# Language Learning Context for an Effective ESL Policy

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## 1.0  Introduction

As we move into the new millennium, nations are grappling with the impact of shifting diversity within their borders.  Demographic changes wrought by political, social, and economic upheavals bring together people with, at best, limited intercultural experience and communication skills and, at worst, antipathy born of such deficits.  Wherever in the world such population change occurs, it is often in public schools that divergent cultural worldviews come into contact.  Research on efforts to accommodate immigrants and refugees at the turn of the 21st century in ways that satisfy the needs of both old and new residents is of great importance not only to the people who live, study, and work in community, but also to educators and educational policy makers around the world (c.f. Carr-Hill, 1996; Daniel, 1995; Lucey and Others, 2000; Mortensen, 1980; Tawil, 1997).

Action research projects such as the one described in this paper may provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon concerns about the intercultural education of students, particularly those whose home language is other than that favored in the school.  Such projects also contribute to a literature that aims at meeting the challenges brought about by the unexpected presence of the Other within social institutions.  Policymakers seeking to address such challenges can benefit from the paper's discussion of ways in which the program succeeded and failed.

## 2.0 Presentation outline

This paper analyzes the educational impact of a particular school's efforts to address the needs of five members of a refugee group collectively known as "The Lost Boys of Sudan."   Emphasis is placed upon the sociocultural context of the schooling experiences of these particular boys, who settled in a rural USMidwestern community beginning in spring 2001.  To uncover this context within the research site, we employed ethnographic methods to investigate the impact of curricular and pedagogical response on students' school success and teacher praxis, particularly in relation to appropriate and effective curriculum and pedagogy for ESL learners.

We begin with introductory remarks to provide background about our methodology, including our theoretical construct, as well as researcher standpoint and an outline of the research questions; then follows a discussion of recent Sudanese history, including the phenomenon of The Lost Boys.  Next, we provide a glimpse of the USMidwestern rural community we call Green Mountain[1] and the refugee students' resettlement in the area, which includes a description of the schooling program present prior to the research project. Finally, we introduce the analogy of chemical bonding to discuss the necessary bilateral bonding between the community, the language learning program, the content area teachers and the language learner.

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[1] To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms have been assigned for all personal and place names in the United States of America.  Dinka naming customs result in many males carrying the same name.  We have chosen randomly among names known to us excluding the actual ones carried by the boys in Green Mountain.

# 3.0 Methodology

## 3.1 Data sources

This paper reports on a project of action research, which Hopkins & Antes (1990) define "as a tool of curriculum development consisting of continuous feedback that targets specific problems in a particular school setting (in Ferraro, 2000). We collected the ethnographic data between January 2002 and spring 2003, a period when we worked and volunteered at Green Mountain High School. Data sources include interviews of the students and their host parents, as well as school personnel and social service agency staff; focus group meetings with the boys' content area teachers; review of school records; and ESL proficiency testing. Weekly discussions of our joint and individual experiences delivering the ESL curriculum supplemented ethnographic fieldnotes and reports of observations made by research colleagues in content area classrooms.

## 3.2 Theoretical construct

The design of this study was driven by Lather's description of "research as praxis" that contributes "to consciousness-raising and transformative social action" (1991:72). In Green Mountain, both high school Principal Duyck and school district Superintendent Kent expressed the belief that several faculty members were struggling to address the needs not only of the Sudanese refugees, but also of other members of the school population. Building upon the administrators' expressed good will, I (Sandra) proposed an action research ESL curriculum project to provide opportunities for collaborative investigation of the learning environment. Fellow educational researchers Kathy Fear, Bob Petrulis, and Barbara J. Davis from a nearby teacher education program lent their expertise as observers of student/teacher interactions in content area classrooms. Ruth and Sandra co-designed ESL curriculum and pedagogy to connect development of English as a Second Language and content area courses. Green Mountain teachers working directly with the boys were invited to join in collaborative discussions to evaluate the program's success. By this inclusion we hoped to foster a Freirean *conscietizao* to allow participants to become "conscious of their fictions so that they will not be ruled by their myths" and "constitutive metaphors" (Pinar and Grumet, 1976), thereby creating the "possibility for these changing views and voices, for future reinterpretations in new moments in time" (Matiss, in Cole & Knowles, 2001).

## 3.3 Researcher standpoint

The personal and professional experiences each of us brought to the research prepared us for the various roles we played, but also required us to consciously address our standpoints (Naples, 2003). As critical ethnographers working directly with people, we must acknowledge our subjectivity (Denzin, 1997) in relation to the field site, fellow educators, and the Sudanese students. Thus, we include the following biographic information in acknowledgement of our own voices within the research project.

Along with a research interest in cultural displacement, my (Ruth's) seven years of living in rural Mexico among indigenous people attracted me to work with refugees. As a linguist, I study an Otomanguean language to create dictionaries and primers for literacy development. I currently teach English to both first and second language learner adults in the USA. These experiences helped prepare me to provide a curricular bridge between English and Dinka, the language spoken by the boys. They also created empathy for marginalized cultures.

For five years, I (Sandra) conducted ethnographic research in a USMidwestern rural community undergoing demographic change brought about by the intentional recruitment of an immigrant workforce. That work included the intervention of life history narrative sharing to bring educators and parents together in an attempt to create a more effective learning environment for the primarily Spanish-speaking children studying with teachers unprepared for their needs as English Language Learners. With more than twenty-five years experience as a teacher in grades 6-12, interspersed with multiple opportunities to teach English as a second language, I am familiar with both the demands of

classroom teaching and the needs of language learners.

Both of us have lived and worked in rural communities – Ruth was raised in a town just miles from Green Mountain; Sandra spent nine years of her professional life in a logging town in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. While we have both experienced the unique qualities of residence in communities under 5000 in population, both of us also have had cultural experiences outside them.

*3.4 Research questions*

As researchers with emancipatory aspirations, we were attracted to the powerful opportunity for praxis in such empirical work and the extent to which it might enable people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situation (Lather, 1991). Green Mountain's administrators hoped that providing opportunities for professional development through the ESL action research project might lead to generalized changes in teaching practices. The project was initially designed to analyze data collected in response to two questions:

1    What is the impact of a parallel ESL curriculum on the school success of Sudanese refugees attending school in a rural USMidwestern community as measured by ESL proficiency, learning outcomes in coursework other than ESL, school grades, progress toward graduation and career goals, disciplinary records, peer relations, and attitudes toward school?

2    What is the impact of participation in the research process on teacher praxis, particularly in relation to appropriate and effective curriculum and pedagogy for ESL learners?

# 4.0 Background: Life in Sudan and Green Mountain

*4.1 Sudan's recent history*

A generation of males, collectively known as The Lost Boys, is the latest and most striking victim of Sudan's intermittent civil wars, which antedate the 1956 independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Government. After independence, political control passed to the Arab minority in the North. The government's harsh treatment of Blacks in the south included the exile of educated southern leaders. The Sudan African National Union called for southern independence in April 1963 and a guerrilla movement known as Anya Nya succeeded in expelling Khartoum's government officials from several southern districts. By 1971, most of the rural areas were under Anya Nya control (op't Ende, 2003). This group declared itself the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), with whom the Khartoum government agreed to negotiate, resulting in the Addis Ababa Accords in 1972.

After nearly 10 years of relative peace, southern leaders formed the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to resist Niemieri's 1981 proposal to redraw borders between the Islamic government-controlled North and the Christian and animist-controlled South. This effort to relocate the oil-rich Bentiu region within Khartoum's political sphere and Niemieri's unilateral abrogation of the Accords in 1982 prompted the formation of the SPLA, the military arm of the SPLM. North/South conflicts in the ensuing civil war have killed over a million and displaced 3.5 million refugees (Domke, 1997). While "the special cultural situation of the southern province" (Abd al-Hayy, 1982:14) required a sensitivity to the non-Arab, non-Muslim population, the Cultural Policy states,

> Islamic law and custom shall be the main sources of legislation. Personal matters affecting non-Muslims shall be governed by their own laws. . . . . In the Democratic Republic of the Sudan Islam is the religion, and society shall be guided in the way of Islam, the religion of the majority; and the State shall endeavour to express its values (Abd al-Hayy, 1982:17).

This token nod to "personal matters" abrogated the sociocultural rights of non-Muslims, situating legal control firmly in the hands of the Arab North. While there are conflicting proposals explaining why the Addis Ababa Accords failed, (c.f.: Domke, 2003:3-4 and Richardson & Wang, 1992:3), it is clear that the breech was on the part of the government, which (in 1981) dissolved the Southern Regional Assembly (op't Ende, 2003:1).

## 4.2 Lost Boys of Sudan

Drought and civil war in the Bahr al Ghazal districts resulted in 250,000 deaths, displacing more than a million southern Sudanese (USAID, 1996). Of the 1.9 million inhabitants who remain, more than 700, 000 faced critical food shortages at the end of the millennium. The town of origin for the Dinka children resettled in Green Mountain is on the front line of the war. The presence of representatives of the opposition army makes it a target for bombings, burnings, raids, and forced slavery. Many nations have at times suspended their relief aid out of fear of being caught up in the violence. This same fear keeps farmers from planting crops and starvation has long been a problem.

> They killed our young men, raped the women, burned our homes and schools and stole our cattle…Because of insecurity we did not farm and now have to depend on wild seeds and roots (Matiok, In Sudan Timeline, 2001).

Reporters have photographed children climbing trees to strip the branches for food (Salopek, 2003:56). Some parents sent their children away to escape the misery. Other boys found themselves among the thousands of children wandering because the war's violence had taken away their parents.

Approximately 33,000 Dinka and Nuer boys were forced from their homes to live "as a virtual city of children – protecting one another, raising one another, and for months spent fending off wild animals and enemy soldiers, burying one another (Barry, 2001). The huge mass of orphans – "a slow-moving column of mostly children that stretched for miles across the equatorial wilderness" (Corbett, 2001), wandered for nearly five years from Sudan to Ethiopia and back before arriving in Kenya, where nearly 10,000 children between eight and eighteen sought refuge in 1992. Many of these refugees also made their way to Kakuma in Kenya where they had access to food, housing, and education. The brightest children were sent to Nairobi boarding schools; others were educated in the camps.

## 4.3 Green Mountain

In Green Mountain School District, deer roam the baseball diamond in the winter and children play in the streets of its two villages without fear of traffic. The high school population numbers 483, while 242 junior high students occupy a hallway of the same building located between the two very small villages (Parkerton, population 1,684 and Amassa, population 789; with an additional 2,100 in Amassa township). European settlement in the area dates back to the 1820's. Amassa's settlers emigrated from a single community in one of the original thirteen colonies. Members of a religious group formed a land corporation and moved en masse to the village site, which they named after a founding family. Parkerton was not platted until the 1860's when the small community vied with Amassa for a railroad depot. Although Amassa was the center of commerce, the Green Mountain Railroad Company awarded the depot to the smaller site, which then named itself after the railroad company's chief engineer.

A hundred years later, a consolidated school district spanning county lines united the two villages. Today the central office maintains a mailing address in Amassa and a phone exchange in Parkerton. An example of the persistent mutual antagonism is Parkerton's naming of Amassa residents as "Dumb Assas". According to a local historian, "People are still angry with each other, but they don't know why they're angry with the other guy. I could tell them – it's the train!"

Culturally, the towns are mainstream USMidwestern, with primarily northern Euro-American roots dating back to the 1820's. Amassa's primarily English (with Irish and Scot) heritage settlers shared a single religious affiliation. No single ethnic group dominated Parkerton's founders, who arrived piecemeal by train from various places in the East. High school students are relatively unaware of their larger cultural background.

## 5.0 Resettlement in Green Mountain
### 5.1 A submersion approach

The U.S. State Department resettled 3,800 Lost Boys in the USA (Corbett, 2001), including some from Bahr al Ghazal, who had been flown to Kenya where they found some of their relatives (young brothers or cousins) already living. In spring 2001, five Dinka boys were placed by a Christian social service agency with a family in Green Mountain School District. Like most Lost Boys, they had been assigned birthdays of January 1 of the year for which social service agencies estimated their age. School administrators used these estimations for age placement at the junior/senior high school in regular content area classes, including English language and literature, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, computer studies, and vocational/agriculture courses.

As many as a dozen international exchange students from predominately European locations have been placed each year in the district since 1968, but their relative English language proficiency precluded the need for any special instructional support. Thus, no special program was instituted to serve the language learning needs of the Sudanese refugees. Without specific ESL intervention, they learned to match words in their books to worksheets and test papers and, with the help of a paraprofessional, completed the homework in their classes.

Impressed with the boys' hard work, teachers assigned passing grades but felt lost in addressing the boys' learning needs. Educators expressed concerns that limited English proficiency and prior school experiences made teaching these students difficult. Host family interactions and peer relations, both in classrooms and sports activities, served to develop basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). As Krashen's (1997) research predicts, cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) did not arise from a submersion approach to language acquisition. Instruction provided in the Kenyan refugee camps did not prepare these students for classrooms with peers who had attended school since age five. Neither did twenty- to thirty-year-old teacher education prepare what Principal Mike Duyck noted as his "seasoned" faculty to deal with students with "no background in math, or history, or science," speaking a language unknown in Green Mountain.

Informed that Green Mountain would be unable to grant a high school diploma by the time he reached the normal school-leaving age, the eldest boy transferred to the nearest urban area, where he received a diploma with subsequent enrollment in a community college nursing program. The school had been expecting the remaining four boys to return in September, but the second eldest also opted to leave the host family and enroll in an urban school.

### 5.2 English across the curriculum

Asserting that "We are committed to seeing these boys graduate," Principal Duyck agreed with Superintendent Kent that a special program should be put in place to meet their academic needs. My (Sandra's) contract as the high school world languages teacher was amended to include compensation for teaching the course and completing the design of English Across the Curriculum (EAC), a parallel curriculum of ESL and content area instruction. By the time school began, I (Ruth) was able to accommodate a daily volunteer lesson around my adjunct professor duties. With the start of the 2002-03 school year, Mading, Ayuel, and Madit were enrolled in one daily period in the new English Across the Curriculum program designed to:

•Measure the English language proficiency of students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, using standardized assessment as appropriate

•Consider language proficiency levels in placing and supporting students in content area courses

•Use research-based instructional techniques to meet student language and academic needs

•Use appropriate instructional materials, including computers and software, to reinforce English language acquisition and content area learning

### 5.2.1 Interacting with the students

Mading and Ayuel quickly accepted the change from a scheduled P.E. course to the EAC class. While their foster mother, Mrs. Huff, herself a retired English teacher, reported during an August parent/teacher conference that the youngest boy Madit chafed at not being able to experience the regular 10th grade English class, she gave her blessing to the EAC assignment.  In keeping with the project proposal presented to a September meeting of the school board, we began by assessing the boys' English Language proficiency.  We designed several units including: study skills, reading and writing skills in both content areas and USAmerican literature, vocabulary development, language mechanics, public speaking, and writing for publication.

Approval of the program just prior to the start of the school year delayed orders for texts and standardized testing materials.  While awaiting their arrival, we assessed language proficiency and school readiness through free and guided writing, conversational exchanges, and working with materials from content area classes.  Confirming our observations during these activities, Language Assessment Scales (LAS-O and LAS-R/W) tests administered in late August and early September revealed productive language scores either double or nearly double receptive language scores.

|  | Reading Level | Writing | R/W Level | Oral | LAS-O | Language Proficiency | LAS-O Category |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mading | 2 | 2 | NL | 1 | N | 1/1 | * |
| Ayuel | 1 | 2 | NL | 1 | N | 1/1 | * |
| Madit | 2 | 2/3 | L/L | 3 | L | 2/3 | LEP-c |

Key: Reading and writing levels range from 1 (low functioning) to 5 (fully fluent) and NL=Non-Literate and L/L=Low level Literate; Oral proficiency levels range from 1 (low functioning) to 3 (high functioning) N=Non-speaker and L= Low proficiency;  * in the LAS-O Category indicates that the score was too low for the test to be considered valid; LEP-c indicates mid-level reading and writing skills and mid-level ("limited") listening and speaking skills.

Based upon testing results, Mading, Ayuel, and Madit each switched from vocational education courses to add a second daily period in the EAC program.

In addition to the English language proficiency noted in the chart above, each boy brought personality traits that affected his learning experiences.  Madit was very quiet in class, but seemed to be adapting well to the drastic change in culture.  Many said that he was the most academically promising of the three:

Madit is very good and gets along well.  He had a well-done oral report.  The students applauded.  He is doing well both academically and socially.  Mading was okay, but Madit    has          better language (Fieldnotes-Social Studies teacher, September 2002).

Ayuel, while extremely withdrawn and culturally disoriented, appeared the most willing to learn. He read from selections without protest, but when asked simple questions about culturally unfamiliar situations (a hat shop for example), he could not consistently identify its relation (as a place of employment) to a main character despite repeated review.

Mading was the most outgoing of the three. During the month he was enrolled in EAC, he assumed the role of group spokesperson. Teachers and administrators, however, remarked on a problem with temper control.

> We are having tough times with Mading and would like to help him develop the ability to respond in a normal manner. He takes things seriously that are not meant to be taken seriously…flies off the handle, makes accusations. When I investigate, we discover it's not true but has been blown out of proportion (Fieldnotes-School Administrator, September 2002).

I (Ruth) found this difficult to believe until I saw an example of his anger during a soccer match. All three boys played on the varsity team. Mading had been playing hard and he looked tired. When the coach substituted him off the field, he mistook this as criticism of his play and chose to protest his anger by stripping off his shirt and throwing it on the ground. Mading's difficulty in controlling his temper played a role in his and Ayuel's departure from Green Mountain midway through the EAC program's first semester.

Chief Lino Aguer (In Deng, 1980) describes the inconceivability of isolation for the Dinka, "In our Dinka ways nothing says that a person goes on his own without his people. He should follow the ways of his people; wherever his people go is where he should go." With the departure of the other boys, Madit found himself a Dinka alone. He progressed from passive to active rejection of the EAC curriculum. Failing to complete assignments in a timely manner, he worked only when pressed to do so. This attitude had a decidedly negative impact on his progress. In fact, he did not complete the last portion of the planned curriculum.

## 5.2.2 Interacting with content area teachers

In a commissioned paper on research in bilingual education, Ramirez (2000) noted an essential need for teachers to understand the sociocultural context of learning, calling for a balance of:

> Meaning and skills . . . their values, beliefs, and behaviors towards first and second language acquisition and English language learners . . . cultural relevance of content and pedagogy . . . strategic balancing of L1 and English instruction . . . and the teacher/parent relationship.

To that end, the following components were also part of the EAC program design:

- Identify and acquire curricular materials, educational software, and technologies designed for students whose first language is other than English
- Provide classroom instructional support to help staff teach language competencies through content area instruction that emphasizes higher order thinking and addresses multiple intelligences
- Provide professional development for school personnel in whole-brain learning and ESL to meet the unique learning needs of students whose first language is other than that regularly used in the classroom
- Coordinate efforts with other schools in the nearby Intermediate School Districts

The latter two components were not scheduled for implementation in 2002-03 and, although we identified and acquired some curricular materials and software to use within the EAC classroom, we were less successful in connecting content area teachers with materials to support the boys' cognitive academic language proficiency.

Teachers indicated a willingness to look at textbooks leveled for language proficiency, but the science textbook was returned to us without comment. The social studies teacher expressed great excitement at being able to assign Madit readings from a chapter covering material parallel to that of the regularly assigned text, but returned the accompanying guidebook for teachers of ESL Students "for safekeeping" to the EAC classroom. A vocational education teacher expressed concern about Ayuel's inability to graphically represent the food chain, a phenomenon in which he had demonstrated

expert knowledge in a classroom discussion.  The teacher's enthusiasm about a suggestion to create stacks of the actual bones from the owl pellet dissection before moving to the abstraction of graphing indicated willingness to try some similar concrete example work in future assignments.  Another vocational instructor lamented that Ayuel's and Mading's limited reading comprehension in English made a simulation on budgeting extremely difficult.  Although he acknowledged the possibility of designing lessons in which students used actual paycheck stubs from part-time jobs to work out a real budget, the teacher did not feel he had the time to provide such individualized instruction.

As we moved along through the EAC curriculum, we kept in touch with content area teachers.  Madit appeared to be functioning well academically in some respects, "He gets perfect scores on identification items, but can't do short answer items" (Fieldnotes-Social Studies teacher, September 2002).   Yet we soon discovered issues of concern for Ayuel, "He can't read, so how can he word process at 100 words per minute?  They don't know directions: up, down, left, right, north, south" (Fieldnotes-Computer Science teacher, September 2002).  "Ayuel is very quiet and he struggles with reading" (Fieldnotes-Vocational teacher, September 2002).  Mading frequently found himself in conflict with one particular teacher in whose class he clashed with classmates over perceived slights:

> He has thrown fits in my room.  The problems are from the past and current.  What's okay for Mading to say or do himself is not okay for others.  <u>He</u> can bully, tease, and confront, but others shouldn't (Fieldnotes-English teacher, September 2002) (Emphasis hers).

This behavior resulted in an in-school suspension for Mading just prior to the time he and Ayuel left the community.

It was not an unusual situation to find copies of failed tests in my (Sandra's) mailbox.  Teachers expected the EAC to remediate:

> On most tests Mading ends up with ten to fifteen percent, fifty percent when he works with      the tutors.  His map tests are good.  When they got help from Mrs. Washington, they did well (Fieldnotes- Social Studies teacher, September 2002).

This practice stemmed from experiences in the previous year when a teacher aide worked with the boys to re-study failed material with the test in hand.  Although EAC goals had been communicated to the teachers, they were unable to find time in their schedules to contribute to discussions of the program. Thus, the research project failed to include Hopkins' & Antes' (1990) requirement for "continuous feed back that targets specific problems."  The collaborative aspect of the research never developed beyond the content area teachers' desire for us to "teach them to read."

## 6.0  Language learning context

Spolsky (2003) hypothesizes that, "the language policy of a speech community may be revealed in its practices, its beliefs or explicit language management."  In Green Mountain, the language policy is one of submersion in English encouraging students to move away from the regional dialect to Standard English. Such change, however, is not absolutely required to function as a successful adult in the community.  The rules of Standard English are not specifically taught at the upper levels where it is assumed that those capable of doing so, have already learned them.

This approach is engendered in "non-linguistic factors in the general social, political, and economic environment [which] set strong constraints on any national or ethnic or religious majorities or minorities who wish to manage language"(Spolsky, 2003).  As ESL instructors, we were aware of the need for specific interventions to help the refugee students develop CALP.  Realizing that the sociocultural context did not foster a school curriculum that encouraged this pro-active approach, we broadened the scope of the research to investigate mitigating factors in the language learning context of Green Mountain.

## 6.1 Economic context

Economically Green Mountain is a rural area under the threat of urbanization. Pressure to urbanize results from Green Mountain's proximity to four large urban areas. In the rural areas, many farms are being broken into small parcels and sold to housing developers. Farmers are making difficult lifestyle decisions; many are selling their family farms while others are arranging their wills so that Centennial Farms, which have remained in the same family for more than a hundred years, continue intact for at least the next generation.

The villages themselves contain residents who work in nearby urban areas. Many of these residents are "imported" from the urban areas and, while some admire the sense of respectability these people bring to the communities, these "imports" maintain a separate linguistic standard. The communities are in many senses no longer independent, now looking to the larger urban areas to provide employment.

## 6.2 Social context

While racially homogenous, Green Mountain inhabitants manage to rank themselves and each other based on family socioeconomic status. People base these rankings on length of time a particular family has lived in the community and/or the level of professionalism found in the family. These two factors are sometimes at odds with one another. In spite of the attention given to "family" the same attention is not accorded by the school curriculum to local history and culture. Although Amassa enjoyed pre-statehood status as a hub for pioneers and Parkerton is renowned for its practice of a traditional craft, students charged with designing a community mural had an enormously difficult time brainstorming culturally significant motifs.

Though they are unfamiliar with their rich local history; they are, however, very savvy about current local social politics. Both students and faculty make frequently comment, "You can't expect more from her/him because s/he's an X family member." Occasionally students explain their academic performance—whether poor or good—with the equivalent of "What do you expect I'm an X?"

Another parameter of social division in the two communities is found within religious practices. There are nearly a dozen Protestant churches, a quarter of which might be identified as fundamentalist, within the various communities comprising Green Mountain School District. A student-led Bible study group meets in the high school building; intercom announcements, school assemblies, and written communications from the administration mention prayer. While students express openness to learning about "other" religions as part of the social studies curriculum, the community atmosphere is overwhelmingly Christian.

Charitable outreach is a significant part of church activity. Churches, schools and local businesses participate in drives to collect funds and material goods for lives disrupted by fire or severe illness. While these collections are public in nature, monetary support to indigent families is understood to happen, but not openly discussed. Students and adult family members participate in Habitat for Humanity and on-going missionary programs, primarily to Mexico and Central America. Several students identify the desire to be effective Christian witnesses with the decision to study Spanish in school. Furthermore, missionaries from Latin America have obtained opportunities to speak in classes.

## 6.3 Political context

Green Mountain's politicians are primarily Republican and, although some community members may be identified as liberal, conservative political beliefs predominate. The elected School Board has a reputation for maintaining strict fiduciary control.

As it did elsewhere in the nation, the September 11th attack on New York City created heightened awareness. The school upgraded its emergency procedures and, in the immediate aftermath, many students expressed negative feelings about Muslims in general. Administrators quickly dealt with a report of harassment of an exchange student, making it known that such behavior would not be tolerated. When students learned that Madit and Ayuel had to register as resident aliens from a

country with previous ties to Al-Qaeda, those who shared classes with the boys were incensed at what they perceived as unjust suspicion.

Although teachers clearly hold politically divergent views, faculty room discussions intentionally skirt controversial issues. Criticism of the military budget was truncated with the remark, "Some of us have family members over there who deserve to be supported." On another occasion, a group with anti-war sympathies spoke out, but no give-and-take conversation ensued. A long time-teacher explains such behavior commenting about a former superintendent:

> He hired people he thought would never bond with each other or find common ground…. Though we differ sharply in all ways we are fiercely defensive of one another… We have lived through horrible times together and survived (Fieldnotes, March 2003).

Discussion of controversial issues is not actively encouraged in the school curriculum either. While social studies and English teachers report "telling them it's wrong," whenever students express stereotypical comments about race or gender identification, there is no pro-active program addressing controversial issues. An openly gay student transferring to Green Mountain to escape harassment in another district was counseled by the principal to "keep a low profile."

## 7.0 The chemical analogy

The above discussion of the functioning of this small but complex community provides insight into patterns of sociocultural exchange. Independence, rather than interdependence, is stressed as a way of life. In this inflexible context, the social exchange of ideas is difficult because revelation of personal preferences lays one open to personal attack. Frequently, the necessary bonds for friendship are slow to develop and must be carefully tended. The comments of a long-term teacher illustrate that even within this community one stands alone, "If you stay, and I hope you do, you will find a place among us" (Fieldnotes-Teacher, March 2003) (Note not: "with us"; emphasis ours). This interpersonal bonding can be likened to chemical bonding.

### 7.1 Chemistry lesson 1

Elements have stable cores around which circle electrons arranged in orbital shells. Each shell has a preferred number of electrons. The shell closest to the nucleus prefers two electrons; the second shell prefers eight, and so on. The shells nearer the nuclei are full and generally un-reactive. As the shells become full, they become inert and will not react unless some extreme force is exerted. When an inert atom comes in contact with another atom or element, one will repel the other. Often, however, the outside shells are not full. They contain valence electrons available to interact not only with their own, but also with other atoms' nuclei to form compounds. In essence, they share electrons to fill their shells. When completely full, the elements form strong intermolecular bonds.

### 7.2 Chemistry lesson 2

In a molecule, when valence shells have an empty place, elements seek bonds and ultimately become more stable as they share electrons and mutually fill valence shells. These larger molecules are stronger because each part gives to and receives from the others. We theorize that each part of the language-learning context should give and receive from the others. In this case, the "atoms" are the content area teachers (social studies, mathematics, sciences, etc.), the EAC facilitators (the language learning program), the language learner, and the community. Each must give an "electron" to the others and, when this bi-directional sharing is in place, the whole system gains stability.

Our perception of the necessary bonds is summarized below in terms of what each participant needs to give and receive:

| Provider \ Receptor | Community | EAC Facilitators | Content Area Teachers | Language Learner |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Community** | | Policy, Vision, Support, and Infrastructure | Policy, Vision, and Incentives | Opportunities for the LL to acquire C2 and share C1 |
| **EAC Facilitators** | Teachers who use thoughtful praxis designed to reach marginalized students | | Vision, Policy, Mentoring, Information on the culture of origin (C1) of the LL, and Intercultural Communication skills | C2 information, Teacher Expectations, Intercultural Communication skills, and intercultural friendship |
| **Content Area Teachers** | Interest in praxis which meets the needs of marginalized students | Teacher expectations (both in behavior and curriculum) | | C2 input and inter-culturally appropriate praxis |
| **Language Learner** | Acculturation to C2 and enrichment of C2 by C1 | C1 information on culturally appropriate behaviors (eye contact, personal space, direct vs. indirect preferences) | C2 appropriate learning behaviors | |

Key: EAC= English Across the Curriculum; LL= Language Learner C1=Culture 1 (in this case Dinka); C2=Culture 2 (in this case USMidwestern)

For example, a unilateral bond we as bilingual educators and researchers might minimally expect to see would be the content area teachers providing EAC facilitators with curriculum expectations so that the EAC could provide necessary academic background to the students. To make that bi-directional, the EAC facilitators would provide cultural information about the language learner to the teachers. A perhaps unexpected, but also necessary bond needs to occur between the community and the language learner. For a program to be successful, the community should provide open opportunities for the language learner to share his or her first culture. These opportunities not only facilitate acculturation to the second culture, but they also add depth to the community. To discover the bilateral nature of the various relationships, read the squares mirrored across the axis in the chart. For example, column 1- row 2 corresponds with column 2-row 1.

## 8.0 Conclusion

We came to Green Mountain to teach languages. Our commitment to creating intercultural bridges while advocating for marginalized populations influenced the decision to create an action research project for professional development in order to engender possibilities for the collaborative consideration of practice as "data is generated from people in a relationship" (Lather, 1991). We counted upon prior experience in rural communities to allow the growth of relationships. As the project proceeded, we realized that we had overestimated our ability to form the necessary professional bonds. As a result, we began to rethink how our shared belief in learners as a marginalized population might be working against the goals of the English Across the Curriculum program.

Given what our ethnographic data revealed about the community, we know that more work needs to be done to facilitate intercultural bonding. In the coming year we hope to begin collaborative professional development designed to provide teachers with the skills to become ethnographers of their own classrooms. Rather than working only with Madit's teachers, the school superintendent suggests participation of district teachers most likely to be open to change—in other words, teachers willing to share electrons.

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