

Appendix B: Transcription Conventions

[the point where overlapping talk starts
=	no interval between adjacent utterances
::	lengthened syllable
word	stress, emphasis, or high volume
o °	talk is quieter than the surrounding talk
<	onset where a stretch of talk is markedly rushed
-	a cut-off or self-interruption
()	when occurring in both the Thai language line and the English translation, this indicates an unintelligible stretch; when occurring only in the English translation, it indicates a linguistic element that does not occur in the Thai language (such as subject pronouns)
(word) in the Thai language line	it indicates the transcriber's candidate, but uncertain hearings
(.)	short pause about 0.2 seconds
(0.0)	length of silence in tenths of a second
(())	transcriber's descriptions of events
.hh	audible in breath

Reassessing Assessment Practices in an Adult ESL Program: Liberian Women's Evaluation of their Academic Achievement¹

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This study reports on data collected during two years of action research and six months of participation in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program comprised of elderly Liberian refugees. The data demonstrate how the female students' goals and outcome markers differ from those defined by the government. The government relies primarily on predetermined goals and standardized test results. In contrast, the female students consider program participation and task completion as more salient markers of academic success. Although not necessarily quantifiable, student assessment measures may offer a more complete picture of program efficacy. As non-mandatory students, adults need not participate in ESL programs or practices that do not meet their needs. When educators and officials acknowledge student-defined goals and outcomes, they may realize a more authentic measure of program success.

Introduction

In the United States, the government does not compel adults to attend school.² Instead, adults voluntarily continue with their education for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to learning basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics that they did not learn in school; obtaining a high-school diploma, the equivalent or an advanced degree; gaining work-skills or retraining for alternate employment; and, learning another language. Furthermore, adults do not necessarily consider measurements such as standardized test scores as representative of

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² The government only requires children to attend school from the ages of 6 to 16 and targets adult education programs to adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (ABLE 2004). Thus, for the purposes of this paper, adult will be defined as any individual 18 years of age and older.

this variable and explicate its effects (e.g., Chambers 1999; Clement, Dömyei, & Noels 1994; Gardner & Lambert 1959, 1972). However, no single accepted definition of motivation prevails within second language acquisition literature (Gass & Selinker 2001). Furthermore, some scholars have proposed that the ill-defined term, motivation, improperly represents why students engage in language learning (Norton 1995, 2000; Pavlenko 2004; Skilton-Sylvester 2002). Instead, they propose the term, investment as a more descriptive way of explaining the complex relationship among language, power and identity that emerges during language learning.

Although Carroll (1962) first introduced motivation as a variable in language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) were the first to posit a causal model in which motivation directly affected language learning. Within this model, motivation is defined as involving "four aspects, a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes toward the activity in question" (Gardner 1985: 50). Additionally, motivation is divided into instrumental and integrative motivation. Integrative motivation is the desire to be identified with another ethnolinguistic group, and instrumental motivation is the desire to learn for utilitarian purposes (Gardner & Lambert 1959, 1972). In these early studies, Gardner and Lambert demonstrated that integrative motivation would have a larger effect on language acquisition than instrumental motivation. While Gardner and Lambert's definition of motivation continues to be influential, more recent studies have revised and refined their definition of motivation and sought to expand their research to different variables, such as short and long term effects (Tesser & Shaffer 1990; Weiner 1986) and sociolinguistic variables such as class, ethnicity and gender (Amara & Spolsky 1996; Spolsky 1996).

As noted previously, despite the ongoing work in researching the correlation between motivation and language acquisition, some scholars believe researching the variable, motivation, is an inadequate method of explaining why some students want to learn a second language (Norton 1995, 2000; Pavlenko 2004; Skilton-Sylvester 2002). As a variable in a study, motivation has a fixed meaning; it cannot capture the complex "socially and historically constructed relationship of the learners to the target language" (Norton 2000: 10). In lieu of using the fixed variable of motivation, Norton (1995, 2000) has proposed the notion of investment. She bases the concept of investment on the on-going social construction of identity. Language learners have complex social histories; in acquiring a new language, they are also acquiring a wider range of symbolic and material resources that they may use as cultural capital. They are also constantly reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world (2000: 11). Therefore, to assess why a student participates in a group it is more appropriate to ask how a student socially constructs herself in relation to the target language as opposed to using

personal achievement. Instead, they internalize personal means of tracking success. In some instances, the government has very little or no input into the curriculum for and assessment of the adults who attend these classes. In others, as the primary funder of the classes, the government provides strict guidelines for content and assessment. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs fall into this second category. Because the government relies on quantitative measures of academic achievement, its assessment practices may conflict with those of program participants who have internalized more qualitative markers of success.

This paper presents an example of differing expectations of government funding agencies and female Liberian students in an adult ESL program. The federal government and the Pennsylvania Department of Education require ABE and ESL programs to demonstrate how their instruction and services have affected student outcomes (Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education [ABLE] 2004). However, they narrowly define the type of evidence that may illustrate student outcomes. Evidence that they evaluate includes attendance hours, retention, basic demographic data, and government-determined goal information and standardized-test scores. This numeric data may provide superficial evidence about the efficacy of an ESL program, but the data can neither fully illustrate nor explain student outcomes for participants. It does not recognize the complex factors that impact an adult's investment in ESL programs. Furthermore, it neglects to account for how the individual students have defined their educational goals and measured success. Using data collected through two years of action research and six months of participant observation of an ESL program comprised of elderly Liberian refugees, this study illustrates how the female participants defined their educational goals and marked their achievement. In particular, it demonstrates that while government funders rely on core goals and standardized-test scores for evaluation purposes, the female students viewed program participation and task completion as more salient markers of their investment in learning and academic achievement.

Investment in Language Learning

Academic achievement is evaluated through pre-determined criteria (McNamara 2000). On the one hand, the pre-determined criteria may be government standards; on the other hand, they may be student-defined goals. This study focuses on goals of the female participants. Their implicit and articulated goals demonstrate their investment in attending the adult ESL class, learning Standard American English and basic literacy skills.

In the 1960s, Carroll (1962) suggested that motivation contributed to language acquisition, and since then scholars have attempted to define

descriptive statistics that correlate a fixed definition of motivation with language acquisition.

Skilton-Sylvester (2002) and Pavlenko (2004) build on Norton's concept of investment. Norton (1995, 2000) suggests that students' investment in language learning can be assessed by their interaction with expert speakers of the target language. While Skilton-Sylvester agrees that interpersonal relationships are important, she also adds that any assessment of investment must take into account the students' engagement with learning institutions. Furthermore, she suggests that cultural identity as well as social identity plays a vital role in language learning (22). Pavlenko (2004) also sees students' interaction in classrooms as vital to understanding their investment in language learning. Specifically writing about gender discourses, she states that, "Classrooms introduce students to 'imaginary worlds' of other languages where gender and sexuality may be constructed and performed differently than in their own culture" (55). These 'imaginary worlds' offer specific spaces in which students may acquire the wider range of symbolic and material resources of which Norton (2000) spoke. This paper uses the concept of investment as introduced by Norton (1995, 2000) and expanded by Skilton-Sylvester (2002) and Pavlenko (2004) as the theoretical orientation for analysis.

Methodology

Using poststructuralist, ethnographic methods, this study examined the investment in language learning of elderly female Liberian refugees, enrolled in an adult ESL-literacy program (Hatch 2002). Specifically, the study investigated two research questions:

- (1) How do the female students define their educational goals?
- (2) How do the students use defined goals to measure academic achievement?

Question (1) represents a means of operationalizing student investment in language learning in concrete terms. Question (2) presents a heuristic for evaluation of academic progress based on perceived goal attainment.

Setting

To address these questions, I studied an adult ESL class held for two hours, twice a week, at a church in West Philadelphia. The class is part of a larger ESL program coordinated by a non-profit organization serving refugees in Philadelphia. The class was comprised entirely of Liberian refugees over the age of sixty. In addition, some of the women brought their grandchildren or great-grandchildren to class with them.

Participants

The participants in this study are 14 elderly female refugees from

Liberia. Liberia has existed in a tenuous economic and political situation since the late 1980s. Eight years of civil strife were formally brought to a close in 1997 when free and open presidential and legislative elections were held and President Taylor was elected. However, years of fighting, coupled with the flight of most businesses, have continued to disrupt formal economic activity. In 2001, the UN imposed sanctions on Liberian diamonds, along with an arms embargo and a travel ban on government officials, for Liberia's support of the rebel insurgency in Sierra Leone. Renewed rebel activity has further eroded stability and economic activity. A regional peace initiative commenced in the spring of 2003 but was disrupted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) indictment of President Taylor on war crimes charges (Nilsson 2003: 7-9). To escape these conditions, many Liberians have fled to the United States and now reside in Philadelphia and its environs.

In Philadelphia, elderly Liberian refugees may not only suffer the psychological burdens of exile and memories of war, but also many of the problems that affect elderly American minorities. Newman (2003: 4-5) notes that the prosperity of the late twentieth century has left white middle-aged Americans in a place of relative ease as they approach retirement. However, despite national prosperity, the success of the white middle-class has not been universal. Inner-city, poor minorities face many obstacles that their white, middle-class counterparts do not. They struggle with poor neighborhood conditions, economic hardship, broken relationships, diminishing health and racism. As refugees, even Liberians who were successful in their own country, now live as poor minorities in the United States.

The Liberian refugees are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Ethnically, Liberia is comprised of 95% indigenous African tribes, 2.5% Americo-Liberians 2.5% (descendants of immigrants from the United States who had been slaves), and 2.5% Congo People (descendants of immigrants from the Caribbean who had been slaves). While English is the official language and is used by 20% of Liberians, over 20 ethnic group languages, of which few can be written, are used in correspondence. Of those Liberians who can use English, 57.5% over the age of 15 can read and write (73.3% male and 41.6% female) (Nilsson 2003: 15). Liberian refugees bring this ethnic, linguistic and literacy diversity to their new home in the United States. If they choose to participate in adult basic education programs, many must not only learn to read and write in English, but also become biliterate in English and their native tongue.

The Liberian women who participate in the ESL program are representative of the data provided above. While they are from different ethnic and linguistic groups, they all fled Liberia to avoid the turmoil there. Currently, they live in the US in poverty, struggling to make ends meet with their benefits from the federal government. They speak the Liberian variety of English and an additional first language. All but one

are illiterate in English as well as their first language. As women over 60, these program participants are not the ones targeted by the government funding agencies. The government wishes these ESL programs to reach young adults between the ages of 18-24 years of age who might use their newly acquired English to move on to the workforce (ABLE, 2004). However, adults are constantly socially constructing their identity, and this social construction of identity can occur through education at any age. When adults socially construct their identity as students, they come to ESL programs with different degrees of investment and definitions for educational success.

Access, Role and Ethics

My research of these Liberian women draws from two years as the director of the non-profit organization and a half-year as a participant observer and tutor in the classroom. From January 2000 until May 2003, I worked as the education director at a non-profit organization and managed the organization's ESL program. My duties regularly brought me into contact with the program's students and teachers. Because of my previous employment history and my familiarity with the program participants, the current program director granted me access to the classroom, but with the caveat that I also serve as a classroom tutor.

My role as a tutor and former program director presented both benefits and burdens. On the one hand, I had more immediate and intimate access to the study's participants. A familiar face for almost three years, the students readily talked to me about their lives in Liberia, their education, and their problems in the United States. On some occasions, I would baby-sit when they needed to work in class. As a tutor and not a teacher, they also saw me as a support system for their own academic endeavors.

Unfortunately, my role as a tutor and my history as the program director also presented obstacles, especially during the participant-observation phase of my study. On a practical level, it was more difficult to observe when I was working with the students. Additionally, it took several weeks for the students to treat me as a helper instead of "the boss". I often had to remind them that I was primarily a research-observer and then a tutor. On a less practical level, the students often spoke to me about sensitive subjects outside of the scope of the project, because of my former role as an administrator. This became especially problematic when students came to me for help and I could only refer them back to the agency. Finally, because of my previous role, I had preconceived notions about what the students could and should learn. I had to distance myself from prior knowledge and try to learn about the students anew. Despite these drawbacks, the benefits of working with a familiar group for a short project outweighed the burdens. The access to the students provided invaluable insight into how they were

socially constructing their identities as students and defining their educational goals.

Data Collection

Even before I began participant observation, I had a wealth of data from two years as an action researcher and director of the program. I observed the class monthly and made detailed notes on classroom activity including student learning. Additionally, teachers submitted monthly examples of students' work for portfolios. These portfolios, in turn, were examined for specific government defined goals. Finally, I had standardized test scores of many students for three years. I had previously analyzed and summarized this data for reports to government funders. These reports based on government-mandated goals and measurements represented a marked foil for the data I collected as a participant observer.

As a tutor/observer in the ESL class, my primary method of data collection was participant-observation supplemented by artifacts, interviews, and a small open-ended email survey. I attended eight, two-hour classes for a total of sixteen hours of participation observation. During class time, I was a moderate participant as a tutor/observer (Spradley 1980). Prior to each class, I would summarize the setting in my journal and then informally talk with the students. When the teacher began presenting the lesson for the day, I would make notes about my informal chats and observe and record the lesson for the day. Once the lesson concluded, I would tutor students who needed special assistance. While I was tutoring, I would once again informally talk to the students that I was helping. After class concluded for the day, I would complete my notes in my journal. Although I had made fairly detailed notes in my journal, at the end of the day, I would review the notes in my journal and write formal fieldnotes on my computer. I would then reread my notes and place comments in the margins about how I used language to socially construct my identity and the identities of the participants at the ESL class. I also used these notes to consider how the program participants defined, worked toward and marked educational success. I would consider what they said to me verbally and how they responded to the lesson in class.

In addition to participant-observation, I conducted three formal, one-hour interviews with students. I asked a pre-literate, literate, and intermediate student to speak with me; therefore, I was able to speak to a range of students with different academic abilities. I wanted to understand why they chose to attend class and what they considered academic success to be. I also interviewed the ESL program coordinator for one hour to learn about the educational goals of the non-profit and how she saw the Liberian class meeting those goals. Of the four interviews, only two were taped: the ESL program coordinator and the literate student.

Although the two other students agreed to be interviewed, they refused to be taped. One was embarrassed about her lack of facility in English. The other wanted to see my handwritten transcription of our exchange before committing the interview to tape. Unfortunately, we ran out of time before we could record the interview. However, I did type/transcribe all four interviews on my computer and then reread and commented on the transcriptions. Finally, I collected open-ended email surveys from administrators of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), the Pennsylvania government agency that oversees adult education. I used the interviews and the surveys to specifically ask informants about their definition of educational success, how it was achieved and how it should be marked.

I also collected a variety of artifacts from the site to inform my work including program advertisements, monthly calendars, program intake forms and tests, and student work. The artifacts demonstrated formal student goals and traditional measurements of success as well as more informal goals and measurements.

Data Analysis

As I collected data, I analyzed it through a series of interpretative memos based on emerging themes in my project. Furthermore, I attempted to follow Erickson's model of considering whole events, decomposing them into smaller fragments and then recomposing them into wholes (1992). I would write a memo about an emerging theme in my research. Within that memo, I would code my data from my artifacts, fieldnotes, interviews, and email surveys. I would then reread and comment on possible interpretations from the memo. I might produce two more memos from this original one based on new themes or interpretations. After I finished the first draft of original memos, I would compare them against the actual data looking for support or contradictions. I would then prepare a final summary incorporating all themes into one memo or several memos depending upon the specificity of the theme (Hatch 2002: 181). Unfortunately, because class had been suspended until the warmer weather of spring when I completed my analysis in late December, I was unable to ask my participants to review the interpretations with me to write a final summary.

Findings

During the two and a half years that I spent with the Liberian women in this ESL program, they did not name the pre-determined government goals as their reason for attending class. Additionally, few demonstrated any improvement on government-mandated standardized tests, such as the BEST and CASAS Life Skills tests³. Yet, the women did not believe

³ Both the BEST and CASAS Life Skills tests measure academic achievement rather than academic proficiency (Center for Applied Linguistics; CASAS).

they had made limited progress. They had explicitly and implicitly defined their investment in education through their own goals, and measured academic success by program participation and goal achievement. In particular, two central goals emerged that represented the female students' investment in the adult ESL program: "Going to school in America" and "Learning the ABCs."

Going to School in America

Beginning very early in my research, I was able to informally chat with the students during tutoring. When I asked one student about her educational background, she replied, "In Liberia, girls do not go to school, boys do. Now that they are in the United States, they can go." As I continued to visit the ESL program, this concept of "going to school in America" resonated as a prominent theme for many, but not all, of the female participants in the program.

Over the course of my visits to the ESL program, many people indicated to me their lack of educational background and their chance to learn now that they are here in the United States. During the intake process, one woman laughed when I asked her if she had been to school. The implication was that such a question was ridiculous. On yet another visit, the daughter of another woman came to class to speak to the teacher. She remarked, "I haven't seen [my mother] in fourteen years, and she never had any education. I just get frustrated, but she really enjoys coming to class. I grew up in this country, so I went to school. So we work on the ABCs." Like other women in the class, this woman had not been educated in Liberia, but now seized the opportunity to learn in America.

In addition to their responses to questions about their educational background, students demonstrated their belief that "because they are in America, they can now go to school" in other ways. Each day, class started with prayers of thanks for the opportunity to learn and intercessions to succeed. Also, more advanced students and/or administrators often reprimanded the class to speak in English and listen to the teacher so that they might learn. On one occasion, one of the administrators of the Senior Center came in and admonished the students to speak English so "everyone can understand." Everyone immediately stopped talking and said "Hello, Teacher." Although the rate of change in their behavior might suggest fear of an authority figure, it may also indicate their eagerness and willingness to learn.

The Liberian students are not the only ones who espoused the concept of limited education in Liberia and educational opportunity in America. The administrator for the ESL program characterized the Liberian group as "a unique group because many of them do not know how to read and write." She continued, "I think their uniqueness comes from their determination considering their age and their inability to read and write."

The theme of "America as a place to go to school" appears in all my

reports, fieldnotes and interviews. Their remarks, their eagerness to learn and their bi-weekly attendance in class demonstrated the investment of the majority of female Liberian students in learning to read and write. These internal indicators contrast sharply with external ones. Without speaking to the students, their families, and teachers, many outsiders might see ESL as more of a social hour than an education class. Students often talked when the teacher was talking or during tests. Some women brought their grandchildren to class with them. Students walked in and out of the classroom at will to go to the bathroom or get doughnuts from the kitchen. Furthermore, quantitative measurements of their abilities showed little to no progress over the course of the study. Yet, most of the women explicitly told me how they valued the opportunity to "go to school."

Although this concept of "going to school in America" appears throughout my research material, it does not uniformly represent the women in the class or the elderly Liberian refugee population. The class I observed had only 14 female students, and thus was a very small sample of the refugee population. Furthermore, one student in the class directly contradicted statements made by all her classmates. She told me she had received a ninth grade education, two years of home economics, and worked for UNICEF. When I asked her if her experience was unusual, she replied, "No, I thought all women received education throughout Liberia." She came to class in hopes of finding a job.

Despite this contradictory evidence, the educational background and beliefs of this student do not negate the experiences of her classmates nor invalidate the concept of "going to school in America." Her classmates did not go to school in Liberia as she did, but once they were in the United States, they could and did go to school. Instead, these differing self-reports demonstrate that people invest in ESL classes for different reasons. Some students are socially constructing themselves as people "who go to school" a new paradigm for them. Others have different reasons for investment, such as finding a job.

Learning the ABCs

The female students only invested in language learning not only to be able to go to school, but also to gain basic literacy skills. In the section above, I retold an anecdote about the daughter of a woman who came to class to speak to the teacher. The daughter recounted how she had not seen her mother in 14 years, but now worked with her on her ABCs every night because of her mother's determination to learn. This story demonstrates that the female students consider investment in education and academic achievement as something more than program participation alone. They also view task work and completion, such as learning the ABCs, as important indicators of investment and success. Often task completion is explicitly marked in class through celebration.

A vivid example of the salience of task work and completion as indicators of academic investment and success occurred when the students were asked to reevaluate their government-defined goals for the ESL class. From prior experience as the Education Director of this program, I knew that this process could be difficult and laborious because of language and literacy differences. Even the word "goal" could pose problems for the novice learner; this was the case for the Liberian ESL class.

During the goal-defining activity, students completed two literacy tasks: one phonological and one semantic. Students first struggled to understand the phonology of the teacher's utterance. In the Liberian variety of English, there is no /d/ sound at the end of the word, gold. Therefore, when they heard /gol/, they thought the teacher was asking what their /gold/ was instead of what their /gol/ was. The teacher had to write the two words on the board to illustrate the difference. The students then wrestled with the multiple definitions for goal. They had difficulty understanding that goal could mean both the end of a soccer field and the purpose of an activity. The students participated in a lively discussion to discover the definition. The problem was resolved when the site administrator came in to see what the heated discussion was about and offered an analogy from Liberia. He said, "We do everything for a purpose. Like when you go to the market. You want to sell something to get money. So you go to the market to sell your vegetables and goods. What is your purpose for going to school? Why do you come here twice a week?" The site administrator's analogy worked and the students were excited that they could now complete the activity.

However, when the teacher wanted to begin reviewing different goals, one of the students interrupted her. The student said to the group, "Let us celebrate our hard work. We deserve a big hand. We all have learned something today. Good job." The entire class broke out into applause. In this class, the actions and words explicitly demonstrate task completion as representative of the student's personal goals and means of assessing success in achieving those goals.

Students also indicated their desire to be literate in less explicit ways. It could be a tentative smile and a request for reconfirmation of teacher praise. For example, when I assisted one student in writing her numbers, she wrote "6" inaccurately but wrote "7" correctly. I praised her "7" and corrected her "6". She smiled and then said, "Good 7" with a rising intonation. This rising intonation is not only indicative of a question, but also hope. She was hopeful that she had completed at least part of the task correctly. I reaffirmed her "7" and her smile broadened.

Sometimes the students even included me in their celebration of task completion. Some of the female students in the class particularly struggled with the mechanics of writing. They had physical difficulties grasping the pencil correctly and forming the letters. One of my prima-

ry duties as a classroom assistant was to work with these students on their writing. I tried having them copy my letters and tracing dotted lines. I had little success with these methods and sometimes used a different approach that I describe in my fieldnotes:

This time, I tried a different approach. I asked them if I could come behind them and guide their pencil as they wrote. I placed my hand over theirs to demonstrate how to hold them pencil and then guided them in writing the word, "City." I then removed my hand, but remained behind them as they attempted to write the word by themselves. For the first time in the lesson, two of the women wrote the "c" correctly instead of on its side. One of the women smiled, stood up and hugged me. She said, "Thank you, Teacher."

In this instance, the student brought me into her celebration of success. Having literally learned to write "C", the woman used a physical means to express her joy of completing the task. She not only smiled, but "stood up and hugged me."

Beyond Participation and Task Completion

Religious ritual also demonstrated the female students' commitment to learning and academic achievement in the ESL class. Beginning in my first set of fieldnotes and in all subsequent entries, I noted participatory, intercessory prayers for educational success. After my first visit, I wrote, "One of the [students] was leading prayers in English while everyone else responded with 'Amen's' and 'Alleluia's'. Prayers included not only intercessions for happiness in their new life in the United States, but also success with their studies. The students were requesting divine interventions in their studies, so that they could study and succeed. Interjections of "Amen" and "Alleluia" – literally "I believe" and "Praise God" respectively – suggest that the students rejoiced in learning and wanted to gain literacy proficiency.

The students neither completed all their tasks nor openly celebrated achievement every time I observed them. Once, the female students chastised me for praising them too much. However, I often felt joyous amidst these students. Students greeted one another each morning. They shook hands with as many people as possible. Prayers were participatory with murmurings of "Amen" and "Alleluia" interspersed. The program administrator also noted this joyous atmosphere. She noted, "[The students] don't get discouraged very easily, in my experience. It seems like they celebrate when they do reach a certain goal of maybe writing a particular letter." The female students wanted to come to school, work on tasks and complete them. When these three events occurred, they often marked their educational success with some celebratory acts: prayers, applause and hugs instead of grades on stan-

dardized tests or completion of government-defined goals.

Conclusion

This study examined two questions through the lens of investment in language learning: (1) How do the female students define their educational goals? and (2) How do the students use their defined goals to measure academic achievement? The findings suggest that most of the women identified "going to school in America" and "learning the ABCs" as their primary educational goals. Furthermore, rather than progress on standardized tests, they saw program participation and task completion as the more salient markers of academic achievement. This achievement was often marked by celebration or prayer.

Through the lens of investment in language learning, the findings show how these women engaged in the on-going social construction of identity. As female, Liberian refugees, these women were poor, displaced and unable to use any variety of American English. In coming to the adult ESL-literacy class, they were acquiring a wider range of symbolic and material resources that they could use as cultural capital in their new home (Norton 2000). Learning to speak as well as to read and write an American variety of English allows these women to participate in activities that would otherwise be closed to them, such as obtaining health care, shopping for groceries, and relating to their children and grandchildren who had been raised in the United States. As women who were previously unable to go to school, they were able to not only dream of "imaginary worlds" (Pavlenko 2004), but also participate in worlds in which they could reconstruct traditional gender roles which prohibited women from going to school.

The small number of women in this study prohibits any generalization about the goals of Liberian women in ESL-literacy programs. Furthermore, within the study one notable exception emerged the woman with a ninth grade education who came to class in hopes of finding a job. Thus, not all the women came to class with the same goals and beliefs about marking achievement. Yet, while this study cannot generalize about the goals of Liberian women in ESL-literacy programs, it does indicate that the goals of students in ESL-literacy classes do not always match those proposed by government funding agencies. Furthermore, it illustrates that students may use goal attainment as markers of academic achievement instead of progress on standardized tests. If programs would like to serve adult needs, they must acknowledge the reasons adults invest in education and their means of marking achievement. Predetermined goals and standardized test scores do not offer an authentic means of evaluating whether or not an adult achieved what he or she set out to learn.

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