# "My Turn," Women's Goals and Motivations in a Diploma Program:
## A Constructive-Developmental Approach

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## ABSTRACT

*This research was part of a larger, mixed-methods study, funded by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, which examined the learning and change experiences of 41 learners in three ABE/ ESOL programs. This paper examines a Polaroid diploma program with a focus on women workers, employing gender (relational) and constructive-developmental theory to frame their learning experiences. Data for this paper focuses on analysis of 224 qualitative interviews, focus groups, and developmental assessments. Three emergent themes regarding women's motivation emerged: practical benefits, the importance of timing, and leadership aspirations. This paper presents how these women describe and understand their learning motivations from both a qualitative and developmental perspective. This investigation informs understanding of women's motivations for learning, and suggests how individual ways of knowing inform such motivation.*

*Keywords:     Adult Development, Adult Diploma Programs, Adult Learning, Adult Literacy, Constructive-Developmental Theory, English as a Second Language Learners, Motivation, Qualitative Research, Theory, Women*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*My education [shows my children] that I am older than them, but I still try to learn. That way they have encouragement from me that education is very important for them to continue their education, to never quit learning, to never give up their dreams, because life is full of opportunity. They will learn this message from me because I don't want them to think I didn't go to school because I didn't want to. I wanted them to think, Mommy worked very hard, she went to school at age 41, and she graduate at age 43 from high school. That makes me feel very proud, and I think they will feel proud too. (Rita, Adult Diploma Program Graduate, June 1999)*

Rita's words illuminate the importance of her children in her learning and motivations. Gender research has long acknowledged the centrality of relationship for women (Gilligan, 1982; Hayes, 2001; Jack, 1999; Miller 1986;

Surrey, 1991), and many argue that relationships inform women's identities and conceptualizations of the world.

In the United States, more than 64 million Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 need improved language skills, a high school diploma, or enhanced basic skills to meet the demands of work, family, and community (Comings et al., 2001). ABE/ESOL (Adult Basic Education/ English for Speakers of Other Languages) program goals range from work/ citizenship preparation to personal empowerment and political engagement (Chappell, 1996; Comings, 2007; Ecclestone, 1997; Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998; Kerka, 1998; Murnane & Levy, 1996; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Regardless of orientation (e.g., basic skill acquisition or personal growth), however, programs must attend to women's motivations and conceptualizations (Bingman & Stein, 2001; Gillespie, 2002; Porter, Cuban, & Comings, 2005). Hayes (2001), for example, explained that, while we have examined the distinctive characteristics of women-learners for centuries, "the nature of women's learning remains controversial" (p. 36). What, then, motivates women to enroll in educational programs, and how do they experience learning?

The research presented in this paper stems from a larger study conducted by the Adult Development Team (Drago-Severson, 2004a; Kegan, Broderick, Drago-Severson, Helsing, Popp, & Portnow, 2001), which examined the developmental dimensions of transformational learning and change among 41 adult learners in three ABE/ESOL programs. Each program in the study was oriented toward English language fluency, content knowledge, and effectiveness as workers, parents, or students. The team's purpose was to better understand how adults conceptualized program learning, and how, if at all, learning helped them change.

Here, I examine data with a focus on women who were shop floor workers in the sample. Guided by the centrality of relationship in women's thinking (Gilligan, 1982; Hayes, 2001; Jack, 1999; Miller 1986, 1988; Pinto, 2002; Surrey, 1991), this paper focuses on women at

a workplace site (i.e., Polaroid) enrolled in an Adult Diploma Program (ADP). My research question asks how relational and constructive-developmental perspectives, which both attend closely to adults as meaning-makers, illuminate how women's developmental capacities influence their learning goals. My intention is not to emphasize gender differences, but rather to illustrate how these women experienced and conceptualized learning.

In this paper I examine how 8 women who completed an ADP articulated motivations for enrolling in the program. This analysis is intended to further the conversation on women's learning and to illuminate the important relationship between gender and motivation.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers call for qualitative approaches whose frameworks go beyond traditional missions or purposes of ABE/ESOL programs (Comings, 2001; Horsman, 1990; Lytle, 1991; Porter et al., 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Valentine, 1990; Wiley, 1993). Quigley (1997), among others (Porter et al., 2005), asserted such qualitative attention can improve policy and practice. In fact, Quigley (1997) argued that the "voice consistently absent in many policy and practice decisions is the voice of the learner" (p. 193). Furthermore, Taylor (1996, 2000) suggested developmental theory can inform our understanding of ABE learners' experiences.

Examining women's motivations will help educators better understand learning in ABE/ ESOL classrooms and provide new insights into teaching. The larger study (Kegan et al., 2001) focused on learners' meanings as the point of departure by employing a constructive-developmental lens. The research team employed Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-developmental theory, informed by 40 years of research into adult development (Basseches, 1984, Belenky et al., 1986; Cranton, 1996; Daloz, 1986, 1999; Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Kohlberg,

1969, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Piaget, 1965; Weathersby, 1976).

Kegan's (1982, 1994, 2000) theory serves as a useful means to understand learners' program experiences because it sees development as a lifelong process. We all engage in meaning-making organized by our ways of knowing, although adults grow from one meaning-system to another, depending on available supports and challenges. While growth processes are sequential, adults of like ages and life phases can be at different developmental places. Each developmental level has its own logic, which builds upon previous logic by incorporating the former into its newer, more complex system. Three different ways of knowing[1] are most common in adulthood: Instrumental (i.e., stage 2, in Kegan's 1982 terminology), Socializing (stage 3), and Self-Authoring (stage 4) ways of knowing.

It is important to note that there are four distinct transitional places in between any two ways of knowing. In transitional spaces, two ways of knowing are shaping a person's way of understanding (for a full discussion of transitional stages or sub-stages, please see Drago-Severson 2004a, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) and Lahey and colleagues (1998). A person's way of knowing shapes how she understands her responsibilities as a learner, parent, partner and worker.

As Table 1 shows, meaning-making systems dictate how adults require different forms of support and challenge in order to participate effectively in work and learning. By attending to a person's way of knowing, we can better facilitate transformational learning—or growth—by shaping "holding environments" (Kegan, 1982, p. 115) to provide supports and challenges. This theory offers ways to understand implicit and explicit life demands, which may call for changes in skills or behaviors (i.e., informational learning) and changes in the way a person organizes or makes sense of reality (i.e., transformational learning) (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2014).

Transformational learning—moving from one meaning system to the next—is a qualitative shift in *how* people understand themselves, their worlds, and the relationship between the two (Cranton, 1994; Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001, 2009; Mezirow, 2000). I define transformational learning as increases in a person's cognitive, affective and interpersonal capacities, which develop abilities to take broader perspectives and better manage the life's complexities.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1. Site and Participant Selection

We (the research team)[2] chose three ABE/ESOL programs widely known for excellent results. I describe the methods employed at the workplace site (data collection methods paralleled the study's two other sites: a community college and a family literacy program). The ADP at the Polaroid Corporation, the workplace site, was 14 months long, allowing examination of the developmental dimensions of transformational learning. It incorporated supports and challenges to facilitate learning (e.g., tutoring, technological support) and curricula aimed at enhancement of worker competency.

We learned from 19 workers enrolled in the program at the workplace site (16 completed the study). These workers, 8 women and 8 men, lived in the United States for about 20 years. The average age of the learners was 42, and the range was from 27 to 58. Seventeen participants were non-native English speakers, and the sample was diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, past educational experiences, and socioeconomic status. The majority of the 16 Polaroid employees who completed the program were hired in the 1970s without high school diplomas. By 1998, when the program began, these employees held various positions, from mailroom assignments to window filter design. The majority had children, and most were married. Although one adult earned a college degree in his home country of Vietnam, the others, on average, attended school for 9 years. Only 2 of these (both men born in the

*Table 1. Common ways of knowing in adulthood and how adults conceptualize knowledge and the meaning of education*

| Way of Knowing/ Structure: *Subject* (S): what a person is identified with, embedded in *Object* (O): what a person can hold out, examine and manage | Preoccupying Considerations and Concerns | Orientation to and Construction of Knowledge | Conceptualization of the Meaning of Education |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Instrumental Knowers** S – Needs, interests, wishes O - Impulses, perceptions | -Orient to one's own concrete needs, self-interests, purposes, wants, & desires -Dependence on rules -Decisions are based on what the self will acquire *"Will I get punished?"* | *"What's in it for me?"* -Knowledge is a type of possession, an accumulation of skills and facts that can yield solutions—a means to an end. -Once I get it and then I have it. -Knowledge is right or wrong. -Knowledge comes from external authority that tells the person the right skills, facts, & rules he or she needs to produce the results to get what he or she needs and wants. It helps a person meet his or her concrete needs and goals, and obtain concrete outcomes. | Education is to get X. |
| **Socializing Knowers** S – Needs, interests, wishes O - Impulses, perceptions | -Orient to valued others' & authority's expectations & opinions -Dependence on external authority. Acceptance & affiliation are ultimate. -Self feels responsible for other's feelings and holds others responsible for own feelings. Criticism & conflict are threats to the self *"Will you (a valued other/ authority) still like/value me?"* *"Will you still think I am a good person?"* | *"What do you think I should know?"* -Knowledge is information one should know for the required social roles and to meet expectations of teachers, authorities, and society. -Knowledge is equated with objective truth -Knowledge comes from authorities and experts who hand down truth. Authorities & experts are the source of the legitimate knowledge and informed opinions. -Knowledge helps a person to meet cultural and social expectations, gain acceptance and entry into social roles, and feel a sense of belonging. | Education is to be X. |
| **Self-Authoring Knowers** S - Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology O - The interpersonal, mutuality | -Orient to self's values & internal authority. -Reliance on self-generated internal values. -Criticism is evaluated according to internal standards. -Concerned with one's own competence and performance. -Can hold contradictory feelings simultaneously. "Am I maintaining my standards and values?" "Am I competent?" "Am I living, working, loving to the best of my ability?" "Am I achieving my goals and reaching my potential?" | *"What do I want and need to know and learn; what is important for me to know to keep learning and growing?"* -Knowledge is understood as construction, truth, and related to context. Bodies of knowledge and theories are models for interpreting and analyzing experience. -Knowledge comes from one's interpretation and evaluation of standards, values, perceptions, deductions, and predictions. -Knowledge is derived from an internal curiosity and sense of responsibility for one's own learning. -Knowledge enriches one's life, and helps to build greater competence according to one's own standards, to deepen one's understanding of oneself and world in order to participate in the improvement of society. | Education is to become X. |

Source: Adapted from Drago-Severson (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2009); Kegan (1982), and Portnow, K., Popp, N., Broderick, M., Author, & Kegan, R. (December, 1998).

US) spoke English as their first language. All 8 women who completed the program spoke English as a second language; 7 were born in West Africa, and one was born in the Caribbean.

## 3.2. Data Collection

The team collected 224 hours of qualitative interviews, focus groups, and developmental assessments (e.g., the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey et al., 1988)), which were tape-recorded and transcribed, 54 hours of quantitative measures, 14 hours of classroom observations, and various documents. Data collection occurred on ten occasions. This article focuses on my secondary analysis of the women's qualitative data.

Interview topics focused on participants' learning experiences and how learners transferred learning to other domains, particularly work. For example, on separate occasions we asked learners the following questions, among others: What are your goals in pursuing this learning? What effect do you think your learning is having on your work and your relationships with family and co-workers? By studying changes over time, these and other questions helped us examine the transformational learning processes and the roles of developmental levels in such processes.

## 3.3. Data Analysis

The first phase of analysis included coding (e.g., theoretical and emic codes) (Geertz, 1974; Saldana, 2009); building thematic matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014); creating narrative summaries (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell & Miller, 1998); scoring subject-object interviews (Lahey et al., 1988) and dilemma-based vignettes; and analyzing quantitative measures. We also analyzed subject-object interviews and vignettes and compared results with learnings from quantitative measures (e.g., measures of locus of control, satisfaction with life, and self efficacy). For a full description of research methods please see Drago-Severson (2004b).

The second phase included responding to analytic questions, tracing changes in par-

ticipants' role descriptions (Seidman, 1998; Saldana, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and comparing participants to understand developmental patterns. During the third phase of analysis, I examined the women's data to understand emerging themes of motivation and expectation. Several learners' experiences proved representative, and their stories serve as examples. Throughout analysis, I attended to validity by examining multiple data sources, employing a variety of analytic strategies, and sharing interpretations with other researchers. I also examined discrepant data (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998) and attended to individual and group levels of data to account for the many perspectives on its interpretation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

# 4. RESULTS

My core focus is women's motivations for learning. I present selected case examples to illustrate the main themes and to provide examples of how women with different ways of knowing make sense of their learning goals and motivations.

## 4.1. Understanding Women's Motivations for Learning in the Program

In this section, I address why women were motivated to enroll in the ADP. First, I present a brief summary of research related to learner motivation. Next, I describe three themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of their experiences.

### 4.1.1. Research on Adults' Goals and Motivations: Learnings from the Field

It is widely accepted that one of the most common problems facing the ABE field is learner retention (Beder, 1994; Comings, 2007; Comings & Soricone, 2007; Horsman, 1991; Porter et al., 2005; Quigley, 1997). Quigley (1997) cited a federal study indicating the dropout rate in federally funded basic literacy and General

Educational Development (GED) programs as close to 74% (Drago-Severson, 2004a). Recently, ABE program directors were asked to increase retention rates, but there is a scarcity of research investigating this problem (Comings & Soricone, 2007; Porter et al., 2005).

It is well known that adults who enroll in ABE and ESOL programs come from diverse cultures and countries, vary in expressive English skills and in educational backgrounds, and have diverse goals and reasons for enrolling (Brod, 1995; Comings, 2007; Comings & Soricone, 2007; Comings, Sum, & Uvin, 2000; Porter et al., 2005; Quigley, 1997). Valentine (1990) investigated learners' motivations for taking ESOL classes in Iowa and found seven reasons they enrolled:

1.  Self-improvement and improving personal effectiveness in society;
2.  Ability to help their children with homework and to communicate with their children's teachers;
3.  Improving eligibility for a job or to participate in job training;
4.  Ability to use English in daily interaction with others (e.g., using the telephone);
5.  Experiencing satisfaction in knowing that they can learn a language;
6.  Improving communication skills (e.g., reading and writing); and
7.  Increased ability to help others from their native country.

While Valentine's work (1990) contributes to our understanding of learners' initial motives for enrolling in ESOL classes, Comings, Parrella, and Cuban's (2001), Comings (2007) and Comings and Soricone's (2007) research adds to Valentine's by investigating learner persistence in pre-GED programs. Through qualitative investigation, the authors found adults who were more likely to persist in these programs were:

•   More than 30 years old,
•   Immigrants,
•   Parents of teenage or grown children, and

•   Comfortable and experienced with self-study,

Importantly, earlier negative school experiences did not appear to affect persistence (Comings, 2007; Comings et al., 2001).

ABE scholars (Beder, Medina, & Eberly, 2000; Brod, 1995; Comings, 2007; Comings & Soricone, 2007; Porter et al., 2005) urge researchers and practitioners to improve retention rates by studying persistent learners. "Successful learners," they feel, can serve as advertisements for programs and rich sources of improvement information. Gowen (1992), like Quigley (1997), urged researchers to listen carefully to the voices of learners; these voices, she contended, will help us improve classroom practice and program design.

This study responded by investigating how learners make sense of learning motivations and goals. In the next section, I describe three themes from these women's motivations for program learning.

### 4.1.2. Three Primary Motivations for Program-Learning

These women described three motivations: (a) practical (increased work opportunities); (b) timing; and (c) leadership aspirations as parents and workers.

## 4.2. Practical Goals: A Desire for Greater Opportunities in the Workplace

Initially, all learners reported enrolling in the program to earn diplomas. All the women in this sample felt that learning communication skills (e.g., English vocabulary and pronunciation) would help them become "better team members" at work. With a high school diploma and improved English, they hoped to earn promotions.

For example, Teresina explained, "I want to have my diploma to get a better job." Her initial motivation for earning her diploma related directly to her wish for better employment opportunities. Teresina continued,

*Well, I always want to learn more and to have my diploma because right now I know if you don't have enough class to have a diploma, you can go nowhere. If like I want to bid on a job, or something like that, they ask for a diploma. . . . That's why I want to learn.*

The relationship between a diploma and job considerations was an important theme in these women's stories.

In the last interview with Teresina, she described two major job changes over the years. First, people were asked to do more work with computers, and, second, people were being laid off, leaving fewer people to do additional work. In the past, she explained, "They show me, then I pick up…. They show me how, I started doing alone. The more I do, the more I learn." Now, though: "Before is not like now. Before, if you go to work, they show you how to do, put a [camera] together, but now they change completely. Now you have to do more work in a computer. If you don't know how to write and read, it is more confus[ing]."

## 4.3. Timing as an Important Motivator: "It's My Turn"

Mary, the administrator of the Continuing Education Institute, which sponsored the ADP at Polaroid, told me that, after working with adults for more than 10 years, she believed she understood the key to program completion: "Timing is everything." Adults, she explained, must invest "time and energy" into academics while balancing both parenthood and work.

Four women talked about prior unsuccessful attempts to earn diplomas. While all enrollees worked to support families after arriving in the US, women prioritized support for children (or, in one case, younger siblings), spouses, and children's educations before their own advancement. When these women began the program, they believed it was their "turn" to pursue education either because the timing was right or because they wanted to set an example for their children.

Seven of the 8 women emphasized how the educational system in the US differed dramatically from that of their home country. They voiced regret about their incomplete educations, but explained that, back home, a person needed to pay for high school and only the wealthy enjoyed such advantages. For many women, there was also the expectation that they "stay at home" and help support their families.

In the following section, I present two cases. Although their life circumstances differed, both women entered the program for their families.

Magda, originally from West Africa, lived in the US for 25 years. She was married and had four adult children. She explained that she decided to enroll in the ADP because the timing was right and her children were grown: "right now I have a lot of freedom." Like other women in the sample, Magda experienced satisfaction from studying. She explained,

*I wanted to [earn my diploma] for a long time, but I couldn't because I had younger children, it was difficult. . . I knew I would really give up. . .That's why I didn't do it. But now, I think was the time.*

In contrast, the 6 women still raising younger children spoke about the challenges of balancing their responsibilities. For them, finding "time" to do what they needed was challenging, but worth the investment. For example, Rita, who was born and lived in West Africa until her early 20s, had school-aged children. Rita explained that she valued her education "for myself number one and number two for my kids." She acknowledged challenges, however:

*It's very hard for any of us in here [the program] that has family and that have work. You have to do everything yourself and then to go to school is very hard, very hard. But never too late, we should focus on ourselves.*

Even though it was challenging to balance multiple roles, Rita worked carefully to balance family, work, and her own self-improvement.

## 4.4. Assuming Leadership in the Family

Another central theme among 6 of the women was evolving home leadership. Several explained they experienced a role reversal with their children. Before the program, they felt unable to help their children academically. However, toward the middle of the program, they experienced greater self-efficacy and felt more able to assist children with schoolwork.

For example, at the start of the ADP, Rita described how she relied on her children, especially her oldest daughter, Zoe, for homework help, reversing the typical parent-child dynamic. Doing her homework was sometimes hard for Rita because she didn't know if her daughter could help her. As Rita explained, "And when I ask her one day, I say, 'Zoe, do you know how to do this?' And she said, 'I'll try. But we didn't have this in our class. I know my friend is doing this.' And she started helping me." Also, Rita's daughters were sometimes busy with their own schoolwork:

*Sometimes when I ask my daughter for [help with] something [she will say,] "Mommy, now I'm doing my homework, you're disturbing me…." Now [I've] got to wait until she is done with her homework, then [I'm] going to do mine….*

Rita also talked about how her daughters made fun of her because she lacked a diploma. In our first interview, she described their reactions to her participation in the ADP. (Interviewer's words are noted in CAPS.)

*Both of them make fun of me because I don't have a high school diploma.*
*INTERVIEWER: THEY MAKE FUN?*
*They say, Mommy, you drop out. I say, "No I didn't drop out, because there when you get to high school, is high school, that's it. If you cannot afford to go to college, stay home, you know. [They say,] "But mommy that's drop out." I say no. . . .But there when I go off to school I was 12 years old. That was the top.*

*My daughter said, "Mommy, you going to graduate before me?" You don't even go to 6, 7, 8, 9,10 grade and you graduate?" I didn't say nothing. I said, "Someday I will show you my diploma, you know."*

As the above passage illustrates, Rita wanted to explain the barriers that limited her early educational opportunities. Rita placed great value on education and wanted to pass that value on to her children.

One interesting change occurred during the course of the interviews. In the first interview, Rita was the learner and her daughters the teachers. In the last interview, Rita described a change in these roles:

*You know, sometimes when I do some math, like algebra –my daughter, she didn't know that. And she ask, "Mama. How you do this?" And I said, "Well, now I will teach you." (laughs)*

For the first time, Rita talked about teaching her daughter, a sign that Rita's skills were improving and that their dynamic was moving in a new direction.

## 4.5. Women's Goals and Motivations for Learning: A Constructive-Developmental View

In this section, I show how women with different ways of knowing made sense of their goals and motivations for being in the program and how, in a few cases, these changed over time.

During our first interviews with Polaroid cohort learners, in March 1998, the research team invited participants to describe reasons for enrollment. We also asked them to describe the value of education and, specifically, what a high school diploma meant to them. The team revisited these questions during our next three sets of interviews (September 1998, February 1999, and June 1999). Our aim was to learn how, and if, thinking about these issues changed.

Here, I discuss how, while many of these women shared similar learning goals and motivations, they made sense of them differently

*Table 2. Participants' name, age, region of origin, years in the US, and ways of knowing*

| Learner | Age, Region of Origin | Number of Years in the US | Way of Knowing at Program Start and Finish |
|---|---|---|---|
| Renada | N/A, West Africa | 30 | 2 to 2(3) Δ |
| Hope | late 50s, Caribbean | 30 | 2/3 to 3/2 Δ |
| Teresina | late 40s, West Africa | 10 | 2/3 to 2/3 |
| Angelina | mid-30s, West Africa | 15 | 3/2 to 3/2 |
| Helena | late 40s, West Africa | 30 | 3/2 to 3/2 |
| Veronica | early 30s, West Africa | 15 | 3/2 to 3/2 |
| Rita | early 40s, West Africa | 20 | 3/2 to 3 Δ |
| Magda | early 50s, West Africa | 25 | 3/4 to 4/3 Δ |

depending on their way of knowing. Using Kegan's (1982, 1994, 2000) framework, I illustrate how they *made sense of* their motivations, and illuminate how meaning-making and goals changed over time. I present cases to illustrate the most common ways of knowing demonstrated (learner's names and information are in Table 2 below).

As Table 2 illustrates, the majority of these women made meaning with a combination of instrumental (stage 2, denoted by the number "2") and socializing (stage 3, denoted by the number "3") ways of knowing. The "Δ" symbol in Table 2 indicates change in the structure of a person's way of knowing, determined by pre- and post-developmental assessments (Lahey et al., 1998). It is important to note that half of these women evidenced transformational learning from start to finish.

Before describing these women's experiences, and illuminating their ways of knowing, it is important to note that developmental level does **not** equate to intellectual level and that higher stages are not necessarily better. Rather, what matters is the fit between external demands and one's capacities to meet them.

### 4.5.1. Renada, an Instrumental Knower: Seeking a "Better Job" and Being a Better Role Model

Renada, who spoke Creole and Portuguese with her three children, family, and friends, worked in Polaroid's lab administering tests and processing films. At program start, she demonstrated an instrumental way of knowing. Renada explained that, at the start, she was motivated because she thought a diploma would improve her chances for promotions and make her a better role model for her children. She did not reflect on larger, more abstract meanings of education; instead, she had concrete understandings of a diploma and education. At the start, Renada, like other women who made meaning in this way, saw things in terms of her behaviors (e.g., earning a diploma) causing an effect (i.e., getting a better job or a bigger salary), reflecting an instrumental way of knowing. She saw the diploma as a "piece of paper" that would enable her to "get a better job."

Like many in the ADP, Renada wanted to be in the program "to get more skills," particularly concrete skills.

Toward the end of the program, however, Renada began to reflect on the abstract meanings of education and other aspects of her life, reflecting the emergence of a socializing way of knowing. Also, Renada wanted to continue her education.

*It helps you [with] a lot of things. At work, you can communicate, you can write and read, computers. Now you need to know. [Co-workers and supervisors] say, "yeah, I can explain myself better." I'm glad, I'm happy. I almost give up*

*Table 3. Learner's expectations for a good teacher*

| Way of Knowing | Learner Expectations for a Good Teacher | Sample Learners' Quotations |
|---|---|---|
| Instrumental knowers | For these adults, good teachers are those who <u>show</u> them how to learn. Good teachers <u>give</u> them their knowledge and the rules they must follow to get the right answers. They know they have learned something when they can "do it" (demonstrate a behavior) and when they get a good grade or some kind of reward (a consequence). | Good teachers "give you that little push," "make me learn," and "explain how do to it, ask you write it down, and you write down exactly how to do it. Then we'd do it." |
| Instrumental/ socializing knowers | Good teachers explain things to help these adults understand. Good teachers help them learn by showing them how to do things. Good teachers give them rules to follow so they can do things the right way. Good teachers give learners their knowledge; they tell them what they <u>should</u> know. These adults know they have learned when they are able to do something and because the teacher tells them so. | Good teachers "teach me all the time," and "show me the correct way to speak so that others will listen." They "make you understand, like if I don't know something, I ask her, 'Can you repeat it?' Then she explains again." Good teachers say "I have to do it this way because if I don't it's no good." They "make me do writing, speaking. She's good, she's always there." |
| Socializing knowers | Good teachers are those who care about them. Good teachers explain things to help them understand and they really listen and support them. Good teachers <u>know</u> what is good for them to know, and they tell them what they <u>should</u> know. They describe good teachers as having certain human qualities; good teachers are kind, patient, and encouraging. These adults can feel, inside, when they have learned something and the teacher acknowledges them in that. | "If you don't have a good teacher, you're not going to be self-confident." "If [the teacher] doesn't teach you the way you learn good, that doesn't help you." "I ask the teacher to explain to me how I'm going to do it." |
| Socializing/ self-authoring knowers | These adults think that good teachers explain things well and help them understand. In their view, good teachers care about students as people; they understand participants' background, and that helps when they are learning. Good teachers listen well and are knowledgeable. Good teachers know what these adults need to learn, and these adults, themselves, know what they want to learn (they feel that they, too, have knowledge). They describe good teachers as being polite and patient and believe that good teachers help them learn what they need to know so that they can pursue their own self-determined goals. Good teachers listen to their feedback so that they can improve their teaching. | "I like a soft person . . . who considers when you are asking a question, they answer you, they don't ignore you. That's the kind of person I like to be a good teacher. So they really understand people. They care for their students." Good teachers "keep explaining things in different ways, they show you different ways to learn. I like that technique." I can ask a good teacher "for help with what I know I do and do not understand." "I think it's very tough for a teacher to teach and listen and explain all the time." Good teachers "do their jobs and help me to do better, I'm proud of that." |
| Self-authoring knowers | For these adults, good teachers are one source of knowledge, and they see themselves, their classmates, and their colleagues as other sources. They give teachers feedback to help improve teaching practices and expect good teachers to listen to that feedback. Good teachers use a variety of teaching strategies. They help learners meet their own internally generated goals. These adults know internally when they have learned something, and when they have, they can then think of multiple ways to teach what they know to others (classmates, colleagues). | Good teachers "understand their students." "No matter how good a teacher you have, if you don't really want to learn, you're not going to learn nothing." Good teachers "make learning interesting. It has to be interesting to the student." "What you do with knowledge after it's given to you is of your own choosing." |

Source: Adapted from Drago-Severson 2004a and Author. (August 2001). 'We're trying to get ahead': A developmental view of changes in Polaroid learners' conceptions of their motivations for learning, expectations of teachers, and relationship to work (p. 529). In R. Kegan, M. Broderick, Author, D. Helsing, N. Popp, & K. Portnow (Eds.), Toward a "new pluralism" in the ABE/ESOL classroom: Teaching to multiple "cultures of mind" (pp. 477-614). NCSALL Research Monograph #19. Boston: World Education. A similar version of this chart also appears in Author (2004a, pp. 108-109).

*because it was hard for me to write a lot [and because] my son sick, things, life [is] not easy.* <u>*Oh, I feel very proud of myself. ...I see now I'm willing to continue and to do some classes, and take course college.*</u>[3]

Here, Renada shows signs of expanding her internal, emotional experience of completing the program ("I feel very proud of myself"). While she continued to demonstrate an instrumental way of knowing, she also began to demonstrate the emergence of a socializing way of knowing.

### 4.5.2. Hope, Transitioning—Making Meaning with the Instrumental/ Socializing Way of Knowing

Seven of the 17 cohort learners demonstrated both instrumental and socializing ways of knowing, and all but one of them were women. While six expressed concrete appreciations of diplomas and education, they also showed increased awareness of internal, psychological lives. They talked often about how important it was for their family members and supervisors to be "proud" of them for participating in the program. Some of these women said they felt other people "respected" them more because they were working to earn their diploma (i.e., they said they were treated differently). Such simultaneity indicates instrumental ways of knowing alongside socializing ways of knowing.

For instance, many spoke about becoming better "role models" for their children. As socializing ways of knowing emerged, education was no longer simply a means to an end, and they spoke often about learning for its own sake.

Hope's case shows common developmental themes for women with this way of knowing. Like others, for example, Hope rarely named the diploma as a key to promotions. In fact, she did not mention it until the last interview. In her first interview, Hope, who was born in the Caribbean and worked several jobs at Polaroid for the past 10 years, spoke powerfully about how a diploma would help her move forward in life. She emphasized that her husband, Scott,

told her a diploma would make her "dangerous," meaning that, with her ADP learning, she could better explain her thinking to people at work and in her private life. Like others in the sample, Hope talked about the educational system in her home country, where a person had to pay for education after fifth grade. For Hope, education had monetary value: "The diploma program, a lot of people say it's just a piece of paper. . . . But to me, where I'm from you have to pay for high school. You don't get high school free." Like many women in this program, Hope had prior educational experiences that shaped her expectations.

The high value Hope placed on education helped her keep her promise to her mother about helping her brothers and sisters earn a high school education. Since arriving in the US, Hope financed her younger siblings' educations back home. At this point in her life, she observed, "I think it's—this time it's for me." Although Hope valued education and appreciated it "costs money," she cared about it for other reasons. There was a sense of wanting to "ask questions" without fear.

*To me, since we had to pay for high school, I recognize that it's more than a piece of paper because its something I earned, because I want it, I want it. Kids go to school...here because they have to . . .* <u>*But I'm going because I want more than the high school diploma. It's something that I learned—to explain myself more freely, and don't be scared to say a question, or ask a question, and ask it the right way, or repeat anything the right way. Cause sometimes because you have an accent, things come out differently. And people look at you funny.*</u> *[INTERVIEWER: THAT'S PAINFUL.] Yes, it is. And sometimes you want to say something, and you don't say it, and then the person over there said the same thing, and you had it in your mind, but just because you're scared of... you don't say it.*

Hope believed an education would help her express herself "more freely." However, she was not able to talk about this in more abstract

terms. Moreover, Hope's concern with other people's evaluations demonstrates a socializing way of knowing.

As mentioned, Hope only named the diploma as a key to a new job just before graduation. At that time, she made an explicit connection between education and the opportunities it promised for work.

*I wanted the diploma. Because I see it's an opportunity for me to get ahead in my job. And if I want to go higher—for higher learning, I could. . . . So, if you can get it [a diploma], I think you should make the best use of it, and get it.*

Hope, in this last interview, recognized concrete benefits, but also emphasized her role in seizing these opportunities.

### 4.5.3. Helena, Transitioning between the Instrumental and Socializing Ways of Knowing

Helena, who was originally from West Africa and worked at Polaroid processing film on computers, went to school until eighth grade in her home country. In her first interview, Helena shared that, growing up, "a lot of people don't care to put like women in school much, so they don't care about that." Helena's view of education was different from her childhood perceptions, and she was doing all that she could to encourage her children to attend a "good school." In her words, "I always want my kids to go to that school [a selective college]. All the time." In fact, at the time of the first interview, her daughter was close to graduating from that selective college, and her son was about to begin an undergraduate program out of state. Helena thought continuing her education was an opportunity to be a good role model for her children. When asked how she felt about beginning the program, she enthusiastically replied, "I look forward to everything." She then shared her view that education is important for work. Like many of the women, she thought having a diploma would give her access to better jobs.

*Because see, first now, see the job I have now, you see I don't have that before, I never had this job. Never, because [for] everything, you have to have a high school diploma. Everything. Everything. If you don't have it you never gonna get any job better.*

At the end of the program, Helena's motivation changed. Rather than viewing the diploma *only* as something to increase her eligibility for promotions, she talked about how ADP learning made her want to learn more.

*So now I'm done. I'm very excited. It makes me very happy it make[s] me [want] go to school more and more, learn more things. . . . Never, never, never, thinking I gonna have high school diploma this country, I never think that. Never. So now I have it, make me very happy, then I gonna continue go to school.*

During the program, Helena developed an appreciation for the *process* of school, and was excited about her diploma. Helena valued education as more than just job preparation (although such concrete concerns were important to her). Sharing the reasons for her happiness, she revealed deeper reasons for wanting more education.

*One time I looked for part-time job, they say, "Do you have your high school diploma?" I say "No." They say, "No you have to have your high school diploma." They [don't] even call me. So now I want reading more and writing and math. I want to continue go to school. . . . Reading and writing and having practice, more practice. . . . Because for practice. I learn more, more, more, more; more you learn, more better for you.*

Helena explained more education meant "more practice." Practicing denotes an abstract way of thinking about learning as an ongoing process rather than as a way to "get a diploma" (demonstrating a socializing way of knowing).

At the same time, Helena did not understand why her supervisor, an American, would continue his education after retirement: If he is going to retire, why would he want to continue with his education (an instrumental construction)? Her supervisor made her think more about learning and was an inspiration for wanting more "practice."

Toward the end of her last interview, Helena spoke about the value of education in today's work environments. She emphasized the pleasure she would derive from being able to "check the box" on her job application indicating she *had* a high school diploma. This was important to many of the women in the cohort. Helena explained why education was important to her at this point in her life.

*Because the first thing when you go anywhere, you filling out the [application], you have to put how much school do you have. First thing you have to do. . . . Then when they see you have education, they respect you. So if you don't have education, like if you look for jobs, when you just walk and go away, they pick it up the paper, throw it in the trash [if] you don't have no education. [INTERVIEWER: SO, DO YOU THINK, BESIDE FROM JOBS, THAT PEOPLE RESPECT YOU DIFFERENTLY WHEN YOU HAVE AN EDUCATION?] Oh yeah. They do. Because sometime like if . . . people, have that language, so maybe if don't speak English, they think you stupid. That's the way they think, if you don't have the patience, you don't speak English, you have accent, they think you stupid.*

Helena voiced concrete concerns about the diploma and what it would do for her. Importantly, Helena also expressed concern for people's treatment of non-native English speakers (i.e., "They think you're stupid"). The way Helena weighed other people's evaluations is emblematic of socializing knowers, who place ultimate importance on others' opinions and evaluations. In fact, when a person has a fuller socializing way of knowing, others' opinions and evaluations define that person, who derives self-worth from those evaluations. As Kegan (1982) put it, such individuals perceive others as such: "You [the other person] are the other by whom I complete myself, the other whom I need to create the context out of which I define and know myself and the world" (p. 100). While Helena was bothered by negative external treatment, she described it in concrete contexts as opposed to internal, subjective states. This points to the presence of an instrumental way of knowing alongside a more pronounced socializing way of knowing.

### 4.5.4. Rita: Growing into a Socializing Way of Knowing

Rita worked in the camera division and then in the mailroom at Polaroid before being laid off during the second semester of the ADP. She demonstrated both an Instrumental and Socializing way of knowing at the start and grew into a singly operating socializing way of knowing.

Rita, like other nonnative English speakers who made meaning in this way, talked often about how education and learning would help her express herself. It was important to Rita and the other women that their children were proud of them for earning a diploma. When asked where their value for education came from, several said it came from their parents or home country. These women identified with cultural and social expectations, and, in a real way, understood the opinions important others held of them to be opinions they held of themselves.

For instance, Rita enrolled in the program because she wanted to improve her ability to communicate. Although Rita was laid off, she completed the program. Rita's goals for her own learning developed and evolved throughout the program. She emphasized how the program helped her envision future career and educational possibilities. Rita entered the program knowing she wanted to go to college, and saw her participation in the program as a "first step" toward that goal.

Then, in February 1999 during her third interview, Rita shared expanded thinking about the value of education.

*I am mom of two and I got a husband and a house to take care of. . . . And I want to get my high school diploma for myself number one and number two for my kids because they also ask me why I didn't have high school diploma before, and why I dropped out. And it's hard for me to make them understand in old country you go up to [6th grade] there, when you reach 12 years [old] you can't go to college, that's the end of it. They think I was dropped out, you know, and I say, "It's never too late. Mommy will have a high school diploma."*

In her last interview, Rita proudly referred to herself as an "American graduate" and emphasized again how much it mattered that her children were "proud" of her. She explained,

*That way they have encouragement from me that education is very important for them to continue their education, to never quit learning, to never give up their dreams, because life is full of opportunity. They will learn this message from me because I don't want them to think I didn't go to school because I didn't want to. I wanted them to think, "Mommy worked very hard, she went to school at age forty-one, and she graduate at age forty-three from high school." That makes me feel very proud, and I think they will feel proud, too.*

In this passage, Rita clearly demonstrated more abstract thinking, emblematic of a socializing way of knowing. Having experienced what an "education is" in the program, Rita felt more prepared to encourage her children to continue with their own educations.

*And I want to encourage my kids to go to school to study, to read a lot, to read a lot of books, that way they will learn because if I don't know what education is, I would not encourage them to go to school. I know the difference between go to school and go to work. . . . When I started this program I was so low self-esteem. . . . Before I used to be shy, [not] open up my mouth, because I used to speak English with a terrible accent,*

*very bad accent, but you know, I go to school and learn how to do other things and I learn how to put the words together, spelling—that makes me feel good.*

Rita's case sheds light on an important and difficult experience that may be characteristic of learners who are both nonnative speakers of English and socializing knowers: they may not see themselves as competent unless others see them that way. These women believed others would not perceive their competence if they could not express themselves well in English (for a full discussion, see Drago-Severson, 2004a).

### 4.5.5. Magda, Growing into a Self-Authoring Way of Knowing

Four of the participants in the ADP demonstrated self-authoring ways of knowing operating in combination with socializing ways of knowing at the start of the program. Only one of these 4 learners, Magda, was a woman. Magda worked at Polaroid taking measurements, analyzing data, and writing reports. She evolved to demonstrate a more complex way of knowing from program start to finish.

Magda, like others, was concerned about people's evaluations. She did not want people to see her as "stupid." Magda, however, spoke about education as a *process*, one that would provide access to different sources of information so she could make her own decisions.

One of the central themes in Magda's initial motivation for program enrollment was the "opportunity to grow." Over time, learners with this way of knowing talked about how the program helped them "feel strong." All assumed some degree of responsibility for supporting their own learning and, in most cases, saw themselves as critical sources of support. They believed education would allow them to do more for themselves. In addition, these learners showed capacities to take larger perspectives on their own and other people's learning.

Like women with other ways of knowing, Magda talked about how education would increase her eligibility for greater work op-

portunities. However, she understood salary increases as a way to help her family achieve larger goals.

Magda made decisions by considering different sources of information, taking a little bit from one place, a little bit from another, and using her own knowledge to make a decision. For example, Magda expected a lot of herself, as illustrated in the following passage:

*SO DO YOU THINK IN GENERAL IN YOUR CLASSES WERE YOU ABLE TO DO WHAT YOU WANTED TO BE ABLE TO DO IN CLASSES?*
*Yes, no. Because the things I want to be able, I want to be able to do everything 100%. I haven't been able to.*
*ONE HUNDRED PERCENT IN CLASS?*
*Yes, 100% when I work and when I'm understanding things [emphasis hers]. I haven't been able, I like to just see it and do it and sit down and wait for the rest of the people.*

Giving 100% seems related to her desire to get things done "efficiently" at work and in the program. "Efficient" seems to mean getting things done right the first time, and not having to go back "twice or three times." "Giving 100%" may also relate to Magda's understanding of a "commitment" to something, whether it be work or learning. During the last interview, Magda defined a "commitment" in the context of learning: "[putting] all your mind and body to it and make sure, you know, this is what you want,…do what you have to do." She noted that, without a commitment, studying will "waste your time."

Magda demonstrated a self-authoring way of knowing in that she focused on her own efforts and desire to work hard and took responsibility in the process. Magda's focus on efficiency suggests a self-authoring construction since she is most concerned with her own abilities (based on an internal set of standards), not what others say about her abilities. She demonstrated that she is capable of self-evaluation ("the more I know, the more efficient I am"), another example of a self-authoring way of knowing.

## 4.6. Summary: Understanding These Women's Motivations for Learning

I have illustrated these women's common and divergent learning goals and discussed their evolving understandings of the value of education. For example, many initially wanted to earn a diploma because they believed it would bring them greater work opportunities. All had the additional goal of improving English proficiency. Also, they wanted to be good role models for their children.

Half of these women's conceptions changed over the course of the program. Many came to see a diploma as more than "a piece of paper" linked to job promotions. Some spoke about how it changed the way they valued education. All of the women reported improved expressive abilities, and several felt better able to live in America as a result. Significantly, all of these women wanted to continue learning after the ADP, and several talked about how successful completion made them more self-reliant.

## 5. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, I examined how women in the study conceived motives for learning.

All expressed initial trepidation about meeting responsibilities as learners, parents, and workers, but they believed "working hard" and "focusing" on learning would help them meet their goals. As noted, women in this sample emphasized it was their "turn" to learn and spoke about ways their learning promoted new authority, greater self-efficacy, and leadership at work and at home.

While these women expressed a variety of learning goals and motivations, such as expanded work opportunities and improved English proficiency, those with children felt earning a diploma made them good role models and demonstrated the value of education. Likewise many women's motivations evolved over the course of the ADP.

Examining women's educational motivations offers insight for supporting women's learning and growth. This research sheds light on women's distinctive ways of knowing as learners. Gender and developmental diversity call for a variety of pedagogical approaches. As shown, although many of these women shared similar goals and motivations for enrolling in the program, they made sense of these in developmentally different ways. Thus, a constructive-developmental perspective can inform our understanding of how to support women in their learning and in their efforts to achieve their goals.

Implications from this research apply to adults and educators in other educational settings. By better understanding women's experiences, teachers can better accompany and guide them. Optimal classrooms help adults grow to better manage the complexities of learning and working. Programs and workplaces that recognize adults' developmental diversity—and supporting adults' growth accordingly—will be especially effective.

In addition, like Comings and Soricone (2007), more research would contribute to understand both men's and women's motivations for learning in adult diploma programs and in GED programs as well as adult education programs in general. Similarly, a constructive-developmental perspective can inform our understanding of how to shape learning environments for all adults so that they can benefit from developmentally appropriate support and challenges in order to learn, grow, and build their capacities as they strive earnestly to achieve their goals.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## ENDNOTES

[1]   I use the terms way of knowing, meaning making system, and developmental level interchangeably.

[2]   The team refers to the Adult Development Team of (NCSALL). I was the captain of the Polaroid site.

[3]   Underlined words in quotations indicate the structure of a woman's meaning making.