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I want to speak English like you : one woman's experience teaching English to adults in Senegal

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"I want to speak English, like you."

One Woman's Experience Teaching English to Adults in Senegal

By Jenny F. Webster

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

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Action Thesis Signature Page

"I WANT TO SPEAK ENGLISH, LIKE YOU."

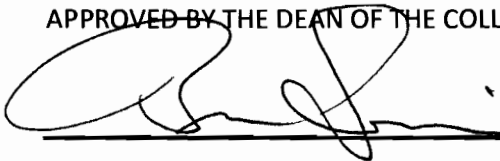ONE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS IN SENEGAL

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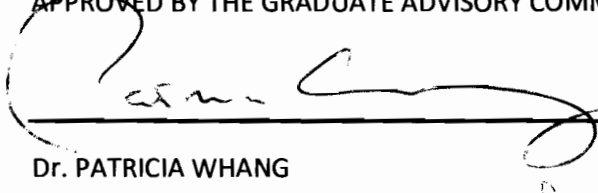JENNY F. WEBSTER

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ABSTRACT

I went to Senegal, West Africa, in December 2004 because I wanted to teach English there. This was my second trip to Senegal. On my first trip one year earlier I went to practice African dance, and at that time several people asked me to teach them English. In response to their requests and my own sense of adventure, I created an English as a Foreign Language curriculum specifically designed for semi-literate Senegalese adults working in the tourist business. I spent one month in the village of Abene teaching adults and children, but specifically for this study I conducted interviews and intensive observations of two women and two men. As a result of this study I am currently building the Bolong International Library in Abene. This library will be a place where adults and children can learn English, practice literacy in French and their home languages, get help filling out official forms, and pick up donated school clothes and supplies. I am also working on recruiting adventurous teachers who want to participate in cultural exchange while teaching English in a beachside village in Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Currently the West African countries lag far behind industrialized countries in wealth, educational and economic opportunities, and quality of life for their citizens. Many of the causes of these discrepancies are rooted in the historical practices of European military aggression and colonialism in Africa, as well as the American slave trade. Underlying these causes are the deep-seated issues of racism and class discrimination. Though I cannot change the injustices of the past, I plan to work towards creating educational and economic opportunities for Africans in the future. I plan to create these opportunities by teaching English to Senegalese adults involved in the tourist industry.

With this study I was able to teach three Senegalese students enough English that they felt comfortable working and speaking with a group of American tourists who arrived one week after I left. I plan to continue teaching English in Senegal, and I would like this thesis to be used by other teachers who are interested in teaching in Africa, or want to continue this project with me. This paper will explore some of the cultural hurdles white American women (and in some cases, men) will need to overcome to work in Senegal. It will also detail the teaching techniques I used, and whether I found them to be effective, based on my students' feedback and my observations of their participation in my class.

For this action thesis I went to Senegal, West Africa to teach English to Senegalese adults. I taught for four weeks during December 2005 and January 2006. For the purpose of this project, I interviewed, taught and observed two women and two men who work in the tourist industry in Abene, Senegal. However, I also worked with many other unofficial students who wanted me to teach them English while I was conducting my study.

Why Africa?

My interest in Africa began when I was a child growing up in California. My mother's friend used to travel to Kenya regularly, and when he returned he brought back fascinating art, jewelry, people and stories. Africa seemed like such a different place from my home in California, and I had always been interested in different places, people and things. However, even as a child, I knew that I would not want to travel to Africa just to look at the people. I have always wanted more than a tourist's perspective. I wanted to form close relationships with people, to understand their daily lives as well as their cultural celebrations, and I wanted to discover our similarities while recognizing our differences.

As an adult I acquired the same knowledge and perspectives that most educated Americans acquire about Africa. I learned that the history of Africa is one of repeated conflict against an inhospitable terrain and climate, conflict against devastating diseases and neighboring tribes, and later conflict against invading Europeans and slave-trading Americans (Iliffe, 1995). In the daily news and in the literature Africa was presented as a place faced with overwhelming problems of poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, corruption and civil wars. Why would I still want to go to such a place?

I still wanted to go to Africa because I am a student of traditional African dance and drum, and because I did not want to accept that this simplified and predominantly negative picture of Africa was the whole picture. I believed, as Koichiro Matsuura, 2005 Director General of UNESCO explains, "the best response we can give (the Africans) is to put behind us the prevailing pessimism about Africa, and our dyed-in-the-wool over-simplifications, habits and convictions" (2005, p. 1).

Through my experiences as a student of African dance and drum I have met many Africans, and I realized that, just as we Americans are not all the same, the Africans are not all the same. I understood that by having an over-simplified and negative picture of these people and their homelands, I was not doing them justice. I also understood that having an overly-positive or reverential picture of Africa and

Africans was not helpful either. bell hooks (2003) clarifies this type of understanding exactly when she writes about her friend whose parents explain that

> "there is good and bad among all races" (2003, p. 54). I had learned about the "bad" side of Africa, and I had heard some people talk about the "good" of Africa by ascribing a sublime beauty or spirituality to the people or landscape, but I agreed with hooks that looking at other people in either of these simple terms is not realistic, and does not further our understanding of others.

Why Senegal?

I took my first trip to Africa in January, 2005. I went with my husband, two sons, and another student of African dance. We were guided by our Senegalese drum and dance teacher, AD. We were there for four weeks. We spent most of our time in campements in Abene, but we also visited AD's family in Ziguinchor, and saw usual tourist sites in the capital, Dakar. During this visit I began to form friendships and I started to know Senegal in its complexity of good and bad. I also met many people who wanted to learn English from me when they realized that I was an English teacher. Most of the people in Senegal speak French, Wolof and other indigenous languages.

After this trip I could not forget about Senegal. Some people say that when I take a photo of someone, I have stolen their soul. For me, it felt like the opposite had occurred. I felt that my heart had been stolen by the people whose photo I had taken. The friends I made in Senegal were clear that they wanted me to come back to teach English. This would help them in their work with English-speaking tourists, and it would allow me to interact with Senegalese people on a daily basis. When I returned to America I contacted AD about teaching his family and friends for my university project. He was very enthusiastic about this because it would help him and his family with the hotel business they are creating in Abene. I went to Senegal because it was a place where I knew people. As my teaching progressed, I realized that "knowing" people was exactly what I had wanted, and it was an essential component for effective teaching in this setting.

Why English?

Paulo Freire (1987) said that sociolinguists have shown that, "scientifically, all languages are valid, systematic, rule-governed systems, and that the inferiority/superiority distinction is a social phenomenon" (p. 53). Freire was trying to make the point that the indigenous languages of Africa and elsewhere are as valid a method of communication as the languages imposed on indigenous peoples by their colonizers. When creating literacy programs for Sao Tome, Principe and Guinea-Bissau, Freire advocated for programs to be taught in the indigenous, or home-languages, of the communities. He argued that these languages are the most widely spoken in the community at large. A literacy program in the home language would decrease the opportunity gap between people who have had the privilege of schooling in the colonizer's language (Portuguese, French or English usually) and those who only know the indigenous languages because they have not had the good fortune to attend school for an extended length of time.

I agree with Freire's sociolinguists that one language is never superior or inferior to another, even when the languages have shorter or longer written histories, and that it would be empowering to have advanced literacy in all peoples' home-languages. However, Freire (1987) also says, "education should understand the value of mastering the standard dominant language of the wider society. It is through the full appropriation of the dominant standard language that students find themselves linguistically empowered to engage in dialogue with the wider society" (p. 152). The adults I taught in Senegal have a strong desire to learn English, a standard dominant language, in order to interact with the wider society. One of my students explained his desire to learn English this way "In world you have French, Espanol, you have English, you have many, many people. It's all these persons have possibility for communication. I like speak English because...in world is nice person for person communication" (DJ personal communication, 12/19/05).

According to Arua E. Arua (2003) of Botswana, "The language policies found across Africa fit the following framework: The language of instruction is initially in the mother tongue during the first years of schooling, and second languages such as English, French and Portuguese are taught as a content area

subject. Later, the languages switch instructional position, with English or the other imported languages becoming the medium of instruction, while the local languages are studied as subjects" (p.2). Senegal was colonized by the French, so for educated Senegalese the usual imported language of instruction is French. A limited number of people will also study English. This explains why about half of Senegalese, who have not attended school past the primary years, have had little formal instruction in French, and even less instruction in English.

None of my students had attended school past the primary grades. I had expected them to have the equivalent of an American fifth grade education, at least in French, but their education was actually lower, especially for the women. This gave me one of my biggest challenges. How do I teach English language to people with limited literacy in any language? My students showed me how to overcome this challenge with their desire to practice diligently, to learn the basics of literacy, and to adopt my teaching techniques with enthusiasm.

Limitations

There are two major limitations to my project. First, it is very expensive to travel from the U.S. to Senegal. This is important because my ultimate plan is to bring other Americans to teach English in Senegal, and I believe it will be difficult to recruit teachers if they have to pay their own way. Second, due to constraints at home of work and family, I was only able to teach for one month. Because of the work schedules of teachers in general, I also think most teachers will not be available for more than a month at a time, and thus the potential impact of teaching in Senegal may be limited.

Summary

In summary, my purpose in conducting this study was to teach English as a Foreign Language to adults in Senegal, and to learn if the Senegalese would like me to bring other English teachers in the future. In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of some of the research relating to my topic.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a review of the literature related to teaching English as a Foreign Language to adults in Senegal I found three general themes. Briefly, these themes are: the "insoluble problem," the zone, and the filter. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the research related to each of these themes.

The Insoluble Problem

The "insoluble problem" refers to the questions behind the philosophies and politics of foreign language (generally French and English) education in Africa. The problem has been explained as follows:

> While the continuing use of English or French in education has had considerable advantages in establishing a high level of achievement for a minority, it presents almost insoluble problems if it is to be applied to education extended to the majority of the population. The use of some second language is inevitable, however, for the majority, if the states are to develop as economically viable units (Mazonde, 2002, p. 125).

For some, the teaching of English in Senegal can be seen as a continuation of the cultural and economic domination that Europe has exerted over Africa for hundreds of years, and for others it can be seen as an important path out of poverty for African citizens.

The foreign language problem began as each African country gained independence from its European colonizer and tried to create a national identity and educational philosophy that gave citizens a sense of cultural pride as Africans. This required teaching students in their indigenous languages. However, it was also recognized that successful interaction with Europe or America would require some people to know French or English. As one researcher explained, "south of the Sahara no African language has yet been used as the medium of secondary or higher education" (Mazonde, 2002, p. 125). This process for education has led to a small elite class who know English or French as well as their home languages. This class has the advantage of linguistic cultural identity and pride as well as the economic opportunities that come from knowing English or French.

With respect to the Senegalese it has been suggested that:

They believe that English is not regarded as important in the education system...Therefore they request that more importance be given to both languages (mother tongue and English) in the education system...home languages (in particular the mother tongues) are dominant in most family and social settings while French is only dominant in public settings. However, the data show that both mother tongues and Wolof are being used in public institutions (Diallo, 2006, p. 1).

An earlier study in South Africa had similar findings as they reported that, "the majority of black parents favor English as a (language of learning and teaching) from the beginning of school, even if their children do not know the language before they go to school...English is becoming more and more dominant because the majority of parents want their children to learn English" (Setati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo, 2002, p. 131). Another study of the insoluble problem of the best language for the people of South Africa to learn agreed, arguing, "that the teaching of English can open up possibilities for students by helping them to explore what might be desirable as well as 'appropriate' uses of English" (Pierce, 1989, p. 401).

As these studies suggest it seems that the Senegalese would like to solve the insoluble problem of which languages should be taught by continuing the practice of teaching younger children in their home languages, and then introducing other languages such as Wolof, French and English at later ages. As one researcher put it:

> Senegalese people are attached to their (home) language because of the more effective communication opportunities the local languages offer and also because of the positive benefits associated with (early) education in one's own mother tongue. In addition, the respondents believe that local languages help them assert their identity and maintain their cultures...As for English, they admire the language because of its prestige and its status as a 'universal' language for communication and its dominance in science, technology, education and business (Diallo, 2006, p. 2).

Senegalese citizens do not seem to be seeking a simple solution to the insoluble problem of foreign language instruction in Senegal. They recognize the value of home languages as well as French and English, and they see that being multi-lingual culture is to their advantage.

The Zone

The second relevant theme I found in my review of literature related to teaching English as a Foreign Language was what I call the "learning zone." This zone is based loosely on Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as it applies to strategies for teaching English as a Foreign Language. The learning zone is the state of mind a student is in when he or she is most receptive to remembering or understanding new information.

As described by one researcher, "Vygotsky (1978) described learning as a fundamentally social process among adult or more knowledgeable group members and less capable novices. He theorized that this social process bridged the learner's 'zone of proximal development'" (Perez, 2004, p. 313). She explains further that, "sociocultural changes formed the basis for the development of higher memory and thinking processes, and that at the center of learning was the social interaction or cooperation between the child (learner) and the parent/teacher" (Perez, 2004, p. 31). The positive social interaction between teacher and learner is one essential component of the complex process of learning. This interaction is what allows the student to step from what he or she currently remembers and understands to what she will remember and understand in the future. The learning zone is the intellectual place where a learner will most easily access information that he or she will remember later independently.

One technique for accessing the learning zone is Total Physical Response or TPR. TPR, which can be used with skits (role-plays), songs and games:

> was developed by James Asher (1972), whose research has shown that students can develop quite advanced levels of comprehension in the language without engaging in oral practice ... In TPR classes, students- children or adults- participate in activities in which they hear a series of commands in the target language, for example: 'stand up', 'sit down', 'pick up the book', 'put the book on the table', 'walk to the door'. For a substantial number of hours students are not required to say anything ... Asher's research (1972) shows that, for beginners, this kind of active listening gives learners a good start. It allows them to build up a considerable knowledge of the language without feeling the nervousness that often accompanies the first attempt to speak the new language (Lightbown & Spada, p. 130).

However critics of TPR point out that this kind of teaching may only be appropriate for beginner learners and question how TPR ties in with any real-world needs. Asher himself says that it should be included together with other methods (Harmer, 2001). These other methods can include involving students in role-plays that directly reflect the types of situations in which they are most likely use English. This practice of teaching language lessons based on specific situations where students expect to use that language is called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Some research suggested that in ESP lessons, "many students derive great benefit from simulation and role-play. Students 'simulate' a real life encounter…as if they were doing so in the real world…Simulation and role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency, or to train students for specific situations" (Harmer, 2001, p. 274). Using role-play activities for ESP learning can be used to access Senegalese students' learning zones by giving them relevant information to be learned in a relaxed social setting.

Another strategy that can be used to access students' learning zones is music, including simple songs that focus on words and phrases that students might need to know for conversation. The songs may even have accompanying movements. Much of the research (Lems, 2001) I found on music described it as a more indirect teaching tool for enhancing student cognitive activity. For example, one study noted that, "neurologists have found that musical and language processing occur in the same area of the brain, and there appear to be parallels in how musical and linguistic syntax are processed" (Lems, 2001, p. 1). Another study supported this idea in that, "an increasing amount of research findings support the theory that the brain is specialized for the building blocks of music" (Jensen, 1998, p. 37).

In addition to enhancing students' cognitive abilities, a teacher can access students' learning zones more readily by using melodies to reinforce their abilities to remember specific words and phrases. This use of music for teaching is described as using music as a carrier (Jensen, 1998). In this case, the melody of the music acts as a vehicle for carrying new vocabulary into a student's memory. Used this way, this teaching strategy can be used with various types of songs such as pop or folk songs. Pop and folk songs can be effective for accessing a foreign language student's learning zone by allowing them, "to understand and relate to the songs, (and) discover the natural stretching and compacting of the stream of English speech" (Lems, 2001, p. 1). Pop songs also tend to use high frequency lyrics that allow students to repeat phrases frequently without getting bored.

Another way to access Senegalese students' learning zones is to use simple games using repetitive language. Games like the card game "Uno" can easily be adapted to a Vygotskian social learning setting by allowing the teacher to guide the conversation from simple to complex as the game

progresses. In addition, games are useful, "to assess the learners developmental level and teach what would naturally come next" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 137). A game can be played with one word sentences or with more complex sentences depending on the level of the student's knowledge.

It has been found that learners who engage in games, role-play and other small group communicative activities, "significantly surpassed...learners who had no such practice...in their communicative competence as measured in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, effort, and amount of communication in unrehearsed communicative tasks" (Savignon, 1974/1978, p. 636). For this reason these strategies have been recommended for language teaching programs in many countries. Of the techniques I looked at I found the least amount of research regarding games as a foreign language teaching strategy.

The Filter

Many researchers (Asher, 1977, Lightbown & Spada, 1999, Smythe, 2002) of foreign language teaching have discussed the "affective filter" as it is critical to be aware of it in all types of teaching. The affective filter has been described as, "an imaginary barrier which prevents learners from acquiring language...A learner who is tense, angry, anxious, or bored may 'filter out' input, making it unavailable for acquisition...The filter will be 'up' (blocking input) when the learner is stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 39-40). Adult learners who have not attended school for many years are more likely to have their filters up because they may have negative memories of school, and it may not be easy for them to return to a setting in which they may feel foolish or not in control. Adults often find it very stressful when they are unable to express themselves clearly and correctly.

It will not be possible to access a student's learning zone if his or her filter is up. The strategies of TPR, role-plays, songs and games play the double role of reducing students' affective filter, as well as accessing their learning zones. As explained by one researcher, "Asher (1977) sees the need to lower the affective filter and finds that organizing physical actions in the classroom helps to do this." In addition, he says, "this idea, that the learner's state of mind, his or her personal response to the activity of learning, is central to success or failure in language learning has greatly influenced teaching methods and materials writing" (Harmer, 2001, p. 90). Most researchers on this topic agree that specific steps must be taken to lower students' affective filters in order to be effective teachers of foreign language.

One foreign language teacher in Africa explained that, "more importantly, I provided positive feedback as students made progress" (Smythe, 2002, p. 1). Positive feedback and activities specifically

geared towards lowering student's affective filters are of critical importance to any teacher who wishes to access a student's learning zone. Activities such as role-plays, songs and games all help students to relax and feel confident in a possibly intimidating environment. To be a successful teacher to adults in Africa it is essential to use activities to help lower their affective filters.

Summary

This review of literature related to teaching English as a Foreign Language to adults in Senegal has discussed these three themes: the "insoluble problem," Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and the role of the affective filter in foreign language learning. The "insoluble problem" refers to the political and philosophical controversy about foreign language instruction in Africa. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is discussed as it applies to accessing a student's learning zone, or the state of mind in which a student can most effectively remember and understand new information. The critical importance of using specific strategies to reduce the affective filter in foreign language instruction to adults in Africa is also discussed. In the next chapter I will describe the methodology I used for this research project.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide the details of the methods I used to design and conduct this study, as well as to collect, analyze and present my data.

Setting

The setting for this study was in the village of Abene, Senegal. Abene is a relaxed beach town with one main dirt road through the center of the village where cars can drive. There are also hundreds of side paths which are primarily traveled by foot or bicycle. I lived and did most of my teaching in a campement called Les Belles Etoile. A campement is a cluster of small cabins surrounding a central kitchen, fire circle, dining area and performance space. From my campement I could walk fifteen minutes along single-track dirt paths lined with jungle and forest plants to get to the beach. The walk to the center of the village was also about fifteen minutes on narrow dirt paths. There is no electricity in Abene, and only the hotels and campements have running water. Some of the hotels have generators for electric lights, but the campement where I stayed had only small gas lanterns at night.

Abene is normally a quiet village of about five hundred people, but at the time I was there it had its annual traditional music festival which attracts hundreds of European and African tourists. The economy of Abene is largely dependent on tourism from this festival.

Much of my teaching was conducted on the tiny cement patio of my cabin, or if I had more than three students in attendance, then we made a circle of plastic chairs on the dirt path directly in front of my cabin.

I also taught lessons while eating meals in the group eating areas, while walking to and from the beach or the village, while learning dance, while helping the women cook at the campement, when having tea and when just passing time together with my students.

Research Participants

I had four official research participants, and many other unofficial students. I chose two men and two women as official students because I wanted to see if I experienced any differences when working with men and women. I chose these particular men and women because they were over eighteen years old, they were either relatives or close friends of my Senegalese friend, AD, and I knew they were all working directly with American tourists.

I conducted initial interviews with all four students, and follow-up interviews with both men and one of the women. The other woman left the campement after one week of English lessons, and I only saw her briefly on one occasion after that. I worked with all my students almost daily when they were at the campement, and I recorded observations of each of them daily.

My oldest student, DJ, was thirty years old. He was one of AD's oldest friends and he worked as a performer and teacher of traditional African music. DJ was not married and had no children. He was about five feet, six inches tall and very muscular. He generally wore casual western-style clothes, and his hair was in shoulder length dreadlocks. What I first noticed about DJ is that he appeared to be asleep even when he was awake. He had small, sleepy eyes and his body was very still when he was sitting. DJ explained to me that many people say that he looks like he is asleep, but it just looks like that because his eyes are small. Another thing I noticed soon after I met DJ was his voice. It was very deep and his speech had a sonorous, relaxing rhythm. People tended to like DJ because he was kind and playful. Creating and listening to music were DJ's passions.

My next oldest student was HD who was twenty-nine years old. He was not married and had a two year old son. HD was about six feet tall with a strong upright posture. He had a handsome

face and smile with a large space between his front two teeth. HD was also a traditional music musician, but his primary job was as concierge. He was very reliable; any time anyone needed help HD was available. HD has short dreadlocks and also usually wore casual western-style clothes. Because his work demanded almost constant direct contact with English-speaking tourists, HD was the most motivated of my students to learn English.

ID was twenty-four years old. She was not married and had a seven year old son. She was AD's younger sister, and she worked as the cook and laundry service for the tourists and AD's other employees. She used to be a professional dancer, but is not any longer; I was not told why. ID was about five feet, four inches tall and was surprisingly chubby for an African. She had almond shaped eyes and a friendly smile. ID had the lowest English ability of my official students, but she worked very hard to learn. She also worked very hard at her other duties of cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes, managing the staff when AD and HD were away, and teaching me traditional dance.

My youngest student was OD who was twenty-one years old. She was not married and had a four year old daughter. OD was about five feet, nine inches tall with a very strong build and a dazzling smile. She worked as a professional dancer and assisted ID with cooking, cleaning and teaching dance. OD seemed motivated to learn English, but left the campement after only one week of lessons. It was not explained to me why she left, but she reappeared for one day to give me a present.

Research Design

The research design for this project was a participatory action ethnographic study. I chose this method of research because I wanted to participate in a study that would be "characterized by first-hand, naturalistic, sustained observation in a particular social setting" (Harklau, as referenced

by Hinkel, 2005 p. 179). This would allow me to analyze the effectiveness of specific teaching methods while teaching adults in Senegal, and at the same time to analyze the desire of my students to continue with this type of project. I also wanted to be able to consider the practicality of bringing other American English teachers to Senegal in the future.

Teaching Tools

Based on my review of the research literature on teaching English in Africa, the teaching tools I planned to use in my own study were Total Physical Response, songs, skits or guided role-play, and games. Each of these is explained in greater detail below.

Total Physical Response (TPR) TPR is Total Physical Response (Segal, 1999), a method for teaching foreign languages that uses movements of the teacher's and students' bodies. The method is based on the following premises: (1) Listening skill is far in advance of speaking skill; (2) Understanding should be developed through movements of the student's body; (3) Speech is natural and developmental, and will emerge naturally in its own time; and (4) Students should not be rushed into reading and writing before they have had ample listening and speaking experience. This emphasis on movement to reinforce learning is consistent with my own experience in learning foreign languages, and is echoed in Eric Jensen's (1998) *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*. He says, "The benefits of early motor stimulation don't end in elementary school; there is tremendous value in novel motor stimulation throughout secondary school and the rest of our life" (p.35). The basic idea behind TPR is that if we connect words and phrases in a new language with a consistent physical action, then our brains are more likely to retain the new words and phrases.

Although much of the research on foreign language learning techniques has been conducted on children, James J. Asher and Ben S. Price (1967) found that TPR was equally, or more, effective for adult learners. They explain, "It may be that children outperform adults in foreign language comprehension because the new language is learned through play activity in which the child makes action responses" (p. 1219). When they compared children to adults learning Russian with TPR techniques, however, they found that, "The adults, on the average, and for any level of

15

language complexity, dramatically excelled the children of any age group tested" (Asher & Price, 1967, p. 1225).

Another reason I felt TPR would be an effective strategy for teaching English to Senegalese adults is that it requires few physical resources. I knew I would not have access to computers or overhead projectors. The only books, paper and pencils available were those that I brought with me. With TPR I could conduct complete lessons using my actions, my students' actions, and our physical surroundings.

Songs The songs I used have simple, repeated words that incorporate phrases commonly used in English. Some songs have familiar American melodies, but I modified the words to teach useful American phrases for an adult working in a hotel in Senegal. With these songs I used music as a "carrier." With a carrier, "the melody of the music acts as the vehicle for the words themselves" (Jensen, 1998, p. 37). I found this to be an effective technique when I was learning foreign languages, so I wanted to see if it would work with Senegalese adults as well. The adults I worked with listened to, created and performed music every day. It is an integral part of their lives so I felt they would respond favorably to learning English with songs.

Skits and Role-play The third technique I used was skits or guided role play. I thought the Senegalese would respond favorably to skits because the lessons were pre-scripted to reduce anxiety, and they were directly related to the work they were performing with American tourists at the hotels. The skits used the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) focus of age-appropriate (adult) material delivered with "sheltered" or simplified English. The skits also applied the SDAIE components of relevant tasks and contextualized instruction when the students were instructed to act out situations they would be regularly involved in at their work. The skits used TPR techniques as well because they involved movements of the student's bodies.

Games The last technique I used was games. I used the games to reinforce specific words and phrases that are naturally associated with specific games. I felt this would be a good technique for encouraging repetition of words without the boredom often associated with repetition. I adapted the games in two ways. First, I simplified them if they involved more vocabulary than my

students understood. Later, I added vocabulary as my students' knowledge increased. Second, I also adapted the games to the setting and lives of my students, so the vocabulary would reflect the objects and actions they come into contact with in their daily lives, rather than the objects and actions that a middle class American would come into contact with. The games were intended to be fun and humorous in order to reduce the "affective filter" of stress that commonly inhibits learning another language.

Data Collection

To assess the success of my teaching techniques, my primary methods for collecting data included:

- pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews,
- daily observations of my students' reactions to specific types of teaching techniques as well as observations of my surroundings, my activities and my reactions to being a white American woman teaching English in Senegal; and
- English-language workbooks.

These methods allowed me to develop a personal and thorough understanding of my student/subjects' daily lives and English skills, to make a daily analysis of their progress with learning English, and to analyze my own reactions to being a teacher in Senegal. Each of these tools is explained below in greater detail.

Interviews My initial interviews with all four of my students were conducted on the patio of my cabin in Abene on December 19, 2005. I tape recorded each of these interviews. The specific questions I asked of my interviewees included the following:

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- How did you learn the English that you already know?

- Why do you want to learn English?

I conducted my second set of interviews on January 5th and 6th, 2006. ID and DJ were interviewed on the patio of my cabin, HD was interviewed in the car en route between Abene and Dakar, and OD was unavailable for the second interview. For these interviews I did not use the tape recorder, but instead hand-wrote my interviewees' responses because I realized that the tape recorder had made them nervous for the initial interviews, and I wanted to hear more relaxed and natural responses. The questions for the second interview were:

- We played games, sang songs, read, had conversation, and practiced skits. What part of the English class did you learn the most from?
- What was the best part of English class?

Daily Journal Observations As mentioned above, I also recorded daily observations of my situation in Senegal using a journal because I wanted to keep a first-hand record of my activities, my personal reactions, my students' reactions and my teaching techniques. I believed that even though I had a curriculum and lesson plans, my lessons might not exactly follow those plans. I wanted to have a method for observation that would be thorough and flexible enough to adapt whatever sort of lessons I ended up providing, and that would allow me to observe myself, my students, my lessons and my surroundings in an in-depth and naturalistic way. For my observations, I kept a daily journal using these general guidelines:

- My daily activities and surroundings. For example, I recorded the places I went including visits to the beach, the market, the telecentre and people's homes.
- My reactions to specific events and people in my activities. For this I wanted a record of the people I met each day, and my interactions with my students outside the teaching environment.
- The specific teaching techniques I used each day. For example, I kept track of when we sang songs and which ones, when we played games and which ones, when we did reading, when we did role-plays, etc.

- A detailed recording of my students' reactions to each specific teaching technique. This included whether they seemed happy or unhappy with the activity, whether they requested to repeat the activity, if they appeared relaxed or nervous, if they participated with enthusiasm, etc.

English-Language Workbooks In order to determine the effectiveness of my teaching on my students, I used the McGraw-Hill "Little Critter" kindergarten, first grade and second grade workbook series, first to assess my students' initial English reading level, and then to monitor their progress. I used this series because it had very basic vocabulary that included more items that I believed I would find in Senegal, rather than some of the other workbook series which have items I thought would not be found in Senegal. The "Little Critter" stories also tend to revolve around family activities and I thought these would be easier for my students to relate to. I told each student to choose the level they wanted to work at, and they each chose the workbook that matched their reading level. I monitored their progress with daily oral readings, and I made a daily assessment of how far into the story or vocabulary they continued each day with a spiral style lesson. I also noted how many new words/phrases were remembered from one day to the next.

Data Analysis

My data analysis used the following methods for the interviews and journal observations. To analyze my interview data I first transcribed my audiotapes into written form. Then I read my transcriptions and I identified the themes I noticed consistently in the students' comments. Concurrently, I analyzed my journal observations examining my experiences and teachings throughout the study. Combining these analyses allowed me to elaborate on the themes initially identified through student interviews. To find these themes I identified key folk terms that were representative of the specific domains that I found most frequently in the interviews and observation notes. I also identified and analyzed the answers to my initial research questions as they related to these domains. These questions were:

- What were my best, worst and strangest experiences as an American woman teaching in Senegal?
- What were my students' best and worst experiences from my teaching?
- In what ways were Total Physical Response, songs and skits effective or ineffective for teaching English in this setting?
- Should I recruit and train other Americans to teach English in Senegal?

I analyzed my findings from the English Language Workbooks by noting which words and phrases the students remembered from one day to the next when they read the identical text, and then spiraled forward in the reading each day. I also recorded their responses to questions of comprehension asked each day and noted what information was remembered and what was forgotten from one day to the next. In addition, I observed and recorded my students' responses to specific types of stories and characters.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained my methodology for my participatory action ethnographic study. This study took place in the village of Abene in Senegal, West Africa, and involved four adults who work with tourists and wanted to learn English. I worked with these four for one month, did pre and post interviews as well as daily, detailed observations of my lessons that included TPR, songs, skits and games.

Chapter Four

DATA ANALYSIS

To gather the data for this project I analyzed my observation notes and the transcriptions of my interviews, looking for repeated folk terms, domains and themes. Combining these analyses allowed me to elaborate on the themes initially identified through student interviews. Analysis of themes then provided the information to answer the following research questions:

- What were my best, worst and strangest experiences as an American woman teaching in Senegal?
- What were my students' best and worst experiences from my teaching?
- In what ways were Total Physical Response, songs and skits effective or ineffective for teaching English in this setting?
- Should I recruit and train other Americans to teach English in Senegal?

In this chapter, I will first present the themes that I identified from the combined analyses of my participants' interviews and my own journal reflections, and then a discussion of how those themes provided responses to my research questions.

Themes

Four themes repeated themselves throughout my observation notes and the interviews, though some were more prevalent either in the observations or in the interviews. These themes are represented by the phrases, "*Tuobab*," "In Africa woman is working many, many, many," "*Donk, loho, nope...*," and, "Thank you, my teacher."

"Tuobab"

The first theme is represented by the word "*tuobab*." Roughly this word means "foreigner," but it is generally used to mean "white person." The word *tuobab* is in my observation notes twenty times, and it is in my interviews once. In my observations I generally used the word *tuobab* to describe my

position as a white foreigner in Senegal, or to quote an African who was referring to non-Africans. In my interview it is used to refer to tourists who speak English.

One of my research questions was: what were my best, worst and strangest experiences as an American woman teaching in Senegal? As I recorded my experiences, I realized that after a couple days in Senegal I thought of myself as "*tuobab*." It was impossible to leave my cabin and not be reminded that I was *tuobab*. Children would consistently call to me, "*bonjour Tuobab!*" Most adults would interact with me in ways that reminded me that I was different. Men who were complete strangers would flirt with me immediately upon our meeting, and women, if they spoke to me at all, would try to sell me things.

Being *tuobab* was definitely my strangest experience in Senegal, and it led to my worst experiences as well. It was strange because when I am at home my physical appearance is much like many other women, and I live in a community that is used to seeing people of a variety of races. At home it is not assumed that if you are of a particular race, then you are a wealthy tourist. In Senegal, if you are anything except black, then it is assumed that you are a wealthy tourist.

This distinction between black and non-black people was very strange for me. When I went to a performance in the evening, my ticket cost ten times more than my African friends' tickets. When I sat with my friends in the audience, I was told by an African woman that I was supposed to sit in the "*tuobab*" section. I later realized that the *tuobab* section was where the white tourists staying in the more expensive hotels were escorted to so they would not be crowded into the black audience section. The *tuobab* section had enough chairs for all the tourists, whereas the black audience members generally stood crowded together or sat on the ground.

Seeing this separation, based so predominantly on race, was very strange for me, but it was not my worst experience because these separations were based on social conventions rather than laws. Since it was not a law that I had to sit in the *tuobab* section, I was able to choose to sit in the black section if I wanted to. I only had to be willing to be stared at and to have conversation with all the African boys and men near me.

My worst experience as a *tuobab* was occasionally being a complete outsider in a culture that is so unlike my own. This was especially clear to me when I attended two parties. One was a birthday party and the other was a New Year's Eve party. I did not know the social conventions for dancing at these parties, so even though I wanted to dance I spent most of my evenings sitting in a corner

watching. The social conventions of parties was not something my students had enough English to explain to me, and I did not want to force any of them to sit in the corner with the *tuobab*, so I sat by myself usually and felt more like an outsider then than at any other time.

"*Tuobab*" is not generally an insult; it is generally just a way of identifying people as tourists. When my student said, in an interview, that she wanted to be able to talk to *tuobab*, she was just pointing out that this would be to her advantage. I frequently heard conversations in languages I did not understand, and heard the word *tuobab* being used. This was disconcerting because I did not know if I was the subject of the conversation, or if *tuobab* in general were being discussed. I had to remind myself that *tuobab* was not an insult, and that I should not feel uncomfortable every time I heard this word.

"In Africa woman is working many, many, many"

The second theme is represented by the phrase, "In Africa, woman is working many, many, many." This specific quote is only in my observation notes once, but the theme it represents (the challenges and rewards of teaching African women) is in my notes nineteen times and in my interviews three times. This theme covers the challenges involved in interacting with and teaching African women because they are almost always working, and because they generally have had very little schooling. It also covers ways I attempted to overcome these challenges, and the results of my efforts. In the interviews, this theme represents my women students' comments on their own education ("I no school") and the work they do in their daily life.

One thing I noticed on my first trip to Senegal was that most of my social interactions were with men. I wanted to get to know women, but their responsibilities at home did not give them extra time for socializing with me. This was one reason I specifically chose to work with two women as well as two men when I did my study.

Women in Senegal are almost always busy. I observed that just preparing food is a very time-consuming activity for them. The women I taught were not farmers but the food they prepared came in a much more basic form than most American women are used to. In order to make the staple food of millet edible, the women would pound it for almost an hour with a mortar and pestle. The first step in making a sauce was to send a child to find leafy branches from a particular tree. Then it took a couple of hours to pull enough leaves off to flavor the sauce. Wood needs to be gathered for the cooking fire. Not only do the women cook in this time-consuming manner, they wash clothes by hand, hang the

clothes to dry, care for the children and babies, gather wood, keep the house clean and neat, and shop at the market. I found that if I wanted to spend time with women then I could not wait until they finished work; I had to join them in their work.

One activity I participated in to increase my interactions with women was food preparation. I learned how strip the leaves from the branches of a young tree to make sauce, I cut potatoes, I dropped batter into boiling oil to make doughnuts, and I peeled oranges. I also offered to help wash clothes, but my offer was politely refused as they knew I had no experience washing clothes by hand.

Another way I increased my time with women was by giving manicures. Once a week I spent about an hour filing and painting the nails of any woman who had her hands free for about ten minutes. My efforts at preparing food and painting nails paid off with more women coming to my cabin to participate in English class. As I sat and did simple activities with them I saw that they were becoming more relaxed in my company. They would talk amongst themselves more frequently, offer me food, and make brief attempts at speaking English with me. In exchange, I tried to learn whatever French, Wolof or Mandinka phrase they tried to teach me.

The other significant obstacle to teaching women in Senegal is their lack of education. The two main women I taught dropped out of school in the first and second grades. They described their education as, "I no school." When I asked these women to put their initials on multiple lines on the consent forms it was a challenge for them. I demonstrated what their initials should look like and where to put them. They understood what they were supposed to do, but for them to actually print the letters several times in a straight line took about five fully concentrated minutes for each of them.

In my second interview with ID she explained that she had not enjoyed school when she was a young girl; she preferred to dance. Her father told her that if she did not want to go to school then she did not have to, but that she would have to work at home instead. He also said that he believed that she would want to return to school when she was older. Apparently she had not had the opportunity to return to schooling until I came along and started teaching her English. She said her father was right; she loves learning now.

ID's story may not be typical of many Senegalese women because her father recognized that she would want to return to school, but it is typical in that she was allowed to stop school whenever her family allowed it. Children are not considered truant if they are not at school; they are only viewed as disadvantaged if the boys drop out early. OD also explained that she stopped going to school at a young

24

age and then only worked at home. Another woman I spoke with never went to school, but she successfully runs a small hotel. She relies on a more educated man to read and write for her, but she owns the hotel and makes the decisions on how the money will be spent.

In order to teach these women, I could not rely on written words. Even though ID carried her workbook around with her so she could "read" when she had a free moment, she was actually memorizing the names of the pictures in the workbook. I taught her the English alphabet and its sounds, but she almost always forgot the sounds. She was far more successful memorizing the spoken names for things, singing English songs and learning from games like Uno.

"Donk, loho, nope..."

The third theme I found repeated in my observation notes is represented by the phrase, *"Donk, loho, nope..."* This is the name of a children's song in the Wolof language that is the equivalent of the American song "Head, shoulders, knees and toes." The theme this song represents is teaching techniques that did or did not create opportunities for cultural exchange. This theme appears in my observation notes thirty-three times, and in my interviews three times. In my observation notes it refers to most of the teaching techniques I tried with my students, whether they appeared successful for cultural exchange and learning or not. In the interviews this theme refers to the techniques my students reported that they learned from and enjoyed.

The first lesson I taught was the song, "head, shoulders, knees and toes." We were at the beach and we drew a figure of a person in the sand. I identified the parts of the body included in the song, and then we sang the song. DJ said it was a very nice song and we sang it repeatedly, and incorporated the traditional movements for this song. On our way home DJ taught me, *"Donk, loho, nope,"* which translates to, "Legs, hands, ears," and is a song that has its own traditional movements that all Senegalese children learn.

This was a successful lesson in two ways. First, DJ was able to remember the song hours and days later, so it appeared he had learned the English for the parts of the body in the song. It was also successful because I learned an equivalent song, and I was able to participate in an exchange of information, rather than a one-sided delivery of information. By learning *"Donk, loho, nope,"* and reciting it together with my students while waiting for the ferry on the bank of the Gambia River, I was able to interact with other Africans who recognized this song from their own childhoods. Several people standing near us changed from indifferent attitudes to friendly and open when they heard us singing this

song together. They sang along with us and everyone laughed as we tried to sing it faster and faster. This exchange allowed me to gain trust and comfort from my students. This trust in turn allowed them to learn more from me as their comfort level with me increased.

My most successful lessons used the game of Uno. For beginning English learners the lesson was on colors and numbers. For more advanced learners the lessons were on expressing gratitude and dismay, or on directions for drivers. The lessons on directions for drivers emerged naturally from HD and DJ as they observed how the game was organized, and they asked for phrases in English that they would use if they were driving cars in heavy traffic.

One reason Uno was successful was that it was fun, and this allowed my students to play over and over without getting bored. Uno also is just a deck of cards, so it was very portable and we were able to play and practice English many places. We played in front of my cabin, we played in the stadium while waiting for the evening show to start, and we played on the banks of the Gambia River while waiting for the ferry. We played just about anytime we were waiting for something to happen, and that was often. I knew that Uno was successful because my students frequently asked to play, and they always used English when they played even if this slowed the game down. In contrast, they never asked to do writing from dictation after the first lesson, and DJ left halfway through the lesson.

"Thank you, my teacher."

The fourth theme I found repeated in my observations and interviews is represented by the phrase, "Thank you, my teacher." This actual phrase is in my observation notes three times, and is expressed in other words four more times. This theme is also in my interviews four times. The theme of, "Thank you, my teacher," refers to my students' respectful way of addressing me, and their expressions of gratitude for my coming to Senegal and teaching them English.

HD and DJ told me that they had explained to their friends that I was there to teach them English, and that many of their friends wanted to join the class. HD then explained that I should take a photo of all the people who wanted to learn English. Then I should show this photo to other teachers in America who would then come to Senegal to teach English. This is the kind of enthusiasm I met anytime someone learned that I was an English teacher.

Every lesson I gave, except for one attempt at dictation, was carried out with diligence and enthusiasm. ID reported that she carried her workbook with her everywhere, and every evening she

studied while cooking and then later by lantern light before she went to sleep. Even when I was sure HD was tired from three or more hours of intense English conversation, skits and reading, he would ask to continue. Then he would end every session with a polite, "Thank you, my teacher."

Whenever my students, and many other people as well, saw me, they would say, "Hello Jenny, my teacher," with such reverence that sometimes I felt a little uncomfortable. I felt as though I should be saving lives with this level of respect, not just teaching English. When I asked DJ what he liked best about the English classes, he said, "All." He seemed unwilling to consider that any part of the lesson was less than ideal for him. ID and HD answered similarly, with ID going on to say she loved me, and she loved learning English.

Research Questions

I began this action research project with four specific questions I wanted to answer, and collected data from sources that I believed were most likely to help me address those questions. Through analysis and triangulation of my data sources, I was able to identify four themes that characterized both my own and my students' experiences as I attempted to teach them English. In my discussion of those themes I have alluded to some of these responses; in this section I will detail how the themes pointed to answers to my research questions.

What were my best, worst and strangest experiences as an American woman teaching in Senegal?

As I described earlier, my best experiences were related to having successful teaching experiences with my students, to receiving their expressions of gratitude, and to having formed close relationships with them and with other local people. My worst experiences were related to the occasional feeling I had of being a complete outsider in a foreign culture, especially when I participated in social events. My awareness that in Africa there is often a very distinct line between what black people do and what white people do, even without laws to enforce these behaviors, was what contributed to my strangest experiences. Growing up in mixed-race communities in California did not prepare me for these distinct divisions based on race.

What were my students' best and worst experiences from my teaching?

Based on my observations and on my interviews with my students I feel confident to state that my students' best experiences from my teaching were playing games. They particularly enjoyed the card game "Uno" and other games that allowed them to practice English conversation in a relaxed

setting. I also feel confident to state that their worst experiences happened when I attempted to have them write something original. Copying written statements was okay, but attempting to write original statements was impossible for some, and very stressful and bewildering for others.

In what ways were Total Physical Response, songs and skits effective or ineffective for teaching English in this setting?

As I explained previously, Total Physical Response (TPR) techniques are effective for teaching adults in Senegal when used with songs and skits, or role-plays, but they are a little tedious if used alone. Songs are very effective teaching techniques if they are very simple, and if they are modified to reflect common English phrases. Skits or role-plays are also very effective if they directly reflect the types of conversations that the students can expect to have in English, and if they are repeated often using TPR techniques.

Should I recruit and train other Americans to teach English in Senegal?

My students were very clear in expressing that they would like me to come back to continue to teach English in Senegal, and that they would like me to expand my project by bringing other English teachers. However, it is very expensive to travel to Senegal, and many teachers do not have enough extra time in their schedules to commit to teaching in Africa for a month or more. Until I have a sponsor who can assist with encouraging and financing other volunteers to teach in Senegal, I am continuing my project by traveling to Senegal by myself every three months, bringing donated school clothes and supplies, teaching English, and building a library in the village of Abene.

Summary

In an analysis of the data from my English teaching project in Senegal I identified four significant themes to help answer my initial research questions. The first theme was represented by the phrase *"tuobab,"* which is what foreigners are called in West Africa. The second theme of the challenges of working with African women is represented by the phrase, "in Africa woman is working many, many, many." Lessons that promoted cultural exchange were represented by the song, *"donk, loho, nope,"* which is the Wolof equivalent of "head, shoulders, knees and toes." The last theme is represented by the phrase, "thank you, my teacher," an expression of gratitude and respect from my students. Each of these themes contributed in some way to helping me formulate responses to my research questions. In my next chapter I will detail my recommendations for continuing this project in Senegal.

Chapter 5

ACTION PLAN

I went to Senegal, West Africa, in December 2004 because I wanted to teach English there. This was my second trip to Senegal. On my first trip one year earlier I went to practice African dance, and at that time several people asked me to teach them English. In response to their requests and my own sense of adventure, I created an English as a Foreign Language curriculum specifically designed for semi-literate Senegalese adults working in the tourist business. I spent one month in the village of Abene teaching adults and children, but specifically for this study I conducted interviews and intensive observations of two women and two men.

When I created the curriculum for this project I wanted to see if Total Physical Response (TPR), songs, skits or role-plays, and games would be effective teaching techniques. Since I knew my students would be semi-literate and that I would have few physical resources on hand I knew I would need to work with teaching strategies that were not dependent on textbooks or modern technological equipment. I also wanted to minimize the affective filter phenomena that can significantly reduce a teacher's ability to reach a student's learning zone. The learning zone is the state of mind that allows a student to most effectively remember and understand new information. The affective filter is the biggest obstacle to accessing the student's learning zone. I found that modified use of TPR, songs, role-plays and games were very good ways to minimize the anxiety that is a large contributor to the affective filter. This allowed my students to quickly and cheerfully work in their learning zones.

Another significant issue I wanted to resolve has been described as the "insoluble problem" of foreign language teaching in Africa. This problem was first recognized when African nations gained their independence from European colonizers in the 1960s. At that time those countries wanted to create a sense of national pride by adopting their indigenous African languages as official languages. However this policy led to the problem that, if the majority of Africans did not know a European language, then they would be significantly hindered in their economic and communicative abilities.

From the beginning I wanted to respect the Senegalese desire to retain Wolof as their national language, and I went to teach English only to those people who had expressed a strong interest in

learning English. One thing I learned from reading about this topic, and from spending time with Senegalese people, is that people who learn many languages from a very young age have a much more flexible attitude towards language than do those of us who were raised primarily with one language. My students, who spoke four or five African languages, as well as French, had no problem with their African linguistic identity as they added English to the list of languages in which they could communicate.

What did I Want to Know?

The questions I set out to answer with this project were:

- o What were my best, worst, and strangest experiences working as a white American woman English teacher in Africa?
- o What were my students' best and worst experiences from my teaching?
- o Were TPR, songs, skit (role-plays) and games effective teaching techniques?
- o Should I recruit other American English teachers to teach in Senegal?

I wanted to consider my own best, worst and strangest experiences because I felt it would be useful to focus on my own experiences so that in the future I could give other American English teachers a thorough description of the experiences and feelings they might encounter if they travel to Senegal to teach. After all, it is the other side of the world and a very different culture from ours.

Now I am very glad I took the time to look closely at my experiences because they will serve as a reference for the seminars I plan to create for other English teachers who plan to accompany me to Senegal.

I found that my best, worst and strangest experiences were similar to those that Peace Corps volunteer Sarah Erdman wrote about in her book *Nine Hills to Nabonkha* (2003). Our best experiences were related to the satisfaction we felt when we saw that our work was truly effective and appreciated by the people with whom we were working. Every time my student would say, "thank you, my teacher," because he had learned something he would use the next day, or he had just had a good time singing or playing Uno, I felt satisfaction from the work I was doing. At that time it did not feel like work.

My worst experiences were related to the occasional event that would remind me of my outsider status in a foreign culture. Sarah Erdman also wrote that it was losing the friendship of

a child by inadvertently violating an unwritten law regarding the way friendship is expressed that was her worst experience. For me personally, it was not knowing what to do socially at a birthday party that made me feel like a true outsider. I wanted to dance but since I did not know the social conventions for dancing in this setting, and I could not figure them out by watching, I did not dance. I felt so alienated that I went to my cabin and cried.

Other white women working in Africa have shared my strangest experiences as well. This happens when we feel the overwhelming strangeness of being "*tuobab*" women. "*Tuobab*" is a word used all over West Africa to describe white people or foreigners. As *tuobab* women we were classified as a strange third sex, not completely male or female. We were obviously female because men would flirt with us in a way we would not normally experience in America, but we were also male because we would choose to do things, and we were frequently invited to do things that were generally reserved for African men.

The next thing I wanted to know was my students' best and worst experiences with my teaching. My findings concur with the literature about teaching English as a Foreign Language regarding the importance of reducing the affective filter. My students' best experiences came from activities I planned specifically to lower their affective filters. The most effective was using the game of Uno as a teaching tool. With a lesson structured to progress from very simple to more complex English, depending on the level of my students' ability, I watched my most inhibited students engage with enthusiasm in the learning of colors, numbers and simple English phrases. Uno was clearly my students' best experience as it was most effective at lowering their affective filters, and allowing my students to move quickly into their learning zones.

My students' worst experiences with my teaching, according to my observations, were when I asked them to write. This activity significantly raised their levels of anxiety, and therefore their affective filters. They did not complain directly about writing, but they appeared bewildered and stressed by the idea of doing more than copying short sentences I had written for them. DJ made up an excuse to leave at the beginning of the second writing lesson, and I did not pursue writing with any of them after that lesson.

The next thing I wanted to know was whether TPR, songs, role-plays and games would be effective teaching techniques for semi-literate Senegalese adults working in the tourist business. The simple answer is yes. All of these techniques were effective for lowering my

students' affective filters, and I would agree with the literature that recommends that these techniques become an integral part of any foreign language learning program. When used properly these techniques can take students quickly to their learning zones, and they offer them lessons they will want to practice on their own. I saw this result repeatedly in my observations, and my students confirmed their enthusiasm for these strategies in their interviews with me at the end of the month.

Based on my findings and how they allowed me to respond to my original research questions, I would make the following recommendations with regard to teaching English in Senegal, or other similar countries.

1. TPR should be used in conjunction with the other techniques, rather than as a stand-alone activity. It can be monotonous used alone, but TPR's exaggerated physical activity is an essential component for the songs, the games, and especially the role-plays.

2. The songs need to be extremely simple (for example, *one potato, two potato*), and can be modified liberally to teach more realistic conversational phrases than is often found in songs. Interestingly, my Muslim students really enjoyed singing *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*, probably because the high level of repetition gave them confidence. (For songs and modified songs, see Appendix.)

3. The role-plays should directly reflect real-life conversations that the students are likely to have. We had an immediate success when I role-played with HD some basic questions to ask someone who has just arrived to the *campement*. The next day he correctly asked a young woman if she would like a mosquito *net*, rather than asking her if she would like a *mosquito*, as he had done previously with guests. He was very proud of himself for correcting this mistake, and really appreciated all the role-plays that applied directly to his work.

4. The games need to begin simply and can progress to a high level of complexity in the rules, and the level of English language used. The teacher needs to directly monitor the game, preferably as a player, and model the English to be practiced.

5. I would not recommend creating an extensive writing program for semi-literate adults unless they have a specific purpose for writing, such as wanting to write a letter or filling out an official form. Since my students did not have an immediate need to write and it was an

activity that raised their affective filters, I was glad it was not my primary method of instruction.

By following these guidelines a teacher will see motivated students working directly in their learning zones. She may even witness them singing songs in English, and playing English-language games in their spare time.

The last question I wanted to answer was whether I should bring more American English teachers to Senegal. The literature says that the teaching of English or French is controversial in Africa. African communities want to maintain their cultural identities by retaining their home languages. On the other hand, they also want to be able to communicate with other continents for personal and economic reasons. According to the literature this is an "insoluble problem." However, this does not need to be an insoluble problem as the Africans are very adept at learning multiple languages. They can keep their home languages as official languages, or they can have dual official languages as Senegal does with Wolof and French, and they can easily add English to the variety of other languages they already know.

So yes, the Senegalese want me to bring English teachers, but I do not think it will be easy to do that. It is very expensive to travel to Senegal, and many Americans do not have more than two weeks of vacation time at one time. To make a difference, I would recommend that teachers be in Senegal for at least a month.

Based on my own experiences as a *tuobab* woman in Africa, I am giving these suggestions for teachers who wish to consider going there to teach English.

1. *Passport* A visa is not required, but of course a passport is. Update your passport before you do anything else.
2. *Health* See a travel doctor. A yellow fever vaccination is required for travel to Senegal. Get all the other vaccinations recommended even if it seems expensive; then you will not have to worry. See your regular doctor for a prescription for anti-malaria medication. There is no vaccination for malaria and it is a deadly disease. Get in shape. Travel in Africa can be strenuous with a lot more walking in the heat than we are used to. Women travelers should bring their own tampons if they use them. Bring a small first-aid kit that includes anti-diarrhea medicine.

3. *Being white (tuobab) in Africa* Be ready to receive a lot more attention than you would normally get at home. Women can expect some flirtation and marriage proposals especially if they do not seem to be attached to anyone. Be patient, but be clear about what you do or do not want. Be ready also for many people to try to sell you goods or services. You will get a better price if a trusted Senegalese person bargains for you. Again, be patient but clear about what you do or do not want.

4. *Culture* Senegal is about ninety percent Muslim, but it is a pretty open-minded society. Most women do not cover their heads. Tank tops are acceptable for women, but short shorts are scandalous. Try to wear shorts that cover your thighs. Young women (younger than grandmotherly) generally do not go in to the mosque, and *tuobab* men should only go by invitation and properly dressed. Senegal has lots of holidays and celebrations; be ready to enjoy them even if you have no idea what you are celebrating.

5. *Food* You will be invited to eat frequently if people are comfortable with you. If you are hungry, sit down to eat. People outside the cities eat with their hands, but they will try to find you a spoon. People do not usually drink anything with their meals, but will have some water or tea afterwards. If you are not hungry, just say *bon apetit*, and you will not offend anyone. You will be invited to drink tea frequently. The *attaya* tea is very sweet and strong. Do your best to enjoy it as it is the national pastime.

6. *Africa Time* Africa can seem like an assault on the senses. Things may seem dirty or unsafe at first. Expect to feel uncomfortable and nervous initially, and after a couple of days you will start to relax. Be patient; many things happen much more slowly in Africa. Expect delays and changes in plans. Expect to spend an entire day accomplishing one thing, or maybe not accomplishing anything. For your own peace of mind, never be in a hurry.

The Bolong International Library

Finally, in response to the obstacles of time and money, I have decided to build a library and guest-teacher house in Abene. The Bolong International Library will be the first library in the village of Abene, and it will be staffed by local Senegalese villagers and myself when I am

there. The guest-teacher house will be available to any teacher who has the time and desire to work in Senegal. Having this house will reduce the cost of finding a place for a guest-teacher to stay while she/he is working.

The library will be a place where adults can come to find books in any language available, to learn English, to receive help with written forms, or to find services for their children. Services available for children will be: checking out books, playing educational games, getting help with schoolwork, picking up donated school supplies and school clothes. For the past three years I have been successfully bringing school supplies and clothes to the children of Abene. These items have been very appreciated by the families, and I look forward to having a central place where the families know they can come to pick up the supplies they need for their children.

At the time of this writing the library is still under construction and being funded primarily from my savings. In the future I plan to create my own non-profit organization, or to solicit funding from other non-profits interested in educational projects in Africa. In the meantime I warmly welcome any teacher who has the funds, the time and the desire to teach English in Senegal. The Senegalese are ready any time we are. Please contact me at jenebaweb@yahoo.com or call (831)521-7535.

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Appendix A

Songs for teaching English as a Foreign Language

Alphabet Song

Do You Know the Muffin Man?

Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes

Hokey Pokey

Mosquito Song

Old McDonald Had a Farm

One Potato, Two Potato

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly

This Old Man, He Played One

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Where is Pinky?

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

Campement: a group of cabins reserved for tourists in Senegal.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): An approach to teaching that emphasizes the communication of meaning over the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESP: English for Special Purposes. Students have a closely identified goal for learning English.

First language: The first language a person learns from birth. In Senegal a person can have more than one first language.

Language acquisition: 'unconscious' language learning which takes place when attention is focused on meaning, rather than form.

Mother tongue/language: see "first language."

Second language: Any language other than the first language learned.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Lev Vygotsky's theory regarding the level of performance which a learner is capable of when there is interaction with a more advanced teacher/parent.