women. Listening to her talk about her work reminded me of what I had given up to be an academic. I had given up relationships, closeness, and being a part of something that was larger than me for the knowledge I could find in books and scholarship. I had sacrificed what Patrice Somé (1994) describes as traditional knowledge: the knowledge of the community and experience of my life for the knowledge we find in the printed word. I knew that somehow I had to make my scholarship count for me personally. I had to side-step grand notions of being in charge of “something big” academically and get back to the real stuff: the reason why I was both a teacher and a

doctoral student. So, I picked up the phone, like I had done several years before, and called Marian.

The Business of Relationships

Marian, the program coordinator of the facility in which I have done my research, is the essence of a spiritual educator. She runs the adult GED/ESOL program in a large, urban, midwestern housing project. Every year, hundreds of students enter and exit her program, she awards over a hundred G.E.D.'s yearly, and coordinates employment, social service, and childcare for her patrons. Last year, the program also enrolled a hundred and thirty seven new adult ESOL students. In addition, every year she scrambles to write a series of grants to keep the program open and running. Because of the demands of her job, she is very concerned with the nitty gritty: program goals, attendance, outcomes, and what people *do* after they leave us, but this is all underneath the value she places on relationships:

> The people I work with have, for whatever reason, been wronged by education. Traditional school has either pushed them aside or just not been occurring at the right times in their lives. Part of this is because to stay somewhere, people have to be in your corner.

> Every day that you walk into that place, you have to feel like those people have your back, even if you've really messed up, over and over again. (Marian Andrews, personal interview, March 15, 2005)

She has fought a long and tumultuous battle for adult education, including ESOL, for most of her educational career and she still gets up every day and goes to work smiling.

In the fall of 2001, when I came back to this area after teaching in Africa and then, subsequently, two major urban centers in the United States, I vowed to myself that my days with English as a Second Language students were finished. I would only work one job, and that would be as a high school English teacher. Six months into this resolution, I was completely and utterly bored. Then, one afternoon, one of my high school students mentioned that she would like to volunteer working with second language students. She felt as though a lot of immigrants were moving into her area and, because she needed to fulfill a community service requirement that our school enforces for graduation, she wanted to do something with her own community. We thought maybe we could run the classes at night out of our high school and began brainstorming ways

to achieve this new and exciting prospect. Meanwhile, we began searching to see if our district already offered such classes for second language students and, through this process, we met Marian. We called her, and instead of talking with us about collaborating on a project like the one we had envisioned, she told us what she really needed were a few more teachers. In a matter of hours I was back in the adult ESOL circuit, and Kamila had set up enough community service hours to last a lifetime. I spent the next year and a half speeding my way from job to job and things got more complicated, more fulfilling, and certainly more exciting. I stopped teaching for her in order to become a doctoral student.

Starting Good Work

It has been because of my dissertation work that I finally began to understand why I became a doctoral student in the first place. This work has challenged every established notion of what it had previously meant for me to be an English teacher. bell hooks (1994) writes that places of learning can often challenge our prescribed notions and push us into unknown territories that offer truly libratory educational experiences:

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

It has not only called into question my own gender role, ethnicity, schooling, cultural background, class status, and spirituality, as good research and teaching experiences often do, but it has also pushed me to explore the meaning of a transition from orality to transcription and to, essentially, transgress into a world of teaching that I have previously not had the privilege of knowing.

In the fall of 2004, when I chose doctoral work in lieu of being a part time ESOL teacher, I knew and didn't know why I wanted to be a doctoral student. The six and a half years that I had spent in various cities and another country rushing to teach an adult ESOL class right after school had pushed me to wonder about what it means to be an educator in diverse contexts. Thus, in my coursework I was drawn to issues of marginality, outsider status, and

educational crossroads: the jewels of critical pedagogy. Now, I know that I wanted to be a doctoral student because I wanted to be a better teacher.

Nevertheless, I was still tired and overwhelmed in my final year of coursework, when I picked up the phone a second time and called Marian. I knew and didn't know that I needed to be back in the place where the wondering had started. Entrée was easy. Marian couldn't wait for me to help out with classes again. I explained though, that this time I needed to be a researcher and an intern. I could work on logistical coordinating pieces of the program, but as a researcher I needed to observe students, conduct interviews, lead focus groups, and talk to the teachers. She agreed, but secretly she had a plan.

In our first planning meeting that included Marian, the teachers, and I, Marian rattled off a list of her own complaints about the English as a Second Language [ESL] program: attendance was low and sporadic, and she didn't have enough students leaving the ESL program because they were pursuing higher education or better employment, which was part of her program goals. Because of these factors, funding had been cut by the district. She did not know why students were leaving; they were just simply coming a few

times and then vanishing. She had some suspicions, but she wanted to find out for sure. Nevertheless, she had set up the framework for an inquiry process to begin.

These issues, Marian believed, could potentially be addressed through my research and internship. Essentially, she had already outlined my pilot study for me. It would explore how students learn English in an urban context and what leads to issues of transience among the ESOL population we served. Specifically, the questions I would address would be: What are the lived experiences of immigrants in urban settings in the United States and how does English proficiency impact this group socially, culturally, and socio-economically? What are the needs of low literacy immigrant populations and how does social segregation impact the literacy levels of these specific immigrant groups? What are the ways in which cities have and can potentially respond to the immigrant community's needs in ways that are both culturally and educationally appropriate? In responding to these questions, I could use my observations, field notes, interviews, and focus groups to get to the heart of what Marian needed.

For the internship piece, I was charged with promoting the program, testing new students, updating files, and

helping the teachers to deal with the heavy amounts of paperwork required for adult education. The teachers were excited and willing to help with the initial stages of the research (getting participants, giving interviews, etc.).

Room for Expansion

I proposed this project to the IRB and with two revisions the banal “Second Language Acquisition Among Urban Adult Immigrants” was approved. The proposal was difficult though. I knew that the dynamic experience of being a researcher in such a program could never be articulated on paper. So, I did the next best thing: I made the project accessible, but with some room for growth. I framed the project around Marian’s initial thoughts that the immigrants the program serviced were struggling to learn English because they were dealing with very tumultuous urban lives.

> They are just like our GED population, except they don’t have any help from the government. No one pays them a stipend to come to our classes, but they still have to make the sacrifices. They have to leave the kids at home, change their work schedules, which sometimes means working less, and they have to venture

> outside of their comfort zone to come to a class full of strangers. (Marian Andrews, personal interview, February 10, 2005)

I outlined a project for the IRB that would explore exactly the notion that Marian spoke of: what are the lives of this group of students and how can education really serve them if education is as difficult for them as Marian believed? This framework, while functional, allowed me to investigate the lives of the students in the program along with their educational lives in order to find out why they were not staying in classes.

Knowledge and Ownership

My role as a researcher, however, was somewhat unclear. In the past, I had been a teacher in the program. In addition, I had a lasting relationship with the program coordinator. Both of these pieces placed me in the position as an insider doing insider research as a collaborative team member with Marian and the teachers. Herr and Anderson (2005) describe this relationship as a type of action research: “Collaborative inquiry groups often are convened by formal institutional efforts that create site-based management teams to engage in data-driven organizational

change efforts” (p. 36). I knew the program well, understood the goals, had worked in the past with all of the teachers, and was familiar with the student body. Nevertheless, I was still, in part, an outsider. My relationship with Marian established a perception that I was an outsider called in to work for change within the program through collaboration with the teachers.

Herr and Anderson (2005) use The Four Squares of Knowledge, as shown in Table 1, to indicate the quadrants of knowledge that action research involving the collaboration of outsiders with insiders often explores:

Table 1

Four Squares of Knowledge

I We know They know	**II** We don’t know They know
III We know They don’t know	**IV** We don’t know They don’t know

Although I saw my relationships with the teachers and Marian as potentially landing in all four quadrants at

varying times, I saw it mostly landing in quadrants I and II. To me, the teachers were the experts. They knew the program, the classes, and the students best by the mere nature of their role in the facility. I discovered later, however, that initially the teachers could not help but to see Marian and myself as part of quadrant III. They recognized the hierarchy that I wanted to deny and, as a result, I had to spend a great amount of time gaining their trust through the promise of confidentiality and competence. Action research is set up to push towards an easing of the tension between each of these relationships in the above quadrants and ultimately, it hopes to push us into a relationship of collaboration, which is housed substantially in the recognition of shared knowledge denoted in quadrant I (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 40). Yet, in order to enter this quadrant with the other stakeholders, I had to become a skilled negotiator.

Missing Pieces

With time, however, we realized that the implementation of the project would require more than negotiations. In the initial meetings and design of the project, we had forgotten one key component: the rest of

the stakeholders. Ernie Stringer (2004) recognizes the importance of each stakeholder in the process of action research. “The clear message of a participatory approach to action research is that all stakeholders whose lives are affected by an issue need to be incorporated in the search for solutions to that issue” (p. 33). We had dismissed an entire group of stakeholders: those whose lives were most affected by the investigation that we had planned on their behalf. By not inviting students to participate in the initial steps of this project, we had to spend considerable amounts of time creating lasting relationships with them in order to make them full stakeholders in the process. Ultimately, because the teachers were teaching and Marian was running a facility, this work fell into my hands. In turn, it was through my contact with these stakeholders that the pilot study evolved into a dissertation study.

My first contact with this group of stakeholders came as a part of my internship goals: to promote the program in the community. Armed with my bright yellow fliers translated in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, and French, I set out to find the adult immigrant hotspots. On afternoons that I didn’t have class, I could be found at neighborhood African, Hispanic, and Asian markets passing

out fliers. I went to the Mosques, Korean Churches, and attended Spanish mass with my flyers tucked away in my bags. In addition, I spent a lot of time eating at two local African restaurants: one Senegalese and one East African.

It was in these two places that I was clearly an outsider with an agenda, especially after my fourth or fifth meal at each location. I talked often and in detail with the owners, patrons, and workers at both locations about our program, merely because they were always interested in my continued support of their businesses. They knew I was a former Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea-Bissau (which explained my affinity for African food), that I was a teacher in a local high school, and that I was also working on my doctorate at the local university. They knew that I was helping out at an ESL program that was free and open to the public. I had bus maps, road maps, and business cards that all served as helpful ways for them to access the program. Nevertheless, the weeks went by and they were still not coming. We had a few new students because of the fliers, but they would come one night and then never return.

When the Cover Story Isn’t Enough

One day, I walked into an African store where I had placed a flier earlier that month, and a young man who was busily stocking shelves greeted me. I asked him if there had been any interest in the flier and started into my typical cover story about our wonderful program and how it could serve his needs and the needs of his customers. He interrupted me. “You lived in an African country, but you don’t shake hands?” he said as politely as possible. I was horrified. Not only had I violated the first rule of interaction with this man, I had consistently done so in every store, restaurant, and place of worship I had entered in the past month. I had established myself as an outsider not only in my physical appearance, but also in the simple omission of the greeting and subsequent launch into what I had learned from my field methods professor as my “cover story”. Nobody cared about my cover story. These potential stakeholders cared whether or not I wanted to know them, what kind of person I was, and, ultimately, if our program would make them feel safe. A handshake would have done wonders for my image.

I quickly exited the store and re-entered, bringing a smile to the man’s face that had initially interrogated me.

I put on my best “mantena” [Creole for greeting] face and said “hello” boisterously as I re-entered the store. I proceeded to shake his hand, ask him how the job was going, how he was living in this country, how his family was back home, and a host of other questions that follow a typical African (Guinean) greeting. I found out in those three minutes more than I had discovered about all of our potential stakeholders from my time delivering fliers, going to mass, and eating African food: this man was from Mali, he was in his early twenties, his family was in Mali but he had not seen them in seven years, work was good, but not too steady, Americans were foolish but loveable, and his name was Toure Keita. The next evening, he came into our program demanding to be taught how to become a citizen.

My first interaction with Toure was the beginning of this process of knowing and not knowing and being called to remember that Somé (1994) discusses: “The challenge of a man [woman] is to act in accordance with what he [she] remembers. You are not as young as you think you are. You cannot be who you truly are until you can put what you remember into action in our life” (p. 309). It was also the

first path that led to the multiple roles I assumed in this project. Initially, I was an outsider, with some insider status, researching with insiders what was an inside issue. Eventually though, I fell in and out of various roles within the process of the study, especially when we began to recognize students as viable stakeholders in this project. Herr and Anderson (2005) explain this as a valid part of the action research process:

> Each of us as researchers occupies multiple positions that intersect and may bring us into conflicting allegiances or alliances within our research sites. We may occupy positions where we are included as insiders while simultaneously, in some dimensions, we identify as outsiders. In the latter case, these dimensions often encompass one's race, social class, gender, or sexual orientation in relationship to the site being studied. These dimensions extend into the worldview that one brings to the institution, both in terms of political or ideological beliefs as well as cultural assumptions. Each of these dimensions enters into the construction of the reality we capture in our research. (p. 44)

In my first interaction with Toure I was a student, first and foremost, and he was a teacher or a guide back into what I remembered. Together, we were in the first quadrant that Herr and Anderson (2005) describe: he knew and I knew, but both of us needed to find the place where we knew together.

How do We Teach the Difficult to Teach?

Suddenly, the students began to trickle in, but the one major problem for the teachers was that they were not the students they could manage best. The students who were coming in were hearing about my interaction with Toure through the African communities and word of mouth in the city. The funny story of our first meeting was enough to make them feel safe and interested enough to attend a class or two. Toure often relays that story when telling others about his first experiences with our program. “I love to tell that story. It has been my favorite white people story since I come to the United States. I say, who this white lady is coming in talking talking, then leaving when I tell her about herself then coming back in again as new person. I love that story” (Toure Keita, personal interview, November 15, 2005). Although I was the butt of the joke, it

somehow drew them into our program, but the problem for the teachers was that they were all African. Long before their arrival, we had file cabinets full of entry folders for now absent African students. According to the teachers, they were the most likely to drop out, vanish, or become disillusioned rapidly with education.

Crandall, Bernache, and Prager (1998) argue that past experience and socio-economic status can often have multiple implications for immigrant students who are adults and children. They claim that the success rate for literacy and acquisition of language is largely dependent on the systems in place to embrace immigrants within schools. Nevertheless, these systems are often riddled with difficulties. Often, as much as thirty percent of these students are not literate in a first language, and they maintain an oral language as their first language, rather than a written one (p. 721). Thus, such issues push them into programs within schools that are not prepared to support them and, as a result, in public elementary and high schools, they often become special education students, who, as they get older, are at greater risk of dropping out altogether (Crandall et al., 1998, p. 722).

Equally, Crandall et al. (1998) argue that programs often fail to address the backgrounds of such students, who have often experienced great hardships in their transition to the U.S. “Many of these students come from countries where war or political turmoil has taken its toll; others come from rural areas where neither schooling nor literacy was necessary or possible” (p. 722). Such factors are often not addressed through programs in place in the public schools on all levels (elementary, secondary, and adult). As a result, such populations struggle more profoundly with reaching personal educational and occupational goals.

Later, Rong and Brown (2002) of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill took a much more focused look at the population Crandall describes above and found that the majority of these students were Black immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean. They found that it is the process of finding an applicable self-identity within the educational program and our larger society that helps them be more successful in education:

> Immigrant Blacks are not exempt from racial difficulties. Therefore, researchers need to examine the role of structural assimilation and racial

> hierarchy in Black immigrants' identity formation and explore the issues related to Black immigrants' perceptions of and strategies to cope with racism. (p. 251)

The authors go on to explain the difficulties immigrants of African and Caribbean descent often have with identity formation in the United States are tied to isolation and lack of community support within the school (p. 252). The authors argue that it is the path of self-identification, not economic placement that leads to success within the schools and with language acquisition. Thus, students who form strong bonds within their immigrant community are more prepared for the normalizing process of schooling. As a result of these ties, such students often choose to identify ethnically, rather than racially, in America, and ultimately tend to have more success in education, regardless of class and literacy levels (Rong & Brown, 2002, p. 253-256).

It was possible that the above research findings had something to do with our inability to retain this particular population; however, the most concerning feedback from the teachers was that this group was extremely difficult to teach. "They have no literacy

skills, so while we manage the students who have literacy skills, we have to also manage these students who cannot read any of the words we put in front of them. We can't keep going over the alphabet and bore the rest of the class, we'll lose them too" (Teacher, personal interview, June 8, 2005). Although I was fulfilling my role as an intern in the program by helping to increase enrollment, the biggest problem seemed to be that I had made the teachers' lives much more complicated in the process, which inevitably increased my outsider status. Instead of going right to Marian, I decided to push my own collaboration with the teachers and try to help them out. As a result, the parameters of my role as a researcher/observer in the classroom soon began to shift.

In our next meeting, I expressed my frustration with the teachers in that I thought I was doing something good, but really I was very sorry to have made things more difficult. "It's okay, but you can't just sit back and take notes. We need you to help now. We can't manage all this by ourselves" the lead teacher said, resolutely. All of the qualitative research horror stories about researcher involvement began traipsing through my mind. This would seriously complicate everything. I tried to tell them that

I couldn’t do this and anyways, we had to voluntarily recruit students to be in the focus group: that is what the protocol said. “How can you understand what we’re dealing with if you aren’t doing it yourself?” the teacher questioned. She was right. I couldn’t be a stakeholder in this project and be silently sitting in the back of the classroom, doing interviews, and meeting with focus groups while they sweated away teaching reading, writing, life skills, college prep, and GED all in the same classroom. “What we can do is set it up so that the African students will be more *likely* to volunteer with you,” the teacher said. “We can tell them they will be practicing reading with you and then they’ll volunteer for the study” she said. Even though this sounded great, it was coercion and I knew we couldn’t do it. I let her know that her proposal was not possible, but that if she would just give me a little time, I could figure out how to structure the research in order to help the common goals of the project. Incensed is the appropriate word for her reaction and, subsequently, she spent several days not speaking to me aside from a monotone greeting.

Reflecting, Re-negotiating, and seeing what is Already There

That night, in my research journal, I wrote: “How can I solve this problem and still keep the relationship going with the teachers? I want to help. It feels right to help, but I can’t coerce these students into my project under the pretense of reading. The IRB will hunt me down. I don’t know how to convince her of this without making her feel like the one who doesn’t know” (S. Lamping, journal entry, February 25, 2005). In the end, however, the one who did know how to recruit the participants was Toure.

The following week I told him about my problem. I told him that the teachers were upset with me about the new students and about me not “working”. In addition, I communicated to him that the focus groups had to be voluntary, but that none of the students were signing up, even though I was doing my cover story every night they had class. Had he not interrupted, I think that I would have begun sobbing. “What kind of study you talking about?” he asked. I launched into the same pre-prepared talk I had given every night to the class, of which he was a member. Everyone, including Toure, had nodded and smiled when I finished, but now Toure was asking what kind of study this

was. “I don’t understand,” he said. “Why you want African students?” he questioned. “I don’t have to have African students, I just need STUDENTS!” I replied. I took out a consent form and showed him the parts that talked about the study. He looked at it and began reading. “You know about white people. White people always writing books about Africa. They don’t know nothing about Africa. You gonna make a study and make money talking about us. You better let us talk most of the time and you some of the time,” he said. I rolled my eyes. “I’m not making money” I said exasperated. “Then why you talk about a study? What these forms for?” he asked. “It’s for my school. I have to do it for my school. I also have to do it so that we can make this school better. I have to find out what the problem is here. Why aren’t people staying in class? Why are they having so much trouble learning English?” I stammered, actually, whined. He flipped over the paper. “First of all, lady, you don’t roll eyes at your first customer. Give me the pen. I am first in the study,” he laughed as he signed the consent form.

A few weeks after we started working together, another name appeared on the sign up sheet: Amin Farrah. “I want to be in the study Toure speaks about,” he stated. Then

came Saran, boisterously reeled in by Toure and Amin's chatter. Those three men made up the pilot study along with the teacher. Ultimately though, Lamine and D'jeco arrived at the door and the study had to be amended to include more people. Yet, the design of the original pilot was still broad enough to hold the expanding research. In the end, there were five in all and there could have been more. Now, a year later, the study is finished, but they keep showing up. They know that now, the way into our group is to come in and say the code: "I want to sign up for the study" and the teacher sends them to me. Last night, I stared into the faces of sixteen African men, seated closely at my small, but expanding, "study" table, as one of my current high school students taught them how to sign their names using the cursive alphabet. Needless to say, the teachers are talking to me again.

The Hopelessly Evolving Study

Both the pilot and the dissertation study itself unfolded over the period of eleven months. They grew into one study involving five African men, one teacher, Marian, the program coordinator, and me. Halfway through my pilot study, I designed a new study based on the pilot as the

framework for my dissertation. In it, I outlined a group of expanded research questions, which were only slightly altered from the original study. I had begun to find out that the language learning issues in the class along with the literacy levels, cultures, and life experiences were all intricately connected. I wanted, however, to explore these tensions further and to begin working with the men and other possible students from the larger class toward changing the ways we taught literacy and English in our program. I wanted to do this with them, because, essentially, there was no other way to do it. In the initial IRB, I outlined the questions as follows:

1. What is the “world” of a group of individuals participating in an urban adult ESL program in the Midwest and how does that world potentially impact their reading of the word as emergent literate voices in American society?
2. What are the processes by which we create such collaborative programs in adult immigrant education while still acknowledging and claiming our status as both insiders and outsiders in these divergent contexts?

3. Such studies have the potential to push us collectively to discover ways to service this population by seeing them as valid resources and voices within our educational sector. As a result, how can these particular participatory research processes lead to the creation of public educational facilities that collaborate with these students to create new highly sustainable programs, materials, and literature that service a wide range of adult English language learners without first assuming literacy in a native language or cultural competence within the host country?

The men and I also discussed the potential for a community garden, to have outside community members come in for workshops, community forums, and computer literacy training.

I submitted it to the IRB, but when I showed the proposal to the initial group of men, they were overwhelmed. "How we gonna do all this stuff? We need to focus on reading and writing. Yes, we do all this stuff someday, but first we need to read and write and we need the computer" (Saran Ba, personal communication, November 30, 2005). Saran was right, the original dissertation

proposal included elements that needed years to complete and the men had more pressing issues. Equally, the IRB came back to ask how this new study was in any way different from the older study. Through reflection and dialogue, we were able to identify that we still wanted to pursue the goals of both the pilot and the dissertation, so I submitted the addendum which allowed me to increase the group size, answer the expanded questions, and expand the scope of the study, while still being able to work with the students in the methodology of action research.

Nevertheless, even though we opened the study to the larger class once again, we only had African students volunteer. I felt there were a variety of reasons for this; however, the two most prominent ones seem to be that the study deals with literacy strategies and it was essentially the African students in the class who struggled with literacy. Equally, their closeness as a community allowed them to be more trusting of the study: seeing their friends working with me made others want to do the same.

The Method of Addressing the Research Questions

In order to answer question one of the study, I used primarily qualitative methods. The methods were

qualitative because they were deeply entrenched in listening and letting the men tell the stories without my interaction. In addition, the answer to this question came in from a large portion of my pilot study. Both the pilot and the dissertation study allowed me to gather extensive data about the men's lives in interviews, field notes, and personal communications that came from their interactions with the other men. At first, it was difficult to use the tiny Mp3 player because the men were all mistrustful of it. So, I took notes and they would then look at the notes before I left our session. Eventually, after being allowed to use the Mp3 player and explore how it worked, however, they quickly overcame their doubts. From their interviews and my notes on their conversations and interactions, I created the five ethnographies of their lives. This gave me an opportunity to know them and for them to know me, even before we began the real action of this study.

The study flowed almost seamlessly into question two of my research; before we knew we were working toward something, we were already doing it. I could not deny, as a researcher, and a human being, that the men deserved reciprocity within this study. I am not only a researcher, but I am also a teacher and an insider in the society they

struggle with deeply. As a result, it would have been impossible to know what I knew midway through the study, and not *do* anything about it when the study expanded. Action research allowed me to step further into the qualitative methods and begin a cycle of dialogue, planning, action, and reflection with the men as a way of bringing them closer to literacy. Without this murky, reflective, action oriented, but deeply personal, process, this study would have ended seven months before it actually did. The men would not have allowed any less than such action. What we created as a result of our process together became the answer to question three of my research.

During the course of the project, I took interviews, field notes, worked on a hodgepodge of literacy strategies with the group, observed them in the regular classes outside of the focus group, went to their homes and their mosques, met their families, learned their immigration secrets, helped them fill out birth certificates for new babies, argued with them, and ate with them. In the end, I had hundreds of pages of data and multiple hours of interviews: considerably more than I had ever expected initially. I had discovered through trial, error, and research, the appropriateness of a theoretical framework

based in critical literacy and the participatory philosophy of education. Action research opened the gate and allowed me to enter the study with the men instead of on behalf of them. Because it required so much of us in the forms of dialogue, action, reflection, and re-evaluation, it inevitably created a process and product for our research. Ultimately, this group that we had somehow forgotten in the beginning had become the focus of our project and, more importantly, had asked more of me than to just “sit there and take notes” as the teacher initially put it.

The eleven-month span of this project was the most intense and difficult of my career as a teacher and now doctoral student. The methods of research allowed me not only to see into the lives of my participants, but to become connected to who they were and where they are going. It is not surprising that the students I worked with lead difficult lives in America. They are working, paying rents, navigating social service, transportation, and schooling, but, in the beginning, none of them could read and write. In addition, they challenged research regarding ESOL students and the process of literacy because they all come from oral language bases. They were an educational conundrum. Their existence poses problems within

traditional ESOL programs because they ask teachers to teach them to read without being able to do so in their languages. They are not only learning English, but they are learning reading and writing from the beginning, without having been exposed in their lifetimes to the English language in the ways native speakers who are learning to read and write are as a part of our culture.

This work, like much of education, is important work. It is important work because it is life changing and life affirming; however, it is also messy work.

> Rigorous action research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way, often leading to a new set of questions and problems. This ongoing reframing of problems leads to the spiraling dynamic that characterizes the process of most action research over a sustained period of inquiry. (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55)

It has pushed me into the realms of action research as a method that both fits and reveals necessary truths about the data in this study. It has made me a better teacher through the cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that Kurt Lewin identified as early as 1942.

Yet, more importantly, it has taken me beyond the earlier methods of action research in which the teacher or practitioner identifies a problem and enacts the above cycle in order to influence change within the classroom (Lewin, 1946). It has asked me to listen and respond to the truths that the students hold about their worlds as immigrants, urban dwellers, and as outsiders in the system of education and listen to these voices as stakeholders in the process of change. Thus, my action research is participatory, evolving, bumpy, open ended, questioning, and frustrating: much like the process of good education.

Reflexivity

Besides making me a cultural blunderer, unqualified literacy teacher, and the center of several jokes about a crazy white woman, this project placed me in a position in which I could not deny my own reflexivity.

> We suggest that our obligation as researchers is to interrogate our multiple positionalities in relationship to the question under study. Our sense is that, in making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex

> understandings of the research question. In addition we hope to avoid the blind spots that come with unexamined beliefs.(Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 44)

My research in both the pilot study and the dissertation study that grew out of it was deeply entrenched in what it means to be an orally literate African man learning English in a formal urban educational institution in America while working a full time entry level job, paying rent in substandard housing, taking care of children, and living a transnational life, which may or may not be undocumented. As a white, middle class, female American citizen, fluent English speaker, doctoral student, and teacher of English reading and composition, it would appear that my study presented a multitude of reflexivity issues. In retrospect, there were many “blind spots”. Yet, the nature of the research led me to question and reflect on these areas and to know myself as a researcher, and, in the process unlearn much of the knowledge about literacy, race, class, gender, and spirituality that I had previously held tightly. My life experience makes me marginally qualified to work in the community I have fallen into; yet, I believe that it is my developing understanding of unity, shared resources, and cultural competence that push me to actively engage in the

community I work with. I realize, with reservations, that as much as I have chosen them, they, in part, have also chosen me.

I grew up in an upper class family in a very white neighborhood in the Midwest. When I was eleven, my mother died of lung cancer and my Appalachian grandmother (mother's mother) came to live with us. She made all of my dresses for dances, dug up about two acres of our yard for gardening, always wore overalls, and voted for democrats, every year. After my mother's death, no one in my family ever talked about politics with my grandmother around. My father and mother, although they had come from poverty, had worked all of their lives to get as far away as possible from it. My father was the first in his family to attend college (GI Bill), and my mother had two master's degrees before I was even born. So, grandma moving in posed an interesting dilemma for our family. Nevertheless, through her presence in my life, she engaged me, at a very young age, in what I politely call a culture clash.

Upper Class Living with Lower Class Rules

My grandmother operated under a different set of rules, if any at all, than my wealthy parents had taught

me. She was the first female director of an urban homeless shelter, where I spent a good portion of my early teens in her tow, making house calls, roving the streets, and participating in the everyday events of the organization. We never had a conversation about race, poverty, or substance abuse, although she worked with it every day. Instead, she told funny stories about her job, which emphasized, with no socio-political discussion, the humanity of her work and the connectedness she felt to it. It was my grandmother who taught me to reject the deficit models of thinking and approach people from who they are and not what we think should be fixed. Yet, doing this, while still being aware of my own background and schooling, is not an easy task.

The Republican Freire?

My father, on the other hand, was ironically a conservative, Republican, accountant who somehow had a very Freirean approach to the education of his children. I spent countless evenings at the kitchen table trying to understand basic word problems from my seventh grade textbook with him as my guide. I remember trying every tactic I knew to coax the answers out of him, but his

replies would always be in the form of questions. Eventually, tired and frustrated, I would break down in tears and beg him for the answers so that I could watch television or talk on the phone. He would reply, “Go into the den and collect yourself, when you’re ready, come back and we’ll start again.” I would skulk off to the den and cry my eyes out for fifteen minutes or so, come back, and we would start again. Sometimes, I would have to go “collect myself” two or three times in the course of the evening, but eventually, we got finished. From him, I learned that education, in its truest, most transformational form, is incredibly painful.

Crossroads and Intersections: Revisited

The summer of my junior year in high school, I decided to go to Mexico and work in a refugee camp. My father would have rather seen me take ballet, but my grandmother bothered him every day about it until he finally caved. I came back with a new sense of the world and my place in it. Two days after I graduated from college, I left the Midwest and moved to Guinea-Bissau, a very small country on the coast of West Africa. I believed, naively, that the Peace

Corps was the only cheap way for me to see the world. Instead, the world just slapped me in the face.

On my first day as a teacher in a tiny school on an island called Bolama, I came in to greet my class in my pressed collared shirt and my long denim skirt: the image of a white liberal, possible missionary, educator in an African country. I looked out onto forty or so black faces, some entirely too much older than I, all in white uniforms, two or three to desks which were conspicuously bolted to the floor, and my entire body became soaked in nervous sweat. I struggled to see the attendance list in our naturally lit classroom, and slowly began to realize that fifteen of my forty or so students had the name Domingos Mane. Thinking it was a misprint, I began to stammer my way through the list, eagerly approaching the section with the errors. I called the first Domingos Mane and a hand from the back of the room went up, the second, and another student shouted “Presente”, then the third, and fourth and so on until I determined that my worst fears were, in fact, a reality. Almost half the class of students, who looked identical to me, had the exact same name. I looked at them, baffled, and said, “Now, we will learn how to tell time in English,” which sealed my fate on

that first day. Ultimately, I realized (in the longest fifty minutes of my life) that my students only understood how to tell time by looking at the sun.

So, I was a culturally moronic, naïve, and very sweaty teacher on a small island called Bolama for two years. I believe it was there that I began to converge my father's Freirian approach to education and my grandmother's lessons in humanity and humility. Although I was teaching at the high school, the largest portion of my work fell in with a women's gardening and literacy co-op that two women and I started when they told me they needed to know how to read their children's lessons, but had no money for books. We started a garden, sold our vegetables at the market and bought books and supplies for the "literacy center", as I loved to call it, with the money. Through them, I realized, before having the words to articulate it, the importance of participatory action in a post-colonial community.

For the women, I possessed knowledge that they wanted, but I had to teach them on their terms, in the gardens, at the market, while we made dinner together. They did not permit me to be the privileged white girl that so many others had in Guinea-Bissau. Instead, they demanded that I

learn *how* to teach them by not showing up for meetings I tried to have at the “literacy center”(which was really a room in the high school) or, (on my fifth try) at the community meeting area of an old Portuguese building, right in the middle of daily siesta. Instead, they willed me to come to their homes, hold their babies on my back, help them get water, and feed their families rather than caving to my demands for education in a colonial building or a classroom setting at hours that were inconvenient (not to mention hot) for them. “Mas, kuma ke na escribi pa bos entiendi manera de conta dinero si n’ka tiene sala par escribi? [But how will I write so that you can learn to count the money if we do not use the chalkboard?]” I said once early on in my broken Creole. A woman handed me a stick and pointed to the dirt. This was my transformation.

Disrupted Education

A week before my service ended, the coup d’etat occurred in the country’s capital. It started when the rebels took over several key locations, and then suddenly people in fatigues carrying guns began to appear everywhere. What we didn’t grow in our gardens, fish for, or kill came by boat and they had blown up the port.

Without phone service, the island was cut off from the rest of the country within twenty-four hours. The people on the island believed if it continued, they would starve. It continued. Three days later, as the Peace Corps struggled to find a way in Washington to get me out of a war halfway across the world, a group of my students from the high school rowed me to another island, where they knew a United Nations plane could land to rescue me. Only people with an American passport were allowed on the plane. I never really said goodbye. The civil war has been going on now, off and on since 1998. I have not been back.

I am connected to the participants in my study through my experience. I do not understand their struggle, but I empathize with it. I have never been poor, black, or male, but I have been an outsider and I have been disrupted and displaced by sudden and violent war. I have been in a country where my cultural practices and language were not accepted as the norm, but where white privilege worked to my advantage continuously. I have struggled with my gender role all of my life in America as an outspoken, opinionated, and independent child of my grandmother. In Africa, I had to learn to keep my mouth shut and at times,

my silence brought me to tears. I know what it is to be an outsider, a privileged one, but nonetheless an outsider.

I also know what it means to be vulnerable and to learn to exist within a culture that questions and is mistrustful of me. I have realized the risk in being forced to seek people in the community who were willing to help me build a bridge into their world without passing judgment on my cultural stupidity. Equally, having lived in Africa and with Africans in America, I have come to understand the snickers that unleash in a classroom when we talk about American supermarkets and the very concept of food created specifically for dogs and cats. I am not an insider in their world, but for some, including the men in this study, I am as close as they will come here and they knew I could help them build the bridge they needed.

Freire (1990) states that, as educators, we cannot just decide where a student is, we have to instead “know what they know and how they know ” (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 66). Ultimately, through this process of finding out, we must also “learn how to teach them things which they don’t know and they want to know” (Freire, 1990, p. 66). For educators this can inevitably become a very humbling process because the inherent question within Freire’s

(1990) discussion is how we decipher between knowledge and necessity:

> The question is to know whether my [our] knowledge is necessary, because sometimes it is not necessary. Sometimes it is necessary but the need is not yet perceived by the people. Then the one task of the educator is also to provoke the *discovering* of need for knowing and never to impose the knowledge whose need was not yet perceived. (p. 66)

So how does a white, recovering Catholic, middle class, highly educated teacher or service provider decipher what her black, male, Malian, Cote D'Ivoirian, Somalian, Guinean, Gambian, refugee, undocumented, war torn, Muslim, Animist, lower class, colonially or tribally educated, socially isolated, unemployed, circularly migrating, border culture living, passively resistant, spiritually rooted, possibly pre-literate students need from her? She listens. She stops with her agendas, her computer software, her thousand dollar text book budget, her American quick-fix ideologies and even her objectives and standards, and she participates in the African oral, spiritual, and cultural traditions by absorbing their individual stories, sharing

meals and religious holidays with them, visiting their homes, and asking about their families.

In essence, she risks all that is culturally appropriate for an American teacher or service provider, rolls up the sleeves of her button down cardigan, and ventures into their worlds. In this process she makes cultural blunders and unveils her ignorance: her humanity, and, all the while, she somehow helps to begin the process of participatory education as an organic human being. She and others like her, serve to create a bridge, in which students, with their teachers, begin to cross from one educational and cultural continent into another. Yet, ultimately, they have to walk across the bridge together. The teacher or service provider cannot yell from one continent over the ocean and get them to join her: it is just not possible.

In speaking of the Highlander School, Myles Horton (1990) describes the experience of shouting from the other continent:

> We were going to bring democracy to the people, I mean bring it to them like a missionary and dump it on them whether they liked it or not. We thought we were going to make them world citizens. All of us had

> traveled, we'd been around, abroad, and we'd read all this stuff, and we were going to bring all this enlightenment to the people. . . . So we thought we were pretty good, but the people didn't pay any attention to anything we were doing. Nothing we were doing they reacted to. We couldn't even talk the language they understood. A lot of their language was nonverbal. We were verbal. We were all certified as verbal, but we couldn't communicate! (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 44)

For Horton, it was in recognizing how to educate outside of the socially prescribed traditions of education in this country that heed to the ideas of "service", which automatically establishes a relationship of power within an educational setting, rather than mutual knowledge and humility.

> I think the problem is that most people don't allow themselves to experiment with ideas, because they assume that they have to fit into the system. They say how can I live out these things I believe in within the capitalist system, the microcosm of capitalism, the school system and within the confines

> of respectability, and acceptance? (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 44)

As a result, we end up regurgitating the same techniques of the past, and education remains a passive system that we impart on others. Instead, he says, we must begin “to think outside the socially approved way of doing things” and in turn, awaken our minds to new “discoveries” (Freire & Horton, 1990, p. 44). Horton’s bridge is one composed of such discoveries.

Structural Deterioration

Nevertheless, my bridge started to crack halfway through my study. I was a horribly unqualified literacy teacher. I had learned to read and write in a private American school from teachers and parents with extensive educational backgrounds. I had also learned to become an English teacher in the context of a society that is based on the written word, yet none of the students I was working with shared my background or familiarity with print and, unlike children learning to read, they were adults who had shaped their lives in transnational urban identities. Each evening, part of me wished that my participants would never return so I could start working more with the teachers and

their literate students. The other part of me, however, remained petrified that my participants wouldn't return to class and, as a clear message to me that my skills were exactly what I had feared all along, would vanish like the others. Yet, they kept coming to class and, subsequently, to the study.

In some ways, I believe they continued to come while the bridge was cracking because they felt sorry for me as I fumbled my way through all the resources our program had for me to teach reading and writing. In other ways, I believe the focus that action research has on creating trustworthiness, building relationships, and collaboration kept them attending. They were stakeholders in this project too, and they knew it. "Oh no. We never gonna drop out. We like this study. We get to talk to each other. We learn to read and the writing together. So, when I think I know nothing. I look at Lamine and say- eh- he don't know nothing either, so I feel good you know. We all in the same place. Even the teacher- she don't know sometimes too" (Saran Ba, personal interview, November 15, 2005). As I listened to the taped interviews and coded field notes weekend after weekend, all I found myself saying in my reflective journals was:

> What a mess. I have a pile of data, tons of information about the tension in each man's life, but no action. We are certainly having fun, but we aren't *doing* anything. I tap the book to keep their attention; they resist and instead find ways to tell stories and jokes about Africa every night. The other teachers probably meet together at some bar after work and spend their evening laughing about our 'study'. (S. Lamping, journal excerpt, September 22, 2005)

Nevertheless, all I thought about was our work together and how we could overcome the hurdles before us. I couldn't get Saran's comments out of my head: knowing and not knowing seemed to be what was allowing us to move forward as equals.

Herr and Anderson (2005) point out that this process of reflection is ultimately what pushes us toward authentic and relevant action in our research:

> As a researcher gains insight into the puzzle being studied, the next step may be to broaden the scope of the data gathering, something not previously anticipated by the researcher; this could be a step that now makes sense, derived from the researcher's reflection and understanding from the previous round

> of data gathering, analysis, and actions taken. (p. 76)

In the spirit of collaborative research, I decided to consult the other stakeholders, including Marian, over and over again. Finally, after hearing how unsuccessful I had been feeling with all the materials and how well the literacy level ESL students were doing, Marian said: “Isn’t this what you’re *supposed* to be researching? Why don’t you interview the men again and then turn to the scholars? What’s already been done?” Knowing she was right, I skulked out of her office, much like I had done as a seventh grader when instructed by my father to go “collect myself” in the den.

Validating the Experience of Action Research

Ernie Stringer (2004) writes that the validity of action research is “verified through procedures establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmabilty, degrees of participation, and utility” (p. 61). Typically, action researchers achieve all of the above through longer research processes that may include pilot studies, a lot of observations and interviews in a variety of settings, triangulation, review of the research findings

with co-investigators, looking at a variety of interpretations for data, detailed description of both the research process and participants involved, accuracy checks of the data with members from and outside the research team, the extent of stakeholder involvement, and, ultimately the usefulness of the research process and findings to enact change (Stringer, 2004, p. 1).

I had never imagined the scope of this project when it began. It wasn't because of action research that the project became so time consuming; instead, it was because my relationship with the participants required me to step out of my cultural comfort zone and build a study that accurately and respectfully represented their experience. I am reminded of the amount of time even the smallest procedure in this study takes by my experience over the past few days. I have been putting the final touches on this dissertation and the men and I have been busily choosing sections from the curriculum we created to include in the appendix that follows. Amin, however, has been having car trouble the past few weeks and has not made it down to the site to choose the pieces from his chapter for the appendix. Although I need to pick up his sections from him at his house, I cannot just swing by and get them

because “swinging by” is not a phrase Amin understands. I know that this weekend, when I go over to his house, I have to have a blocked off section of time for a visit that, subsequently, produces the documents I need. It will require sharing a meal, visiting with his baby and his son, and chatting away the afternoon with his wife. It will also probably include a conversation in which Amin says that I can choose the pieces from his chapter for the appendix, even though he already has his mind set on specific pages. We will go back and forth until finally, smiling, he will relent and miraculously, with little thought, produce the sections he wants to see in the appendix. I can predict this interaction because it is one that I have grown to love over the past eleven months. It has required me to remember how much as Americans we rush through in life.

Stringer (2004) believes that action research is valid when it has occurred over a long period of time and in a variety of settings, and I believe that action research calls for this because how Amin acts at school is so much different than how he is at home. Equally, I am different when I come to his home than when I am at the school. When I am in the back of Toure’s apartment trying

to fix the leaky shower because the landlord won't answer his phone calls and he can't afford a plumber, I'm doing action research: the conversations we have while I'm pretending to be a plumber reveal more about him, and me, than a scripted interview ever can. So, as I have learned, because action research requires us learn with our participants, it also requires us to spend more time with them and to, inevitably, uncover the deep respect inherent in *knowing* a person's experience.

It has been through triangulation in this study that we have come closer and closer to the truth. I could have never just interviewed Lamine, found out that he couldn't read and write in his first language, and then continued with the literacy lessons that our program has for native speakers. Instead, I kept going back to him, I kept watching, and I kept asking questions about his process. Then, I went to the lead teacher and she gave me a new method, a new book, and new activities to try. When, after a week, nothing had changed, I started reading about literacy and critical literacy. I also started looking at other studies that had been done with adult immigrants and found that there were only a few relating to ours.

I sat down one evening after a session with Lamine and read Purcell-Gates' (1995) *Other People's Words* and started to see how Lamine's experience, even though he was worlds away culturally from the adult literacy student in the book, was similar to what Purcell-Gates discusses. I then started to connect it to Freire's (1983) literacy work, and continued up and down the research paths that led me right back to Lamine. "I think it hard because it seems so far away" he said one night about reading. "What if we look at one of your papers," I said, pointing to the briefcase. From one of Lamine's immigration forms, we lifted the simple phrases: name, birth date, address, and social security number and, from there, we kept going. Without the experts, I would have stuck to my narrow understanding of Lamine's struggles with literacy. I had to look at my notes, listen to the interviews with him over and over, begin understanding how words worked and didn't work for him, and consult the people who had done this before, of which he was the most qualified expert. I also learned that such strides occur for each person differently and, even though I may have not been seeing full sentences and paragraphs, Lamine was reading and writing single words, for the first time in his life.

A way that we began reviewing my findings was through listening to older interviews together and then record or conversations about them. Going back and reflecting on these as a group allowed me to see the data in a new light. In addition, it allowed for conversations that had not taken place before to arise. In the second round of interviews, the men said that D'jeco's arrival had really changed things. "We find out teacher is African when D'jeco come here. She speak in one of our languages. We have respect for that" (Saran Ba, personal interview, November 16, 2005). What I hadn't realized before we took as second look at the findings was that the shared language between D'jeco and I created more of a sense of closeness for all of us, which is why the African stories and jokes were coming out more and more. I had previously seen these pieces to our focus group as diversions away from the *real* learning that I thought needed to take place. Yet, the men believed that more learning than ever was taking place because of the closeness. "I am comfortable now. I used to have problems saying the words that I was reading. Remember? I say 't-t-t-he' instead of 'the'. In this group, I don't do that no more" (Saran Ba, personal interview, December 15, 2005). I had forgotten about Saran's

noticeable stutter when the group first formed because it had completely disappeared, which, for him, was an incredible accomplishment. The men also thought we were on the right track by starting to learn to read with the things that really mattered in their lives.

When I began talking with Marian about some of my findings, she was extremely excited. Her excitement, however, didn't stop her from questioning our work. "Do you ever think that your commitment to them makes you see things that maybe aren't there?" She asked one afternoon (Marian Andrews, personal communication, November 15, 2005). I didn't have an answer for her, but her interpretation of some of our sessions made me question myself. I came back to her the next evening and asked her to clarify. "Well, I think sometimes in this kind of work we have to keep ourselves from doing things for people instead of with them. I think that's the hardest part. I think sometimes you see the men as working with you, but maybe you are really introducing a lot of the stuff to them. What would they do if you stopped coming?" (Marian Andrews, personal communication, November 16, 2005). Stopped coming? I thought she must have been kidding. Nevertheless, in my journal that evening I wrote about

sustainability, questioning my role as being too central, and I began pushing myself to explore ways to make the project belong to all of us, instead of me just believing it did.

Without the pieces that Stringer (2004) describes, my study would have never been as difficult or as meaningful for all of us. Through the amount of time I spent with the men, through my constant investigation of our hurdles, through my somewhat reluctant sharing of research with Marian and others (reluctant because they always made me step away from myself to reflect), and through my endeavor to constantly check the extent of stakeholder involvement, we built a process that produced change within our literacy instruction and, more importantly, gave the men ownership in that change process. I would have never known as much as I do had I not used Stringer's (2004) methods. Yet, the methods seemed sensible and never forced. They called me to do the things I would normally do as a teacher: dialogue, plan, act, observe, reflect, and begin again. They asked me, as a researcher, to see our project and the humans within it as dynamic works in progress.

Critical Literacy and the Push Toward Progress and Utility: Method or Madness?

Freire (1983) believed that when people are learning literacy through what he calls “generative themes” presented in a problem-posing environment, they are more likely to take ownership and to allow the process of literacy to also be a process of transformation (p.95-99). Yet, he also denotes that for this thematic methodology to emerge, we must appropriately “present significant dimensions of an individual’s contextual reality, the analysis of which will make it possible for him to recognize the interaction of the various components” (p.95). As I continued transcribing and coding the data of this research, I began coming across interviews from very early on in our group meetings. I also asked the men to start listening with me to a lot of this early footage. Together, we began to see the change our group started to undergo as we became closer. Little by little, the stories and jokes started creeping out in our taped interviews and conversations. One of our later and more typical focus group sessions (December 14, 2005) is transcribed below:

Sally: Ssssss

Lamine: Ssssss

Saran: Ssssp

Sally: Sp-oo-n
Djeco: Spo-on

(Laughter and background chatter in Soninke)

Sally: What’s so funny? You guys should be excited. We just read the word together.

Toure: We are, we are. It’s just such a funny word for us.

(Laughter and more background chatter in Soninke. Sally sighs)

D’jeco: Entou, na Guine, bu famila teneba kudjer? [Now in Guine, did your family have a spoon?]

Sally: Yes. We had one spoon.

Lamine, Saran, D’jeco: Beh (more laughter)

Saran: Sally you lucky your family had more spoons than we did in the whole village!

(More laughter)

Sally: I think they bought the spoon for me after they found out I couldn’t use my hands too well.

(More laughter)

Saran: They bought the spoon only for (laughter) white lady who no (more laughter) know how to use her hand. (More laughter) Aye yay yay Africans. We are so poor because all

we do is work together to serve the white people. (More laughter). We would be rich if we didn't help each other and the white people so much (group laughter).

Of course, as we revisited this dialogue, the same amount of laughter and joking ensued. After the men finished wiping the tears from their eyes, we started to talk about the themes. "It's so different now. We poor, but we had so much. Now we rich, we have a lotta spoons, but we have nothing" (Lamine Kane, personal communication, November 18, 2005). I wrote down a few words on flip chart. Poor: a word they knew well from previous sessions. Rich: another word they could read. I drew lines under each one. What makes a person rich or poor? I asked. By the end of the evening, we had created pages and pages of new words that we could read and write. According to me, we did more traditional learning in that two hours than we had in months. What I had been blind to, however, was that the critical literacy that Freire (1983) speaks of in his discussion of generative themes comes directly from the stories, jokes, laughter, tears, and interactions that made this research so incredibly human.

Initial Discoveries

So, we began using our own conversations, taped interviews, and previously recorded pieces to shape our literacy curriculum. We started at the beginning with the tapes of focus groups. I would hand out a transcript of the tape and we would play it back as we tried to read along with the conversation. This time, however, I welcomed the jokes and stories.

These sessions reminded me of an African film festival I attended several years ago at Lincoln Center in New York City. The films in the series that evening were all from a famous director from Guinea-Bissau named Flora Gomez. Of course, many of the audience members were Guineans who knew Gomez and were excited to see him and talk about old times and, when the films started, this exuberance did not subside. The audience was about a quarter Guinean and the other three fourths were Africans from other countries or film “scholars” and “critics” from NYU and Columbia who attended the festival. As the movie started, the Guineans were still chatting away in Creole, having seen Gomez’s movies hundreds of times. After a few minutes of banter back and forth across the theater and several shouts at the actors on the screen, the film scholars and critics became

restless. I could hear them shifting in their seats, wanting to quell the noise with a polite “Shhh”. The Guineans continued, until one brave critic turned and forcefully threw out a “SSHHHHHHH!” The entire audience erupted in chaos. Laughter followed by chattering about the ridiculousness of being quiet so that Americans can read subtitles, sucks of the teeth, and the occasional “beh” filled the room. Several of the critics got up and left. It was clear that they had never watched a movie with a bunch of Guineans.

Our time in the focus group operated much like my experience in the movie theater, until I stopped being the critic and allowed myself to be a part of their collaborative experience. When Marian questioned my role in the study, I knew she had a point, so I started practicing getting out of the way. As a result, the conversations became more comfortable, and the men took more ownership.

Often, I would write down themes that came out of talking about or reading a transcript and then, the following night, I would ask one of the men to tell a story about that theme while I recorded him and typed his story into the computer. The next night, we would practice reading the story he had introduced us to the previous

evening. We stopped using the GED literacy books and started using our own text: the one we had spent seven months creating. In it, we found the words that came out of our understanding of the world we lived in as fellow citizens. For Elsa Auerbach (1992), this is precisely what characterizes a participatory approach to learning:

> This collaborative investigation of what is important to students is at the heart of the instructional process, the direction of which is *from the students to the curriculum* rather than *from the curriculum to the students*. In place of a static body of knowledge defined by outside experts, students and teachers have a set of principles and processes to guide their own selection of content and production of knowledge. Not only are students involved in deciding *what* is to be done, they are involved in deciding *how* to do it; as they participate increasingly in creating and producing their own forms and materials (drawings, photos, drama, stories, music), they take more control of the learning process. (p. 19)

Yet, it was through this action and communal reflection that we were finally able to generate the themes that Freire (1983) discusses. The men had to reflect on their

own discussions, stories, and experiences in order to find the themes and, as a stakeholder with a background that was drastically different from theirs, I had to allow them to discover these themes through dialogue and problem posing as a group. As a result, the men started bringing in texts and writing down words from their daily lives to fuel the curriculum and strengthen the reflection and dialogue. They were becoming a part of the written world, yet the participatory approach to critical literacy was allowing them to use their own ways of knowing as a framework for moving in and out of their oral past and their written present.

CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: JOURNEYS INTO OUR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPACE AND PLACE

As a researcher, this study has called me to do what John Dewey (1964) suggests when “the teacher is really a teacher, and not just a master or ‘authority’, he should know enough about his pupils, their needs, experiences, degrees of skill and knowledge, etc. to be able (not to dictate aims and plans) to share in a discussion regarding what is to be done and be as free to make suggestions as anyone else” (p. 154). In order to get to the center of my research questions: to understand what it was that my participants needed, I had to first touch their experiences.

As I did this through interviews, field notes, and the communication that occurred through our focus groups, I began to piece together the stories. At first, the puzzle didn’t work: I couldn’t fit the parts into it that I thought were necessary, but when I started listening, really *listening*, I realized how privileged I had become. The men in this study invited me into their lives through their narratives and their humor. Clearly, they answered

all the interview questions in detail, and participated in the study fully, but it was the informalities that led me to the truths of their lives. These truths rested in their interactions, conversations, and responses to each other. Dewey (1964) states that the student “finds and develops himself in what he does, not in isolation but by interaction with the conditions which contain and carry subject matter” (p. 177). The subject matter of this study was embedded in the printed word, but the subject of that printed word centered on the lived experiences of these five men and, it was the conditions of community and closeness that made the activities of critical literacy occur in the context of vigorous interaction. These explorations happened in the background of the focus group, in whispers, and what I thought previously had been diversions. The group had become something more than class time for them: it had become a breath in a busy day and a chance to interact with others in the same ways that they had done all of their lives: the ways that they had missed since coming here. The little table where we studied became a place of self-preservation and reflection within the larger spaces of their lives.

Research Question One: The World and the Words

Exactly what is the “world” of a group of individuals participating in an urban adult ESL program in the Midwest and how does that world potentially impact their reading of the word as emergent literate voices in American society?

Identifying a sense of place within a landscape, urban or rural, is often what we all, immigrant or otherwise, seek to accomplish. Whether it is social, economic, religious, or cultural, we all seek to carve a place within our terrain. For some of us, that place is temporary and a stepping-stone to the next, bigger space we will seek to occupy, or it is one more step in the journey home. For many immigrants their landscape is urban both by location and by the symptomatic problems of urban areas in the United States. Friedland (1992) defines an idea of place in the context of social and economic theory, yet does not dismiss the power of the subject within a theoretical space:

> Without subjects, there can be no theory of place. For place is the fusion of space and experience, a space filled with meaning, a source of identity. It is also a specific context for our actions, a configuration of

> objects and events in space, a milieu as the French would say. It is outside and inside us, objective and subjective, universal and particular. (p. 4)

As history progresses, the subjects that Friedland describes are becoming more and more diverse and, as a result, the collective definition of place is somehow unattainable. “Cultural significance, human meanings, shape the social fact. . . because of their contextual wholeness and because their significance derives from the meanings humans impart to them, places are natural candidates for narrative understanding” (Friedland, 1992, p. 4). Ultimately, it is the nature and point of view of such narratives that seems to create confusion. Equally, it is the separateness of each subject that causes certain “places” within an urban context to be subordinate. Nevertheless, this study allowed us to create a place within the educational context that provided us with the narratives and, ultimately, the closer understandings of each man’s urban journey.

Oppositional Forces: Place and Self

On a larger scale, Michel Foucault (1993) offers that society, or the space that a subject occupies is made up of a series of techniques:

> One can distinguish three major types of techniques within human societies. The techniques which permit one to produce, to transform, to manipulate things; the techniques which permit one to use signs; and the techniques which permit one to determine the conduct of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives. That is to say, there are techniques of production, techniques of signification, and techniques of domination. (p. 6)

Yet, he furthers this claim to propose another technique that both affects and is affected by the techniques of production, signification, and domination. That technique is what he terms “technique of self” (Foucault, 1993, p. 201).

> There is in all societies, I think, in all societies whatever they are, another type of techniques: techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on

> their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of technique a technique or technology of the self. (p.203)

If we are to examine Foucault's techniques of production, signification, and domination with his technology of the self in the context of the Africanization of urban areas, we find that these two divisions of techniques are creating systems of tension within the realm of subject and space.

The techniques of production (both economically and socially), signification, and domination within American society are culturally oppositional to the techniques of production, signification, and domination in many of the societies from which an African immigrant may emerge. The technology of self, if we maintain Foucault's stance, exists, however, in a transnational sphere. Yet, ultimately, the immigrant's interaction with the economic, linguistic, educational, and institutional aspects of his new society or space impedes the personal actualization of the technology of self.

Economically speaking, the African immigrant often struggles within the urban landscape, and, as a result, the tension between Foucault's two divisions is often strengthened. "Boom, boom, boom that is what I hear at night. Music, very very loud. I cannot sleep. Toilet is broken, the apartment is so hot I open windows, but there is noise outside too (Saran Ba, personal interview, May 17, 2005). The men in my study were refugees, asylees, or undocumented immigrants in the U.S. and immersed in the throes of lower SES status here. Their living conditions are often substandard, crowded, and noisy. Equally, because the United States is a much more private society, much of their lives are suddenly spent inside, rather than outside, and, as a result, the conditions of life in an urban area become even more pronounced for such groups. In our final discussion of the focus group process, Lamine spoke first,

> Most of the time when I come to school I am in Africa again. Sitting on my uncle's veranda making tea and sharing the events of my life. It makes me miss my life there, but I have it here too. School is so difficult. Reading and writing is difficult. I get better though. I get better because I want to. I want to come here. I want to see my brothers and learn

> too. (Lamine Kane, personal interview, December 17, 2006)

What Lamine describes is the ability for school to ease the tension he often faces with his urban environment. School became a place for him where he could once again exist as he did *outside* in his country. He identified his feelings about this sense of place as part of the impetus for staying in school. Yet, the school could not serve as an escape. Instead, it had to become a means by which he both understood and navigated the outside world as himself in America. Nevertheless, this was not without obstacles of race, education, and class.

Race, Place, and the Technology of Self

The environment that the above men inhabit is one that is wrought with a history of socioeconomic struggle, racial tension, and power conflicts that many of the immigrants themselves do not understand or share with their neighbors. Stephen Haymes (1995) terms this type of urban setting as a result of post-war urban planning. “Stratified by race and class the modern city becomes a testing ground of survival, of racialized power and control” (p. 2). Ultimately, Haymes states, the segregation that has

occurred within cities allows a white-supremacist society to construct meanings and associations between urban contexts and race:

> In a white supremacist society like the United States, the spaces of racialized populations, black, Latino, and Asian, are differentiated from the spaces of the non-racialized population, in this case mainstream white. It is by discursively constructing populations and their spaces as racialized that mainstream white institutions in the city legitimate the removal and colonizing of the inner city. In many ways, the equating of the urban with “race” has allowed white mainstream institutions to define “urban problems” – single-parent households, violence, poverty, joblessness, drugs, as the problem of race, and therefore the problem of blacks. (p. 217)

Nevertheless, when an African immigrant inhabits an urban area, they, like African Americans, unwillingly take on an identity in white society that is consistent with Caucasian notions of urbanity in a white-supremacist culture. It is possible that African immigrants may not even associate with their neighbors or they may hold the same opinions of them that the power structure holds, but they are still,

from the eyes of the outsider, enmeshed in the social fabric of what it means to be black and urban in the United States.

As a means of negotiating this technique of power with the technology of the self that Foucault describes, African immigrants often identify ethnically rather than racially in American society. “One thing that distinguishes the black immigrants from other African-Americans, is that they [African-Americans] do not have another country that they have a close connection to and they’re in touch with. . . so that they have a dual identity here” (Logan, 2005, p. 4). Logan goes on to discuss the tensions that often exist between African-Americans and Africans who differ drastically in historical experiences within the United States are not surprising, but go beyond ethnic identity:

> Ethnicity within the black community is very important. And that’s something that’s been hidden from view for – really for decades. America has tended to think that the world is black and white and black is black.. . . that there’s no differences in the black community. But it turns out that the same kinds of tensions that arise between African Americans and Africans have arisen in the past between Irish

> Catholics and Jews or Germans or other white ethnic groups. (p. 3)

Thus, historically speaking, communities have had tension and jealousy over a variety of shared resources, especially employment; however, what has remained is our desire to define the truth for ourselves in our own special context.

During the course of this study, Amin, the Somalian refugee who was spoken about in the third chapter, celebrated the birth of his daughter. Surprisingly, he was shocked when he found out that she would automatically become an American citizen and to hold dual citizenship with Somalia, he would have to make an application with the embassy. Although the other men in the study told him this was a positive thing, he was not so sure in our conversation. “She is Somali. She may have American passport, but in her heart, she is Somali” (Amin Farrah, personal interview, June 26, 2005). Research, however, would indicate that Amin’s greatest task as a father to his daughter will be to do exactly what he states and keep Somalia “in her heart” as she grows up surrounded by American society.

In the past year, Amin has established himself within a type of “border culture” in the United States that Gloria

Anzaldúa (1987) speaks of in the context of Chicano/a identity:

> A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'. (p. 3)

Within U.S. society, Amin exists on the fringes of a majority culture that neither accepts him nor understands him. Yet, because of his family, he is able to preserve a sense of cultural place. Within the context of larger society and in the throes of our techniques of production, signification, and domination, he will constantly struggle. His daughter, however, will identify a new border culture for herself, which will hold less tension between Foucault's three techniques of society and the technology of self. The tension will be eased because, as an American, she will be immersed in a society where such techniques are uniform and, more than likely, she will remain in this

society until she dies, unlike her father whose experience was profoundly disrupted and in turn, his technology of self renegotiated in a new system of production, signification, and domination.

Signification, Place, and Self

Foucault's discussion of the technique of signification that a society carries is one that becomes a profound struggle for an immigrant in a new linguistic and cultural center. Understanding cultural, spiritual, and linguistic nuances of a new society can often be burdensome and frustrating. Delpit (1990) argues that the rate by which a person acquires a second language or dialect has a great deal to do with the ease of the situations in which the language is used (p. 389). She refers to Drashen's (1992) theory of the affective filter. "The so called affective filter is likely to be raised when the learner is exposed to constant correction. Such correction increases cognitive monitoring of speech, thereby making talking difficult" (p. 390). In a society where techniques of signification, including language and expression, are heavily altered from one's original context, the affective filter could become even more pronounced. For example,

situations of confrontation (with a coworker, a boss, or a person of authority), potential embarrassment, or scrutiny, for adult immigrants, are ones that produce a high affective filter.

We see this with Saran, the Cote D'Ivoirian immigrant who used to complain of his situation in a large urban housing complex. "When I get on the phone to call the management office, it is if I don't speak any English. I mean nothing. Even if I practice, I feel like they never understand what I'm saying, you know?" (Saran Ba, personal interview, February 15, 2005). Essentially, removing the stressors from the situation he experiences on the phone could lower Saran's affective filter. An example of this could be using an interpreter, which would cause him to be in an even more subordinate position than before or writing a letter, which is another point of struggle for him, and ultimately even heightens the affective filter more profoundly. Thus, we can surmise that affective filters are often greater in situations involving adults than with children, who tend to acquire language more easily.

Stephen Pinker (1994), however, argues that there is more at stake for adult language learners than heightened affective filters. "In sum, acquisition of a normal

language is guaranteed for children up to the age of six, is steadily comprised from then until shortly after puberty, and is rare thereafter" (p. 293). Pinker states that the maturational changes the brain undergoes in certain phases of our lives are likely causes for this occurrence and that our language-learning circuitry is more plastic in childhood, meaning that children can recover language even if that part of their brain is damaged, but an adult may not (Pinker, 1994, p. 293). Yet, many of the African immigrants living in the United States speak seven or eight other languages; however, several of them are orally based and may require no written proficiency. Certainly, the most profound issue involving many African immigrants is their educational background. Being able to read and write in their native language is often a strong determinant of how well they will succeed in learning English or changing their socioeconomic status.

Research Question Two: The Word and the World: The Processes by which a Facility Creates Change

What are the processes by which we create such collaborative programs in adult immigrant education while

still acknowledging and claiming our status as both insiders and outsiders in these divergent contexts?

Socio-economic status, literacy, and the emancipatory process of education are all factors that impact the process of education for this specific group. Paulo Freire (1997) differentiates between the word and the world that educators and students occupy. “In the area of adult literacy, for example, I have long found myself insisting on what I call a ‘reading of the world and reading of the word.’ Not a reading of the word alone, nor a reading only of the world, but both together, in dialectical solidarity” (p. 105). Freire (2003) advocates an educational setting in which educators and students first learn to “touch” the world that they both occupy through discussion of that world:

> Literacy’s oral dimension is important even if it takes place in a culture like that of the United States, whose memory is preponderantly written, not oral like that of Africa, for example. Considering these different moments, which took place over millennia, and also considering the modern experience, it is not viable to separate the literacy process from

> general educational processes. (Freire & Macedo, 2003, p. 356)

Ultimately, Freire notes that the people of African countries often have an intimate relationship with the world due to the history of struggle, conflict, disease, and famine that many countries in Africa have experienced. Yet, upon liberation from colonial rule, one fault of the new, African, governments has been their inability to prioritize the importance of their populations' reading of the word, as we have seen with Saran, Lamine, and D'jeco in this study:

> African peoples who fought brilliantly to reappropriate their culture and throw out the colonizers, are later depreciated by the new leadership because they cannot read the word. . . . Their new leadership fails to recognize that in the struggle for liberation these people were involved in an authentic literacy process by which they learned to read their history, and that they also wrote during their struggle for liberation. This is a fundamental way to write history without writing words. It is shocking that even though they were successful in the most difficult aspect of literacy, to read and write

> their world, they were belittled in this much easier aspect, that which involved reading and writing the word. (Freire & Macedo, 2003, p. 360)

As a result, African immigrants who arrive in the United States without knowledge of the “word” fall prey to the techniques of production, signification, and power that our society already has established. By focusing on working, sending money home, family, and faith, they are able to create a technology of self that serves to manipulate the situations they currently endure in the United States. Ultimately, this becomes an effort to construct a barrier that will keep them safe and productive while here. Thus, education cannot be a means by which to further this passive relationship they maintain with the outside world: a relationship of survival.

According to Dewey (1964), education for this and other groups must not occur as a means to an end (a way of getting a job, making more money, or surviving). Instead, it has to do more than that: it has to be a means by which this group of people continues to move forward while learning to renegotiate the systems of power in our society. “Education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the

adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction" (p. 437). School, for these men had to celebrate their individual experiences but also had to serve as a place of recognition and impetus for continual growth and change within these experiences. "I have apartment, job, money, everything I need, but I have to learn how to survive for myself in this country. I have to fight for my family for better life for my kids" (Lamine Kane, personal interview, December 5, 2005). Lamine's definition of survival is not in his own material security, but in his ability to know and actively participate in the world around him.

Freedom in Literacy

For Lamine and the other men in this study, the school became a means by which to ease the tension between the technologies of production, signification, and power and their own technology of self. They began to use school not only as a place to learn to read and write, but also as a meeting point for discussion, for remembering, and for re-negotiating their places in an urban American context. This action is denoted by D'jeco Camara's last interview:

> I go out into the world and I know they can't trick me anymore. They can't make me feel like I don't know nothing. Maybe I don't know nothing, but someone in my class does and now I can ask them for answers. I know they can't make me live with a sink that runs water all day long and they cannot make me work all day long without no breaks for food or drinking. I know these things and I can sign my name. I can read the job application. I can ask the right questions instead of just walking away. I can do all of those things now. (D'jeco Camara, personal interview, December 11, 2006)

Dewey (1964) denotes that freedom can be a direct result of the educational experience. For Dewey, freedom can come from simply the ability to accomplish a task on one's own or, if it is "genuine", it can have an even more profound impact on the individual:

> Genuine freedom, in short, is intellectual; it rests in the trained *power of thought*, in ability to 'turn things over,' to look at matters deliberately, to judge whether the amount and kind of evidence requisite for decision is at hand, and if not, to tell where and how to seek such evidence. (p. 258)

Through his time in the focus group, D'jeco began to sign his name and read a variety of items without outside support; yet, it was his ability to "turn things over" as Dewey states that inched him closer to personal freedom and the ability to develop a much more active technology of self.

Equally, others in the study identified similar personal gains:

> I moved. That is big step for me. I moved away from all that bullshit. I live in a great apartment now. I didn't know I could do that. I didn't know I could do that. Before, I just thought, you know, Allah, he is knowing what is happening. He will lead this. I know he help me, but I help too. I help to get myself on this better road. (Saran Ba, personal interview, December 17, 2005)

Much of Saran's work in the focus group consisted of not only learning to read the words on the page, but also learning to read the world critically through a new lens. Part of this new reading pushed him also to re-negotiate his position as both a spiritual and autonomous urban dweller. The idea of Sovereignty of God became a constant point of discussion within the group. Saran, who came in

believing that much of his path had to do with Allah's wishes, began to see his spirituality differently and, in turn, transform these beliefs into ones that both nourished his internal as well as his external needs.

Each man learned to read the words of his world, however separate or shared these words were. By the end of the study, Lamine had begun to use email to contact immigration, he had gotten his forms straightened out, learned to press his lawyer for details, make copies of everything, and actively participate in seeking answers about the case of his family. As of today the visa center has processed his documents and his wife and family all have appointments with the consular in Dakar for visa interviews:

> I want to say thank you for these changes. I know how to read the papers that come in the mail. I can get on the email at the library or at the school and follow my case, ask questions, and they usually give me back a response. Sometimes they tell me it is in process. But now I receive letter that say she and my kids have appointment. I believe they will come shortly. I know more than I did before. My wife though, she no understand any of this. She think I

> make all this up in my head. It has been so long, how can I show her the truth? (Lamine Kane, personal interview, December 13, 2005)

Often, Lamine's case was frustrating for me because I wanted so badly to fix it. I knew he had to wait, but I wanted his suffering to end. Inevitably though, I could not, as an outsider, ease his feelings even in the slightest. I could help him do the things that led toward more control, but it was the men who provided the mental nourishment he needed. Amin especially found an opportunity to mentor Lamine in a shared experience:

> When I was in Somalia and my wife and son here I cry every day. For many times, I didn't know where they even were. My wife though, she figured it out. She did it first. Sometimes I did not believe her. It took so long to find out anything about my situation. I had to trust her though. She is my wife. It will work out she say and I had to believe her. Now that I am here and working and seeing my son and daughter grow I know she is the right one. (Amin Farrah, personal communication, December 13, 2005)

I could never have offered such advice to Lamine; only an insider in his experience could provide such profound and deeply connected insights.

Nevertheless, it was through these types of interactions that the men taught me the value of what Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, and Gee [The New London Group] (1996) term as pedagogy of multiliteracies. Such practice not only operates on the value of each individual voice, but also on the larger, more global idea that literacy is more than words in print. "A pedagogy of multiliteracies, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects" (p. 64). What occurred in our focus groups was exactly what the New London Group outlines in their article, and it was one that acknowledged the idea that "the visual mode of representation may be much more powerful and closely related to language than 'mere literacy' would ever be able to allow" (p. 64). Equally, it privileged a pedagogy "in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (p. 64). Often, I

was not privy to the cultural purposes such literacies were working toward, because such truths were a part of the insider knowledge the men held with each other; yet, sometimes we defined these truths in a cross-cultural and transnational interaction that both identified new knowledge while still maintaining and building on older, more culturally rooted experiences.

Research Question Three: Participatory Processes and Program Change

How can these particular participatory research processes lead to the creation of public educational facilities that collaborate with these students to create new highly sustainable programs, materials, and literature that service a wide range of adult English language learners without first assuming literacy in a native language or cultural competence within the host country?

In his spiritual autobiography *Of Water and Spirit*, Malidoma Somé (1994) recounts the difficult road of his own colonialist education in Burkina Faso as a “memory of fifteen years of brainwashing in the seminary, an

institution that claimed the supremacy of knowledge" in which for the sake of formalized knowledge, he was taught to be a person "who lives in denial of who he really is" (p. 297). Yet, upon escaping from what he considers the "white man's world" and returning to his village, he found that his knowledge was both controversial and a symbol of his outsider status in the Dagara community:

> As an educated man I had returned, not as a villager who had worked for the white man, but as a white man . . . . People understood my kind of literacy as the business of whites and nontribal people. Even worse, they understood literacy as an eviction of a soul from its body- the taking over of the body by another spirit. . . It was not harmful to know a little, but to the elders, the ability to read, however magical it appeared, was dangerous . . . . To read was to participate in an alien form of magic that was destructive to the tribe. I was useful, but my very usefulness was my undoing. (p. 167-168)

Somé's father knew that the only way for him to once again be a part of the village was through initiation: a tribal education that focuses on connectedness, spirituality, and mentorship. "This was the kind of knowledge I was going to

become gradually acquainted with -not by going outside of myself, but by looking within myself and a few others" (p. 201). Yet, after all of his initiation was completed and he was seen once again as a member of the village, he was still referred to as one who straddles both worlds. In a conversation his initiation coaches had with his father, one of the guides voiced this concern. "Have you checked to see how he feels about being in the middle of two worlds? You can't because you're not in his skin . . . . I can only imagine how strange it must feel to not really belong because of what you know" (p. 300). It soon becomes clear that although the father does not want to let go of his son again, the village elders believe he should continue on in the white man's world, even after initiation.

In the midst of making this difficult decision and feeling a host of contempt for the type of education he experienced in the seminary, Somé visits his spiritual mentor who tells him, "In you I see an elder, weighed down by the energy of his ancestors, and knowing that, Fate is asking him to live as a man who remembers" (p. 309). His mentor then pushes him to "go and allow yourself [himself] to be swallowed" by the white man's world, knowing that his

roots in the Dagara tribe will protect him from *becoming* a white man (p. 311).

Although Somé went on to receive three master's degrees and two doctorates, he still reflects on his struggle to live in both worlds well:

> The logic of the school totally contradicted village knowledge . . . there, in the city, at the college, the book had replaced the elder. Because the two worlds could not be brought into harmony- and indeed I had the feeling that it never occurred to any of the students but myself to even try to live in both of them . . . . My enduring passion for magic, rituals, and ceremonies reassured me that the traditional world had swallowed me and that I was resisting the white world- or maybe I had grown to be a man trapped between the white and the traditional worlds. (p. 311)

Ultimately, the strength that he gathered from his initiation in the village allowed him to use the white man's knowledge, but to be critical of it and, through this process, he made sense of what was useful on his journey toward a greater understanding of the "overall picture" (p. 311).

Somé's spiritual guides and mentors in his village are the types of teachers that encourage students in the process of literacy to be critically engaged. They initiated him into the society in which he was born through a process of pushing him inward. Meanwhile, they proceeded to question and express their views of the education he had received at the seminary. Ultimately, they forced him to embrace his fate as a man who lives in both worlds. Yet, they pushed him to neither reject nor accept both, but to absorb, question, and grapple with the teachings of each through the action of education; thus, they prepared him to live more fully as himself in both worlds. In the end, he realizes how such schooling has influenced his path. "I was finally living out the destiny foretold by my name – Malidoma- he who makes friends with the stranger/enemy" (p. 311).

The methods used in this study had to coincide with what Somé discusses in his autobiography. The knowledge these five men acquired from the books they had begun to read could not, ever, replace a lifetime of primary, culturally relevant discourse. Instead, the process of literacy had to allow them to fuse, mitigate, and critically engage in their experience as transnational

people. They had to have space within the process of literacy to retell and reflect upon the stories that had shaped their lives. Such stories are deeply rooted in African rituals of storytelling and orality as a means of communicating history and knowledge.

Like Freire (2001) we wanted a program for literacy that:

> Would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men and women as its Subjects rather than patient recipients, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterize search and invention.(p. 82)

So, instead of using a prescribed set of resources to teach reading and writing, we began to use the men's lives and stories that were previously recorded as material for a truly multicultural literacy project based in Freire's (2001) ideas of dialogue, student driven content, and thematic techniques for generating new words and material for literacy instruction (p. 83).

Multicultural and diverse have been terms that many educational facilities have begun to use in regards to

educating students who are minorities or who do not come from a primary discourse that is also middle class (Zehr, 2005, p. 1). Yet, many of these pushes are curricular and deal with the types of books these students read and annual activities they participate in, but they do not result in structural changes within classrooms, schools, and relationships that advocate critical multicultural literacy and democratic ideals for the truly diverse voices within each classroom. Sonia Nieto (2005) states: “A multicultural perspective is not just about adding, what I call ethnic tidbits to the curriculum. It’s about who gets access to learning? And how are kids affirmed in their quest to learn? How are their identities affirmed? Their communities respected?” (Franquiz, 2005, p. 163). In an urban adult ESOL program, it is not too adventurous to also believe that this type of teaching is relevant, sustainable, and important; it is precisely the questions that Nieto describes which drive such curricula.

We did it. During the course of our time together and through interviews and reflection, we documented the pieces that made up the histories of each man in this study. They allowed me in to see the world of their lives and, through that process, we were guided in establishing the framework

for reading the words of their lives. There were many times when the study would not have moved forward because of my inability to trust the process that they were using. The process they were engaged in was one in which they began to identify vocabulary that was common to their lives within and outside of school. Freire (2001) defines such discoveries as integral parts of participatory research. “The research is carried out during informal encounters with the inhabitants of the area. One selects not only the words most weighted with existential meaning, and thus the greatest emotional content, but also typical sayings, as well as words and expressions linked to the experience of the groups in which the researcher participates” (p. 87). Through such action and reflection, the men called me to remember: to recall the knowledge that we create from the contact we have with each other in our human experience and to do something with those interactions.

Their stories led us through each of the five phases that Freire (2001) outlined in relation to his literacy work in Brazil: Phase 1 researches the vocabulary of the people, Phase 2 identifies generative words that are phonetically rich, challenging, and have greater social and cultural implications, Phase 3 in which we codified such

generative words into situations for discussion- allowing us to delve deeper into the men's lived experiences, Phase 4 in which we enacted a plan for what words and phrases we would discuss and learn each session, and Phase 5 where we began to break down each word into phonetic sounds that the men practiced. The men combined these new sounds to form more generative words. Ultimately, they set out to discover as many new words as possible that were composed of the newly learned phonetic sounds and record, reread, and evaluate them as a group (p. 89).

Through this process, we created the book that is now an integral part of our literacy curriculum. It is set up in the same framework as the study itself: exploratory, expansive, and open-ended. All of the chapters of the book are based on the men's personal stories and the generative themes that each identified in our time together. We used my research in critical literacy to create reproducible classroom activities that are based on the stories of the men's lives. Initially, it provides the foundations, which the men felt were necessary: the alphabet, both cursive and print, a list of sight words that the men compiled from generative themes in their own lives, and several exercises that students can use to practice sight words, the

alphabet, writing their names and addresses, and a signature. As we began to compose this section, I argued over the necessity of including such tasks. “Do you guys remember the ABC’s? We used those books and you guys didn’t know any of the words like web and aunt? Why are we going to use them here?” I questioned. “Sally, to learn the reading we have to start at some place. We have to know *how* to read the lines. We didn’t even know (laughter) that the words are moving left to right. We think they go up down” D’jeco replied. So, we decided on Chapter 1 as an introduction to the basics. We didn’t use any instructions because the men wanted it to be easy for someone to pick up and just start practicing, maybe with a friend or a teacher, but not requiring a huge amount of written proficiency to begin. We then gave some advice to teachers on coaching groups to create their own vocabularies and generative themes. Our completed literacy curriculum is over two hundred pages. In Appendix A of this dissertation, there are selections from two of the chapters in the curriculum, which give readers a sample of the completed piece (see Appendix A).

The next chapter is Toure’s chapter. The subjects it deals with are coming to the United States as a young man,

enrolling in school, talking to teachers, finding a job, and immigration status. It also deals with life maps and plans and what a GED is and what it does for a person. The chapter has beginning words, sentences, and stories based on each of these topics (which are part of the sight word list in the first chapter). Toure thought it would be a best to attach a color-coding system to the chapter, which we stuck with in the rest of the book.

> I think it would be a good idea to make easy things red, medium ones yellow, and more difficult green. That way if you not so sure about your ability you can just stay in the red parts for each topic. When you ready, you move to other colors. We also teach colors this way too cause even though people not reading they driving. They know red yellow green. (Toure Keita, personal interview, December 17, 2005)

Everyone liked this idea, so we used it throughout the book for each chapter. In addition to the activities in each section, we give ideas for extension (depending on the color of the section), like interviewing other people, writing letters and extended responses about the different topics, telling stories about first days of school, immigration, families, or teachers.

Amin’s chapter deals with spirituality and raising a family. His topics included having a baby in America, finding the Mosque or African community in the area, remembering and practicing traditions from home as a family, using the internet, participating in a child’s school, the library, balancing prayer and work, and community service. He also has a section on maps, how to find them, and use them.

Saran’s chapter deals with life goals, learning to read and write, post-secondary education, moving, renting a good apartment, dealing with the landlord, and police relations. Lamine’s chapter follows Saran’s with readings and a discussion of the separated family unit, pro-actively navigating immigration, using email, buying a car as a conscious consumer, loneliness, and dealing with death of a family member while one is here. D’jeco’s chapter is the final one, it addresses the grocery store, identifying products with pork and alcohol, healthcare, telephone complaints, becoming a permanent resident, voice, and the question of why school *now?* “So many of my friends they always say before, why you go to school *now?* I guess I am older than secondary school student. Sometimes I feel old too, but I know I not too old. School is how I feel wise I

tell them" (D'jeco Camara, personal interview, December 13, 2005). Each chapter has three levels, indicated by colors for students to gauge their own pace and learning.

Yet, the biggest component of the book process has been our discussions of community. At first, the idea of making a book out of their stories was exciting for all of us, but we all wondered how the book could help create the community we had in the focus group. I explained that this kind of closeness sometimes comes from being close for a long time and struggling together, which we had done for the time we had together. The men, however, were not satisfied. "The teachers should know about the student though. How do we get the teacher to know about the student, if a teacher uses this book?" Lamine said. I suggested that we look at the ways we got to know each other and list them. The men agreed. Our list was small: food, stories, discussions, problems, interviews, and reflection. Dewey (1964) believed that such methods of getting into the real material come from essential attitudes "among the most important are directness, open-mindedness, single-mindedness (or whole-heartedness, and responsibility" (p. 397). We had all of Dewey's attitudes,

but we were unsure of how to get others who didn't witness it to see it from a book.

We decided on an initial explanation for teachers that both introduced them to the oral traditions within our group, but also discussed the types of literacy that existed in our group and encouraged them to find multiple literacies within their classrooms. We said that such an introduction would also have to include directions on "open-mindedness" and "whole-heartedness" as acts we engage in as part of the process of knowing where our students are initially. We also put some words in about the meaning of literacy in the men's countries and what the transition from orality to transcription also signifies in a classroom for such unique adult learners. The men decided to go back into each chapter and place markers where teachers might want to do recorded interviews, take a walk or field trip together, or have the class, including teachers, bring in food (which the men thought should be all the time). These markers were placed in critical moments in the curriculum where students may be exploring difficult issues or sadness. In addition, the book is produced in a binder so that teachers and class members can add in transcribed interviews and stories from their own classes as they build

them. We also liked the idea of letting the book be photocopied. When we discussed this, Saran spoke first “We African. We share. Man if this helps somebody else because the teacher can copy it then we should do that. Nobody owns this. We not American” he said. No one, including me, contested his opinion.

In the end, the project took so much more time than I had ever anticipated. Initially, I set out to answer three questions in this study: what is the “world” of a group of individuals participating in an urban adult ESL program in the Midwest and how does that world potentially impact their reading of the word as emergent literate voices in American society? What are the processes by which we create such collaborative programs in adult immigrant education while still acknowledging and claiming our status as both insiders and outsiders in these divergent contexts? And, how can these particular action research processes lead to the creation of public educational facilities that collaborate with these students to create new highly sustainable programs, materials, and literature that service transnational adult English language learners without first assuming literacy in a native language? The questions, in the course of the study were answered, but we

soon realized that such answers were, as Dewey (1964) states, continuous and an inherent part of the process of acquiring knowledge. Although we produced a substantial product, we still have questions that came out of the process of answering the initial and subsequent inquiries.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While writing this dissertation, I have found people both inside and outside of education who range from being fascinated about this work to being apathetic about the possibilities for change. Often, I hear words like: where do teachers find the time for this? Or, the more forward, why should we be focused on this group of people when we can't even take care of our *own* students? Living in a system that divides and categorizes human beings allows us, even in the field of education, to compartmentalize students into commodities: people who do and do not belong to *us*.

Several years ago, I was an outgoing, yet naïve twenty year old, freshly graduated from college and on my way to a country that I knew nothing about and a culture that was completely different from my own. I remember reading through my Peace Corps offer letter with its short description of Guinea-Bissau and asking a close friend what it meant when they said 10% of the water in the country was potable. It seems fitting that two years of intestinal

distress provided me with an exemplary explanation of her answer, which was: drinkable. Nevertheless, initially, when I boarded the plane from Washington D.C. to Lisbon and then to Guinea-Bissau, I believed I was of sound mind and body, although, I had never been outside of the United States aside from Mexico.

Guineans do not wait in lines. This was my first lesson about Africa. When they call the flight, everyone rushes to the gate, pushing and shoving their way down the narrow aisles and forcing electronic devices, food items, blankets, gifts, and assortments of international artifacts into the overhead compartments of the plane. By the time we were seated, I was already sick to my stomach. I was seated next to my new best friend, a fellow volunteer, and to his right a Guinean woman who did not speak any English; to my left were an older man and his daughter, eager to practice the few English phrases they had picked up in Lisbon. Behind us were three Senegalese men, all dressed in colorful Dashikis, speaking a language I would later come to recognize as Wolof and there was a smattering of others from all over the world, including the thirteen American volunteers. It really was an international flight.

Our group had just finished a two day orientation in Washington D.C. that ran more like a crash course in survival. The two days ended with the signing of several forms, which by that time none of us had read. Exhausted, we all settled into our flight to Bissau. Several hours later, at about 11:00, I was awoken by the sound of wheels emerging from the plane, the unbuckling of seatbelts, and the rustling of anxious passengers. The plane began its descent and I looked eagerly out the window into the dark night sky. There were no lights: anywhere. The night was pitch black, but the plane continued to move in for landing. “Where’s the runway?” some bold American asked. We all sat quietly, waiting. We knew we were moments away from landing.

In a matter of seconds, the scene changed from anticipation to shock as the plane shot back up into the air rapidly, leaving stomachs, passengers, and small children spilling into the aisles and tumbling over each other. Oxygen masks dropped out of the compartments above and the stewardess took her seat. I could hear the men behind me saying something in unison. I looked next to me as the man held his weeping daughter and the woman next to my friend bowed her head in what looked like prayer.

Across the aisle, another volunteer was embracing an older gentleman who appeared to be African. People were crying, sobbing, praying, and holding rosaries and medallions. My friend leaned in closely and whispered: “Was one of those forms we signed life insurance?” we both laughed and grabbed each other’s hands. At that moment, regardless of education, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or cultural practices, we were all the same. We were the same in our fear and our responses as we held on to each other and to our gods. The people on the plane represented every spectrum of humanity, yet our situation suddenly unified us in our efforts to respect and embrace each other in what we thought might be our last breathing moments on earth. For only a few moments in our lives, no one belonged to anyone, yet, everyone belonged to each other.

We soon heard the pilot’s shaky voice over the crackling sound system. Of course, he spoke in Portuguese, which none of the Americans understood. Yet, the man next to me, eager to practice his English told me that the generators in Bissau had gone off at ten o’clock, so the pilot had missed the runway and was now either going to Dakar, which he doubted we had enough gas for, or turning around and trying it all over again. Soon, we felt the

plane turning around and once again preparing for landing. Miraculously, we landed in a pitch-black airport, except for one bright red siren from a fire truck that had been called in -just in case. When they opened the cabin door, the breath-stealing Guinean humidity, and a long line of smiling faces of family members, Peace Corps coordinators, and friends greeted the haggard passengers. We all parted ways and walked separately into the arms of whom and where we *belonged*.

And so I am reminded of this almost crash landing when people tell me about who belongs to whom in this country, in our schools, and in our communities; Freire (2001) states that such absolutes contribute to our own personal weaknesses (p. 208). Yet, in earlier writings, he denotes that such thinking deprives us of more subtle understandings of our larger global existence and potential for change. “Lead us to transcend the narrow horizons of the neighborhood or even the immediate geographical area, to gain that global view of reality indispensable for an understanding of the task of national reconstruction itself” (Freire, 1997, p. 87). The men in my study have led me to such ideas of transcendence and toward this deeper

understanding of how global views of education can be the impetus for change.

Yet, my work in public education provides me with the experience of hopelessness. In a system that is rapidly moving away from problem posing curricula and practices focused on global and intimate understandings of students' cultures and lives and into a national ends/means approach to education, it is difficult not to see the hopelessness. Equally, as I have watched my program coordinator repeatedly beg, plead, and scrounge for money for adult education, I am also reminded that students like those I work with are compartmentalized in the underbelly of system priorities. Not only are they low income adults, but they are also non-literate, non-white, and second language learners. Thus, we continue to drain money from such programs and pump it back into the already under-funded high schools that have become the lands of high stakes testing, overcrowded classrooms, and increasing teacher burn out. The high schools need that money and so we enter into the conversation of what belongs to whom and, inevitably, who belongs to whom, in education.

What belongs to Hassan, the twenty-year old Cote D'Ivoirian tenth grader whom I met at the library last

week? He is a permanent resident, a green card holder, and a public high school student who works forty hours a week. He cannot read and write, but he cannot attend another program at night because his district will not allow him to attend both schools. He either has to drop out and get his GED or continue at his current school and get his high school diploma. Most teachers would encourage him to continue because we know, in the real world, a high school diploma is more prestigious than a GED, and therefore he belongs to the public high school. He will probably pass, even without being able to read and write, and he will most likely graduate from his current high school. Yet, what he did not know when we met was that he must do all of these things before he is twenty-two, at which point, he can no longer attend public high school in America. Once he turns twenty-two, he must drop out or enroll in a GED program. In both routes, he will have to learn to read and write in order to live freely in our society. So, he may graduate from high school, but he may end up ultimately in a GED program so that he can become literate. Right now though, he is one of many English as a Second Language students in his high school who are in the same situation; because the school so desperately needs the money attached to his body,

he is not being fully serviced or consulted in his own path.

In this work, I am calling for programs that bridge this literacy gap through strategic dispersing of funding, the sharing of resources, and a greater understanding of the reality of our changing student bodies: a reality that reflects our global awareness. Yet, this will require us to turn away from absolutes that Freire (2001) discusses and toward programs and schools that truly nurture the changing individuals who inhabit the classrooms:

> In fact, as soon as you begin to say, 'no, only what is Chilean is good.' The distinctive marks of your culture are weakening. But if, instead of treating the marks of your culture as absolutes, you cherish them and seriously cultivate them, without absolutizing them, then you see that were it not for them you would even find it difficult to learn new things which, placed alongside your own personal history, can also be meaningful. (Freire, 2001, p. 208)

Students like Hassan and those in this study remind us that there are no absolutes in education. Instead, there are only places where, if we resist seeing absolutes, we find

new ways of existing. It seems that if we don’t start recognizing such possibilities now, we will be forced to confront them later as our country changes without the leadership of our schools.

Over the past year, I have grown multitudes as a teacher and as a human being who still holds the capacity to learn. This piece is a sample of one small section of a diverse classroom, somewhere, anywhere really, in the United States. It tracks the lives of five men and seeks to place them in both a social and educational reality that becomes the framework for our study, which begins by first delving into a deeper understanding of the lives our students live. Research has told us repeatedly of the impact environment has on learning (Dewey, 1936; 1964). Yet, such a study strives to push into a transnational space that does not allow me as a white middle class educator and researcher to use my own learned frame of reference as a way to better understand the educational path of each man.

Instead, it calls me, and others in similar situations, to put aside my prescribed ways of knowing and to seek new ways of proceeding, disseminating, and acting. Because of our drastic cultural, gender, and social

differences, such a project required, if not demanded, that we find some common ground and, inevitably, it establishes the idea that such common ground is, in fact, with much sweat and tears, very possible. It is also an open-ended study that derives conclusions and findings from what we did as well as what we did not find and values the journey as a necessary method of knowing. Yet, it also, as Dewey (1964) recalls, focuses on education as a process rather than an end:

> The ‘end’ is not, in other words, an end or finality in the literal sense, but is in turn the starting point of new desires, aims and plans. By means of the process the mind gets power to make suggestions, which are significant. There is now a past experience from which they can spring with an increased probability of their being worth while and articulate. (p.155)

Clearly, this study is not the end, but it has become a hopeful one in the middle of perceived hopelessness.

I am advocating, as others before me have also advocated (Auerbach, 1992; Dewey, 1936, 1964; Freire, 1997, 2001; Freire & Horton, 1990; hooks, 1994, 2003) for progressive education:

> Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. . . . One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. (Freire, 1997, p. 9)

I met Hassan in the English as a Second Language section of the library. It was through my offering of the services in our program that I found out his story. Standing there, next to scores of materials meant for literate ESOL students, I realized I was standing in the middle of the struggle. In what, to me, seemed to be a hopeless situation, I had to seek ways to find hope.

I called one of my high school student volunteers and set up some tutoring sessions for him, but I knew there had to be a way to make him *ours,* collectively: to share him in order to provide him with the best path toward his own freedom. From the men in my study, I had learned the ways of the collective, not the ways of the separatist, at all costs. Yet, in order to find this collective, I had to learn how to plunge deeply into the lives of my

participants through ethnographic research. On my way home from the library I wondered if Hassan's teachers were also ethnographers. Did they know what I now knew about him? Were they trying to bridge this gap? Were they too struggling to find materials for him while the rest of the class moved on? Was he at the library because they had encouraged him to participate in his own education or was it because he had nowhere left to go? I wondered how we could work together for Hassan, who would later become Toure, Amin, Saran, Lamine, and D'jeco as he moved out of the prioritized high school system and into the struggles of adult education.

This study reminds us of what it means when education becomes the process of transformation. It was an investigation into what it means to focus on the beauty of a gap between orality and transcription. It calls on us to mind such gaps in our work instead of pushing and pulling our way to the exit. Yet, it was also a study about remembering: of what it means in a written society to learn to read and write and, equally, of what remembering and moving forward mean collectively. Freire (1997) discusses this as a way of educating exile. "It is very difficult to experience exile, to live with all the different longings-

for one's town or city, one's country, family, relatives, a certain corner, certain meals- to live with longing, and educate it too" (p. 32). In addition, this study is also about exiles: people who live in what Anzaldúa (1987) describes as a "border identity", yet, it seeks ways to "educate" as Freire (1997) states, this new identity:

> It is this critical ability to plunge into a new daily reality, without preconceptions, that brings the man or woman in exile to a more historical understanding of his or her own situation. It is one thing, then, to experience the everyday in the context of one's origin, immersed in the habitual fabrics from which we can easily emerge to make our investigations, and something else again to experience the everyday in the loan context that calls on us not only to become able to grow attached to this new context, but also to take it as an object of our critical reflection, much more than we do our own from a point of departure in our own. (p. 33)

Critical literacy and participatory practices, although they became the driving forces of discovering this new identity through literacy in this study, were not always the methods. We struggled constantly between what we

needed at that specific time or what others, including myself, thought was needed, and the long process of discovering what we actually needed through dialogue, action, and reflection.

I am calling for the existence of classrooms where teachers use ethnography to create texts that speak about and within the lives of their students and, in this effort, begin to learn from these students and from their research, new ways to bridge the literacy gaps within schools. Because of our positions as teacher ethnographers, we are pushed to wonder, to make mistakes, to question, to unlearn, and to see new ways to educate diverse learners. Yet, equally, we are creating spaces for students that allow them to participate in their own education and, inevitably, as Freire (2001) states, to both honor their own cultures while being a part of the ones they currently inhabit:

> If you give up the distinctive marks of your culture, you do not genuinely take on the distinctive marks of your new culture, and your life in the new culture is a pretence. But if you cherish your culture, without treating it as an absolute, then you can afford to let yourself be influenced by the new culture. In other

> words, the new culture does not invade you, but nor is it repressed. Basically, it too gives you something. (p. 208)

As educators, we are certain that such ideas are not easy tasks and that they require the passion and commitment of those who are both endowed to education and to participatory research within education. Nor, as Dewey proved as early as 1936, is this the first time such practices have been suggested:

> The alternative to furnishing ready-made subject matter and listening to the accuracy with which it is reproduced is not quiescence, but participation, sharing, in an activity. In such shared activity the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher- and upon the whole, the less consciousness there is, on either side, of either giving or receiving instruction, the better. (p. 188)

As teachers and service providers, we often suggest that we don’t have enough time or that we’ve never had enough time. We know, however, that if we collaborated more with each other and with our students, we could make more time for meaningful endeavors. Because, really, without them, we are laboring away with new individuals, who have drastically

different cultures and places of reference in the world, by using the same ideas and tools that continue to marginalize and under-educate those whom we find most difficult to understand.

We are all on a plane and it’s headed for the ground, the oxygen masks are out, and the stewardess has taken her seat. Do we give up? Do we react to each other as separatists might? Do we decide who will live and who will perish based on race, nationality, gender, educational background, or sexual orientation? Or do we automatically, without much thinking, recognize our common humanity and our ability to see each other as co-investigators in this struggle?

REFERENCES

Altareb, B. (1996). Islamic spirituality in America: A middle path to unity. *Counseling and Values, 41*(1), 29-38.

Anzaldua, G. (1987). *Borderlands: La Frontera The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.

Appiah, K. (2004). Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person. In L. M. Brown (Ed.), *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives* (pp. 194). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arthur, J. (2000). *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*. Westport: Praeger.

Auerbach, E. (1992). *Making Meaning Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy*. McHenry: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Banawi, R., & Stockton R. (1993). Islamic values relevant to group work with practical applications for the group leader. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 18*(3), 151-160.

Beckwith, C., & Fisher, A. (1999). *African Ceremonies* (Vol. 1&2). New York: Abrams.

Borjas, G. (2002). Welfare Reform and Immigrant

Participation in Welfare Reform Programs. *International Migration Review* (Winter 2002), 1093-1123.

Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., & Gee, J. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(1), 60-91.

Center for Applied Linguistics (1996). *Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics Refugee Service Center.

Collier, V. (1992). A Synthesis of Studies Examining Long term Language Minority Student Data on Academic Achievement. *Bilingual Research Journal, 16*(1-2), 187-201.

Contreras, R. (2002). The Impact of Immigration Policy on Education Reform. *Education and Urban Society, 34*(2), 134-155.

Corbett, S. (2001, April 1). The Lost Boys of Sudan; The Long, Long, Long Road to Fargo*. The New York Times,* p. 5.

Costanzo, J., Davis, C., Caribert, I., Goodkind, D., &

Ramirez, R. (2001). *Evaluating Components of International Migration: The Residual Foreign Born* (No. 61). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

Crandall, J., Bernache, C., & Prager, S. (1998). New Frontiers in Educational Policy and Program Development: The Challenge of the Underschooled Immigrant Secondary School Student. *Educational Policy, 12*(6), 719-734.

Delpit, L. (1990). Language Diversity and Learning. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.),*The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (pp. 388-403). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Dewey, J. (1936). *Democracy and Education*. New York: MacMillan Company.

Dewey, J. (1964). *On Education: Selected Writings*. New York: The Modern Library.

Di Giovanni, J. (2002). *Terror and Ethnic Cleansing in Ivory Coast*. Retrieved February 5, 2006, 2006, from http://www.crimesofwar.org/about/about-website.html

Dickens, L.,& Watkins, K. (1999). Action Research: Rethinking Lewin. *Management Learning, 30*(2), 127-141.

Education For All 2000 Assessment. (2000). Retrieved September 19, 2005.

El Azayem G., & Hedayat-Diba (1994). The psychological aspects of Islam: Basic principles of Islam and their psychological corollary. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 4*(1), 41-50.

Ferdman, B. (1990). Literacy and Cultural Identity. *Harvard Educational Review, 60*(2), 181-205.

Flayton, L. (2005, August 16). Lost in America. *Salon.com*.

Foucault, M. (1993). About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth. *Political Theory, 21*(2), 198-227.

Franquiz, M. (2005). Education as Political Work: An Interview with Sonia Nieto. *Language Arts, 83*(2), 166-172.

Freidland, R. (1992). Space, Place, and Modernity: The Geographical Moment. *Contemporary Sociology, 21*(1), 11.

Freire, P. (1983). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (2001). *The Paulo Freire Reader* (A. Freire, & D. Macedo, Eds.). New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. & Horton, M. (1990). *We Make the Road by*

Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change (B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters, Eds.). Philadelphia: Temple University.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (2003). Rethinking Literacy: A Dialogue. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (pp. 354-364). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Gee, J. (1989). Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education, 171*(1), 5-17.

Gordon, A. (1998). "The New Diaspora- African Immigration to the United States". *Journal of Third World Studies, 15*(1), 79-103.

Greenberg, E., Macias, R., Rhodes, D., & Tsze, C. (2001). *English Literacy and Language Minorities in the United States*. Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

Growing African Immigrant Community Deepens Roots in New York: 350,000 Capital Campaign for African Services, Community Center in Harlem. (2005, June 6). *U.S. Newswire,* p. 1.

Haymes, S. (1995). Toward a Pedagogy of Place for Black

Urban Struggle. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano & R. Torres (Eds.), *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (pp. 211-235). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. (2005). *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hodge, D. (2002). Social Work and the House of Islam: Orienting Practitioners to the Beliefs and Values of Muslims in the United States. *Social Work, 50*(2), 162-174.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching Community*. New York: Routledge.

Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. (1997). Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

Kelly, D. (2004, December 23). Illegal Immigrant Measure Upheld: Judge says Arizona can enforce a proposition barring some services to the undocumented. *Los Angeles Times,* p. 2.

Kelly, E., Aridi, A. & Bakhtiar, L. (1996). Muslims in the

United States: An exploratory study of universal and mental health values. *Counseling and Values, 40*(1), 206-218.

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Krashen, S. (1996). Surveys of Opinions on Bilingual Education: Some Current Issues. *Bilingual Research Journal, 20*(3/4), 411-432.

Lather, P. (2001). Postbook: Working the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography. *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture, 21*(1), 199-227.

Lewin, K. (1946). Action Research and Minority Problems. *Journal of Social Issues, 2*(4), 34-46.

Logan, J. (Speaker). (2005). *Africans in America* (Radio Recording]. Washington DC: National Public Radio Talk of The Nation.

Luke, A. (2004). Two Takes on the Critical. In B. Norton & K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (pp. 27-29). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mangum, M. (2005, May 9). Extending Hands to City's Africans; Community Center Goal of Group*. Worcester Telegram and Gazette*.

Marek, A. (2005, November 28). A Welcome Mat for Guests? *U.S. News and World Report, 193,* 50-51.

Marshall, S. (2005, June 20). Hospital Reaches Out to African Immigrants*. The New York Times,* p. 2.

Mbiti, J. (1969). *African Traditional Religion*. Pourthmouth: N.H. Heinemann.

Mora, P. (1994). “Senora X No More.” In M. Gillan & J. Gillan (Eds.), *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry* (p. 129). New York: Penguin.

Nwadiora, E. (1996). Therapy with African Families. *The Western Journal of Black Studies, 20*(3), 117-125.

Padilla, A. (2003). Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: A New Perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 25*(1), 35-56.

Perez-Pena, R. (2000, January 13). Spitzer files Suit Against Supermarket*. The New York Times,* p. 1.

Pinker, S. (1994). *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Portes, A., Gurarnizo, L. & Landolt, P.(1999). The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 22*(2), 217-237.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. (1996). *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ramirez, J. (1992). Executive Summary. *Bilingual Research Journal, 16*(1-2), 1.

Rong, X., & Brown, F. (2002). Socialization, Culture, and Identities of Black Immigrant Children: What Educators Need to Know. *Education and Urban Society, 34*(2), 247-273.

Somé, M. P.(1994). *Of Water and The Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*. New York: Penguin.

Somé, M. P. (1998). *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Stoller, P. (2001). City Life: West African Communities in New York. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 30*(6), 651-677.

Stoller, P. (2002). *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Stringer, E. (2004). *Action Research in Education*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (1997). Two Languages are Better than One. *Educational Leadership, 55*(4), 23-27.

Toohey, K., & Norton, B. (2004). Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning: An introduction. In K. Toohey & B. Norton (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (pp. 1-17). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United Nations Scientific, Education, and Cultural Organization (2005). *Education in Guinea-Bissau.* Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

United States Committee on Refugees (1994). *Refugee Reports*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee on Refugees.

Vesely, M. (2005). Africans in this US- second migrants outdo African-Americans. *African Business, 309* (May 2005), 38-42.

Wan, W. (2004, April 10). Clock is Ticking on Initiative: About 200,000 more signatures are needed to put a bid to bar illegal immigrants from public services on the ballot*. Los Angeles Times,* p. 3.

Woman Admits Causing Accidental Fire at Paris Hotel that

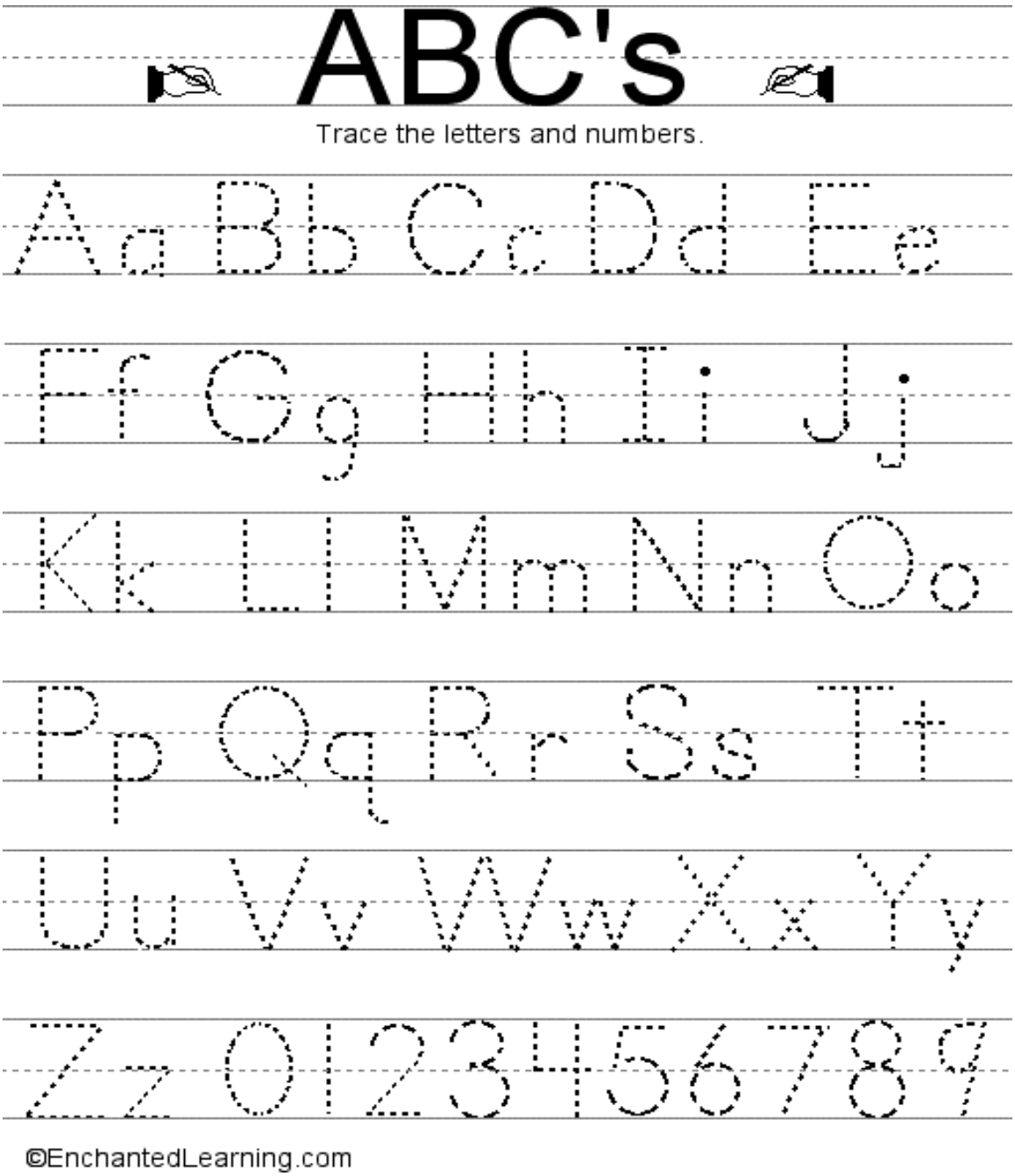
Killed 22. (2005, April). *Agence France Presse,* p. 1.

Zehr, M. (2001). Out of Africa. *Education Week, 20*(27), 2.

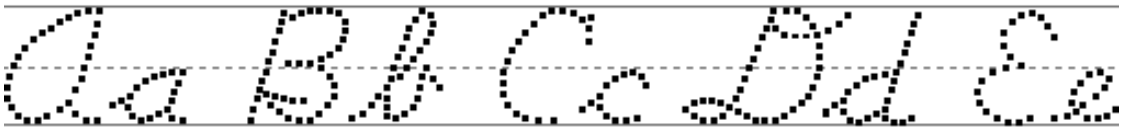
Zehr, M. A. (2005). States Still Grappling with Multicultural Curricula. *Education Week, 25*(10), 1.

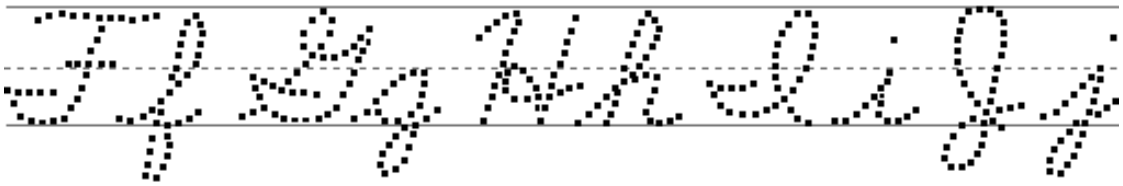
APPENDICES

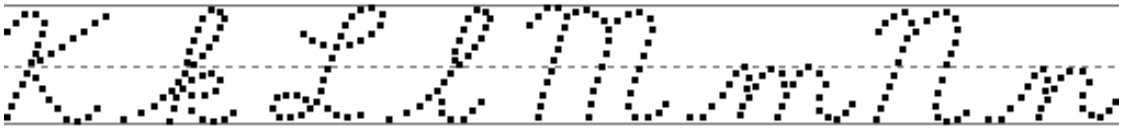
APPENDIX A SAMPLE PARTICIPATORY ESL CURRICULUM

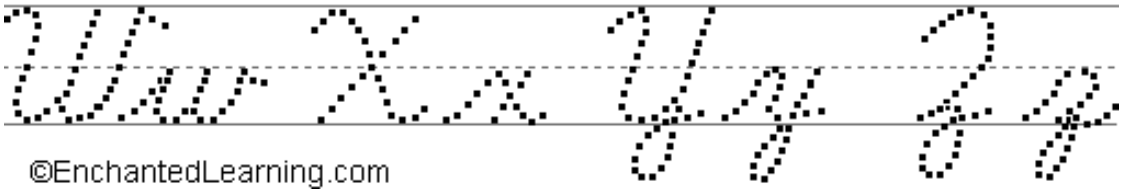


Trace the cursive letters.









©EnchantedLearning.com

Library Card

Keita_____Toure_____Mr._____
Last Name First Name Middle Name Title

May 23, 1976_____
Birth Date

152_____Central Avenue 2B_____
Street Number Street Name Apartment

New York New York 10027
City State Zip Code

212 360-1627
Area Code Telephone Number
Signature_____Toure Keita_

_____ _____ _____
Last Name First Name Middle Name Title

_____
Birth Date

_____ _____
Street Number Street Name
Apartment

_____
City State Zip Code

_____
Area Code Telephone Number
Signature

GENERATIVE WORDS

Table A1

A	A-part-ment	Apartment
	Am-nes-ty	Amnesty
	A-gen-cy	Agency
	Air-port	Airport
	A-lone	Alone
B	Be	Be
	Be-gin	Begin
	Bus	Bus
	Bus-y	Busy
	Bor-row	Borrow
C	Come	Come
	Court	Court
	Co-mun-nity	Community
	Con-ver-sa-tion	Conversation
	Care-ful	Careful
D	Do	Do
	Debt	De-bt
	Dan-ger	Danger
	Dan-ger-ous	Dangerous
	Diff-i-cult	Difficult
E	E-ver-y	Every
	E-ver-y-one	Everyone
	E-nough	Enough
	En-ter	Enter
	Ex-it	Exit
F	Fill	Fill
	Fix	Fix
	For-get	Forget
	Fam-il-y	Family
	Fu-ture	Future
G	Go	Go
	Get	Get
	Gi-ve	Give
	Go-ing	Go-ing
	Gr-eat	Great
H	Hi	Hi
	Hel-lo	Hello
	Hap-py	Happy
	Hon-est	Honest
	Hun-gry	Hungry
I	In	In
	In-side	Inside
	Im-mi-gra-tion	Immigration
	In-for-ma-tion	Information
	In-tel-li-gent	Intelligent
J	Jus-t	Just
	Ju-dge	Judge
	Jur-y	Jury
	Jail	Jail
	Joke	Joke
K	Kind	Kind
	Kind-ness	Kindness
	Kid	Kid
	Kid-ding	Kidding
	Kill	Kill
L	Like	Like
	Laugh	Laugh
	Laugh-ter	Laughter
	Love	Love
	Lov-ing	Loving

M	Mad	Mad
	Miss	Miss
	Miss-ing	Miss-ing
	Mar-ry	Mar-ry
	Mis-take	Mistake
N	New	New
	No	No
	Ne-ver	Never
	No-thing	Nothing
	Ner-vous	Nervous
O	On	On
	Out	Out
	Out-side	Outside
	Oth-er	Other
	Old	Old
P	Pick	Pick
	Per-fect	Perfect
	Poor	Poor
	Pow-er	Power
	Prop-er-ty	Property
Q	Qual-i-fie-d	Qualified
	Qual-i-ty	Quality
	Quan-ti-ty	Quantity
	Quiz	Quiz
	Qui-te	Quite
R	Re-move	Remove
	Re-frig-er-ator	Refrigerator
	Re-mem-ber	Remember
	Re-ceive	Receive
	Ring	Ring
S	S-tay	Stay
	Sp-oon	Spoon
	Sp-e-cial	Special
	Sick	Sick
	Sin-gle	Single
T	Tire	Tire
	Tire-d	Tired
	Try	Try
	Tall	Tall
	Ter-rif-y	Terrify
U	Up	Up
	Un-der	Under
	Un-der-stand	Understand
	U-nite	Unite
	U-nite-d	United
V	Vi-sit	Visit
	Vi-sit-or	Visitor
	Ver-y	Very
	Vis-it-ing	Visiting
W	Wor-ld	World
	Wo-man	Woman
	Wor-ry	Worry
	War	War
	Win	Win
X	X-ray	X-ray

Y	Yell	Yell
	Yell-ow	Yellow
	Young	Young
	Younger	Younger
	Yiel-d	Yield
Z	Zoo	Zoo
	Ze-bra	Zebra
	Zinc	Zinc

INTRODUCTION:

We created this text to help teachers and tutors work with ESL students who come from oral language backgrounds. The text is a reflection of an eleven-month research project in which five African men, with the help of a researcher, used their own life stories to create a literacy text for students of similar backgrounds. The text that follows is set up to give classes the opportunity to do what we have done: use the lived experiences of students to create literacy texts. As a result, the text can be used in a variety of ways, which will be determined by the classroom circumstances in which you are working.

ESL STUDENTS FROM ORAL BACKGROUNDS:

We would like to take an opportunity to introduce you to students who come from oral backgrounds. It is important to remember that because an ESL student does not read or write in his first language, it does not mean that his place of origin does not value education or writing. There are a variety of reasons why students from other countries do not read and write in a first language and we encourage you to have conversations with your students about how writing is used in their countries and cultures.

This can help open your classroom to conversations about literacy and the multiple ways literacy is used in different parts of the world. It is also important to remember that written language is very different from spoken language (for more information on this topic see Purcell-Gates, 1995).

PRINCIPLES:

This curriculum is built on three basic principles of education outlined by John Dewey (1964). They are:

Directness: Directness is defined by a person's connection to what he or she is doing. We have noticed that it is easier to learn in an environment where we don't feel self conscious or intimidated, but are instead focused on what is directly in front of us: the actions that we are taking in the process of learning.

Open-mindedness: We also think teachers and students need to be open-minded and ready to consider suggestions from all the people and resources in the classroom: the teacher and the students have equal say in how things work. In addition, just because something worked for us, doesn't

mean it will work for all people. Also, we need to understand too that knowledge is always growing and building. To have open-mindedness, we have to be aware that the creation of knowledge is ongoing.

Single-mindedness (or whole-heartedness): Students and teachers need to be unified in the classroom and the curricula should show this unity. When the teacher or the students are not unified, it means that one person or group has another, hidden, agenda. So, although the teacher may be teaching and the students may seem to be responding by doing the exercises, one or both groups are not wholly invested and are thinking about other things. When the teacher and students have created the curriculum together, the curriculum can then respond to the lives of the people in the class. We believe that this creates unity.

Responsibility: We are responsible for what we learn in school. Being responsible does not just mean we understand what we have learned, but also that we understand it fully as it applies to each one of us. Responsibility also includes what we do with that learning and how we reflect on that action. In our group, we were not only thorough

about the topics we worked on, but we also reflected as a group on how that learning became action in our lives. Sometimes, the action that came from the learning wasn't easy, but the conversations helped us to understand these actions better.

WHAT WE DID:

We used Paulo Freire's (2001) Phases of Literacy to form our work together:

Phase One: Investigation into our lives and vocabularies

Phase Two: We identified common words that were phonetically rich and meaningful for us personally

Phase Three: We discussed these words

Phase Four: We worked out a plan for our own literacy process

Phase Five: We started breaking down the words into sounds and searching for new words in our lives that used these sounds. We then combined them to make lists of new words.

* Although Freire lists this process in phases, our phases were sometimes repeated, they were constantly looping, and, at times, they came out of sequence. We found his work helpful in planning our curriculum, but we also needed to change it to fit our needs.

We made this curriculum out of our conversations as a literacy group and the activities that came from those conversations. When we started to write this curriculum, we were unsure of how we could teach teachers and tutors how to create community in their groups and classrooms. In part, we think that community emerges from learning situations that are respectful and loving. Although these words are easy for us to say, they are often difficult to enact, especially in classrooms that have a variety of perspectives, cultures, and religions.

We think that the first step toward community is sharing. Teachers and students have to feel comfortable sharing about their lives. In the beginning, we had a lot of parties where we brought food and music from our countries. We also got out of the classroom a lot together. We took walks around the neighborhood or went to the local store or library together. This helped us to feel more comfortable together and to have different conversations than we might have outside of the classroom.

We also did some drawing of our families and brought in artifacts or pictures of our families. This helped us to have visuals of what is important to us to share with the group. Near the middle of our work together, we bought

three cameras and passed them around the group. We each took ten pictures of our lives now and then we developed the cameras. This helped us to discuss more about our lives now and what we are interested in as individuals. After the first few months working together, we started to work on interviewing. Sometimes we would do interviews as a group and sometimes as individuals. At first, our tutor took notes on what we were saying because we weren't comfortable with the tape recorder. Then, later on, we started to tape record ourselves in the interviews. Our tutor would type these stories and conversations and we would go back and read and listen to them together. Of course, every time we did this, we discussed the issues in the interview.

From the interviews, we created lists of words that were important in our lives. We then practiced the phonetic sounds for each word. After which, we tried to find new words in our lives that included these sounds and build new lists from those words. We also used the words as topics for our curriculum.

THE PARTICIPANTS

We are from five different countries in Africa:

Our countries are marked with a red box on the map. They are: Mali, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Cote D'Ivoire, and The Gambia

Our countries were all former colonies: Mali (French), Somalia (Italian, British), Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese), Cote D'Ivoire (French), and The Gambia (British).

Even though all of our countries are now independent, our national languages, except for Somalia, are French, English, and Portuguese. In Somalia, however, the national language is Somali. Only one of us speaks his national language (Somali) fluently. The rest of us speak our

tribal languages, which are oral, fluently (Dioula, Creole, and Soninke). On average, each of us speaks five languages, all of which are oral, except for Somali, which is a written language.

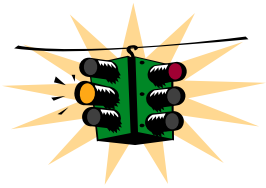
OUR EDUCATIONS

One of us attended elementary and part of secondary school. The rest of us have been educated in Qur'anic schools in our villages. These schools are designed for us to learn the Qur'an by listening to the teacher recite it to us. Therefore, we are familiar with the stories of the Qur'an, but we cannot read its words very well. All of us know a specific trade: auto mechanics, truck driving, textile sales, and carpentry. We learned these trades from our village elders as a part of our educations in our countries. One of us attended school to learn to be a truck driver.

OUR CURRICULUM

Each chapter is based on our own lives and experiences in America. We created the chapters to reflect our own lives and to help others who are learning to read and write for the first time in another language. We hope that the

chapters will help you in your life and also in your education. The chapters are arranged in levels:



Red: The sections with red circles are the easiest sections. We felt like the beginning is the most difficult part of learning to read and write, which is why we made it red because to us, red means stop.

Yellow: The sections with yellow circles are medium. They are not easy, but not too difficult, so you can move through them slowly.

Green: The green section means go. For us, when we started reading and writing words and letters, it seemed like every day we found new words. We made this section green because it's difficult, but it means that you are moving faster.

*Two of the men chose three excerpts from their chapters to include in the appendix of this dissertation. The curriculum itself is over two hundred pages long; however, these chosen pieces will hopefully serve to provide a general idea of what each chapter entails. The chosen excerpts are starred in the contents list of each chapter.

Chapter 1: Toure Keita

* Toure's Story

Talking with Teachers

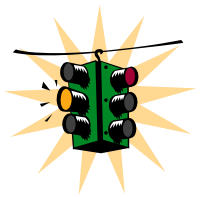
* Enrolling in School

* Making a Life Map

Finding a Job

General Education Diploma (GED)

Toure's Story:

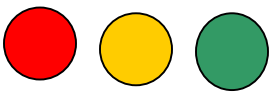


Students can listen to their tutor, friend, or teacher read all or part of this story. They can then talk about the story. They can also list words that come from the conversation to learn.

Students can listen to their tutor, friend, or teacher read this story. They can also talk about it and list words to learn that come from their conversation. They can then read the story with the teacher as she reads it

again. Students can then fill in the words that are missing in Exercise 2. Students can also discuss this story and write a few words about the story.

Students can read this story with their teacher, tutor, or friend. They can then talk about the story. They can also list words that come from the conversation to learn. Students can then write their own stories about one of the words they have listed or about a topic that they were interested in from the story. Students may also want to write a letter to me about one of the topics in the story. Students should share what they write with someone else.



My Story

I miss my family. I have not seen them since I came to the United States seven years ago looking for a better life. I was so young at that time. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to return to my country: Mali, but I refused. I wanted to become a student in America. I wanted to have an American diploma and maybe go to the

university in America. So, I stayed in this country and worked as a stock person and delivery boy for an African store in my city. This work has been very difficult.

I work ten or eleven hours a day, even when I am sick, but I still don't have enough money to live and go to school in this country. Last year, I found a school that had classes at night. I asked my boss to let me go early so that I could attend classes. He was not happy, but he let me go.

When I came to school, I found somebody who could help me. The teachers at the school all wanted better things for me. They never made me feel nervous or afraid to be there. The school is also free, which is good for me. I started going to classes every week, but I felt very tired. The classes were not helping me because they were for people who did not speak English. I speak English, but I wanted to get my GED.

A GED is like a high school diploma. Because I am too old to go to high school in America, I have to work on a GED. After I finish the GED, I can go on to the university in this country or in Mali with this document, but I have to take classes to prepare me for the GED test first.

In America, it is okay to ask the teacher for help and to tell the teacher how you are feeling. If I had not told my teacher about my difficulties in class, I would still be in English classes now. After I told her, she started helping me to get into the GED program.

I took a test to see what level I would be and the test said I needed to work on reading and writing. The woman who gave me the test said I should stay in English classes. I was so sad. I asked my teacher to help me talk with the principal. I was honest with the principal and asked her if I were American if she would still recommend English classes for me. She said “no”. She then put me in the GED program. The teachers in the GED program have never had an African student before me. So, I have to help them understand who I am and what my problems are, but they are very patient with me.

Right now, I am so close to taking the GED test. I have come a long way in the past year, but work is still a problem. I took a new job that requires me to travel, so I have less time to come to GED class. My teachers gave me books, so I work on the exercises when I am on the road. I know that someday I will be able to get my GED, but I have to stay focused on my dream.

Questions to help start the discussion:

Did you like this story? Why or why not?

Do you think Toure will achieve his dream? Why or why not?

What are your goals or dreams?

How do you plan to achieve them?

Do you like Toure’s boss? Why or why not?

What would you do if you were in Toure’s position at work?

What did Toure learn about school in America from his teachers?

Word List

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word

Use the questions and word list from the red section to identify words and help with your discussion of the story.

Practice

I _____ my family. I have not seen them since I came to the United States seven years ago looking for a better life. I _____ so young at that time. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to return to my country: Mali, but I refused. I _____ to become a _____ in America. I wanted to have an American diploma and maybe go to the university in America. So, I _____- in this country and worked as a stock person and _____ boy for an African store in my city. This work _____ very difficult. I _____ten or eleven hours a day, even when I am sick, but I _____ don't have _____ money to live and go to school in this country. Last year, I _____ a school that had classes at night. I asked my boss to let me go early so that I could attend classes. He _____ ____ happy, but he let me go.

When I _____ to school, I found _____ who could help me. The teachers at the school all _____ better things for me. They never made me feel _____ or _____to be there. The school is also free, which is good for me. I_____ going to classes every week, but I felt

very tired. The classes were not _____ me because they were for people who did not speak English. I _____ English, but I _____ to get my ___.

Listen to someone else read the paragraph and try to number or organize the sentences as you hear them:

The teachers in the GED program have never had an African student before me.

I took a test to see what level I would be and the test said I needed to work on reading and writing.

I was so sad. I asked my teacher to help me talk with the principal.

The woman who gave me the test said I should stay in English classes.

So, I have to help them understand who I am and what my problems are, but they are very patient with me.

She said “no”.

I was honest with the principal and asked her if I were American if she would still recommend English classes for me.

She then put me in the GED program.

Write a list of words about how the story makes you feel:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now write sentences for each word:

I feel_____

_____

_____

_____

Read the story below by yourself or with someone else:

I miss my family. I have not seen them since I came to the United States seven years ago looking for a better life. I was so young at that time. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to return to my country: Mali, but I refused. I wanted to become a student in America. I wanted to have an American diploma and maybe go to the university in America. So, I stayed in this country and worked as a stock person and delivery boy for an African store in my city. This work has been very difficult.

I work ten or eleven hours a day, even when I am sick, but I still don't have enough money to live and go to

school in this country. Last year, I found a school that had classes at night. I asked my boss to let me go early so that I could attend classes. He was not happy, but he let me go.

When I came to school, I found somebody who could help me. The teachers at the school all wanted better things for me. They never made me feel nervous or afraid to be there. The school is also free, which is good for me. I started going to classes every week, but I felt very tired. The classes were not helping me because they were for people who did not speak English. I speak English, but I wanted to get my GED.

A GED is like a high school diploma. Because I am too old to go to high school in America, I have to work on a GED. After I finish the GED, I can go on to the university in this country or in Mali with this document, but I have to take classes to prepare me for the GED test first. In America, it is okay to ask the teacher for help and to tell the teacher how you are feeling. If I had not told my teacher about my difficulties in class, I would still be in English classes now. After I told her, she started helping me to get into the GED program.

What happens? Finish the story with your own ending.

Now read the rest of the story and discuss how your ending is different

I took a test to see what level I would be and the test said I needed to work on reading and writing. The woman who gave me the test said I should stay in English classes. I was so sad. I asked my teacher to help me talk with the principal. I was honest with the principal and asked her if I were American if she would still recommend English classes for me. She said “no”. She then put me in the GED program. The teachers in the GED program have never had an African student before me. So, I have to help them understand who I am and what my problems are, but they are very patient with me.

Right now, I am so close to taking the GED test. I have come a long way in the past year, but work is still a problem. I took a new job that requires me to travel, so I have less time to come to GED class. My teachers gave me books, so I work on the exercises when I am on the road. I know that someday I will be able to get my GED, but I have to stay focused on my dream.

What is the story of your education? Write about it here or in your journal:

Write some questions here that you can use to interview your classmates and teacher about their education, employment, or life stories:

Use your questions to interview your classmates and write their answers below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Write a letter to me or to someone you know (including yourself) and encourage us to accomplish our dreams:

School Enrollment Form

Last Name_____ First Name_____

Middle Initial_____

Street Adress_____

City_____ State_____

Phone Number_____

Emergency Contact_____

Social Security Number or School ID

number:_____-

Are you a U.S. Citizen? Yes No

Birth Date:_____

If above answer is NO, write date you entered the

country:_____

If not, do you have an F-1 (student) Visa? Yes No

Do you have any children? Yes No

Last year of school completed:_____

What are you interested in learning? GED preparation, English, Citizenship, Literacy

Name of School:_____

How did you hear about our program?_____

Do you have reliable childcare?_____

Do you have reliable transportation?_____

Life Map

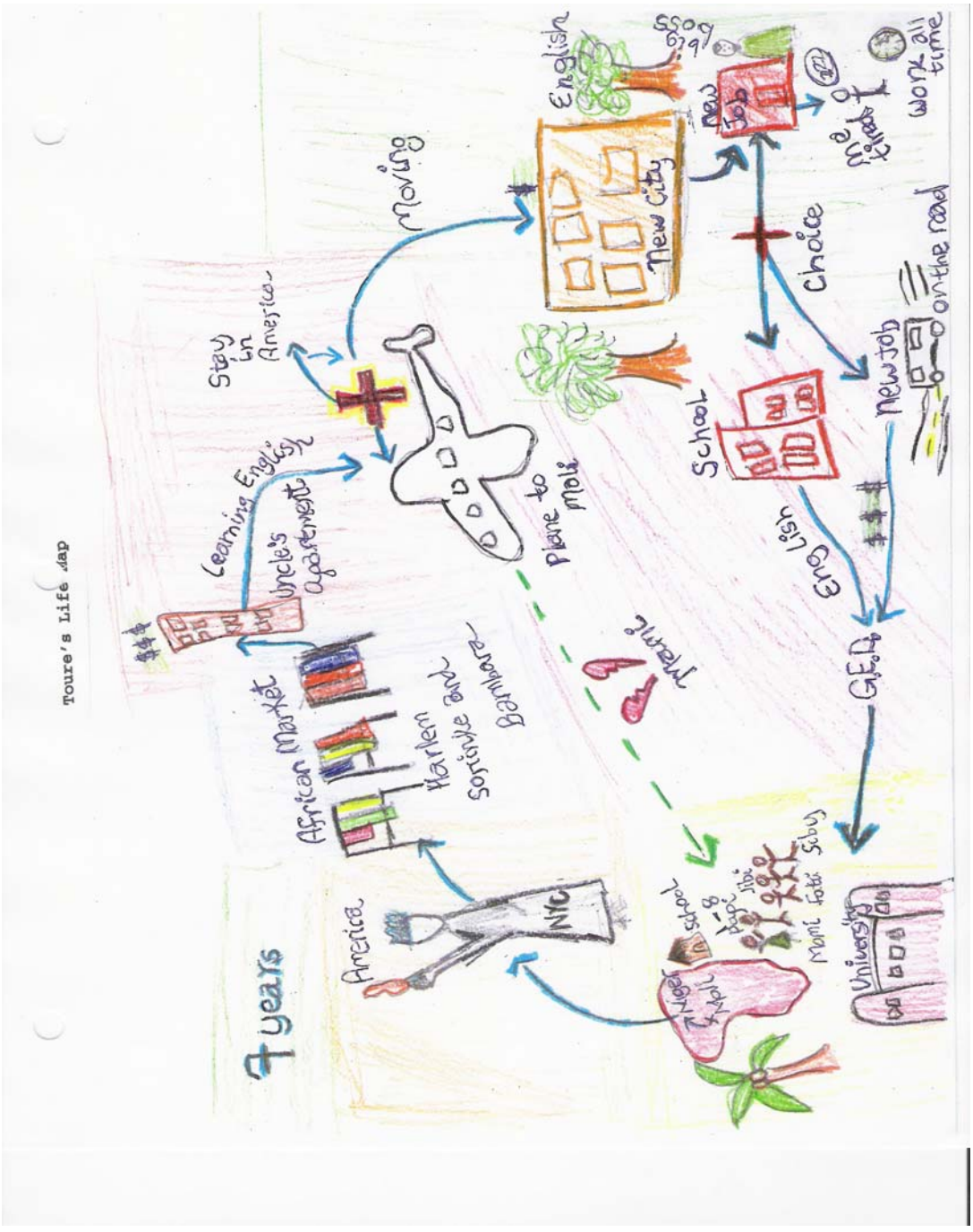
The first time I drew my life map, I realized how fast my life had changed since my arrival in the United States. The life map helped me to remember all of the things that have happened in my life and what I want to accomplish in the future.

Look at the example and draw your own life map without using words. Explain your life map to someone in your class, your teacher, or someone close to you. Ask them to help you write some of the important words that should be on your map.

Look at the example and draw your own life map using as many words as you possibly can. Use your dictionary to help you with the words. Explain your life map to someone in your class, your teacher, or someone close to you. As you learn more words and phrases, add them to your map.

Look at the example and draw your own life map using short stories for each of the points in your life. Use your dictionary to help you. Switch maps with a partner and read your partner's. Discuss your important accomplishments and dreams.

Toure's Life Map



Chapter 2: Amin Farrah

Amin’s Chapter

Spirituality

*Raising a family

*Having a baby in America

Finding your mosque or community

Practicing traditions as a family

Participating in a school

Using the library

Balancing prayer and work

Community service

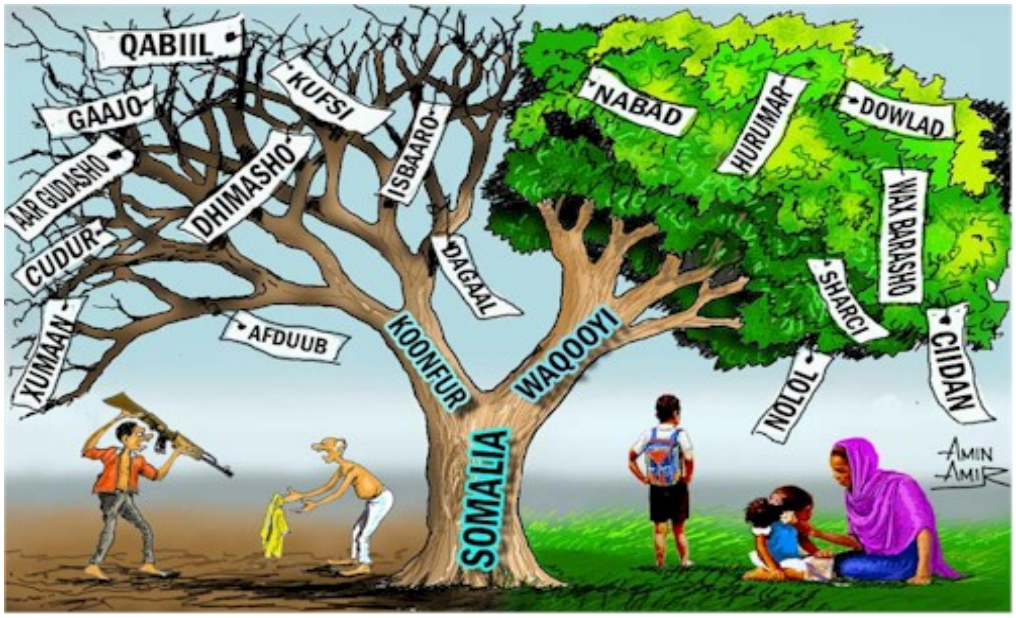
*Maps

After the War: Raising a Family

Look at the cartoon below. Discuss the picture with a friend or classmate

Look at the cartoon below. Write as man words as you can to describe the cartoon. Share your word list with classmates

Write a story about one of the people in this cartoon. Share the story with your classmates.



After you have discussed or shared your thoughts about the above cartoon, make a class list of new words below:

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word

With a partner, discuss each of the words and how it applies to you. Now, make a list of new words from any of the syllables in the above list.

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word

My Story

The cartoon at the beginning of this chapter is a very important one for me and my family. Amin Amir is a famous Somali cartoonist. He now lives in Canada. Mostly, he draws pictures about Somali life and politics. In the cartoon above, he shows two different sides of Somali life: the side where there is life and growth and the side where there is war and death.

In my life, there was once war and death. In Somalia, I was a truck driver. I drove long distances on deliveries for my company. One week, I was gone on a trip and our village was bombed. My wife and son were in the village. When I returned, they were gone. At that time, I thought my life was really over. I did not know where they were or how I could find them.

Many months later, I received a phone call from my wife. It was the happiest day of my life. She and my son were in Kenya and they were safe. They were preparing to leave for the United States because they could not return to Somalia; it was too dangerous for a woman and a child.

For five years, my wife and son lived in America before I arrived. When I arrived in the United States, my son who was three the last time I saw him was now seven. He is so beautiful and so smart. He speaks English perfectly. Our life here is

difficult, but it is full of blessings. We are healthy and safe, we have a Somali community here, and we have a new daughter in our house. She is an American citizen, and she was born last summer.

I came to school at first to learn more about working in the United States. I am a truck driver here also, but it is much different. I make a lot of mistakes and I get lost all of the time. So, school has helped me find my way in America. I have learned to use the computer to help me with my routes and also to learn more about my son’s school.

Finally, we have life here in America. Many are not so lucky, but we are very thankful for our health and our family in this country.

After you listen to my story, draw a picture of your own story. Be sure to include your family. Ask the teacher to help you with new words to put in the picture. Share the picture of your story with a classmate.

After you have read the story with your teacher or classmate, write down some words that will help you tell about your own family story. Answer the following questions, if you wish:

Do you think it is easier or more difficult to raise a family in the United States? Why?

Is it important to speak the language from your country with your children? Why or why not?

How can a family practice traditions even while in America? Explain.

Write your own family story and share with your classmates or teacher. After you have shared, write a new story in which you tell about your family in ten years. Where will you be? What will you be doing together? Explain. Share your new story with your classmates.

Draw your family tree and share with the class:

Practice filling out the Sample birth certificate application below:

Do the best you can, or have a teacher or classmate assist you

Try to fill out the spaces you are familiar with.

Work with a classmate to find the other answers.

Fill out the sample application below and share your answers with your classmates.

Sample Birth Certificate

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
Division of Public Health
DPH 5291 (Rev. 08/04)

STATE OF WISCONSIN
Chap.69.21 (1a), (2b), Wis.Stats.

WISCONSIN BIRTH CERTIFICATE APPLICATION

PENALTIES: Any person who willfully and knowingly makes false application for a birth certificate is guilty of a Class I felony [a fine of not more than $10,000 or imprisonment of not more than three years and six months, or both, per Chapter 69.24(1), Wisconsin Statutes].

APPLICANT INFORMATION

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS ABOUT THE PERSON COMPLETING THIS APPLICATION

YOUR Name (Please Print)	YOUR Daytime Telephone Number ( )
YOUR Street Address / Apt. No.	MAIL TO Address (if different) / Apt. No.
City / State / Zip	City / State / Zip

RELATIONSHIP TO PERSON NAMED ON THE CERTIFICATE

According to Wisconsin Statute, a CERTIFIED copy of a BIRTH certificate is only available to a person with a "Direct and Tangible Interest." If you do not meet any of the criteria for boxes A – F, please refer to the information on page 2.

Check one box which indicates YOUR RELATIONSHIP to the PERSON NAMED on the certificate.

- ☐ A. I **am** the PERSON NAMED on the certificate.
- ☐ B. I am the **parent** of the PERSON NAMED on the certificate, and my parental rights have not been terminated. (**Note**: In the case of a non-marital birth, the father's rights must have been established before he may obtain a copy of the certificate under this category.)
- ☐ C. I am the **legal custodian or guardian** of the PERSON NAMED on the certificate.
- ☐ D. I am a **member of the immediate family** of the PERSON NAMED on the certificate. (Only those listed below qualify as immediate family.)

  CHECK ONE: ☐ Spouse ☐ Child ☐ Brother ☐ Sister ☐ Grandparent
- ☐ E. I am a **representative authorized**, in writing, by any of the aforementioned (A through D). The written authorization must accompany this application.

  Specify whom you represent. _____
- ☐ F. I can demonstrate that the information from the birth certificate is necessary for the **determination or protection of a personal or property right** for myself/my client/my agency.

  Specify interest. _____
- ☐ G. Other: Uncertified copy only. Copy will not be valid for identification purposes. (Please refer to the information on page 2.)

FEES

- ☑ Search Fee (includes one copy of the birth certificate, if found) ..... $12.00 — 12.00
- ☐ Each additional copy of the same record, issued at the same time as the first copy _____ (No. of Copies) X 3.00 _____

NOTE: FEE IS NOT REFUNDABLE IF NO RECORD IS FOUND. **TOTAL** _____

BIRTH RECORD INFORMATION

First Name	Middle Name	Last Name at Birth

Sex	Birthdate (Mo/Day/Yr)	City	County

Mother's MAIDEN Name	First Name	Middle Name

Father's Last Name	First Name	Middle Name

Make check or money order payable to: **STATE OF WIS. VITAL RECORDS.** Send completed form; stamped, self-addressed, business-size envelope; and your check or money order to: **STATE OF WIS. VITAL RECORDS, PO BOX 309, MADISON, WI 53701-0309**

I hereby attest that the information provided on this application is correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and that I am entitled to copies of the requested certificate in accordance with the categories checked above.

SIGNATURE - Applicant (Person Completing Application) | Date Signed

OFFICE USE

Below is FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

File Date	Mother's County	Certificate No.

Clear Form and Start Over

Read the following story or have your classmate or teacher read it to you:

Having a Child in America

Last summer, I had to have my teacher help me fill out my daughter's birth certificate. This was very difficult for me because I felt as though I should be able to do this simple task for my child. The form was so complicated, much like the one above, so I had to have assistance. Now, however, with practice I am able to fill out the necessary forms for my children in this country (immigration, school, and hospital). Equally, the hospital was difficult for us to understand. Without insurance, we would never have been able to pay the bills. It is important to understand the hospital system in the United States.

Draw a picture of a hospital in your country. Ask your classmates and teacher to help you write some words that relate to clinics and hospitals in your country.

Your Picture:

Hospital Word List:

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word

Make a list below of similarities and differences between American hospitals/clinics and those in your country. Share your list with classmates.

My Country	The United States

Work with a partner to define the following terms:

Maternity Leave:

Birth Certificate:

Outpatient:

Inpatient:

Emergency Service:

Prescription Drugs:

Pharmacist:

Copay:

Doctor:

Nurse:

Midwife:

Read the following article excerpt from the New York Times and discuss it with your teacher and classmates. Make a list of words you do not understand:

When Ming Qiang Zhao felt ill last summer, he lay awake nights in the room he shared with other Chinese restaurant workers in Brooklyn. Though he had worked in New York for years, he had no doctor to call, no English to describe his growing uneasiness.

Mr. Zhao, 50, had been successfully treated for nasal cancer in 2000 at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, which has served the immigrant poor since its founding in 1736. But the rules there had changed, and knowing that he would be asked for payment and that security guards would demand an ID, he had concluded that he could not go back.

So Mr. Zhao went to an unlicensed healer in Manhattan's Chinatown and came away with three bags of unlabeled white pills.

A week later, his roommates, fellow illegal immigrants from Fujian Province in China, heard him running to and from the

toilet all night. In the street the next day, July 6, he collapsed.

Immigrants have long been on the fringes of medical care. But in the last decade, and especially since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, steps to include them have faltered in a political climate increasingly hostile to those who face barriers of language, cost and fear of penalties like deportation, say immigrant health experts, providers and patients. More and more immigrants are delaying care or retreating into a parallel universe of bootleg remedies and unlicensed practitioners.

Last year, about 80 bills in 20 states sought to cut noncitizens' access to health care or other services, or to require benefit agencies to tell the authorities about applicants with immigration violations. Arizona voters approved such a requirement in 2004 with Proposition 200. Virginia has barred adults without proof of citizenship or lawful presence from state and local benefits. Maryland's governor excluded lawful immigrant children and pregnant women from a state medical program for which they had been eligible (Bernstein, 2006, p. 1).

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word

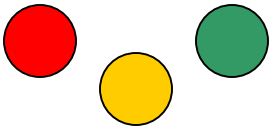
Questions for discussion:

What Could Mr. Zhao have done differently?

What would you have done in his situation?

What is more efficient: traditional medicine or prescription drugs? Why?

What is your opinion of this article? Why?



EXTENSION:

Teachers and tutors: this is a good opportunity to have healthcare workers, doctors, or nurses come in and speak to your classes. It is also a good idea to try to arrange a possible field trip to a local hospital or clinic.

Define the following words alone or with a partner:

Word	Syllables	Picture of the Word
Next to		
Behind		
Left		
Right		
In front of		
Intersection		
Highway		
Route		
Avenue		
Street		

Road		
Landmark		

Draw a map of your neighborhood in your country or in the United States. If you have trouble remembering, draw a map of your classroom.

Draw a map of your neighborhood in your country or in the United States. If you have trouble remembering, draw a map of your classroom. Label the map with as many words as you can.

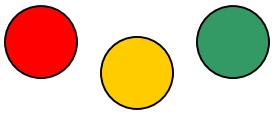
Draw a map of your neighborhood in your country or in the United States. Label your route from your home to your school, market, or place of work. Use as many words as you possibly can.

Draw your map here:

Look at your map and label it with your new vocabulary

Write directions for someone to get from your house to school and home again using your map. Exchange maps with a partner and see if they can locate your school and house with your directions.

Make detailed directions from your house to a place that is far away. Read your directions to a classmate and ask them to draw a map of your directions as you read.



Extension opportunity: Go for a walk with your class in which you or another student directs them to four important landmarks by using oral directions. When you are finished with the walk, see if students can create their own maps of the areas in groups. Share the maps with the class.

Helpful Websites:

www.yahoo.com go to maps, then driving directions. You can get anywhere in the United States with these maps.

www.googlemaps.com students can use the map or the satellite version to look at geography of their area.

References

Bernstein, N. (2006, March 6, 2006). Recourse Grows Slim for Immigrants who Fall Ill. *The New York Times,* p. 1.

Dewey, J. (1964). *On Education: Selected Writings*. New York: The Modern Library.

Freire, A., & Macedo, D. (Eds.). (2001). *The Paulo Freire Reader*. New York: Continuum.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Consent to Participate in a Research Study (student)
College/Departmental affiliation: Urban Educational Leadership
Investigator's name: Sally Lamping
Investigator's telephone number/email: 513-226-7383 lampinsa@email.uc.edu

Title of Study: The Ways in Which Adult Immigrants in Cities Learn English

Introduction:
Please read the description. It will tell you about this study, what it is, and in what ways you will participate. It is your choice to be a part of this study. At any time, you can stop your participation in this study without any problems.

Purpose:
This study is to see how different types of classrooms make learning easier for certain students. The study will also examine the ways in which living in a city changes how a person learns English. You will be one of a possible five students taking part in this study. One teacher and one program coordinator will also take part in this study.

Duration:
There will be 7 observations over a 5 month span, each lasting one hour. There will be 3 interviews out of class over the 5 month span, each lasting 20-30 minutes. There will be 5 group meetings during the class time over the 5 month span. There will be one group interview lasting twenty to thirty minutes on one occasion.

Procedures:
In the study, there will be five days over the next five months when you will be separated from the larger class so that you can work on specific learning goals you may have. Each time, you will work in a small group for one hour. You will have the opportunity to use the computer, have discussions with other classmates, ask questions in a small group, and practice "real-life" learning (job interviews, making a purchase, traveling, buying a house). I will watch you and take notes during this time. I will also video tape you in this group on one occasion. The video tape will last one hour. I will interview the group one time for twenty to thirty minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded. You may have a copy of the questions before the interview if you wish.

During the study, I may also interview you three times about your life in America and your experiences. I will ask you to be interviewed before or after class so you do not miss class. You may have a copy of the questions I am planning on asking before the interview. The interview will last twenty to thirty minutes. The interview will be recorded on audio cassette tapes.

On seven separate days when you are not pulled from the large class, I will be watching and taking notes on what you are doing in the larger class to see if you are improving in any way. I will watch you in class for an hour each of the seven times. On one of these days, I will video record you in class for one hour. I will share my notes with you if you wish.

Risks/Discomforts:
There are no expected problems that you may experience during this study.

Benefits:
This study may or may not help you to learn English faster. It may also help you to get achieve some of the goals on your ILP. The results of this study may also help other English classes to change in ways that benefit different types of students in cities.

Confidentiality:
All of the information from this study will be in a locked file cabinet at my house. Only my advisor and I will be able to look at the information for this study. My advisor will look at the data in order to help me with the study. When we are finished with the study, all of the information (data), including videotapes, cassette tapes, notes, and interviews, will be destroyed. Any names used during the study will be changed before publication. The only way I would tell someone about this data is if I find something that I have to tell someone about that would otherwise put you or someone else in danger.

Right to refuse or withdraw:
You are doing this study as a volunteer. At any time, you can decide to stop being a part of the study. There will be no problems for you in the class or the program if you decide not to continue with the study.

Offer to answer questions:
If you have questions please call Sally Lamping at 513-226-7383 or Dr. James Koschoreck 513-556-6622. If you would like to know about your rights as a participant in this study, you can call the Chair of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at 513-558-5784.

LEGAL RIGHTS:
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal right you may have nor does it release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY INFORMATION.

_____
Participant Signature Date

_____
Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent Date

_____
Signature of Translator Clarifying Consent Document Date

University of Cincinnati
Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Program Coordinator)
College/Departmental affiliation: Urban Educational Leadership
Investigator's name: Sally Lamping
Investigator's telephone number/email: 513-226-7383 lampinsa@email.uc.edu

Title of Study:
Second language acquisition among urban immigrant students

Introduction:
Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. It also describes the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results of the study.

Purpose:
This study is to see how different types of classrooms make learning easier for certain students. The study will also examine the ways in which living in a city changes how a person learns English. You will be the only program coordinator participating in the study; there will be three to five student participants and one teacher.

Duration:
There will be 7 observations over a 5 month span, each lasting one hour. For the teacher, there will be one interview lasting approximately 30 minutes outside of class. For the students, there will be 3 interviews out of class over the 5 month span, each lasting 20-30 minutes. There will be 5 group meetings during the class time over the 5 month span. On one occasion the group will be interviewed for twenty to thirty minutes.

Procedures:
During the course of this study, the following will occur:
I will be visiting classes in your program on seven separate occasions to take notes on teacher practices and to videotape students participating in this research study. I will visit class for one hour each time. I will videotape one class one time for one hour. I will also be taking field notes during these observations about student response to methods and classroom interaction.

I would also like to interview you at least one time about your program goals, literacy expertise, and experience with the students. The interview will last approximately thirty minutes and will be held outside of class time. It will be audio tape recorded and then transcribed. You may have a copy of the interview questions before the interview. The study is strictly voluntary, so your participation would be helpful, but it is not obligatory. On five separate occasions I will be pulling a small group from class to work on specific goals and skills using technology and hands on activities. I will pull these students for one hour each time. I will take field notes on these students in group work and video record them on one occasion. I will also interview this group on one occasion for twenty to thirty minutes. I will audio-record this interview and transcribe it.

I will also interview individual students on three separate occasions for twenty to thirty minutes each time. These interviews will occur before and after class, so they will not interfere with instruction. I will audio tape record these interviews.

Risks/Discomforts:
There are no expected problems that you may experience during this study.

Benefits:
The benefits to you for participating in this study may be a development of better ways to service the adult ESL population in your program. However, you may receive no benefit from participating in this study. Yet, it may help other teachers, program coordinators, and service workers assist the student population in better ways.

Confidentiality:
Your research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the investigator's home. Only the investigator and her advisor (Dr. James Koschoreck) will have access to your data. The advisor will have access to the data to help the investigator with her study. After the study is finished video recordings and audio recordings will be destroyed. Research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study and then destroyed. The data from the study may be published; however, you will not be identified by name. Your identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law, such as mandatory reporting of child abuse, elder abuse, or immediate danger to self or others.

Right to refuse or withdraw:
You are doing this study as a volunteer. At any time, you can decide to stop being a part of the study. There will be no problems for you in the class or the program if you decide not to continue with the study.

Offer to answer questions:
If you have questions please call Sally Lamping at 513-226-7383 or Dr. James Koschoreck 513-556-6622. If you would like to know about your rights as a participant in this study, you can call the Chair of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at 513-558-5784.

LEGAL RIGHTS:
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal right you may have nor does it release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY INFORMATION.

_____

Participant Signature Date

_____

Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent and Role in the Study Date

University of Cincinnati
Consent to Participate in a Research Study (teacher)
College/Departmental affiliation: Urban Educational Leadership
Investigator's name: Sally Lamping
Investigator's telephone number/email: 513-226-7383 lampinsa@email.uc.edu

Title of Study: Second language acquisition among urban immigrant students

Introduction:
Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. It also describes the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results of the study.

Purpose:
This study is to see how different types of classrooms make learning easier for certain students. The study will also examine the ways in which living in a city changes how a person learns English. You will be the only teacher participating in the study; there will be three to five student participants and one program coordinator participant.

Duration:
There will be 7 observations over a 5 month span, each lasting one hour. For the teacher, there will be one interview lasting approximately 30 minutes outside of class. For the students, there will be 3 interviews out of class over the 5 month span, each lasting 20-30 minutes. There will be 5 group meetings during the class time over the 5 month span. On one occasion the group will be interviewed for twenty to thirty minutes.

Procedures:
During the course of this study, the following will occur:
I will be visiting your class on seven separate occasions to take notes on your practices and to videotape students participating in this research study. I will visit class for one hour each time. I will videotape your class one time for one hour. I will also be taking field notes during these observations about student response to methods and classroom interaction.

I would also like to interview you at least one time about your classroom practices, procedures, and experience with the students. The interview will last approximately thirty minutes and will be held outside of class time. It will be audio tape recorded and then transcribed. You may have a copy of the interview questions before the interview. The study is strictly voluntary, so your participation would be helpful, but it is not obligatory. I would also like your assistance in informing students about the study and their voluntary participation.

On five separate occasions I will be pulling a small group from your class to work on specific goals and skills using technology and hands on activities. I will pull these students for one hour each time. I will take field notes on these students in group work and video record them on one

occasion. I will also interview this group on one occasion for twenty to thirty minutes. I will audio-record this interview and transcribe it.

I will also interview individual students on three separate occasions for twenty to thirty minutes each time. These interviews will occur before and after class, so they will not interfere with instruction. I will audio tape record these interviews.

Risks/Discomforts:
There are no expected problems that you may experience during this study.

Benefits:
The benefits to you for participating in this study may be a development of better knowledge of your student population and their responses to your teaching and interventions. However, you may receive no benefit from participating in this study. Yet, it may help other teachers, program coordinators, and service workers assist the student population in better ways.

Confidentiality:
Your research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the investigator's home. Only the investigator and her advisor (Dr. James Koschoreck) will have access to your data. The advisor will have access to the data to help the investigator with her study. After the study is finished video recordings and audio recordings will be destroyed. Research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study and then destroyed. The data from the study may be published; however, you will not be identified by name. Your identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law, such as mandatory reporting of child abuse, elder abuse, or immediate danger to self or others.

Right to refuse or withdraw:
You are doing this study as a volunteer. At any time, you can decide to stop being a part of the study. There will be no problems for you in the class or the program if you decide not to continue with the study.

Offer to answer questions:
If you have questions please call Sally Lamping at 513-226-7383 or Dr. James Koschoreck 513-556-6622. If you would like to know about your rights as a participant in this study, you can call the Chair of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at 513-558-5784.

LEGAL RIGHTS:
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal right you may have nor does it release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY INFORMATION.

_____
Participant Signature Date

_____
Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent and Role in the Study Date

APPENDIX C Sample Interview Questions

Question Guide for Focus Group

1. How does your larger English class help you in learning English?

2. What has been the most helpful part about the class?

3. How has your life changed because of the English class?

4. In the group class, what have you learned?

5. How has that helped you in your life?

6. Are you ever absent from class?

7. If so, why?

8. If you were a new student in the class, how do you think we could help you (transportation, better explanations/ translations, etc.)?

9. How do you learn best (by doing things, by translating with your dictionary, by discussion, writing or other)?

10. Where are you still having trouble? How could we improve that?

Sample Individual Interview Questions:

1. How long have you lived in the United States?

2. What would you like to be doing in five years?

3. Do you have a job?

4. If so, where do you work?

5. What is the most difficult part about living in America?

6. What would you like to be able to do with your English skills?

7. Do you have family here?

8. On a daily basis, how often do you speak English outside of class?

9. What is the most helpful part of English class?

10. What would you change about English class?