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Abstract

Preliterate English as a Second Language Learners: A case study of Somali Bantu women

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The influx of immigrants and refugees with little or no previous formal education has made the investigation of English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy instructional techniques and methods a priority within the ESL professional field. The 2003-2004 resettlement of over 12,000, mostly preliterate, Somali Bantu refugees to the United States has become a focal point of the ESL literacy field. In this study, I investigate the past and present experiences of five Somali Bantu women refugees in relation to their experiences within my ESL literacy classroom and their second language acquisition.

Through in-depth interviews, observations, and personal reflections, the learners' perceptions of the researcher's class and the ESL literacy techniques used within that class are examined. Additionally, the personal and educational experiences of the women in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States are explored. I also reflect upon my personal and professional experiences with the participants during the past twenty months and my own evolution as a teacher throughout the interview process.

This qualitative case study gives insight into the life experiences of the participants, the strengths they bring with them, and their perceptions of their ESL education within the United States. The experiences of the women and the researcher shape the study's programmatic and instructional implications which maximize the use of

the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students within the classroom while supporting their literacy development.

PRELITERATE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY OF SOMALI BANTU WOMEN

by
Colleen Shaughnessy

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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For my parents and each of the Somali Bantu families who have taught me so much over the years.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background and Positioning the Researcher

The idea for conducting this study emerged in September of 2004 shortly after I began teaching an English as a Second Language literacy class to a group of nine preliterate women. My students were part of a group of 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees whom the United States government agreed to resettle in 75 cities. In an effort to better understand the backgrounds of my students, I began to research the history, culture, and language of the Somali Bantu as well as the field of instructional techniques for teaching preliterate learners. I quickly found that there is limited knowledge regarding both the Somali Bantu and preliterate ESL literacy instructional techniques and decided my teaching situation was ideal for adding to the body of existing research.

As an educator and a researcher, my research philosophy is centered on valuing the multiple perspectives of the participants while providing tools for fellow English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners. I believe both instruction and research should empower their respective audiences and it is my hope that my students will experience a sense of empowerment as a result of this study. Qualitative research is, in my mind, an evolutionary process that should not be defined by a single label or approach nor restricted to certain boundaries; as qualitative research evolves so too should its research design. Additionally, I value the act of positioning the researcher within the context of the research. As an educator researcher, throughout the duration of this research I have held the role of teacher, researcher, advocate, and friend; to dismiss these experiences and perspectives would only serve to lessen the depth of this study.

My interest in teaching ESL goes back many years and led me to pursue a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). As a child, I often talked of traveling to Africa. While there were many who dismissed my dreams as naive, I never gave up. In my very homogenous, Midwestern, Catholic high school, I sought out what few opportunities there were to engage and befriend those from different cultures such as a Japanese study abroad student and a Jewish soccer coach. No one necessarily encouraged this, but neither did they discourage it, and my positive experiences led me to seek further contact with people distant from me in experience, culture, and worldview. I decided to get my Bachelor's degree at Monmouth College (Illinois) because the school had a spring break service trip to a Native American Reservation and I believed this would provide me with an opportunity to further my quest for knowledge of other cultures.

In college, I did, in fact, go on the service trip to the Native American Reservation twice and then decided with the support of several professors, to study abroad in the southern African country of Zimbabwe. During my six month stay, fellow study abroad students, University of Zimbabwe students, and my host-family further broadened my knowledge and appreciation of the differences between cultures. My experiences of reflective, honest discussions about women's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention and aid, the legacy of colonization and racism, and the value and importance of one's native language are but a few examples of the topics that began to expand my perspective. Only after returning to the United States did I begin to recognize the extent to which my understanding of varying perspectives and worldviews had been transformed. I realized my life had been forever changed by experiences such as witnessing the AIDS pandemic,

being a negatively viewed racial minority, and coming face to face with the realities of the impoverished peoples of this world. I saw new and disturbing sides of my own culture that I had had the privilege of ignoring as a member of the majority race. I also knew that Zimbabwe was not the end of my journey but rather just the beginning. In an attempt to continue on this journey, I decided to immerse myself in a new culture for a longer period of time and so joined the Peace Corps after graduating from college and began life as a secondary school science teacher in a village in northern Ghana.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, I had both a host-family and a host-village. In the first few months of my time in Ghana, my host-family, members of a northern Ghanian tribe, the Mamprusi, taught me about their culture and the Mampruli language. They treated me with utmost hospitality, showered me with love as I suffered from amoebic dysentery (and a variety of other illnesses), and welcomed me into their individual and cultural families. My home for two years, Wulugu, was a medium-sized village with an approximate population of 4,000 in the Northern Region of Ghana. Despite the economic and personal hardships of living in a developing country, the people of Wulugu mirrored the welcoming spirit of my host-family by looking out for me, making sure I was comfortable, helping me navigate my new cultural surroundings and eventually developing life-long friendships with me. On many occasions in Ghana, I promised myself that I would do my best to emulate the friendliness and generosity of my close contacts in Ghana to visitors or newcomers in my home country. Upon returning to the United States, this promise led me on a path that eventually involved teaching English to immigrants, international students, asylees, and refugees.

After moving to the east coast to begin graduate school in ESOL education, I was asked by the local community college to teach an ESL literacy class to a group of Somali Bantu women. The classes were initially held at a Boys and Girls Club in which I taught the mothers upstairs while their children received childcare downstairs. During the second week of class, one of the children walked out the front door and was found by a concerned resident who took him to the police station. Thus, the childcare was deemed inadequate by the Department of Social Services which forced us to shut down our class. After a month of trying to determine a viable option, it was decided that the class would be held in an apartment of one of the students as many Somali Bantu families lived within the same apartment complex.

Originally, there were nine women in the class including two mother/daughter pairs. Due to the lack of funding to hire child-care providers and the difficulty previously encountered, the seven students who had children under school age brought them to the class. The husbands of the students worked or took English classes at the community college during the day so they were not in the home during the classes. During the class, two women along with their three children moved homes and so had to leave the class. One mother gave birth four months into the class. Therefore, for the last six months there were nine children and seven mothers who participated in the class. All seven of these women were originally going to participate in this study, but during the interview process one family, containing two participants, abruptly left town for an unknown destination, most likely closer to other relatives in the United States, and the interpreter and I were unable to interview them. Therefore, five of my students participated in this study.

Somalia and the Somali Bantu

An understanding of the unique history and culture of the Somali Bantu within the context of Somalia is essential as it provides an invaluable perspective into the lives of the participants. Van Lehman and Eno (2003) report that in 2000, the United States, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, agreed to resettle over 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees who had been living in refugee camps in Kenya for eight to twelve years. Due to delays caused by the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, this resettlement began in 2003. The Department of Homeland Security's Yearbook of Immigration Statistics reported a total of 35,726 ethnic Somali refugees have arrived in the United States since 1995 as compared to 12,000 Somali Bantu who arrived in 2004 alone. This study takes place in an east coast United States city with 250 Somali Bantu refugees who arrived in mid-2004.

History of Somalia

In 1960, the colonies of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland united to create the country of Somalia. Britain and Italy had ruled the area since 1885 when European countries came together at the Berlin Conference to establish rules for the division of the African continent amongst themselves. Prior to colonial rule, Somalia consisted of several Islamic sultanates and sovereign indigenous communities. In 1960, the newly united Somalia held elections and by 1967 they had elected two presidents, albeit by questionable means. In 1969, the second elected president was killed, the lack of a leader created the opportunity for a coup d'etat which occurred and was staged by Siad Barre. Barre then ruled Somalia until late 1990 when three opposition groups overthrew him,

igniting the start of the civil war, which still continues today (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004).

In 2000, a transitional government was created in Somalia. With little progress having been made in creating a stable government, Somali warlords met in Kenya to set up a government, later electing a president, Abdullahi Yusef Ahmed, and a prime minister, Ali Mohamed Ghedi. Despite the presence of this interim government, Somalia remains an ungoverned state with traditional clans and factions controlling various sections of the southern region of the country ("Somalia Timeline", 2005). The northern region of Somalia, which was formally British Somaliland and is now the Republic of Somaliland, declared itself independent of southern Somalia in 1997. The Republic of Somaliland is currently not recognized by international bodies as a sovereign state despite its functioning government and relative state of peace ("Somaliland Elections", 2005).

The Somali Bantu

Approximately eighty-five percent (or 7.3 million) of the Somali population is ethnic-Somali; the remaining fifteen percent is made-up of Africans of sub-Saharan descent and a small number of Arabs ("Somalia", 2005). The estimated 600,000 sub-Saharan descendants will be referred to throughout this study as the Somali Bantu. Bantu is a term used for over 400 ethnic groups from Cameroon to South Africa who are united by the use of a common language family, the Bantu. After the start of the civil war, the situation in the refugee camps required the need for an all-encompassing name for those who trace their roots to sub-Sarahan Africa, and they chose through consensus to be called the Somali Bantu. Some of the Bantu residing in Somalia, especially those in the

far south of the country, are indigenous to the area. None of these indigenous Bantu residents were resettled in the United States (Van Lehman and Eno, 2003).

The non-indigenous Bantu groups were brought as slaves by Islamic traders to Somalia from Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique in the 1700s (see Figure 1). While the laws were changed in the early part of the 20th century to make slavery illegal, the descendants of these slaves have continued to exist at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in an already extremely impoverished nation. Discrimination was made easier by the distinct physical features of the Somali Bantu as compared to ethnic-Somalis. Kinkier hair texture and darker skin color were often used to separate out the Somali Bantu so as to continue their subjugation. Ethnic-Somalis commonly referred to the Somali Bantu as "adoon" and "habash" (both of which mean "slave") and "ooji" (which means "today") as they believe the Somali Bantu are unable to think beyond the present moment. The marginalization of the Somali Bantu included the denial of access to education, government services, and professional positions as well as a complete lack of representation in political bodies. Intermarriage of Somali Bantus with ethnic Somalis was discouraged to the extent that it was basically unlawful. (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003) The perspectives of the participants on these topics and facts varied from these printed sources and will be examined in Chapter 5.

Figure 1: Map of Eastern Africa - Image from: www.cmu.org.uk/stats/stats-images/20map_ea.gif

The Culture

During the 20th century many of the Somali Bantu adopted Islam, but have also held on to many of their animist or indigenous beliefs. In general the Somali Bantu are more liberal Muslims than ethnic Somalis. They do, however, celebrate Eid-al-Fitr at the end of the month of Ramadan and Eid-al-Adha during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. After arrival in the refugee camps, a few Somali Bantu converted to Christianity but they remain a very small minority. In line with Islamic and indigenous beliefs they practice both polygamy and female circumcision and women wear head covers once they reach puberty. Marriage occurs by the parents making an arrangement or the children eloping. In general, they maintain extended families in which most families have four to eight children and the traditional rituals are passed down by the mother. Divorce is not uncommon and younger children usually stay with the mother while older children may stay with the father. Overall their society is communal in nature with cooperation and community taking precedent over all other matters. (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003)

The Land

The Somali Bantu populations live along either the Juba or Shabelle Rivers in southern Somalia. The population that has been resettled in the United States generally lived along the Juba River valley. This is the most arable land in Somalia because the Juba River is one of the few rivers in Somalia that does not dry up during the year. The vast majority of Somalia is arid and unsuitable for agricultural pursuits. (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003)

Farming, and the sedentary lifestyle it requires, was not desired by the majority of ethnic Somalis who are mostly nomadic pastoralists. This disdain for a sedentary lifestyle explains the original acceptance of the Bantu inhabiting the most fertile region of the country. In the mid 1800's runaway Somali Bantu slaves, most notably a large group who escaped through the leadership of a female leader named Wanankhucha, created the communities in these "undesirable" lands. During the Italian colonial period, the Somali Bantu land was recognized as one of the only areas of the country that could produce items for export and consumption within Somalia. In the mid-1930's, the Italian colonial government determined that the economy of Somalia would never flourish without tapping this natural resource, so they confiscated the land from the Somali Bantu to create large plantations on which they forced the former owners to provide slave-like labor. After independence, especially in the later years of Barre's regime, land was again taken by the government for large-scale agricultural projects or by the political elite, rendering many of the Somali Bantu landless. (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003) Again, the perspectives of the participants varied from these printed sources and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

The Civil War and a Forced Exodus

Gardner and El Bushra (2004) describe the impetus for the Somali civil war as the historically unequal, oppressive, and corrupt distribution of power and resources. The war has evolved into a clan-based struggle for power. The clan, amongst ethnic Somalis, is the basic social organizing structure. Single males and females are members of their father's clan, while married men and women are protected primarily by the husband's clan but can rely on support from the wife's father's clan as well. In the context of the civil war, clans form groups which protect each other from enemy clans. Non-ethnic Somalis who have not made a concerted effort to assimilate into ethnic Somali life do not belong to clans. The Somali Bantu, therefore, do not belong to clans. Thus they are unable to reap the benefit of having the protection and the social connections that clans provide. Without these social connections, the Somali Bantu were unable to obtain weapons in order to arm themselves.

The civil war in Somalia is based on the struggle for control of resources, most notably land and money. The Somali Bantu live in the most fertile lands in Somalia where land equates resources and money. Without clans to protect them or the means to arm themselves, the Somali Bantu have been one of the most victimized populations throughout the civil war. This targeted attack is what drove the majority of the Somali Bantu population to seek refuge in Kenya and Tanzania. (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004) Fraade-Blanar (2004) estimates that a third of the Somali Bantu population has been killed as a result of violence, natural causes throughout the civil war, during the journey to refugee camps, or throughout the eight or more years spent in refugee camps.

Life in Refugee Camps for the Somali Bantu

The movie *The Final Exodus* (1999) documents the situation that the Somali Bantu found upon arrival in the refugee camps. They were not the only Somali citizens who fled to Kenyan refugee camps; ethnic-Somalis arrived in these camps as well. This impacted the experiences of the Somali Bantu as the subjugation and oppression they theoretically left behind in Somalia continued to be carried out by the ethnic-Somalis residing in the camps. Violence, particularly rape, was heavily reported by the Somali Bantu residing in the Kenyan refugee camp of Dadaab. After six to ten years, many of the Somali Bantu were moved from Dadaab to the Kakuma refugee camp, also in Kenya, for approximately two years to prepare for their departure to the United States.

Literacy and Education

Given the lack of educational opportunities offered to the Somali Bantu population in Somalia, upon arrival in the refugee camps, few, if any, of the Somali Bantu were literate and their language, Mai Mai, was only recently codified so as to create a written language. In contrast, the United Nations reported a 24% literacy rate for Somalia in 1990, and the Somali written language was developed in 1972. Only an estimated five percent of the Somali Bantu refugees who arrived in the United States had previously attended school, acquired literacy, or developed English language proficiency. Cultural orientation, of no more than 80 hours in duration, was provided in the Kenyan refugee camp of Kakuma to prepare the Somali Bantu adults to come to the United States. The orientation included American cultural information and English language and

literacy education. Some of the children attended school in the refugee camps if their help was not needed by their parents. (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003)

Despite these academic deficits, the Somali Bantu offer several funds of knowledge or networks of knowledge. Funds of knowledge refers to historically developed strategies (e.g., skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being. (Moll, 1992) Collectively the Somali Bantu have an extensive understanding of agriculture, economics, birthing practices, and traditional medicine. Given the prevalence of oral history within their culture, they possess strong oral language skills including excellent pronunciation skills. Additionally, the majority of the Somali Bantu are survivors who have had to demonstrate exceptional resilience, adaptability, and the determination to succeed.

Definition of Terms

The Somali Bantu's unusually small number of formally educated individuals and the absence of a widely distributed written language in tandem with their historical experience of subjugation, recent experiences of trauma, and extended stay in refugee camps combine to create a population in need of unique instructional strategies. This study examines the culturally-relevant pedagogical techniques developed for this unique population through the self-reported opinions of the participants. Gay (2000) defines **culturally-relevant pedagogy** as "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective [for students].... It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29).

Savage (1993) discusses four types of students who may require literacy instruction: preliterate, non-literate, semi-literate, and literate in non-Roman alphabet language. These distinctions are particularly significant when determining the instructional techniques one should use with a particular group of learners. **Preliterate** encompasses students who speak a language whose written form is rare or does not exist. **Non-literate** students (formerly illiterate) speak a language that has a written form, but they have not learned to read or write it themselves, while **semi-literate** students have some formal education and are able to read and write at an elementary level. Students who are **literate in a non-Roman alphabet** are functionally literate in their native language, which may use characters or a non-Roman alphabet; they therefore need to learn the formation of the Roman alphabet and the sound/symbol relationship in English.

Statement of Problem

Adult ESL Literacy is a very under-investigated instructional field in which little formal research has been conducted (Condelli & Wrigley, 2004; Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). Within this field, preliterate instructional approaches are even less developed. Preliterate populations are increasingly prevalent in immigrant communities in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand (Guth & Wrigley, 1993). Beyond the influx of approximately 12,000 Somali Bantu in the last two years, other formerly preliterate populations such as the Hmong and the Haitians (both Hmong and Kreyol have written forms today) have lived in the United States for ten to twenty years, while speakers of some English Pidgins and Creoles and a myriad of other unwritten African languages are on the increase.

Women and elderly refugees and immigrants, who frequently make up the majority of ESL literacy learners, are often unable to attend regular ESL classes due to their roles as caregivers. In response to this impediment, home-based instruction has been introduced in some situations. Research on home-based ESL literacy instruction is even less explored than classroom instruction.

The majority of adult literacy research focuses on first language literacy. The lack of a written language excludes preliterate learners from this body of research. Second language literacy research concentrates on regular classroom instruction with non-literate populations as opposed to preliterate students. While there is a small body of research on ESL literacy with preliterate populations, much of it is concerned with children and adolescents, not adults. Preliterate adult populations who have been in the United States for ten or more years (the Hmong and Haitians) and the culturally-relevant methodologies used to educate these groups have been, at best, minimally researched (Robson, 1982; Burtoff, 1985). For newly arrived preliterate populations there is an even smaller body of research devoted to their cultural backgrounds and the development of instructional materials relevant to these backgrounds.

The purpose of this study is to examine the learner's perceptions, reported by themselves and observed by the researcher, of the researcher's class and the culturally-relevant ESL literacy techniques used within that class. Additionally, the personal and educational experiences of the women in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States will be explored. I will also reflect upon my experiences with them during the past 15 months and my own evolution as a teacher throughout the interview process. This study,

therefore, contributes to the field of preliterate ESL literacy instruction and our collective knowledge of the past and current experiences of the Somali Bantu.

Research Questions

1. What are the personal and educational experiences of the Somali Bantu women participants?
2. How do the participants view their experiences as students in my classroom?
3. What are the participants' motivations for learning English/Literacy?
4. How does the in-depth interviewing affect my experience/views of the participants and my role as an ESL literacy professional?

Research Methods

This is a qualitative case study which was completed through interviews with the participants, observations during the interviews and the class, and reflective journaling by the researcher. The interviews utilized an interpreter to inquire into the experiences of the participants prior to being students of ESL and literacy in the researcher's class as well as their experiences within the researcher's class. Throughout the interviews, the researcher wrote down any literacy practices or signs of literacy observed in the home such as the participants writing something down or the children's homework on the walls. The researcher also looked reflectively on her experience as the instructor of the participants and recorded her memories.

Limitations

The four main limitations of this study include the small number of participants, the reflective nature of the research, the need for an interpreter, and the researcher's

relationship with the participants. While there are only five participants, it was determined that a detailed case study would be better than a cursory study of a large number of students. The opportunity to complete this research occurred after I had completed over half of my teaching and was not finalized until after the class had ended. Therefore the study had to be reflective in nature. While this is a limitation, I feel it is better to have done this research retrospectively than to not have completed it at all. The lack of a common language between the participants and the researcher demands the use of an interpreter. Interpreting creates the role of an intermediary who may impact the answers of the interviewees with their own perceptions. Despite my use of several data sources, proving validity through triangulation was made difficult by the use of an interpreter and the limited amount of existing research on the Somali Bantu. Finally, the strong relationship between the researcher and the participants may place undue pressure on the responses in the interviews. While I attempted to account for this by reassuring the participants that all answers are acceptable, I cannot be sure how much my presence was a factor in their responses. This is especially true in relation to the questions concerning the class; it may have been culturally inappropriate for the students to tell their teacher what she could have done better given the position of honor a teacher usually holds in African cultures. I do not think I can overcome this limitation. I also do not think this should stop me from asking the questions as they may be willing to give me suggestions based on their experience. According to Jamila*, the interpreter and cultural informant, the use of an interpreter assisted with this concern as it allowed the students to give suggestions or criticize my teaching indirectly through an intermediary. Jamila stated that Somalis approach situations, in which they will be giving advice or criticism,

* All names are pseudonyms.

through an intermediary often a family member of some sort. The mutual respect that our relationship has come to encompass in the last twenty months is not only a limitation; our strong bond may increase their willingness to discuss their personal histories with me.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

One of the major difficulties in teaching ESL literacy to preliterate Somali Bantu learners is the extreme lack of research, best practices, and appropriate textbooks. The influx of preliterate refugees and immigrants into developed counties throughout the world has caused concern throughout the adult ESL educational profession, but the field of ESL literacy research is limited and its scope varied. This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the limited literature that discusses specific concerns related to preliterate learners and instructional techniques for preliterate learners.

Teaching Preliterate Learners

Burt & Peyton (2003) define preliterate ESL learners as individuals who may not be aware of the purposes of literacy and have had little or no exposure to a written language. Instruction for these learners depends heavily on oral language activities (Carroll, 1999). Robson (1982) and Strucker (2002) point out that the progress made by preliterate learners is often slower than other ESL learners, due to the necessity for high levels of repetition if retention is to be achieved. Robson concluded from a study of the Hmong, that learners with only minimal native language (NL) literacy progressed more quickly in acquiring English literacy skills. This encourages the use of the NL to make the connection between the spoken and written word in instructional situations.

Guth and Wrigley (1992) in their evaluation of 123 effectively managed and successful adult ESL literacy programs concluded that curricula should be collaboratively created by teachers and learners or enhanced with their perspectives. Additionally,

program models should include methods and approaches that have the following features: learner-centeredness, context-specificity, meaning-based, knowledge of the learner community, and a supportive environment.

Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2002) further concluded that the use of authentic, relevant material made a significant impact on basic reading skill development. They recommended the use of items such as gas bills, receipts, or bus schedules within the classroom. Using students' native languages to give directions or clarify concepts is advisable as classrooms which used native languages in this manner showed an increase in both reading comprehension skills and oral communication skills (Wrigley, 2005). Additionally, the researchers advocated the use of both English and the native language to help students develop critical thinking skills. Finally, the researchers concluded that the use of various activities, techniques, and approaches will increase students' abilities in all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Approaching topics from various angles and a multitude of media ensures learners have more opportunities to retain the information.

Native Language Use in the ESL Classroom

In a study of Hispanic English as a Second Language leaners, Sewell (2000) found that the use of the students' native language significantly lowered the affective filter[†] for adult ESL learners, affirmed their native language and culture, and allowed for more natural learning of English to occur. The students in her study stated several times

† One of the five hypotheses that compose Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition, the affective filter hypothesis states that learners' motivation, self-confidence, self-image, and anxiety levels impact their second language acquisition. Low affective filters increase a learner's ability to acquire a second language and are associated with low anxiety levels which create high motivation, self-confidence, and self-image. (Krashen, 1985)

that they felt very comfortable and at ease within classes where both their native language and the target language were used. They were adamant that the classes were not only positive, but were life altering. The frequency of these and other similar sentiments led Sewell to conclude that the use of native language in instruction lowers the affective filter. Students often referred to the respect their cultures were shown through the welcoming of the culture's language, food, dance, and music into the classroom and the respectful attitudes of the teachers and fellow students. Sewell (2000) concludes that the regularity of these respect-related comments indicates the students felt their native languages and cultures were validated within the classroom. This validation, says Sewell, is a result of the use of the students' native language within the classroom which inculcates pride and confidence in their cultural and linguistic heritages.

Specific Techniques for Preliterate Learners

Wrigley (1993) promotes the use of hands-on experiences, learner-generated materials, and a learner's native language to bridge to English. She also advocates providing a social context for literacy and focusing on communicative language, not on grammatically correct language. Holt (1995), building on Wrigley, advises that ESL literacy instructors use real pictures and realia (real objects from everyday life, i.e. bringing in a shirt when discussing clothing) as often as possible. Holt supports the sequencing of the presentation of material from concrete to abstract concepts, such as when demonstrating the number "four": 1) count four pennies, 2) visually represent the number four with dots (like on dice), 3) write the numeral "4", and 4) then write the word "four". Additionally, she suggests building repetition into the ESL literacy curriculum to

overcome irregular attendance problems and to increase the retention of the new language skills the students are learning.

Vacca, et. al. (2003) describe two main approaches to the teaching of reading and writing: Phonics Based Instruction (PBI) and the Whole Language Approach (WLA). The PBI method of teaching first introduces students to the letters, then to all of the sounds the letters make, and then to the grouping of these sounds together to make a word. The end result of this bottom-up approach is that students will be able to apply the sounds and the rules about sounds when they need to understand a word they have never read before.

The Whole Language Approach is essentially the opposite of PBI. Phonics moves from the letters in a word to the sounds in a word to the actual word itself. WLA does not focus on letters, sounds, or even words; it puts its importance on the meaning of what readers read and writers write. The WLA looks at a paragraph as a whole and the teacher and his/her class focus on discovering the meaning and significance of a sentence, groups of words, or a paragraph not on the individual words or sounds (Goodman, 1986). This inductive approach also emphasizes the use of student produced texts and literature so as to give even more meaning to the reading and writing done within the classroom.

Holt and many other ESL reading theorists advocate that literacy instruction should balance these two approaches, not choose one over the other. Jones (1996) supports Holt by defining the importance of phonics in ESL literacy instruction, which is often avoided in many ESL classrooms which favor a complete Whole Language approach. In order to strike a balance between the two methods, one specific technique, the Language Experience Approach (LEA), is recommended by Holt.

The significance of the LEA is that it demonstrates the connection between spoken language and written language. A teacher, when using this method, first prompts his/her students with a topic or with questions. The ideas or responses as dictated by the students are transcribed in verbatim by the teacher. The responses may come from one student, a few students, or the entire class depending on the aim of the teacher. It is very important that the instructor transcribe the statements as the students create them; this means using their vocabulary and their grammar. If students create a statement that is incomprehensible, the teacher may ask questions in order to clarify the student's idea but must get their approval before altering their response in the transcription. As the students' statements are transcribed, the teacher should speak each word while writing it onto the board, as this helps the students' make the connection between what the teacher is saying and what is being written. After the story is finished, the teacher reads through the story while the students listen. A choral reading of the text with the entire class follows the teacher's reading and finally the teacher remains silent while the students read the text (as the teacher points to the words). The student-generated text can then be typed by the teacher and used for letter or word recognition, phonics instruction, or other class activities such as illustrating the story (Taylor, 1993; Holt, 1995).

Trauma and Learning

The lack of formal education, in addition to the multitude of psychological, social, and physical symptoms of trauma refugees often endure, greatly affects their learning process. Allender (1998) examines the characteristics that impact the formal language learning abilities of ESL learners. Among the characteristics she lists, three can be

applied to the typical backgrounds of the Somali Bantu: no previous formal education, disrupted livelihoods due to war or other political crisis, and suffering severe effects of political torture and trauma. Additionally, trauma often manifests itself in chronic psychological symptoms such as memory impairment, short attention span, anxiety, and limited concentration which directly relate to and can impede the learning process (Adkins, Sample, & Birman, 1999). Refugees often struggle with a lack of motivation, a reluctance to trust, and a multitude of issues resulting from the resettlement process such as isolation, financial instability, and unemployment. Many refugees experience continual physical pain in the forms of debilitating headaches, insomnia and therefore sleep deprivation, and complications with trauma-related injuries (McDonald, 2000). Each of these symptoms, individually and cumulatively, has a great impact on a student's ability to learn. Throughout the duration of the actual class and the interview process for this study, several, if not all, of these symptoms and characteristics were demonstrated by the Somali Bantu participants.

In response to the challenges facing many refugees in the ESL classroom, Allender (1998) calls for small classes (no more than 10) held in quiet environments close to the learners' homes and training for instructors in distress symptoms and in the evaluation of appropriate or sensitive topics, activities, and resources. Lucy, Chaffee, Terry, LaMabre, Stone, and Weincek (2000) furthermore advise a safe environment in which competition is minimized, non-threatening activities occur, new skills are developed in a meaningful manner, and respect for the students' past experiences abounds. They also suggest that teachers learn as much as possible about their students'

pasts so as to increase their understanding and increase the relevance of their teaching material.

Lucey and others (2000) call our attention to the assets refugees bring with them. They have a strength, a courage, and a wisdom that many ESL teachers can only dream of and can only begin to understand over time. McDonald (2000) furthers this claim by admonishing the adult ESL field for not doing a better job of acknowledging the enormous gains victims of trauma can make within the ESL classroom in terms of learning to connect, trust, and share again, which cannot be measured by tests of language skills. Within the confines of the safe environment of ESL classrooms, immigrants who have experienced trauma begin to regain their sense of pride and trust, while redefining their identities. These enormously important personal growths should be honored, acknowledged, and respected within the classroom.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Dehistorization and Voicelessness

The research study which led to Equipped for the Future polled literacy learners who named four purposes for learning literacy: voice, access, independent action, and bridging to the future (Stein, 1995). The fact that voice is one of the four indicates that learners feel they are lacking a say in their own experiences. Luther (2000) explores the history of the Khmer Rouge, the voicelessness refugees often fall victim to within their new societies, and the dehistoricization of refugees upon arrival in the US. The Somali Bantu arrived to the United States as individuals who had been oppressed and refused basic rights. In the United States, they face three levels of voicelessness due to their

minority positions within society as refugees, black Africans within a strongly African American community, and individuals unable to read and write. These three labels that can be applied to the Somali Bantu render them voiceless on a variety of levels and situations. The Khmer Rouge supported Pol Pot's brutal regime which deprived Cambodian citizens of food and basic human rights. Discussing this part of their history evoked a great deal of emotion and pain from the participants. Dehistorization is the phenomena in which refugees are thought of as a homogenous group without characteristics that distinguish them from each others: for example, calling the Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese: Southeast Asian refugees.

The Somali Bantu have also experienced dehistorization when, in the refugee camps, they were required as a community to determine an all-inclusive name to call all non-ethnic Somali refugees of sub-Saharan descent. This blanket grouping deprives refugee populations of their historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Many refugee groups, especially those from preliterate cultures, are marginalized by their inadequate educational backgrounds, lack of transferable skills, and their minority status within the United States, and this marginalizes them even more. In the experience of Luther's Cambodian learners, this marginalization, dehistorization, and experience of living in terror under the Khmer Rouge combined to increase their voicelessness or the lack of influence and control these women have over their place in society and their own lives.

Shumann's Acculturation Model

The Somali Bantu women in my class were not only learners of English but also motivated observers of American cultural values. They were and continue to be immersed in the process of acculturation. Acton and Walker de Felix (1986) define acculturation as "the gradual adaptation to the target culture without necessarily forsaking one's native language identity." Schumann, amongst others, has examined the affect this gradual process has on the acquisition of a second language.

Schumann (1978) argues that the degree of social and psychological distance experienced by a second language learner impedes or assists acquisition. Social distance is interpersonal and involves the extent to which a learner becomes a member of the target language group and achieves contact with them while psychological distance is intrapersonal and concerns the degree to which a learner is comfortable learning a task. Acculturation is achieved when the input from contact with target language speakers is high in quality and quantity.

Schumann's acculturation model for second language acquisition (see Table 1), when applied to the Somali Bantu participants and community, can give some insight into the challenging English learning environment the participants face outside of the classroom. Within Schumann's model, several factors are discussed within the categories of social and psychological distance. Table 1 defines the factors that *encourage acquisition*, though some may be seen in situations beyond language acquisition as undesirable.

A few of the factors and their resulting variables used by Schumann (1978) require further explanation. Social dominance is concerned with the degree to which the

second language (L2) group is politically, culturally, technically, or economically superior or inferior to the first language (L1). The level to which the L2 group is exposed or able to interact with the L1 group is defined as enclosure by Schumann. Enclosure is closely related to the cohesiveness of a group which looks at how close-knit the members of the L2 group are and to what degree they are required to interact with the L1 group. The extent to which a group assimilates, or gives up its own culture/language to adopt that of the L1 group, or acculturates is categorized as the integration pattern of the L2 group. The level of similarity between the two cultures, L1 and L2, is called cultural congruence and is related to the extent of culture shock which is the degree to which one may be disoriented or anxious upon arrival in the L1 culture. Attitude, in regards to second language acquisition, refers to the language attitudes towards the second language and vice versa.

Table 1 – Factors which encourage second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978)

SOCIAL DISTANCE	PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE
Social Dominance – equal or superior to L1 group	**Language shock** – no fear or anxiety regarding speaking the new language
Integration pattern – assimilation	**Culture shock** – little anxiety or disorientation upon arriving in the L1 culture
Enclosure – share the same facilities/need to interact with the L1 group	**Motivation** – highly motivated
Cohesiveness of the L2 group – lacking cohesion creating more need to interact with L1 group	**Ego permeability** – little inhibition regarding the L1 boundaries and expectations
Size of L2 group – small L2 group lessens ability to be cohesive or enclosed	
Cultural Congruence – L2 culture closely related/similar to the L1 culture	
Attitude – both groups have positive attitudes towards each other	
Intended length of residence – a longer intended residence often increases motivation	

Instructors should remain cognizant of these factors by recognizing the social and psychological frustrations and difficulties the students may be facing. Additionally, teachers can assist students with the integration into the L1 culture by teaching dialogues relevant to not only conducting business in the L1 culture but also making friends and support networks within the L1 group. Instructors are encouraged to make time for field trips with the students in which they have the opportunity to meet members of the L1 group. Teachers can also help by acting as the bridge between the two cultures by learning as much as they can about the L2 language and culture.

Conclusion

The literature establishes a link between incorporating the cultural, linguistic, and personal backgrounds in the classroom with effective ESL literacy instructional techniques. The research supports the notion that student-centered curriculum, authentic materials, and the use of native language enhances instruction and lowers a learner's affective filter. Preliterate learners are often refugees and therefore victims of trauma; these two factors combine to make the process of learning a second language particularly challenging. The social and psychological distance factors and the psychological and physical manifestations of trauma make it important to create a safe learning environment in which the personal attributes of the learners are valued and the content is culturally-relevant and meaningful. In order to accomplish this, researchers suggest the use of real pictures, realia, repetition, and the Language Experience Approach.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

Methodology

In choosing to write a thesis, I wanted to direct my inquiry into the experiences of preliterate learners and the instructional techniques used with this population. After some consideration, I decided to focus on a group of Somali Bantu women who were enrolled in an ESL literacy class in which I was the instructor from September 2004 through August 2005. I determined my extensive experience with this group would prove to be beneficial. This population, while not completely representative of all preliterate learners, will exemplify some experiences of members of this population and illustrate considerations ESL professionals should think about when working with preliterate learners, especially the Somali Bantu.

Given the recent influx of over 12,000 Somali Bantu into the United States, learning to serve this population better is an urgent concern. Their history of subjugation and persecution, in conjunction with their lack of exposure to schooling or written language, makes the Somali Bantu a unique group within the context of ESL education in the United States. The contemporary and distinctive nature of the participants as defined in Chapter 1 suggests the use of a case study as the methodological approach. A single case study was chosen because I intended to look at the experiences of these women as a group who had studied together in my class, not as individuals. Berg (2001) defines a case study as the systematic gathering of information about a particular person, group, or setting such that the researcher can effectively understand how it functions. McLeod (1994) and Stake (1995) believe that educational research demands a case study approach when a unique people, program, or approach is under investigation while Yin (1994) adds

the importance of the contemporary nature of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Yin suggests the examination of the types of questions a study asks and supports the use of a case study approach when the majority of questions are exploratory and begin with "How", "Why", or "What".

When analyzing the direction of my own study, I found my interests and concerns in-line with the aforementioned definitions of a case study. Moreover, upon examining my own research questions by the parameters set out by Yin (1994), I found they were most correlated with the questions of a case study. The fundamental questions posed by this research are:

1. What are the personal and educational experiences of the Somali Bantu women participants?
2. How do the participants view their experiences as students in my classroom?
3. What are the participants' motivations for learning English/Literacy?
4. How does the in-depth interviewing affect my experience/views of the participants and my role as an ESL literacy professional?

The ESL Literacy Class

This study took place as a result of an ESL literacy class conducted through the local community college's Refugee Assistance Program, which serves refugees throughout the state. I began teaching the class in September 2004 at a Boys and Girls Club. Due to insufficient childcare at the Boys and Girls Club, the class was moved to one of the student's homes in October of 2004. We continued to meet until August of 2005 when the students moved and were dispersed throughout the city. The class met for two hours, three times a week for six hours of instruction per week. The class began with

nine women and twelve children under the age of five and ended with seven women and nine children (see Figure 1). The presence of both the mothers and the children was at times chaotic for me and distracting for the mothers, but overall the children added a fresh energy and curiosity to the classroom. The class met in Rukia and Amina's home (all names are pseudonyms). During the sixth month of teaching, I experimented with small group tutoring instead of a large group setting in which we met in Kadija's home in addition to Amina and Rukia's home. The students expressed discontent at this set-up and I also felt it was not effective so we returned to the large group setting. This was mostly because the students enjoyed the social aspect of the class given they had little time or opportunity to socialize outside of their homes.

Participants

Prior to this study, I was the instructor for the ESL class in which the participants were enrolled. This opportunity gave me access to the local Somali Bantu community, including the participants, and ten months of instructional experience to draw upon. Given that one purpose of this study is to have the participants reflect upon their in-class experiences, all seven students who remained in the class for its entire duration were invited to participate in the study. Two of the seven, Rukia and Amina, were unable to participate because they moved out of the city where the study took place and I was unable to reach them to interview them. I was also interested in my own development as an educator over the course of the class and throughout the research. The extensive experience I have had with the participants throughout the ten months I taught them, during which I became heavily involved in their personal and family lives, and the subsequent eight months when I have visited them as a family friend and interviewed

them for this study play a particularly important role in this research. These experiences have enhanced the richness of the study and the validity of its conclusions.

Although the children who were in my class are not the focus of this study, they have deeply informed my understanding of their mothers and the Somali Bantu culture. They continued to do so throughout the duration of the research even though they were not directly interviewed. The presence of the children and all they have taught me through our interactions and my observations of their interactions with their mothers have inevitably factored into the conclusions I drew.

Table 2: Student's names, ages, total number of children, and number and sex of children in the class

Name	Age of Student	Total Number of Children	Sex and Age of Children in the Class
Amina	80 †	6	n/a
Shukri	**60 ‡**	**4**	**n/a**
Shamsa	**40**	**8**	**F3½, M1**
Rukia	32 †	5	F3½
Rahamo	27*	1	M4*
Kadija	**26**	**6**	**F4, F3**
Asha	**26**	**4**	**F2, M(born 4 months into class)**
Halima	**22 ‡**	**3**	**F2½, M 8 months**
Luley	22*	3	M4*, M2*

Key:

Bold participants in this study
* students/children who left the class when they moved
‡, † mother and daughter pairs
F = Female, M = Male
Age is in years unless otherwise noted

Research Procedures

This case study follows five learners. Data was collected about the reflections of these learners' experiences as students in my class, the learners' personal histories, and

my own journey throughout the class and the research. I collected this data through semi-structured interviews with the participants and general observations and reflective journals which I completed. The audio of the interviews was transcribed; the transcriptions, observation notes, and reflective journal entries were subsequently coded as themes emerge.

Interviews

I have led over fifteen training sessions informing ESL practitioners about the Somali Bantu culture and history as well as introducing instructional techniques to be used with the Somali Bantu. It has been my experience that the majority of ESL instructors have a very generalized and cursory understanding of the culture and experiences of the Somali Bantu. I, therefore, intended to document the multiple realities, or the various interpretations of experiences by each individual, of the five participants through the examination of their reflections on their experiences in my classroom and their personal histories. Given the very low literacy levels of the participants, this was most easily achieved through the use of in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview format gave direction to the interviews while allowing the interviewees to narrow the focus of their responses to the ideas they felt were the most important. It also allowed me to follow-up on ideas, ask for clarification, and probe deeper into some responses (Arskey & Knight, 1999).

Interpreter

Through an interpreter, I originally planned to do two separate, one hour interviews with each of the participants. This was the procedure for the first three participants we interviewed: Shamsa, Asha, and Kadija. Due to both Jamila's (the interpreter) and Halima's time constraints, we completed both interviews with Shukri one day and came back and completed both with Halima the following day.

Given my lack of Mai Mai skills and my students' limited English skills, an interpreter was asked to participate in the study. I originally chose the interpreter, Jamila, a Somali, on the basis of her ESL Master's degree and experience in the field of adult ESL, her willingness to spend the time it takes to do fourteen interviews, and her interest in the experiences of the Somali Bantu refugees. I quickly realized that she had several other assets with regard to her likelihood of being trusted by the participants.

In my original thoughts about this study, I was very concerned about the issue of trust since the people available to act as interpreters were all ethnic-Somalis and given the historical experiences of these two groups, trust seemed a doubtful commodity. Therefore, the following information was shared with the participants as a way of building trust. While Jamila is an ethnic-Somali, she has lived outside of Somalia since 1980, meaning that she had no part in the civil war or its atrocities on the Somali Bantu population. Her mother is a refugee living in Canada; this was a particularly salient fact for the participants.

Kapborg and Berterö (2001) suggest a variety of ways of minimizing the effect of the validity issues raised when an interpreter is used in qualitative research. First they advise that the interpreter be well-informed about the field of research and

knowledgeable about the culture of the participants in addition to the necessary linguistic abilities. Jamila's knowledge of the adult ESL field in tandem with her Somali cultural and historical background proved invaluable. The year I spent teaching the participants and my continued involvement in their lives supports the recommendation that the researcher have extensive experience with the participants as it is only possible for a high level of trust to be developed over time. During this time, the researcher can also deepen her understanding of the culture. Finally, they suggest that the researcher have some understanding or experience with the language and/or culture of the participants. My extensive experience with the participants in addition to my other experiences in African countries provides me with a strong understanding of the culture of the women.

In an effort to engender trust between the interpreter and the participants, the first interview was designed to examine the student's motivation for taking ESL literacy classes, their opinions about my class, and their previous learning experiences. The second interview approached the more sensitive topic of the personal histories of the participants in Somalia and Kenya as compared to their lives in the United States. The first three participants interviewed were interviewed in this order while the last two participants completed both interviews in one sitting. See Appendix A for the complete set of key questions.

During the first interview, I demonstrated the function of the tape recorder by doing a practice run where the participants were able to hear their own voices. We began the interview after she had been informed verbally of my intentions and verbally consented to being interviewed and recorded (see Appendix for IRB waiver of written consent). During the interview, I asked the question in English then Jamila asked it to the

participants in Somali who responded in Somali and Mai Mai and finally Jamila told me the response in English. I subsequently transcribed the English parts of the recorded interviews for analysis. The total time of all the interviews was approximately eight hours.

Observations

The second data source consists of general observations that I made during the home-based interviews. In particular, I looked for print material in the home and any literacy activities displayed by the participants or members of their families such as children's writing, papers on the walls, or books out in the open. During the interview, I made quick notes to myself about these activities and then wrote at length about these observations upon returning home from the interview.

Personal Reflections

I was the instructor of the participants' literacy class for ten months. Now that I am no longer teaching these women, our relationship has evolved from instructor to friend. We spent over ten months together during which we experienced the growth of their children, personal and group crises, and the frustrations and joys of our past and present lives. In an attempt to document these experiences and the depth of our relationship, I wrote a reflective piece after each of the interviews on each of the participants describing my impressions of the student and my significant memories of that particular participant and her children. I was not aware that I would undertake this study while I was teaching the class so I unfortunately do not have a detailed journal of

my experiences. However, my memory of this class is vivid and I do have some brief notes and several personal emails that I wrote while teaching the class which I referred to as I wrote the reflective pieces.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts, observational notes, and reflective journal entries were analyzed with the research questions and Schumann's Acculturation model as a framework. The participants' answers and any commonalities were noted and listed under their corresponding research question category. After coding, the significant aspects that resulted from the interviews were analyzed and triangulated to the extent possible.

Limitations

There are several possible limitations to all studies and this is no exception. The nature of the population focused on within this study requires an interpreter for all interviews with the students. While Jamila was certainly as asset to this study, the need for interpretation creates an intermediary role. This role introduces another stage of interpretation through another set of lens beyond that of the researcher. Given my extremely limited Mai Mai vocabulary and the participants' improving but still limited English skills, it was not possible to remedy this expected limitation.

My strong relationship with the participants may have placed undue pressure on the participants during the interviews. As their former instructor, researcher, and friend, I am devoted to the success of these individuals and their families. While this is a

limitation in some regards, it was also an enormous asset since their trust in me increased their willingness to talk about complex personal experiences and hopes. Additionally, given the respect I have for them, I have done everything in my power to not intentionally hurt or misrepresent them. It remains that the relationship we have potentially factored into the responses the participants gave during the interviews.

As a former instructor asking students about their opinions of my class, they may have painted a prettier picture so as to not offend me. While my presence was necessary to engender trust and enhance the comfort of the participants, it also more than likely had an impact the responses of the participants. I attempted to account for this by telling the participants to be honest and re-wording questions when I wanted more information, but I remain aware that my presence might have, to some extent, affected their responses. Here, however, speaking to an interpreter might have mitigated this possibility as the participants and interpreter were speaking in a language I did not understand.

A total of five subjects is a very small population to study. All of the students in my class were asked to participate so as to have as many subjects as possible given the situation. Two were not able to participate because they moved out of state during the interview process. While this is a known limitation, this richly detailed study of five students provides some descriptive information about one population of literacy level students who are so often overlooked by researchers.

The reflective nature of the study does allow for extensive details and narrative from the time period during which the class actually took place. The lack of a personal journal detailing my experiences as well as the lack of writing/homework samples from the students is unfortunate and impedes a fully in-depth study. I believe that despite these

missing pieces the story of these women and the lessons learned from my experiences as their teacher and their experiences as my students are invaluable.

Finally, students were informed that their interviews were being recorded. I showed the students what the recorder does in the event that they had never seen such a device. By doing this, I intended to familiarize them with the machine so as to minimize their discomfort based on lack of knowledge. While they did not seem to be phased by the idea of being recorded and my attempt to minimize the effect, recording their answers may have affected their answers.

Chapter 4 – The Researcher's Perspective

The Class Through My Eyes

I received the phone call offering me a job teaching ESL literacy to several Somali Bantu women upstairs at a Boys and Girls Club while their children were cared for downstairs in August of 2004. I got off the phone and emailed friends and family ecstatic with the idea of this teaching position that fit my interests and personality so perfectly. I knew a great journey of learning and growth lay ahead of me though I do not think I knew the depths this journey would ultimately encompass. On a personal level, as a result of this experience, my worldview has been expanded to incorporate perspectives known to few in the US. As a teacher I took on a challenge in which I fell down many times just to get back up again, touched the peak, and laid in the bottom of the valley along the way.

The class began on September 20th and by September 27th the Boys and Girls Club setup had come to an abrupt end. One of the children had walked out the front door and was found by a concerned citizen who took him to the local police station. Shortly after this, the police department decided to shut down the class due to the lack of adequate childcare. I was devastated for my students who had a taste of what English classes could be like but quickly had it taken away from them. This setup had been created to meet the childcare needs of these families, thus allowing the mothers to attend English classes. Without childcare, the women would be unable to attend English classes and would not receive language skills vital to their ability to provide for their families

and negotiate life in the United States. I was also disappointed that this incredible opportunity had lasted only one short week.

My boss at the community college and the staff at the International Rescue Committee were equally upset. They set out to determine an alternative plan. Less than a month later, I received a phone call from my boss with a solution. She asked me if I would be willing to teach a class to a group of nine women who lived in an apartment complex together. I would teach in one of their homes with the women and all of the under-school aged children present. My boss informed me that this type of classroom situation is not common practice, but I said I was up for the challenge and hung up the phone in disbelief. Did the dream job just become dreamier? It sure had.

I walked into Rukia's home on October 20th and held our first class in the new setting. In an email to a friend written after the first class in Rukia's home I wrote, "I can't even explain how incredible the experience I just had was! I'm ridiculously happy." And so we began again. This set-up would last almost a year until August of 2005.

When I look back at my lesson plans from the first three or four months, I am appalled at the speed with which I covered topics and the types of activities I attempted. Along the way, my understanding of the many things individuals raised in a literate environment take for granted increased. I also learned first-hand the length of time learning takes for individuals with no literacy backgrounds; the Mainstream English Language Training project (1985) stated that it will take longer than 1000 hours of instruction, the maximum for learners with some literacy skills, to achieve basic communicative second language skills. Throughout the entire experience, the success of a new activity was never ensured. Trial and error became my main methodology. I often

began activities and realized half way or three-fourths of the way through that it just was not working and I would gently end the activity and move on to something else. This was an intensely challenging way of teaching but occurred out of necessity given the rare educational and personal backgrounds of my students. There are few documented techniques that are known to be effective with this population and so I, like other teachers of adult ESL literacy to preliterate populations, had to develop my own.

The class focused on the following topics: personal information, filling out applications, body parts, medicine, health, emergencies, clothing, days of the week, dates and time, money, food, and family. Throughout the actual instruction of these topics, a few activities stood out as significantly successful or unsuccessful.

Successful Activities

Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) was particularly effective (the technique is described in detail in Chapter 2). In the class we did a few LEA activities with different themes. The first and perhaps the most significant LEA was entitled "Our Class Story". Each of the students told the class about themselves using the English they could in answering the following questions: "What is your name?", "How old are you?", "What is your husband's name?", "How many children do you have?", "Where are you from?", and "How long have you been in America?" One student per class period told us her answers and when we had completed the LEA with each student I handed out the compiled class story.

The day remains one of my favorite teaching moments. All of the students looked at me like I was crazy as I handed them this sheet of paper with so much writing on it. I began to read what was on the page and they began to connect the LEA activities we had done in class to what the paper had written on it. They became very excited and wanted to know where their part was and eagerly looked for their names within all of the writing. Two students, Kadija and Shamsa, insisted that they read the entire paper out loud to me. As they read I had tears in my eyes. This was the first time they had, in their lives, known what was on a piece of paper and read from a piece of paper. I chose this information for the paragraphs because they could communicate it and I assumed they knew some of the information about each other, making them very familiar with the content. Therefore, I am not naïve enough to think that they did not memorize the little paragraphs but as they read along they did attempt to sound out words and pointed to the words. The self confidence building nature of this moment was incredible, it was a definite peak in my teaching experience in which I began to see for the first time that they were really beginning to get some of the literacy concepts we had been talking about and felt proud of their accomplishments.

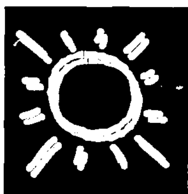
Initial Consonant Sounds Activity

In order to assist my students in making the connection between the spoken word and the written word, I introduced initial consonant sounds. My student's lack of an extensive vocabulary in tandem with my desire to incorporate the language and culture of my students inspired me to use my student's names, the names of individuals in their families, and simple Mai Mai words to introduce this concept. I believe this was an

effective means of introducing the concept of initial consonant sounds to my students. I claim this because there were a few sounds that I was unable to find Mai Mai words to associate them with, despite their existence in Mai Mai. I, therefore, had to use English words which I had taught them but with which they were not as familiar with as the names of those close to them. These sounds remained more difficult for them to remember throughout the entire class while the sounds associated with more familiar words were easily recalled by the students.

In order to assist students in remembering which letters represent which sounds, I created a sequence in which they said the letter and then the sound associated with that letter and a standard word which began with that letter and sound (eg. "R" = /r/ = Rukia). In class, I would say the letter "R" and the students would then say: the sound /r/ and the word Rukia alternatively I would say the sound /r/ and expect the students to say the letter "R" and the word Rukia or I would say Rukia and expect the students to say the sound /r/ and the letter "R". As the class progressed, I incorporated this knowledge by asking the students to help me spell words by saying the word and asking them what I should write. For example if I said, "mouth" the students might try to work it out by saying the sound /m/ or Maryan, our word associated with the letter "M", and I would elicit the letter "M" from these responses or they would simply say the letter "M" which I would then write on the board. (See the appendix for the list of initial consonant sounds for the class.)

Photos and Pronouns

The use of visual representation of objects is ineffective with preliterate populations as they are unfamiliar with these representations which really do not reflect the real object (Hvitfeldt, 1985). It has also been determined that a quick sketch of the sun  has no meaning to preliterate learners and actually may look more like a new letter of the alphabet than a representation of the sun (as it does to most individuals who were raised in literate environments). For this reason, it is suggested that only real pictures be used to introduce objects to preliterate learners. The real pictures may then be used to scaffold (support) the students into recognizing and understanding standard visual representations. I discovered this the hard way and towards the end developed one of my more successful activities. In this activity, I used real photos of my students, their children, objects in their apartments, and myself to teach pronouns. Pronouns were a particularly difficult part of speech for my students and their incorrect use of them greatly confused meaning. Explaining the use of pronouns with a limited working vocabulary is not a simple task so I decided to take pictures of my students and objects in their homes and make flashcards with the pictures. I used these to demonstrate who I was referring to when I said “I”, “You”, “She”, etc. We used this exercise for at least two months and it effectively helped to clarify the distinctions between the meanings of the different pronouns as the students began using them correctly more frequently.

Less Successful Activities

Make Believe Books

On another, less positive, occasion, I decided to read a very basic book out loud so that the little kids could listen and look at the pictures along with the parents. I chose a book in which a woman goes to a make believe market and buys items starting with every letter of the alphabet. The students struggled immensely with the concept of make believe; they wanted to know if it was the market down the street from them. I could not get across to them that someone thought this up and that it does not really exist. The abstract conceptualization of places and ideas outside of one's reality was difficult for the learners, possibly due to the fact that their lives are so intensely based in the reality of survival and their lack of exposure to "make believe" and similar activities. Teaching this type of concept was severely inhibited by our lack of a mutual language. In order to avoid this confusion, I began to develop a storybook using pictures of myself, the women and their children, the apartment complex, and their older children's school. I was in the midst of this project when the class came to an end, but I plan to use the idea in a future class as my experiences make me believe it will be effective.

Wilson Literacy Program

I spent some time towards the very end of the class experimenting with the adaptation of Wilson reading materials, a literacy program for adult native English speakers, for use with non-native preliterate learners. The program is phonics-based and seemed a nice compliment to my initial consonant sound activities. The main focus is on letters representing sounds which the students can manipulate. The idea is to begin with

the student using their finger tips to mark each sound in the word – for example with the word, cat (phonetically /kăt/), students put their thumb and pointer finger tips together on the /k/, on the /ă/ they put their thumb and middle finger tips together, and on the /t/ they put their thumb and ring finger tips together. The instructor then connects the sounds to their corresponding letters /k/ = c, /ă/ = a, and /t/ = t. The students then move to manipulating big cards with the letters c, a, and t on them, then manipulating smaller magnets with c, a, and t on them, and finally the students attempt to write the letters c-a-t as a word. My students had already been writing so we had broken one of Wilson's main rules without even starting, but the tactile finger tip aspect and the puzzle of putting the sounds on the magnets together to make the word were effective as well as enjoyed by the students. I think using this program was reasonably successful although in its purest form it uses words that are not easily explainable without a large working English vocabulary, made up words which would only serve to confuse the beginning ESL learner, and words that are not highly functional or useful additions to a beginning English speaker's vocabulary. In the end, I think the tactile aspect of this program is valuable. Since this program is intended for a native speaker audience, the majority of the program must be highly modified to ensure its effectiveness and decrease the aspects that cause confusion for non-native speakers.

Small Group Set-up

On a more administrative level, about six months into the class I saw three levels of proficiency emerging amongst the eight students I had at that time. I also knew that a great deal of adult first language literacy is conducted one-on-one or in groups of three or

four. I decided to try to split the group into three groups and work with them for shorter more intensive periods of time throughout the week. This had the additional benefit of lessening the number of children around as we worked, decreasing the distractions and allowing the students to focus better. The students despised this arrangement. This trial set-up made the social aspect of our class especially evident to me. The students expressed discontent at not getting out of the house as often and interacting with fewer of the women throughout class. For my students, the class was, perhaps primarily, a rare moment for social interaction with each other and with an American and an enjoyable reason to get out of the house, at least as much as an educational experience. We quickly returned to the large group setting.

Painful Memories and The Housing Crisis

Over time the challenge became less about teaching and more about personal, emotional involvement in the lives of my students. After about five months there were a few occasions in which my students expressed memories of the traumatic events in their pasts during which they watched as their husbands and other family members were killed or they themselves were tortured (see the end of this chapter and Chapter 5 for further details). They usually physically reenacted these events due to their lack of verbal English language to express such events. Obviously this presentation, while necessary, was very difficult and intensely emotional to witness. I am deeply honored by their desire to communicate these experiences to me despite the fact that they had to physically imitate such horrific things that had happened to them or in front of them.

Another intense experience took place during the last three months of the class. All of my students were sent letters informing them that their leases would not be renewed. I was the first one to see them after they got the letters so they asked me what the letter said. I explained it to them and also called the interpreter at the International Rescue Committee to have him explain it to them in Mai Mai. The eviction date came and went for most of them two times and for one of them once. Throughout the entire three months they were anxious and fearful that they and their families would be rendered homeless. I could see the fear on their faces daily. Being in another potentially traumatic situation brought to surface a great many emotions and caused the signs of post traumatic stress syndrome to come out in full force. Many of them were not sleeping or sleeping all the time; not eating or eating too much; or completely emotion-less, overly emotional, or unpredictably emotional.

The housing crisis, as I referred to it with friends and family, ended with most of them finding housing after two to three possible evictions in which no one communicated to them until the day before or, more often, that day that everything would be okay. Additionally, two of the students received non-renewal of lease notices in error and were not told until the middle of the third month after they received the erroneous notices. The anxiety my students were unnecessarily put through was deeply disturbing to me as was witnessing the effect this anxiety had on them. I was not made aware that strings would be pulled at the last moment to extend their leases one more month, so I also went through the anxiety along with them but differently as my eviction was not pending. In the end of this housing crisis, the students found housing, but they were spread across the city, making the class no longer feasible.

The Students Through My Eyes

As a means of introducing the participants, I will provide brief anecdotes and impressions of each of them as students and individuals. The descriptions are void of information gained in the interviews. Interviewing the participants with Jamila was the first time in over a year of knowing the participants that I had unlimited access to an interpreter. Therefore, these introductions to the participants are my notions prior to communicating with them at length through an interpreter. These impressions were only confirmed and furthered through the interview process.

Asha

Asha is a twenty-seven[‡] year old mother of three girls and two boys. She was pregnant when we began the class in September of 2004 and gave birth to her son Mohammed in December. We happened to be in class the day she went into labor. She got up in the middle of class and said, "Teacher, baby coming." while making gestures imitating a baby coming out of her and quickly left. This is a great example of her linguistic adventurousness; she was always willing to try to communicate. From day one, she seemed to have no hesitations about speaking, correctly or incorrectly, in English. Getting her point across, through whatever means was always Asha's priority. Another distinct memory of Asha occurred as the students, their children, and I sang the "hokey pokey" during a class on body parts. Always quick to laugh and see the humor of a situation, she literally fell over from laughing at the silliness of the song and our actions.

[‡] All ages are approximations, as the Somali Bantu did not record ages as we do in the United States. All ages were determined in the refugee camps in order to process their paperwork.

When I think of Asha, I often conjure up the image of her on the ground, giggling away or going through heroics, both verbal and non-verbal, to communicate something to me.

Kadija

Kadija is a twenty-seven year old mother of five girls and one boy. A passionate, lively soul, you can always count on Kadija to have an opinion. If she agrees with you, you are in luck; if she disagrees with you prepare yourself for a heated argument. During the housing crisis, Kadija was extremely upset by the situation and shared her frustrations with the group regularly. She did this in Mai Mai but despite my inability to understand but a few words of Mai Mai, I always understood Kadija's stance given her impassioned orations. On one of the first days of the housing situation, she came in with the most desperate eyes and said, "No house, no food, no job, no money…babies street." My heart broke as I looked into her eyes, heard her words, and could offer no solace. While bold and proud, Kadija also was quick to smile and joke. She was one of the first to really reach out to me, on one occasion by dressing me in her own headscarf. As Kadija put the headscarf on me, the rest of the students looked on with great joy (see Figure 6). This act was one of great significance to me as it symbolized their acceptance of me. On another occasion, she pointed out to me one of the children who had crawled between two of the couches and was looking snug in his new little home. She knew that I would find this cute and/or funny because she had quickly become accustomed to my sense of humor. She was also the first to invite me to her home to eat lunch with her and her children.

Shamsa

Shamsa is a forty year old mother of five girls and three boys. As the third oldest of the group, Shamsa was the quiet source of wisdom who often sat back and observed and then stepped in to quell an argument. She was the most advanced student in terms of reading skills as she had her daughters help her at home. As a single mother, her need to learn English to help provide for her family seemed to provide her with more motivation than the others. Shamsa stands out in my mind as an incredibly good mother. Her parenting techniques were impressive. Her amiable personality gave her the position of the quiet leader. Shamsa is holding onto her traditional ways more intensely than the younger learners. I witnessed this each morning as she greeted each woman with a handshake and a long-winded greeting while the younger women were less consistent about greeting in this manner and leaned more and more towards a short "good morning" like greeting. Another example of her proclivity to hold on to her own culture and another of my favorite memories is Shamsa's son Idris learning to shake hands the Somali Bantu way.

> *Adorable...the group teaching Idris how to shake hands "Somali Bantu style". They showed him how to do it and he practiced around half of the room. Then Shamsa said, "Teacher Colleen." So here comes the little guy with his hand outstretched. We shook hands, then I kissed the top of his hand and then he kissed the top of my hand. We both passed the test, We did it correctly and received a lot of laughter in return. He then finished the rest of the room. Such a sweet moment of passing on the culture.*
>
> *(Personal Journal, July 6, 2005)*

Asha and Kadija always showed an eagerness to acculturate and adapt to use more "western" ways within their homes and with their children. When I taught them about the thermostat, how to open their windows, or how to check who was at the door before opening it, they were always the most attentive and enthusiastic of the students. Neither of them ever showed the desire to give up their own cultural ways, but they did exhibit the willingness to do some things the American way. Asha, Kadija, and Shamsa advanced the furthest during the class. Kadija and Shamsa were particularly adept at comprehending the basic underlying concepts of reading and writing.

Halima

Halima is a twenty-two year old mother of one daughter and two sons. Her mother, Shukri was also in the class. She was always an eager student especially when it came to reciting entire dialogues verbatim. She had a knack for hearing things and remembering them, but reading and writing was a great challenge for her. She is one of the students that I suspected had a learning disability. Writing was difficult for her as she often reversed her letters. What she heard she seemed to remember, but once it was associated with writing, retention became more difficult. Although Halima was quick to laugh or shoot you a smile, she always seemed a bit downtrodden, often tired, and sad. She was one of the first to find a job and I think her work schedule and her household duties took a toll on her. She struggled more overtly with "American ways" despite her great desire to succeed here.

One of the more humorous memories I walk away from this experience with involves Halima and "my husband". As a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, I learned to

handle inquiries into my marital status with humor. I knew that the Somali Bantu probably had similar expectations of women within their culture, that they should be married before my age at the time, twenty-six. I decided to try and take one of the small children as my husband because I had done this in Ghana and it had worked. So the first time I was asked about my husband, I said I did not have one but indicated that I wanted Abdi, Halima's son, to be my husband. I chose him because at the time he was the youngest male child. Of course, they recognized the silliness of my statement, and it began a joke that would last throughout the entirety of the class and beyond. Each morning I would greet Abdi with, "Good morning, my husband." Halima, always a good sport about this little game, would often speak for Abdi by saying, "Good morning my wife." This little joke deterred them from the topic of my marital status and distracted them with laughter.

Shukri

Shukri is a fifty-eight year old mother of one boy and three girls, one of which is Halima. Shukri was the second oldest of the group. She appeared to receive a great deal of respect from the other students, most likely a result of her mid-wife role in Somalia and the refugee camps in Kenya. She was unabashed about her love for her culture and language. Her eyes lit up each time I asked for a word in Mai Mai and as I pronounced the word her endearing smile often changed into a supportive laugh. Shukri is the quintessential grandmother whose words of wisdom and nurturing touch you long for. We could always count on Shukri for a silly dance or chant or a joke. While often in the

role of our class clown, Shukri was the first to share the horrors she had endured in Somalia. Her past clearly haunted her daily and she wanted (or needed) to share her pain.

The day remains crystal clear in my memory, a testament to the intensity of the moment. My supervisor had stopped in to collect registration forms. This was the first time we had done the more thorough forms and had to get information that I had not yet discovered about them: such as if they were married, single, widowed, or divorced. Shukri said she was single. I knew she had children so I knew she must have been married at some point. I tried to clarify this information through gestures and she confirmed that her husband had been killed. After she said yes, she began to sob. The other students began laughing and my supervisor and I were very confused. I later determined with the help of Jamila that she most likely said something in Mai Mai to lighten the air. If everyone in that room began to think about all those who had been killed, Shukri realized they would all begin to sob and as the class clown to the end, she made a joke to save the others from their memories.

After the other students had left, I asked Shukri if she was okay. Even though I knew she probably did not understand what that meant, I hoped that my facial expression would give me away. She then began to explain to me what had happened by reenacting the event. She made cutting motions at her cheek, her upper left arm, and her side. To clarify, I got a knife from the kitchen and she said yes. She showed me darker skin areas which I assumed were burn marks. I pretended to cook and pointed demonstratively to where the flame would be and she again confirmed my suspicions. She then turned around and put her hands behind her and motioned in circles around her hands and her feet, I assumed she had been tied up. I took my coat sleeve and tied it around my legs

and she said yes. She then insinuated that she was face down and said, "Husband", pointed in front of her, made a gunshot sound, and began shaking her head no and sobbing again.

Even as I write this now, almost a year and a half later, tears come to my eyes. It is hard to imagine from my position in this world, how Shukri goes through each day and with such joy and humor. The helplessness and powerlessness I felt in that moment were beyond my imagination. This woman, who I view as my own grandmother, had been treated so inhumanely and there are so few tangible things I can do to ease her pain. The power of listening and compassion are lessons Shukri taught me in that moment. I cannot do more for her than listen and have compassion but perhaps this at least helped.

From this moment on, my relationship with Shukri deepened in an unexplainable way. I think she saw that I cared and I saw her strength and spirit. She was by far the most difficult to look in the face as the class came to an end in August of 2005. Leaving her was like abandoning your own grandmother; while I planned to still visit her I knew it was not going to be the same. She also knew this, as when I did get up the courage to look her in the eyes, I saw tears streaming down her face. The lessons in forgiveness, living life to the fullest despite any number of reasons to be unhappy, and the power of laughter Shukri taught me will always make me laugh, smile, and warm my heart.

The students as a whole

While each of the students in the class had distinct personalities, they have each, in their own ways, shared their lives and wisdom with me. Collectively they taught me about perseverance and resilience in the face of past and present hardships I can only

begin to understand. Their shared desire to learn, to laugh, and to be accepted as well as their willingness to teach, to make others laugh, and to welcome others into their lives showed me that the positive aspect of humanity can withstand the pressures of the worst sides of humanity. The ease with which these women laugh, the warmth of their hearts, and the persevering attitude with which they approached learning despite the journey life has taken them on has given me a renewed since of hope and a changed perspective about life in general.

Jamila - The Cultural Informant/Interpreter

Jamila, the interpreter utilized throughout this study, is an ethnic Somali who has been living in the United States since 1980. Jamila is currently a doctoral student in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She received her master's degree from the University of Findlay in ESL education and has extensive experience in the ESL field as both an instructor and a teacher trainer. Despite the fact that Jamila currently lives in another state and commutes to the state where the interviews took place for a day or two a week, she graciously offered to assist with the interview process upon hearing about my experiences with the literacy class and my intention to conduct this study.

Jamila has not lived in Somalia since 1980, nor has she returned to Somalia since 1988. She therefore did not experience the events leading up to the civil war nor the civil war itself. As a member of her family and the ever-growing Somali immigrant and refugee community in the United States, she has, however, heard countless reports and stories secondhand. Her parents are living in Canada and have refugee status. Her

mother left their home as the threat of violence in the area where they lived increased. She left the home in their watchman's care and after fleeing to Djibouti, learned that the house had been ransacked and looted and that their watchman, of many years, had been killed in the process. While Jamila did not witness these events or any of the violence that has occurred and continues to occur in Somalia since 1991, as a Somali citizen it is not possible for her to remain apart from these realities.

Jamila readily joined this project showing great concern for the struggles of refugees, especially Somali refugees. As previously mentioned, I had some reservations about using an ethnic Somali as an interpreter given the historical relationship between them and the Somali Bantu. In the end, the lines drawn between ethnic and non-ethnic Somalis seem to become blurred as they arrive in the United States. On some levels, I imagine the mistrust is still present but on other levels it appears that the Somali community is becoming one in the struggle to survive as refugees and immigrants in the United States. The participants immediately welcomed Jamila into their homes and readily shared their concerns, hopes, and confusion with her.

On the way to our first interview, I mentioned to Jamila that some of the interviews might be rather emotional in nature. I wondered, on a cultural level, how she would suggest that we handle these situations. She told me that she does not become emotional in these situations and would just gently console and then move away from the more disturbing topics. As the interviews continued, I watched Jamila become more and more emotionally involved and connected to these women. It was a joy to be able to share in her journey as I watched her become attached as I had while their teacher. The

dynamic personalities of the participants along with the struggles they have endured and continue to endure seem to have a magnetic effect on those with whom they interact.

The two participants, Shukri and Kadija, who were willing to share their emotionally laden personal struggles, became particularly dear to Jamila. She has put both of these women in touch with her mother and Shukri in touch with her father. Additionally, her mother has sent gifts to Kadija. Jamila described her father as an intellectual who held a position in Siad Barre's government and her mother as a traditional, uneducated housewife. Watching Jamila call her mother and give the phone to these women, whom according to Jamila has general prejudices about them, and then hearing that her mother has not only been willing to talk with them but also compelled to send gifts has been indescribable. The crumbling of the walls of prejudice and intolerance that are keeping their homeland in turmoil may be one of the few positive results stemming from the horrific Somali civil war. To have witnessed this firsthand has been a privilege beyond words.

The interview with Shukri in which she showed us the physical markers of the violence she endured when rebels attacked her village was of great significance to Jamila. Shukri not only shared her experiences with us, but during the interview we discovered that Shukri's husband and Jamila share the same clan. Shukri was brought to tears and Jamila was clearly impacted by this news. Shukri went on to describe in great detail the torture she endured and how she narrowly escaped death. As soon as we left the house after this interview, Jamila stated that she wanted to help these women as much as possible when she moves back to this east coast city. The self-proclaimed un-emotional

Jamila had become emotionally attached. We did interview Halima the next day and Jamila told me how intense the experience had been for her.

She explained that for years she has heard the horrors of the civil war, but she had not seen the physical representation of this horror. I told her of the first time I had heard Shukri's story in which Shukri physically reenacted what had been done to her. My reaction had been similar to Jamila's but I do not believe it compares with the way that she received this information. My Somali connections encompass approximately forty Somali Bantus, seven of whom I know intimately, and Jamila. Jamila, on the other hand, knows hundreds of Somalis whose stories materialized in front of her as Shukri spoke and showed us her scars. Whether or not her intention of working with them upon returning to the area materializes, Jamila has been positively touched and has touched the lives of the participants and myself.

Jamila brought many strengths with her as an interpreter/cultural informant. Her non-involvement in Somalia during the onset of and throughout the civil war, her parents' refugee status, her extensive knowledge of both Somali and American cultures, her ESL background, her family roots in southern Somalia (near the home of the Somali Bantu population), and her concern and passion for the Somali refugee population in the United States combined to make her an ideal interpreter. However, having even the best interpreter does not eradicate validity concerns with the use of a third party in research.

Research is the interpretation of data. The use of an interpreter adds another layer of interpretation which raises concerns about the quality of the information received through this conduit. What might the interpreter filter out; what might she add in; when is she adding her own perceptions to the information are but a few questions that arise.

This was of course a concern with Jamila despite the valuable perspective she brought to the study.

Time constraints made validating the interpretation very difficult. Jamila was volunteering her time and, understanding her limited time as a doctoral student, mother, and instructor, I could not ask her to transcribe the interviews from verbal Mai Mai into written Somali and then into written English. Therefore, throughout the interviews I would ask the question in English and Jamila would give me the response in English. These responses were often summarized because as an ethnic Somali, Jamila speaks Af-Somali not Af-Maay (aka Mai Mai) as the Somali Bantu participants do. The two languages are fairly similar but often Jamila found herself negotiating the meaning of what was being said before translating it into English to me. These extra steps made direct translation nearly impossible.

These issues could not be eradicated for several reasons. Obviously given my extremely limited Mai Mai vocabulary I needed an interpreter to conduct this study. There exist few Mai Mai speakers who are fluent enough in English to reliably translate. Those who are fluent enough are extremely busy interpreting at hospitals and doctor's offices, and other social services appointments for the entire Somali Bantu population in this east coast city. Therefore requesting them to use their limited spare time to interpret for me with little or no compensation was not an option. However, I believe these concerns became insignificant as the many advantages of Jamila's background and perspective began to emerge throughout the interviews.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I act as the narrator setting the stage, introducing the setting, and describing the characters. As the narrator, I gave my own perspective on the events that took place throughout the class and the interviews. Introducing the setting, the classroom, and the characters, the participants and Jamila allows for familiarity with the key components of this study. Examining the environment and players from my perspective allowed a more comprehensive view of the variety of roles I have played throughout this experience: teacher, advisor, researcher, and fellow human. The background knowledge provided in this chapter allows a deeper look into the experiences of the participants while examining their interview responses.

"The world is day and night. A person who is alive in the day time may be dead by the night time. Someone who is alive in the night may be dead by day. So we should take advantage of our time." - **Shukri**

Chapter 5 – The Participants' Perspectives

Introduction

The previous chapter approached the class and the participants from the perspective of the researcher. While this point of view is of great value, it paints an incomplete picture lacking the individual voices of the participants. In this chapter, the participants will be introduced in more detail through the use of this study's research questions as a framework for examining the interview data and will conclude by positioning the participants within Schumann's Acculturation Model.

By way of introduction to the group as a whole, I include here descriptions about the group as reported by the students themselves during the interviews. The participants range in age from approximately 23 to 55 and they are all mothers of three or more children. Halima is the youngest, has the least number of children, and is the only one who is currently pregnant, with her fourth child, while Shamsa is the oldest of the younger generation of participants and has the most children of the group with a total of eight. Shukri is the oldest participant and Shukri and Shamsa both stated that they had lost children. Shamsa had two twins that died and Shukri told me that three of her children were killed by rebels when her husband was killed and she was attacked. All of the mothers reported that their children enjoy living in the United States and attending

school. Halima was the only one who was employed, at a towel manufacturing factory, when the interviews took place. I have subsequently found out that Kadija has found work at the same factory since the interviews ended.

During the interviews, the participants discussed the current locations of their family members. I learned that their families are spread out between Somalia, Kakuma (a Kenyan refugee camp), and various cities in the United States. Kadija was the only one to report that all of her siblings were in the United States. Half of both Asha's and Shamsa's siblings are in Somalia and the other half are in the US. Shukri and Shamsa's parents died a long time ago and Halima's father, also Shukri's husband, was killed during the Civil War. Some of Shukri's siblings died a while ago and others were killed in the Civil War while two of her children, also Halima's siblings, live in Kakuma and the other two, including Halima, live in the US. With this background knowledge in mind, I will now explore the participants' interview responses in more detail.

What are the personal and educational experiences of the Somali Bantu women participants?

Personal Experiences

Somalia

The interview questions about Somalia focused on the participants' roles as mothers and so their answers discuss their experiences through the lens of motherhood. Halima and Kadija were not mothers in Somalia and reported that life there was good for them. Shamsa and Asha both spoke of being farmers. They both owned their own land and farmed a variety of vegetables such as corn, beans, cabbage, squash, and potatoes.

Their children were too young to go to school but Shamsa stated that there were schools for her children to attend when they got older, while Asha said there were no schools available to her children.

Shukri enjoyed life in Somalia which she made clear as she explained her life as a mid-wife, a profession she learned from her mother and grandmother through watching them as a young child. Overall, the other participants did not speak favorably nor unfavorably about their lives in Somalia. Instead they discussed the experiences in rather matter-of-fact terms. This was noticeable only in contrast to their discussions of their other two places of residence about which they were overtly positive or negative.

Variation from printed sources regarding Somali Bantus historical experience

The sources cited in the first chapter of this study state several historical facts that I have not been able to corroborate through the interviews with the participants. The interviewees made no mention of slavery in their pasts and when asked directly about this, they appeared to have never heard about their own relatives or ancestors experiencing such a thing. Shukri did say that she had heard from her parents and other elders that the colonial powers of Britain and Italy did terrible things to the natives, but that she had not heard anything about slavery.

Shukri's husband was of the same tribe as Jamila, meaning that he was an ethnic Somali. Shukri is therefore an ethnic Somali by marriage. All of the sources on the Somali Bantu that I could find stated that intermarriage between ethnic Somalis and Somali Bantus was forbidden. Jamila stated that this was true, but during the regime of Siad Barre, division amongst the tribes was abolished and intermarriage was allowed. When he was assassinated these divisions were brought back, with a vengeance, in the

form of the clan war. Despite the fact that Jamila and Shukri are from the same tribe, they are from different clans and depending on the circumstances it would be possible in present day Somalia for their clans to fight against each other even though they are of the same tribe.

All of the participants that farmed in Somalia stated that they owned their own land. This is also contrary to the reports I read about the life of the Somali Bantu prior to the Civil War. Additionally, contrary to printed sources Shamsa said that her children would have been able to attend school had the war not started. The other participants were in agreement with the documents as they said that there was no opportunity for their children to go to school in Somalia.

Kenya

All of the participants stated that they walked for two or more weeks to arrive in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya after violence had entered the region of Somalia in which they had lived. After approximately eight years in the Dadaab refugee camp, most of the Somali Bantu were transported to Kakuma refugee camp to begin the process of being resettled. Shukri spoke only of her work as a mid-wife in Kenya. She was able to take a class to gain further knowledge about stitching techniques involved in caring for new mothers. She also worked with Christian mothers for the first time. The other participants spoke of the difficulties in the type of work available, the lack of work, lack of schooling, and the minimal food available through United Nations rations. Asha and Shamsa both made their livings through weaving mats to sell or barter; Halima and Kadija did not work while in either refugee camp. No mention was made in any way of

violence in the camps; rather their focus was on food, work, and the lack of schooling available to their children.

United States

The participants were the most critical of their lives in the US, expressing both positives and negatives. Kadija and Halima found the constant need for money in the US troubling, but expressed that they enjoy living here especially because of the educational opportunities for their children. Halima expressed disdain at the constant movement of Americans and life in America: "People here are always moving, never resting." Halima also discussed raising children in the US: "It is very hard here with children, it is much easier to raise children in Africa." Asha spoke of the comfort brought by her husband's constant, biweekly income as well as the joy she finds in the incredible array of food available in US grocery stores. She is frustrated, however, by the lack of medical insurance which does not allow her to give her children the best care when they are ill. Shamsa also enjoys the ability to get groceries to feed her children and the education available to her children. Shamsa wisely stated that life in the US was the easiest but that she does not work and she, therefore, felt that she could not speak about the way life would be for her here if she had to work. She imagined it would be much more difficult. Shukri was the only one to be completely negative about life in the US when she poignantly stated, "Here I make no money, I don't do anything, I am worthless. I don't have my own money, only a little money from the government. I don't have soap and I can't provide for my basic needs. I would like to have a job to support myself and make my own money, but I can't do anything here." This seems to be a reasonable assessment

given her inability to perform the mid-wife work she enjoyed so much due to her health and the educational requirements for such work in the US. Additionally, she has lost the stature that the mid-wife position holds within the Somali Bantu culture.

In response to the question inquiring about what it is like to be a wife in the United States as compared to Kenya and Somalia, Asha spoke only of not being able to spend as much time together with her husband because he is always at work. Halima said that her and her husband are both working and also see very little of each other, but she did not seem to lament this as much as Asha. Husbands who had more than one wife were required to choose one to be married to during their life in the United States. Shamsa was the first wife of her husband, but was not chosen and so she lives in the US as a single mother receiving child support from her husband. When discussing this situation she said, "In Africa, I was doing it all by myself even though he was there with them – I did all the work. So now it is not more difficult, actually it is easier." Kadija also discussed marital problems related to the issue of multiple wives. She was chosen by her husband to be his only wife in the US, but the other wife causes a lot of tension amongst Kadija and her husband which was not an issue in Somalia and Kenya. It was implied by both Kadija and Shamsa that their husbands maintain relationships with both wives despite their divorces for US legal purposes.

Conclusion

Most participants saw life in Somalia as relatively neutral; nothing remarkable. Shukri was the only one to say that life there was the best as she was able to be a mid-wife and live her life as she knew it. Shukri was also the only one to speak positively of

life in Kenya, again because she could work as a mid-wife. Overall there was great disdain amongst the other participants for life in the Kenyan refugee camps of Dadaab and Kakuma. Kakuma, the camp where the participants were moved to for resettlement processing, was far and away the most unpleasant experience for the participants, except Shukri, because of the climate, the lack of food, and the lack of income-generating opportunities. Shukri was also the only one to not look favorably on her life in the US, while the others were balanced and critical about their experiences in the US thus far.

Educational Experiences

The past educational experiences of the participants were, as expected, very limited. None of the women attended school in Somalia while some of the women reported that they had English classes in the Kakuma refugee camp. The participants stated that the classes in Kakuma were of questionable quality. Kadija said that yes, she did learn English but she only remembers three words. Shamsa told us that she learned only the alphabet and Halima claimed to not have learned anything. All of the participants began the class with some knowledge of the alphabet. They were relatively adept at copying the letters from the board and could recite the alphabet in its entirety. Although when I pointed to a letter within the alphabet, out of sequence, they were unable to recognize it or recall its name. The fact that the students had some knowledge of the alphabet and knew how to copy the letters of the alphabet called into question their reports about their English instruction in Kakuma. I speculate that the courses did not meet their standards or were taught mostly in Mai Mai and were therefore totally dismissed by the students. When Halima reported that she learned nothing in her English

class in Kakuma, I asked her how she knew the alphabet and she admitted to having learned the alphabet in the class. Her dismissal of this knowledge is interesting though I could not get her to further explain why she ignored this aspect of her education in Kenya.

My course was the first ESL class the participants took in the US and for many of them it is thus far the last. Shamsa has been taking classes at the local community college since my class ended. Asha was able to take a class for about two months while her husband was laid off and, therefore, able to take care of the children when she was at school. Shukri takes care of Halima's children while she is at work making it difficult for either of them to attend classes. Kadija was not working when the interviews took place but had to take care of her youngest child who was taken out of pre-school when they moved homes. Now that her youngest has been re-enrolled into a pre-school, Kadija has been able to get a job but is still not able to attend ESL classes.

How do the participants view their experiences as students in my classroom?

Overall, the participants expressed content with the way my course was taught, showed remorse at the fact that the class ended, and stated that they use the English they learned in my class in a variety of ways in their everyday life. The participants pointed out specific things that they liked about the class. Shamsa enjoyed the fact that I used a lot of repetition in class, as it was helpful for her to hear things repeated several times. Shukri was grateful that she learned how to write her name for the first time: "I was not intelligent, I couldn't write my name. Now I can write my name, I know how to write it." This was especially poignant given her recent stroke and her current inability to use her

right hand, which means that she was able to write her name for only a short period of time. I did share with her that being able to write your name has no impact on one's intelligence, but despite my opinion, the fact that sees herself in this new way appears to be important for her own self-confidence and esteem. Halima said that learning the days of the week, months of the year, and the numbers in English has been really helpful for her especially in regards to her job. Halima also told us that she got her apartment by herself by reciting a monologue I taught them in class and performed the monologue for us during the interview! Asha highlighted the fact that I wrote down most of what I said in class which helped her realize that writing is connected to what we say while Kadija focused on how she has been able to use her knowledge of initial consonant sounds and the alphabet to use the bus and to recognize her name and her children's names.

The participants overwhelmingly expressed their discontent with the course coming to an end. In fact, the only complaint they were willing to make about the course was that it ended and that they no longer have the opportunity to learn English. Shamsa and Asha expressed their interest in going further with learning to read. Shamsa said, "I have mastered the alphabet. Now I really want to learn to be able to put the letters together to make a word. That is where I am stuck, but I want to learn that." Asha stated, "I was realistic because I started with the alphabet; there are many things I would have liked to have learned from your class but how could I learn those when I had to first learn the alphabet. What I needed, I was able to learn; now I would like to learn more about putting the letters together."

The students told me several ways they use English throughout an average day. Kadija said she was better able to use the bus system, to get around town using street

names, and to communicate with her children's school. Asha expressed that she was not afraid to try to communicate information about herself and her children to important people, such as teachers, social workers, and doctors. Shukri uses English the least in her daily life, mostly because she is inside all day caring for children. She did express the ability to say yes/no to questions on the phone and that she recognizes and understands some words when they are used in conversation. Halima showed the most oral proficiency which is interesting because her literacy skills were amongst the slowest to develop during the class. Her oral skills are most likely a result of her immersion in an English-speaking environment, her work place, for several hours each day. She stated that she uses English to ask questions and to communicate in general at work. Shamsa highlighted her ability to read a few words that she learned in my class when she sees them in public.

What are the participants' motivations for learning English/Literacy?

The participants are primarily motivated to learn English and functional literacy to be more self-sufficient and independent members of society. Shamsa was very adamant about wanting to be independent. She said that her children will grow up and leave and she will need to be able to take care of herself. She also mentioned being really bothered by her inability to communicate her needs to social workers and medical professionals and wanting to be able to read and write well enough to fill out applications for jobs so that she does not have to ask others. Halima expressed interest in wanting to help others but not being able to because of her minimal English skills as well as wanting to improve her English for use at work. Kadija spoke of learning English to help her

children with their schoolwork, to get a job, and to be independent. Asha is motivated by the need to speak with doctors and social workers. Shukri wants to learn English to communicate with others around her, especially at the doctor's office.

Observations of Literacy Practices

During the interviews, I noticed signs of literacy in the homes and literacy development amongst the participants and their children. I was excited by the literacy developments I saw in the participants as many of the things they did nonchalantly during the interviews were skills that I had taught them over and over again without really knowing if they had understood. During the first interview when Kadija came over to Asha's home, they requested my phone number and when I wrote it down for them they independently turned their papers correctly and Kadija read the number out loud to me. Shukri also took my interview question sheet from me and turned it correctly to imitate what reading looks like. Shamsa's youngest son was very seriously drawing on paper throughout our second interview with her. In most of the houses I noticed a lack of school papers on the walls, but Kadija's house displayed several pieces of children's artwork and writing.

I made two other observations, which were not necessarily literacy related but did show a level of acculturation. During one of the interviews, Asha's son Mohammed was playing at vacuuming with a toy vacuum cleaner. Jamila and I joked about how he is American now, since cleaning the house is a traditionally female role in Somali Bantu culture. His correct use of the vacuum cleaner also indicated a level of acculturation. Asha's daughter Fatuma also showed her acculturation when she heard a beeping noise

and went over to the alarm clock even though the noise was coming from her mom's watch. Before arriving in the US, it is unlikely that she had seen an electronic alarm clock so the fact that she knew where beeping noises like that come from and presumably how to work the alarm on the clock is notable.

How does the in-depth interviewing affect my experience/views of the participants and my role as an ESL literacy professional?

In general, my experiences and views of the participants were only confirmed and strengthened through the interview process. What I learned about each of the participants only furthered my previous thoughts about them and their life experiences. Obviously, the details I received through the interviews gave a clearer picture to the stories I had heard previously through gestures and broken English and Mai Mai. I was surprised by the accuracy of my understanding of the stories they had told me and the general facts about their lives. I was also surprised by their ability to critically assess their lives and their educational experiences. I had underestimated them, especially in regards to their ability to examine their experiences in my classroom. I think this was because I knew they lacked previous educational experiences to use as a basis for evaluation.

I found the interviews themselves to be very telling in the amount of English used throughout the sessions. I was honestly surprised and very impressed with the improvements in speaking English and the comprehension of spoken English the participants had made in the nine months since the class had ended. Asha, Kadija, and Halima often answered questions in English and sometimes gave answers in English or Mai Mai before Jamila had a chance to interpret into Mai Mai. All of the participants

responded that they could understand more English than when they first got here. Shukri showed the least progress in her response while Kadija and Shamsa reported that they understand a lot but have trouble responding. Shukri also answered one question in English during the interview. I was excited to learn that the participants said they currently are able to use English for functional purposes such as answering the phone, taking the bus, and communicating at work.

The participants expressed great sorrow at the termination of the classes and at my not teaching them any more. I was deeply touched by these comments which I believe the participants did not feel obligated to say, given the great conviction with which they said them. A few examples are when Shamsa said, "They really cried when you left." or when Shukri called me her granddaughter and asked me to stay overnight with them. On another occasion, Asha and Kadija created a scheme together, in English, of how I could still teach them, "Just 30 minutes for only 2 letters of the alphabet, today "A" and "B", next day "C" and "D"." I noted in the interview transcript that there was an air of humor, heavily tinted with seriousness and that I had to translate their English for Jamila! Overall, the interviews deepened the connection I feel with these five women, showed me even more of their spirit, and confirmed many of the notions I had created over the year I worked with them.

The Somali Bantu Participants and Schumann's Acculturation Model

In Chapter 2, the factors that create an ideal second language acquisition environment were detailed. In this section, these factors will be looked at as a framework to synthesize the interview responses of the participants and my own experiences with the

Somali Bantu students in my class. I believe it is valuable to look at the factors affecting the Somali Bantu as they work towards acquisition of English as a second language. Examining their acquisition from this perspective sheds light on the struggles they face on a daily basis which in turn increases the understanding and empathy with which we approach the teaching of these individuals. Some of these factors can be generalized to the whole Somali Bantu population given their similar historical and cultural experiences, while others will be dependent on the experience and personality of the each individual within this group.

A few factors are working to benefit the language acquisition process for the Somali Bantu. In regards to their integration patterns, the individuals I interacted with appeared to be focused on maintaining their own culture while assimilating to American cultural ways. This varied by individual as Asha and Kadija readily tried new ways to do things especially in relation to their apartments and their children and expressed the desire to learn the "American way." Shamsa and Shukri were more reticent in adapting these new ways and displayed more attachment to their own cultural ways. As a group, the participants showed minimal language shock or little fear and anxiety speaking English in front of native speakers. Shamsa showed the most hesitation and anxiety while the other four tie for the least self-conscious language learners I have worked with in six years of ESL teaching. All of the participants showed great motivation and gave several reasons for their motivation such as filing out forms at the doctor's and speaking with the children's teachers, with their own and their children's doctors, and with social services personnel. The intended length of residence in the United States for the Somali

Bantu population is presumably for life and the small population size of their community in this city are positive factors in regards to acquisition.

One of the factors that cannot be clearly defined as positive or negative is the attitudes of the first and second language groups. There was great divide amongst the Americans that resided in the apartment complex with the participants. Some of them had great empathy and compassion for the trials the families had been through in life and gave them clothing donations, helped them read their mail, and helped them look for work while others saw them only as loud, dirty (as in body odor), and having too many children. However, in general, the Somali Bantu have a positive attitude towards Americans and desired more interaction with them.

Several factors are less than ideal for the Somali Bantu as a whole. The Somali Bantu within the cultural context of the United States may be viewed by many Americans as socially inferior to the English-speaking population. This is not only in relation to their language skills, but also in terms of their race, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, there is limited cultural congruence between the Somali Bantu and the Americans they are living near. For example, their religious belief in polygamy is illegal in the US and their worldview is communal, not individualistic as in the US. The anxiety and disorientation or culture shock experienced by the Somali Bantu upon arrival in the United States was enormous. The Somali Bantu appear to be a relatively cohesive group, relying on each other for all things except medical needs and social services. The Somali Bantu as a cultural group face many factors that do not encourage acculturation according to Schumann. In addition to the stresses of

resettlement, the factors inherent to their cultures work against their acquisition of English as a second language.

Conclusion

Colleen: What do you think of me asking you all these questions?
Kadija: "It's good (in English). I like it. Someone who is interested in what I went through, makes me feel like someone cares (in Mai Mai)."

This chapter adds the vital element of the experiences of the participants through their own voices. The historical and educational experiences of the participants give us some insight into the experiences of preliterate learners in our classrooms. While these perspectives do not represent all preliterate learners, they can inform classroom practices of ESL literacy instructors. The participants noted several aspects of my classroom that assisted them in learning or that they particularly liked such as repetition of topics and writing down what was said verbally. These techniques provide opportunities for further research and have direct implications on the instructional practices of the ESL literacy profession.

Chapter 6 – Implications

This study began as an endeavor to further our collective understanding of the Somali Bantu population and in so doing several recommendations for the professional field of ESL literacy education have emerged. Within the recommendations resulting from this study, I will examine what I would do differently next time as well as programmatic and instructional suggestions. The implications of this study aim to enhance the instruction of preliterate learners and provide better opportunities for such instruction.

Personal Reflection – "What would I do differently the next time?"

There are essentially three things I will do differently the next time I teach a preliterate and/or non-literate student population. Initially, I would utilize more structure within the classroom. I found that my lack of experience teaching literacy did not allow me to start the class with a great deal of structure. I now think it would be effective and extremely helpful for the students had I at least started and ended each class in the same way. This would have increased their familiarity with classroom procedures and better allowed them to focus on the content as opposed to the endless possibilities of what I might talk about next.

I would also develop several picture books that utilized pictures from the lives of my students and increased in complexity. I began this towards the very end of this class and regret not having the opportunity to try this method with my students. I believe that scaffolding reading with relevant stories including pictures of their homes, families, and schools would have really enhanced their reading skills.

Finally, I would have pushed the students more. I think in some ways, I was very easy on them as I introduced formal learning to them. I believe I could have introduced things like headlines and picture captions from newspapers about immigration, refugees, Somalia, Kenya, learning English, etc. This would have been more difficult and thus would have challenged them to extend out of their comfort zones to expand their learning.

Programmatic Implications

Childcare/Head Start needs to be a high priority.

Each of the women in the study profusely requested English classes; they want the classes but cannot attend them due to their childcare needs. Given the positive attitudes exhibited by the participants towards life in the US and learning English, it seems we should better enable them to make the most of their lives here by ensuring that they at least have access to ESL classes. It was the experience of the researcher and the participants that the resettlement agency did not prioritize childcare. The information about Head Start programs was given to the refugees after they had been in the country for almost a year. The programs responsible for providing ESL also need to better accommodate these learners through family literacy programs which would be an ideal response to this population's need. While the class I taught was created to accommodate this concern, it was less than ideal given the high level of distraction ten or more pre-school and younger children create in a classroom. As a last resort, classes similar to mine in which the adults and the children are together can be offered. Despite their

childcare needs, women learners deserve access to classes that meet their language learning needs.

Safe, intimate learning environment provided for refugees upon arrival.

The lack of familiarity with the expectations of what it means to be a student was difficult for my students. In response to this, resettlement agencies and ESL providers can create learning environments that ease the students into the expectations related to being a student. Classes held in the home are advisable as they increase comfort levels and lower the affective filter, therefore positively affecting the learning environment. Students from the same culture often encounter similar difficulties. If courses are held in which all students are from the same culture, their needs may be more easily met. Based on the level of comfort my students reached between six months and a year, I suggest that this type of setup last for at least six months and ideally a year. The students should then be recommended for the appropriate next level and introduced to the classroom teacher by their current teacher; this type of personal attention can have an impact on retention.

Instructional Implications

The following sections list instructional and methodological suggestions that I found useful in an adult ESL literacy classroom, especially with preliterate learners. These are the direct result of my own trial and error as well as derived from the responses of the participants to questions about what techniques they liked most and what they disliked. Many of the techniques listed are included in the ten-week curriculum in Appendix D. This curriculum was created in response to a need to provide volunteer tutors with some sort of a guide for their first weeks in the homes of the learners. The

curriculum was created for non-ESL trained instructors and tutors and therefore includes detailed instructions and suggestions based on the experiences of the researcher and the implications drawn from this study.

Things teachers of preliterate and non-literate populations should keep in mind:

- Utilize and honor the strong oral skills of the learners through dialogue and the use of song or rhyme.
- Realize that progress will usually be <u>much</u> slower than with other groups of learners; celebrate the seemingly small achievements (holding a pencil, knowing which side of the paper is up, etc).
- Repetition is key and necessary for retention.
- Remember <u>everything</u> is new: writing on lines, page numbers, titles, writing your name on the top of the page, which side of the paper is up, etc.
- Learn about the backgrounds of the students; know what they have gone through to sit in the classroom

General Techniques and Methodological Suggestions:

- Use the native languages of learners where possible to link between first language and second languages and between oral and written languages.
- Use authentic, relevant material.
- Focus on the communicative aspect of language.
- Use realia (real items) and real photographs as often as possible.
- Use words and items from their lives, especially utilize names of the students and their family members in all examples as well as the instructor's family's names.

- Have the student help make materials, for example, cut out shapes, to develop their fine motor skills
- Sequence from concrete to abstract
- Model errors – make mistakes on overheads, handouts, etc. on purpose and correct them during class
- Focus on the process of learning – how do we learn, how do we look at a worksheet, where do we start?
- Offer thicker pencils if students have trouble using a regular sized pencil
- Have students help with classroom tasks, such as handing out name cards, handing out papers, as this can help develop and build their self-confidence.
- Enlarge pictures and text.
- Use newspapers – single out captions, headings, or key sentences from articles that are relevant to their lives.
- Begin a literacy course with numbers as they are a universal concept.
- Begin writing on a large scale – moving arms in shape of letters, writing letters in Jell-O powder or sand, and then writing in very large scale on the board.
- Use Comic Sans or a font that has the letter **a** shaped like this a not like this **a**.
- Use activities detailed in Chapter 4. These activities include the modified Language Experience Approach, teaching initial consonant sounds, and the pronoun activity

Recommendations for Further Research

The research and the studies referred to within this thesis establish a link between incorporating the cultural, linguistic, and personal backgrounds in the classroom with effective ESL literacy instructional techniques. The research is limited to short topic papers, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations and contains a very small number of qualitative or quantitative longitudinal studies. Within this small research corpus, studies that focus on preliterate populations made up an even smaller quantity of the research. Therefore, the most important area for future researchers to explore would simply be to begin further investigation into the worldviews and experiences of pre-literate adult ESL learners.

More specifically, Guth and Wrigley (1993) suggest research in the use of technology, assessment practices, and needs assessment tools within the preliterate adult ESL literacy classroom. Their study and this study illuminate the importance of these issues but it was not within the scope of their study's research questions to analyze these concerns in detail nor was it in the realm of this study due to its reflective nature. The use of technology in ESL literacy classrooms is immensely understudied; in fact the author was unable to locate a single study focusing on this topic though Luther (2000) suggested the use of technology to meet the needs of the Cambodian women she studied.

One of the priority issues discussed in *The Research Agenda for Adult ESL* (1998) is that of assessment practices within the Adult ESL field. Condelli (2002) utilized current standardized tests and created his own original assessments to carry out his analysis of student performance in relation to the use of effective adult ESL literacy instructional methodologies. Condelli expressed in the body of his study that

assessments for pre-literate and non-literate adult ESL learners are few in number, limited in scope, and often inappropriate for the populations in need of assessment. This study discussed the possibility of using the native language to conduct assessments. Researchers who create their own assessment instruments would do well to evaluate the validity and reliability of these assessment tools to better inform the field of adult ESL literacy testing practices.

Luther (2000), and Warriner (2003) investigated the perceived needs of adult ESL literacy learners as well as the perceptions of their needs by their instructors. These studies did not examine the instruments available for needs analyses with literacy level adult ESL learners. The inability of literacy level students to read reduces the options of creating a needs analysis tool. As was the case with this study and is true for many other ESL literacy classes, the lack of an interpreter makes needs assessment very difficult. Research that analyzes the effective current needs analyses instruments as well as testing originally created instruments would greatly enhance the field of adult ESL literacy.

Sewell (2000) and Ingersoll (2000) examined the role of native language use within the adult ESL literacy classroom. All of the studies in this review mention this aspect of adult ESL instruction on some level. It is undisputed that adult second language learners who learn literacy skills in their native language first or simultaneously show more progress in second language literacy acquisition. The limited use of Mai Mai within the researcher's classroom proved to be useful and effective, therefore, future research into the feasibility of native language literacy instruction, reasons why it is not more widely instituted, and the implications of its limited availability would contribute a much needed understanding into the field's current stance on native language literacy.

Exploring the ways in which the funds of knowledge, or assets, a population brings with them can be utilized within the classroom is advisable. (Moll, 1992) Understanding the impact of teaching English by starting with the content of which students have extensive knowledge could increase the effectiveness of instruction. It would be interesting to learn the impact if instead of seeing students as lacking literacy, we saw their strengths and built the literacy curriculum around them.

Further investigation into the psycholinguistic effects of trauma on learning is also advisable. While current research exists, the majority of it is written from the instructor's perspective. (see Quan, 1986; Allender, 1998; Adkins, Sample, Birman, 1999; McDonald, 2000; & Lucy, et. al., 2000) An in-depth look at the effects of the past experiences on the learning process through the lens of the learners will increase the ESL profession's ability to understand, empathize, and accommodate these learners.

My curriculum (see appendix) was created retrospectively based on the successes and failures within her own classroom. The curriculum was created to fill the void in available resources and activities for instructors working with preliterate populations. It was also a product of trainings I facilitated for volunteer tutors whose use of the curriculum was not monitored. A critical investigation into the appropriateness and effectiveness of this curriculum would add to its credibility making it more likely to be utilized by a wider audience.

The current research adds specific techniques, methodological considerations, and an in-depth look into the experiences of five preliterate learners to the field of adult ESL literacy research. However, given the limited quantity and scope of current research studies there is much work to be done. The above suggested future adult ESL literacy

research avenues will only touch upon the myriad of complexities involved in the acquisition of second language literacy skills by pre and non-literate adult learners.

Appendix

A: Key Interview Questions

Interview #1	**Interview #2**
Have you learned English before my class in any context?	How old are you?
Are you taking English classes right now? If yes, what do you like/not like about your class now? How is it different from my class?	How many children do you have?
Have you used anything you learned from my class in your daily life?	Tell me about your parents and siblings? Do they live here or elsewhere?
What did you like about my class?	What tribe are you from?
What did you not like about my class?	Describe what is like to be a mother in Somalia.
When you took my class why did you want to learn English? Why do you want to learn English now?	Describe what it was like to be a mother in Kenya.
What did I not teach you that you wanted to learn?	How did you get to the refugee camp?
Are you happy with the English classes you have had in the US?	Describe what it is like to be a mother in the US.
Are you able to understand/speak more English than when you first arrived?	Which one was easier? Why? Which one was most difficult? Why?
	What do you like and not like about the US?
	Are you married? If so, how is your life different as a wife in the US as compared to Kenya and Somalia?
	How do your children feel about living in the United States? Do they like it here?

B. Example Language Experience Approach Modification

Language Experience Approach - Our Class Story

My name is Halima[§]. I am twenty-two years old. My husband is Salaad. I have three children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Rukia. I am thirty years old. My husband is Aman. I have five children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Kadija. I am twenty-six years old. My husband is Said. I have six children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Amina. I am sixty years old. I have six children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Asha. I am twenty-six years old. My husband is Okash. I have three children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Luley. I am twenty-two years old. My husband is Mahamed. I have three children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Shamsa. I am thirty-nine years old. My husband is Abdi. I have eight children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Shukri. I am fifty-five years old. I have four children. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

My name is Rahamo. I am twenty-seven years old. My husband is Muse. I have one child. I am from Somalia. I have been in America for five months.

[§] All names are pseudonyms.

C. Initial Consonant Sound Activity Example

Somali Initial Consonant Sound Alphabet

Words used to introduce initial consonant sounds:

Bisharo
Colleen
Dahiro
Fatuma
Galbet
Halima
Jamila
Kadija
Luley
Maryan
Name **
Pencil **
Rukia
Suliman
Teacher
V ^
Weledi
Years **
Zip*

** Students had difficulty remembering the standard word associated with these letters

* Students had moderate difficulty remembering the standard word associated with these letters

^ The only word we learned was "very" that started with a "v" therefore this letter was not taught as an initial consonant sound.

All other letters were easily associated with their words and sounds on numerous occasions as well as during the interview process.

D. Ten Week Curriculum for Use with Preliterate Learners

This curriculum was created in response to a need to provide volunteer ESL literacy tutors with some sort of a guide for their first weeks in the homes of the learners. The curriculum was created for non-ESL trained instructors and tutors and therefore includes detailed instructions and suggestions based on the experiences of the researcher. The curriculum was created around the techniques suggested in the implications section of this study.

ESL Literacy Curriculum

By: Colleen Shaughnessy

Intended Student Population:	**Preliterate adult ESL/Literacy Learners**
Intended Audience:	**Non-ESL Trained ESL Literacy Tutors/Instructors**

Note to Instructor:

This curriculum was created to fill a gap in available resources for preliterate ESL literacy instruction. It was designed with non-ESL trained volunteer tutors in mind. Below are a few things to keep in mind as you use the curriculum:

- Each lesson plan covers approximately two hours of instruction; this can be expanded or divided into hour long lessons. Realistically there is much more in these pages than 20 hours of instruction and the number of concepts covered is fairly pervasive. In my experience, I would estimate that this curriculum could be used for six months when repeated and recycled.
- Length of exercises is denoted in parenthesis (ie (0:05) equals 5 minutes into class period)
- It is advisable to remove all citations from worksheets prior to giving them to the students – extra writing (ie citations, notations) tends to confuse literacy level students.
- During these 10 weeks, only capital letters will be taught.
- /j/ is used to denote the sound a j makes when pronounced or read.
- The Worksheet numbers (W1, W2, etc.) should be deleted before copying for the students.
- The following assumptions were made in creating this curriculum:
    - Most students have heard numbers in sequence in English.
    - Many students have learned to write their names.
    - Many students can recite the alphabet orally and may recognize the letters, but only in sequence.

Week 1

Topic: Numbers

Competencies: Cardinal numbers (0-10)
Phone numbers

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Begin recognition of written numerals and the words:
"Phone Number"
Copy Numbers 0-10
Copy their phone number

Speaking and Listening: Pronounce numbers (including the pattern of phone numbers, with pauses after the first three numbers and the next three numbers)
Recognize numbers when spoken
Recognize "Repeat."

Procedure:

Introduction: Greet students in English. Learn greeting for time of day you teach in their language. Hand out name cards as time goes by you can begin spelling the students names as you give it to them and maybe eventually you can have the students hand out the name cards. Do this every day to provide structure (As students gather/before class begins)

Have something to count (pencils, pennies) by using gestures. Request that they count (using the objects) to 10 in their own language. Make sure they know the name of the object – if they don't, teach it to them (0:05)

Presentation: After they have counted in their own language, begin to give them the English words. Demonstrate the whole sequence before they repeat. Begin again and ask them to repeat (using gestures at first, but also begin to introduce the command "Repeat" in conjunction with the gesture). Continue until pronunciation is communicated – this usually happens on the 2nd or 3rd round. (0:10)

Use objects again – and take out a certain number (like 4) and say, "How many?" Model by counting each object: 1 penny, 2 pennies, 3 pennies, 4 pennies.
Repeat: "How many?"
Elicit response of "4 pennies"
Repeat activity several times with various quantities. (0:20)

Repeat sequence 0-10 – have them pronounce after you again. (0:22)

Begin literacy aspect by correlating numbers to dots (like dice). Show them this by demonstrating on the board – one dot = one.
Using flashcards with dots 0-10 – show them entire set in order and have them repeat numbers.
Show flashcards in random order - elicit numbers from group and from individual students. (0:42)

Randomly lay flashcards out on a table – or draw the dots on the board in random order and ask students to come to the board/table and point or pick up the number you say. (0:52)

Repeat sequence 0-10 – have them pronounce after you again. (0:54)

- BREAK- During break ask students their phone numbers if you do not have them from your administrator. (1.04)

Introduce written numerals: Write numerals on the board and orally count as you point to each numeral (x3). Orally correlate pennies with the numerals written on the board and have student repeat then correlate dot flash cards with numerals on the board. (x3). Using the numeral flashcards, have them take as many pennies as the flashcard says. (1:20)

Assessment: Ask students to teach you the numbers in their language(s). As you repeat them, jot them down phonetically. Using the numeral cards repeat the numbers in order in their language (guaranteed to be humorous!). Then randomly show them numbers and ask them the number in their language. This will demonstrate to you whether or not they understand the concept of numerals representing numbers. You can elicit group responses and individual responses from the group or do this individually (one on one) (1:30)

Writing: Give students worksheet in which they write numerals several times (see W1) – demonstrate on the board (and you may have to demo on their individual papers as well) with 0 that they should copy the numeral several times. (1:45)

Give students phone number worksheet (see W2) with their number filled out on the first line. If students are unaware – you may have to demonstrate by gestures that this is their phone number also demonstrate the act of making a phone call on a real phone and have the students practice this as well – generally they know what phone numbers are but they may not know their own nor the English word for it. Have students copy their phone number from your example. (1:55)

Have students say their phone numbers out loud – reading them from the sheet if they can. If not have them repeat it after you. (2:00)

Notes:

All worksheets have a space for name – if students are unable to write their name, instructor should enter the names until this is taught in class.

Cultural: Have students show you how they count with their hands – this generally differs by culture and it will help if you use their method so as to use the most familiar. (ex. Ghanaians start with their thumb when counting instead of their index finger)

Writing – Depending on the level – you may have to teach students to hold/help them hold the pencil correctly. Fatter pencils will be helpful especially if you have elderly students.

If this truly is the first time students have written you will want to avoid worksheets and have students make numbers in a pan with Jell-o powder and then VERY LARGE on the board with marker/chalk. Slowly move to smaller and smaller writing – you can limit this by making lines for them to write on (though writing on lines will often need to be taught in order for them to understand the expectation). When they are ready you can introduce worksheets (this may take a long time for some, esp. elderly students – 2 months or more)

If students have written only once or twice before – it is okay to use worksheets but be sure the space for their writing is quite large (see W1).

Vocabulary: "How many?"
0-10
Repeat.
Phone number.
Write.
Pennies/Pencils
Copy.

Materials: 10 objects – pennies recommended.
Number and phone number worksheets.
Dot and numeral flashcards.
Chalkboard/Dry erase board.
Student's phone numbers (either from them – usually they have it written down somewhere or from your administrator)
Telephone key pad on a real phone is best; a kids toy will also work
W1 (write numbers in)
W2 (write their phone number on the first line for them to copy)

W1
COPY. NAME:________________________

W2

NAME:______________________________

COPY.

(________)________________-______________________

(________)________________-______________________

(________)________________-______________________

(________)________________-______________________

Week 2

Topic: Numbers (cont.)

Competencies:
Cardinal numbers (0-10)
Phone numbers
Personal questions I – phone numbers

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing:
Recognize of numerals, "phone number", and "zip code"
Become more comfortable writing numerals
Differentiate one numeral from others
Recognize of numerals in sequence

Speaking and Listening:
Pronounce numbers, recognize numbers when spoken by another.
Ask others and answer "What is your phone number?"
Recognize 'F' and 'S'

Procedure:

Intro/Review: Greet the student in English and their native language. Hand out name cards.

Give students (in Ziploc bags or another container) amounts (0-10) of pennies (or other objects) and have them count how many they have. They should then line up from 0 to 10, the person with 0 pennies should be on one end of the line and the person with 10 pennies in their bag should be at the other end of the line with the students with 1-9 pennies in between them in order. This will need a lot of facilitation by the teacher. (0:10)

Presentation: To continue review and recycle information – use flashcards dots and numerals to elicit verbal responses from them. (0:15)

Write numerals on the board in random order and have students come to the board and point to the number you say. (0:20)

Play MEMORY – have the number "3" written on one card and three dots on the other card. Make a full set of these 0-10, but only out 5 sets of matches for the first few times. Have them play as a group. You will have to demonstrate this, possibly several times. (0:40)

Give out W3. Have students circle the number that matches the number in the left column. Demonstrate for the first row – you may have to do more examples as well as walk around and help those that need assistance. (0:55)

Teach: One, Two Buckle My Shoe** – using gestures will help get them involved and help them remember the lyrics (1:05) [feel free to use any counting song you are familiar with, this is just an example]

1, 2 buckle my shoe
3, 4 open the door
5, 6 pick up sticks
7, 8 close (or shut) the gate
9, 10 let's do it again!

** Modified to include more useful verbs

-BREAK- (1:15)

Have one student model the following conversation with you in front of the class (make sure they either know their phone number or have their worksheet with them):

Ask question: "<Student's name> what is your phone number?
Elicit response – student can either read it from previous worksheet or, when possible, recite it from memory.
Go around the room and ask each student their phone number.
Then ask one student their phone number and have them ask another classmate who then asks another classmate who then asks another classmate who then returns the question to you (the instructor). This is known as TSSST – Teacher-Student-Student-Student-Teacher. (1:30)

Sequencing: Write on the board "1 2 3 ___ 5 6 ____ 8 9 10" Demonstrate "4" then have a student come up and write "7". Repeat 5 times or more, other examples "1 ___ 3 4" or "4 5 __" (1:45)

Give out W4. This is a dictation. You will recite phone numbers and they should write down the numbers they hear. You can use their numbers, numbers you know they frequently call, 9-1-1, or random numbers. Have numbers written on the board for their reference. (2:00)

Notes:

Cultural: W3 – it has helped to explain "same" and "different" when giving directions for this worksheet. I used shoes (because my students take them off in class) to demonstrate same and different – I am sure there are

other options out there! It has also helped to cover the lines above and below the line the student is working on. Especially until the student catches on – this may take much longer than you might expect.
Let them try but if they are struggling cover up the other lines so they can focus only on the line in question.

Vocabulary:

"What is your phone number?"
Same
Different
Circle
Words in 1,2 buckle my shoe

Materials:

Number flashcards
Pennies
MEMORY 0-10 set
W3 (this will be completed for the binder just not yet)
W4

W3

NAME: ____________

CIRCLE.

W4

NAME______________

WRITE.

(___ ___ ___)___ ___ ___-___ ___ ___ ___

(___ ___ ___)___ ___ ___-___ ___ ___ ___

(___ ___ ___)___ ___ ___-___ ___ ___ ___

(___ ___ ___)___ ___ ___-___ ___ ___ ___

(___ ___ ___)___ ___ ___-___ ___ ___ ___

Week 3

Topic: Numbers (cont.) and Body Parts

Competencies: Initial consonant sounds 'F', 'S', and 'B'
Personal questions II - children
Cardinal numbers (0-10)
Body parts
Health I

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize 'F', 'S', and 'B'
Recognize numerals in sequence

Speaking and Listening: Answer "How many children do you have?"
Repeat 11 body parts
Recognize /f/, /s/, /b/
Ask and answer "What is wrong?"

Procedure:

Intro/Review: Write numerals on the board randomly and all over the place. Say a number and have one student come up and point to it on the board. You can also point to the number and ask the students to say it or ask one individual student to say it. (0:10)

Presentation: By now you are probably familiar with some of their family (esp. the children) – you may need to use them in order to get the following dialogue across. Repeat dialogue demonstration exercise from "What is your phone number" dialogue from last week.

1: "How many children do you have?"
2: "I have ___ child(ren)."

(Especially good if all the students are mothers or fathers, but still good for the childless to learn to say, "I have no children." since it is grammatically confusing – if there are zero why do we use the plural!) (0:25)

W5 – Sequencing – you did this last week as a group, now you are asking the students to write the numbers on their own paper. Be sure to demonstrate the first question as an example. (0:40)

Introduce consonant sounds (see cultural note) F, S, and B – in my class this was easy – I had two students named Fatuma and two with the last name Suliman and the class took place in an east coast US city that begins with a "B". Also 2 numbers start with F (4,5) and two start with S (6,7). Say the word that will be the main initial consonant sound word for that

letter. For instance: the main word for F for my class was Fatuma. Say Fatuma emphasizing the first sound. Write Fatuma on the board – perhaps Fatuma will recognize her name or maybe not. Either way, show that the first letter is F and F makes a /f/ sound. Repeat for S and B.

See if students can come up with other English (or their own language) words that start with the same sounds. You can give them hints by gesturing the numbers with your fingers. Don't expect too much realization – this is the first time you are introducing this – take it slow and help them come up with examples (Four, Five, Six, Seven). (1:00)

-BREAK- (1:10)

Body parts – Point to the body parts on you and have them repeat. Do this about 4x (you can also point to the parts on them or the kids). Try pointing at the body parts and not saying anything to see if they can do it on their own – help them if needed. Write the 'F' 'S' and 'B' words on the boards solicit their help with the first letter of each word. (1:25)

Have the students point to the body parts on baby dolls. Then use cards with photos of body parts on them and go back through the body parts. First with you saying them and the students repeating (x2) and second having them try without your help (unless it is necessary) – x2. Then give each student a card and ask them what it is – to be sure they know. (1:30)

Dialogue- Repeat dialogue demonstration with:

1: {Student name}, what is wrong?"
2: My {body part in their picture} hurts.
1: Sorry, {student name}.

(During your initial demonstration try to be dramatic) (1:50)

Introduce the song Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes and practice it together – (2:00)

Notes:

Cultural: Initial consonant sounds – the words you teach these sounds with should be familiar to the students. For instance their names, the names of their children/husbands/wives/etc., numbers in their own language, any words that you know from their language, or even any names you are familiar with that are typically used in their culture (for example, my class was all Islamic and even though there wasn't a Rahaman in any of their families we used Rahaman for "R")

If students come up with phone for 'F' – commend them, they are getting the idea – even though it is not spelled that way.

Students may get really into this lesson and want to know names to all of the body parts, including breast, etc. Be prepared to give them answers to these questions.

Vocabulary: Fingers
Feet
Back
Stomach
Eyes
Ears
Nose
Mouth
Head
Hair
Hands
"How many children do you have?"
" I have ____ child(ren)."
"What is wrong?"
"My _____ hurts."

Materials: Photo flash cards of body parts
W5
Baby dolls

W5

NAME ________________

WRITE.

1 2 ___ 4 5

4 ___ 6 7

___ 8 9 10

3 ___ 5

6 7 ___

Week 4

Topic: Body parts (cont.) and Days of the Week

Competencies: Health II
Initial consonant sounds 'N' 'M' 'H'
Days of the Week

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize N M H
Copy F S B N M H

Speaking and Listening: Recognize initial consonant sounds: /n/, /m/, /h/
Differentiate /f/ & /s/ and /n/ & /m/
Repeat days of the week and yesterday, today, and tomorrow

Procedure:

Introduction: Review body parts by pointing to your own and then go through body parts cards. (0:05)

Presentation: Review conversations – give a few students body parts cards and have pennies on hand then go around room asking the students randomly:
"How many?"
"What is your phone number?"
"How many children do you have?"
"What is wrong?"
Review phone and children conversations as necessary depending on how the review goes. (0:20)

Bring in bottles of medicine – prescription and otherwise. Show them the different pills. Ask them "How many?" – we hope they say something about the doctor telling them how many or you should tell them that. Explain that these are examples of medicine. (0:30)

Review "What is wrong?" conversation and then add something new to it. Use the dialogue demo as previously explained.

1: What is wrong?
2: My {body part} hurts.
1: Sorry, did you take medicine?
2. Yes, thank you. (0:45)

Introduce N, M, H initial consonant sounds as you did for F, S, B.
N: nine, number, name, nose
M: many, morning, medicine, mouth, mother, Monday

H: how, head, hair, hands
Again be sure to introduce the sounds with words from their language (names, etc.) where possible. We used "Name" "Maryan" "Hawa" (1:05)

-BREAK- (1:15)

W6 – demonstrate on the board what they should do then have them copy the letters 5 times. (1:25)

Recognition activity: Write F on one side of the board and S on the other. Ask which letter is F, they should point to the side that F is written. Make sure they are clear that that side is F then repeat for S. Randomly and more quickly as you go along say "F" "F" "S" "F" – students should point dramatically to one side of the board or the other depending on which one you say. Repeat with M and N (more similar to each other) and H and B (not so similar). (1:35)

Introduce days of the week – as well as yesterday, today, tomorrow.

It is advisable to learn these in their language – usually one student is familiar enough with English days of the week enough to help (in Mai Mai – Ahat, Isniin, Talado, Arbaa, Kamis, Jumaa, Septi). To teach yesterday, today, and tomorrow use NL then go to English. They already know almost all of the initial consonant sounds – so you can have them help you write them if there is time – T, W, and Y will be next week – so Tues, today, tomorrow, Wed, and yesterday will be covered then. (2:00)

Notes: Medicine – keeping it simple for now – later on recognizing "Take 3 2x a day." will be more feasible.

Cultural: Much of the medicine taken by the Somali Bantu was the first medicine they had taken in their lives. The dosage is very confusing and when explaining anything about medicine be very careful to ensure that different medicines are not confused.

Try to convey that when they have medicine to take, they should continue taking it until it is gone, even if they feel ok. Medicine is only for one person, it should not be shared with anyone else, including their children, and medicine should not be shared between children.

It is advisable to find out as much as possible about the medicines that they used in their home countries and the medicine they use here. If possible, have them bring in samples from their homes and discuss the differences. This is a good time to utilize the concepts of same and different in comparison/discrimination activities.

Vocabulary: Medicine
"Sorry, did you take medicine?"
"Yes, thank you."
Sunday
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
yesterday
today
tomorrow

Materials: Medicine bottles with pills inside
Body part photo cards
W6 (write one letter on each line of the letters covered so far - FSBNMH)

W6

NAME ____________________________

COPY.

Week 5

Topic: Colors

Competencies: R G P
Colors

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize the letters R G P

Speaking and Listening: Repeat colors
Recognize /r/ /g/ /p/

Procedure:

Introduction: Bring markers or crayons to class. Say the color of one and the color of another then try to elicit the names in their language. Let them teach you and practice saying the colors in their language. (0:10)

Presentation: After you are familiar with the colors in their language, introduce the English words for the colors. If some of the colors have the same name in their language, but different names in ours (like red/orange/brown) attempt to explain this difference in language/culture by using the words "same" and "different" again. Show red, orange, and brown and say, "Mai Mai same, English different…Mai Mai gaduud, gaduud, gaduud…English, red, orange, brown." Ask "What color is this?" let them try to answer or prompt them. Have them repeat after you (x3) (0:20)

Introduce consonant sounds – R G P
R – red, Rahamo, Rahaman,
G – green, Galbet
P – purple, pennies, pencil, (0:40)

Do W7 – have them color in the boxes – all of them color the 1st box the same color (say red) then have them write RED by copying it from the board. (1:00)

-BREAK- (1:10)

Language Experience Approach (LEA) – This is a modification on the original concept of an LEA. You will ask students questions you know they are able to answer (name, age, phone number, number of children, husband's name (?)). When they answer you, if they do not give you a complete sentence, make it into a complete sentence and say it for them and have them repeat your full sentence then write the sentence on the

board repeating it as you write. Ask about 4 or 5 questions to one student and write the answers on the board. After you have about 5 sentences, read through the paragraph while pointing to the words you are saying. Repeat twice and then ask the students to repeat after you (x3). Then have the students try on their own. If they get stuck on a word that starts with one of the consonant sounds you've introduced, try to have them figure it out on their own. Help them out where needed. Write the paragraph down in your notebook. After you have done an LEA with the same questions for each of the students you can put them all on one page and give them to the students and help them read it. Today though you should only do one student and one every week for the rest of the curriculum or until you finish all of the students. If you choose you can model this activity with your own information as opposed to asking a student for the first LEA.
For example:
You would ask these questions: What is your name?, How old are you? How many children do you have? Where are you from?, and How long have you lived in America?
And you would write this on the board:
"My name is Maryan Galbet. I am twenty-seven years old. I have six children. I am from Somalia. I have lived in America for one year."
(1:30)

Play Uno! You will have to orchestrate the whole game – assisting each player with their hand until they get the hang of it – but my students loved it – you can simplify it by taking out some of the special cards, keep a few though. (2:00)

Notes: The questions in the example LEA are questions my students either knew when they came to class or were taught by me to them.

Colors are important for use in various games and can be used to help organize the classroom so I think it is important to introduce the names of colors so that you may start using them within the classroom.

Cultural: Colors are perceived differently by different cultures and within cultures. In Mai Mai, red/orange/brown are the same color – "gaduud", purple/black are the same – "meedou", green – "agaar", yellow - "jalla", and blue - "bluk"

Vocabulary:
Red
Orange
Yellow
Green
Blue
Purple

Black
Brown
White
"What color is this?"

Materials: Uno game
Markers/Crayons
Flipchart/wipe board for LEA
W7

W7
COLOR AND COPY.

NAME ______________________

Week 6

Topic: Days of the Week (cont.) and age

Competencies: Initial consonant sounds: Y W T
Days of the week
Age

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize YWT
Copy RGPYWT

Speaking and Listening: Recognize /y/ /w/ /t/
Repeat days of the week
Ask and answer "How old are you?"

Procedure:

Introduction: Ask students: "What day is today?"
Give them answer, "Today is (Wednesday)." (x4)
Ask students: "What day was yesterday?"
Give them answer, "Yesterday was (Tuesday)." (x4)
Ask students: "What day will tomorrow be?" – to simplify you can ask "What day is tomorrow?"
Give them answer, "Tomorrow will be (Thursday)." (x4)
This will take a long time to for them to understand (maybe) and remember – be patient. In the beginning I wrote only the days on the board so: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. After a while, I began to write "Yesterday was Tuesday." "Today is Wednesday." Tomorrow will be Thursday." – don't overwhelm them but bring this in when they seem ready. (0:15)

Presentation: Introduce dialogue:
"How old are you?"
"I am ____ years old."
My students knew about this question so I did not have to explain what age is – but if I did I would have used one of the kids to say they are 5 and then one of the adults who was older to say "No, 5" (as in Not 5 years old) – and carried on until someone caught on. You may have to have them show you with their fingers how old they are and then tell them the number in English. (0:25)

Introduce consonant sounds – Y W T
T – Tuesday, today, tomorrow, teacher, two, ten
W – Wednesday, what, (they may say "one" – which is just fine!)
Y – years, yesterday (0:40)

-BREAK- (1:10)

Play Bingo – with F S B N M H Y W T R G P (W8)
Have them pick the letters from a hat/bowl – they should say letter, sound, then special word (F /f/ Fatuma)
Demonstrate with a bingo card what the goal is – but most likely you will have to monitor what they cover up and if they've won and inform them that they have! (1:30)

W9 – Copy RGPWTY as done in Week 4/W6 (1:40)

LEA – as done last week (2:00)

Notes:

Cultural: Different cultures have different concepts of time and value time in varying ways. Keep this in mind in regards to the way that you approach this topic and the amount of time it may take students to adapt this vocabulary. These are not merely words about the days of the week, they are a cultural concept.

Vocabulary: How old are you?
I am ____ years old.
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday
Yesterday
Today
Tomorrow

Materials: W8 (randomly put the letters covered so far into the boxes)
W9 (write one letter on each line - RGPYWT)
Flipchart - LEA

W8

W9

NAME ______________________________

COPY.

Week 7

Topic: Clothing and Money

Competencies: Clothing
Money
Initial Consonant sounds J V

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize J V
Read money (in dollars only)

Speaking and Listening: Recognize /j/ /v/
Differentiate between /g/ and /j/
Repeat clothing words

Procedure:

Introduction: Recycle days of the week – ask students "What day is today?" write answer on board then "What day was yesterday?" write answer on board then "What day is tomorrow?" and write answer on the board (0:10)

Presentation: Introduce clothing words using objects students are wearing and/or ones you brought with you. Have students repeat after you (x3). Then point to the object and have them tell you what it is without your help (x2). Then say the word "jacket" and have them point to the jacket (etc.) – x 2. (0:25)

LEA – repeat from Week 5 (0:45)

Introduce consonant sounds /j/ and /v/ as done in Week 5.
J – jacket, Jamila, jalla (word for yellow in Mai Mai), (months of January, June, & July if you have discussed these)
V – veil
(1:00)

-BREAK- (1:10)

Give students each $200 in fake money. Have them count the money and tell you how much it is – it is amazing what they pick up along the way but if they cannot, model counting for them and explain how English numbers work with the hundreds. Then lay out the clothing cards and have students "buy" whatever they choose to buy. After the students have "bought" their clothes, have them tell the group what they bought – model for them: "I bought one red sweater, one blue dress, and black shoes." If they do not include the color in their report, it's okay – just saying "I bought one sweater, one dress, and shoes" is great! (1:40)

Write G on one side of the board and J on the other. Ask what letter is G they should point. Make sure they are clear that that side is G then repeat make sure they know that the other side is J. Randomly and more quickly as you go along say "G" "G" "J" "G" – students should point dramatically to one side of the board or the other depending on which one you say. Repeat by saying their sound /j/ /g/ /g/ /j/. Repeat for B and P if time allows. (1:50)

Go around room and ask "What color is Maryan's shirt?" etc. and elicit answers from them. (2:00)

Notes:

Cultural:

Vocabulary: Jacket
Veil
Shirt
Shoes
Pants
Dress
Sweater
Socks
dollars

Materials: Pictures of clothes with price written on bottom
Fake money
Flipchart - LEA

Week 8

Topic: Filling out an application

Competencies: Applications I
Initial Consonant Sounds: L Z C

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Copy J V L Z C
Copy First Name, Last Name, Zip Code

Speaking and Listening: Recognize /l/ /z/ /c/
Recognize first name, last name, zip code
Answer and ask application related questions

Procedure:

Introduction: Days of the week as done for Week 7 (0:10)

Presentation: Introduce vocabulary – first name, last name, zip code
After you are sure they understand the concepts ask one student: "What is your first name?" let her answer.
"What is your last name?" let her answer. Then do T-S-S-S-T from Week 2. (0:30)

Introduce L Z C consonant sounds as done in Week 5. Then review JVLZC and have them copy them in W10. (0:40)

LEA – as done in Week 5 (1:00)

-BREAK- (1:10)

W11 – explain what they should do by modeling on the board when they have finished ask around the room "What is your first name?" etc. (1:40)

Play Uno! (2:00)

Notes: L: last, leg
Z: zip
C: code, color, copy (not circle or city – they start with an S sound)

Cultural:

Vocabulary: First
name

last
name
zip code

Materials: W10 (write in JVLZC – one on each line)
W11 (write in their information on the first 3 lines for them to copy)
Uno game
Flip chart – LEA

W10

NAME ______________________________

COPY.

W11

COPY.

FIRST NAME ______________________________

LAST NAME ______________________________

ZIP CODE ______________________________

LAST NAME ______________________________

ZIP CODE ______________________________

FIRST NAME ______________________________

LAST NAME ______________________________

FIRST NAME ______________________________

ZIP CODE ______________________________

Week 9

Topic: Filling out an application (cont.) & Household Items

Competencies: Household Items
Application II
Initial consonant sounds D K

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize application words
Copy their application related information
Recognize D K

Speaking and Listening: Recognize /d/ /k/
Answer and ask application questions

Procedure:

Introduction: Days of the week as done for Week 7 (0:10)

Presentation: Introduce address, city, and state – make sure they can recite their own address verbally before moving on, do this by asking them their address and helping them until they are able to say it without your help. (0:25)

W12 – explain what they should do by modeling on the board when they have finished ask around the room "What is your address?" etc. (0:45)

Matching with personal information. Give students their personal sets of application cards and have them try to match their first name with the words 'first name'. Demonstrate first and help them when needed have them do this 2 or 3 times depending on the time. (1:10)

-BREAK- (1:20)

Initial Consonant sounds D K – introduce as in Week 5 then introduce household vocabulary using the furniture in the house and walking throughout the house with the students showing them the words and having them practice (1:40)

LEA – as done in Week 5 (2:00)

Notes:

Cultural:

Vocabulary: Door
lamp
table
chair
kitchen
bedroom
bathroom
window
floor

Materials: W12
Flip Chart – LEA
Set of application flashcards for each student – "last name" on one, their actual last name on another…etc.

W12

NAME ______________________

WRITE.

ADDRESS ____

CITY ____

STATE ____

CITY ____

ADDRESS ____

STATE ____

CITY ____

ADDRESS ____

STATE ____

Week 10

Topic: Filling out an application (cont.) & Family

Competencies: Applications III
Family
Letters X Q

Language Skills:

Reading and Writing: Recognize X Q
Copy D K X Q

Speaking and Listening: Whole alphabet (except vowels) with sounds
Repeat family related vocabulary

Procedure:

Introduction: Days of the week as done for Week 7 (0:10)

Presentation: Introduce X Q – don't worry about the sounds for these – unless they ask. Then you could use X-ray and Quiet – these are so rare and difficult that I wouldn't worry about them – just make sure they become familiar with the letters. (0:15)

Review D and K then let them copy XQDK in W13 (0:25)

Write the alphabet without the vowels on the board (in order) and have them say them with you. Go back through and do their sounds and the special word that goes with the sound. You can also sing the alphabet song here. (0:35)

W14 – they can use anything they have collected to fill this out – model "first name" by looking at W11, show them that they can use their flashcards or worksheets and then try not to give them the answer (unless it is becoming too frustrating – then help them match their worksheets/flashcards with the words on the page) (1:00)

-BREAK- (1:10)

LEA as done in Week 5 (1:30)

Introduce family vocabulary by bringing in a picture of your family (or your brother or sister's family). Then ask individual students "What is your father's name?" "What is your daughter's name?" etc. at random (1:40)

BINGO – JVLZCDKXQBNM as done during Week 6 (2:00)

Vocabulary: Mother
father
daughter
son
brother
sister
husband
wife

Materials: W13
W14
W15
Picture of your family
Flip chart – LEA

W13
COPY.

NAME ______________________________

W14

WRITE.

FIRST NAME ______________________________________

LAST NAME ______________________________________

ADDRESS ______________________________________

CITY ______________________________________

STATE ______________________________________

ZIP CODE ______________________________________

W15

Suggestions for next topics:

- Months/Dates
- Time
- Emergencies
- Pronouns (explain method)
- Food
- Vowels – (explain method?)
- Small letters
- LEA – kids names

Resources:

This is a list of textbooks that can be referenced. Keep in mind that some of the activities will need to be modified to better suit the students. Especially, the pictures, directions, and format used in the exercises.

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Appendix

Somali Initial Consonant Sound Alphabet

Words used to introduce initial consonant sounds:

Baltimore*
Colleen
Dahiro
Fatuma
Galbet
Halima
Jamila
Kadija
Luley
Maryan
Name **
Pencil **
Rukia
Suliman
Teacher
V ^
Weledi
Years **
Zip*

Notes:

You may want to cover the other sound of the letter "c" such as in city and circle.

** Students had difficulty remembering the standard word associated with these letters

* Students had moderate difficulty remembering the standard word associated with these letters

^ The only word we learned was "very" that started with a "v" therefore this letter was not taught as an initial consonant sound.

All other letters were easily associated with their words and sounds on numerous occasions as well as during the interview process.

Curriculum Reviewer Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to review this curriculum. Your input is greatly appreciated by the author. Please use this form to provide feedback or send an email following the format of this form.

1. How would you rate the overall design (format, page design, etc.)?
   ____ 1 (low) 2______ 3_____ 4_______ 5_____ (high)
   How would you improve the design?
   ____
   ____
2. Is the time allotted for each activity sufficient? ____ yes ____ no
   ____
3. Are the directions of the activities clear? ____ yes ____ no
   If not please give specific comments using page numbers and activity names.
   ____
   ____
4. Are the activities suitable for pre-literate adult learners? ____ yes ____ no
   If not please give specific comments using page numbers and activity names.
   ____
   ____
5. What kind of activities did you add while using this curriculum or would you suggest adding?
   ____
   ____
6. Is the language appropriate for the level? ____ yes ____ no
7. What changes would you make to the curriculum to make it more user-friendly for non-ESL trained volunteers?
   ____
   ____
8. Are the tasks appropriate? ____ yes ____ no
   Are the tasks authentic? ____ yes ____ no
   Are the tasks relevant? ____ yes ____ no
9. Please elaborate on any of the above questions or add any further comments you may have. ____
   ____(over)

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