

Date: 16 November 2010.



Sheila Mullooly, MA TESOL Studies, Chemeketa Community College,  
Language & Culture Institute Coordinator,

Subject: English Language Specialist Report, Sudan, 04-16 October 2010.

## Overview

It was an honor to be the second English Teaching Specialist sponsored by the United States Department of State to visit Sudan in approximately 30 years. Despite the ongoing armed conflict situation, poor infrastructure<sup>1</sup>, and long-term Arabization process<sup>2</sup>, English Language Teachers (ELTs) were welcoming and positive about our presence and training efforts at all program events. It was a pleasure to offer teacher training to such highly committed, engaged groups of professionals representing such a wide range of educational institutions. The demand for additional professional development opportunities for EFL instructors and on-going support (e.g. book donations, assistance with infrastructure, etc.) remains high.

On a personal note, I would like to sincerely thank the Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the US Embassy Khartoum for their unflagging support of this work alongside local organizers at the University of Khartoum, TESOL Sudan, the Sudanese English language Training Institute (SELT), University of Juba, Al-Neelain University, Omdurman Islamic University and other institutions of higher education. I would also like to thank Chemeketa Community College for their continued support and willingness to allow me to participate in

---

<sup>1</sup> 10% of the population of Sudan has access to the Internet, compared to 77.4% in the USA, as reported on Internet Stats: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See: CIA World Factbook, Sudan.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html>

this project. This report offers an overview of the programming we completed along with some suggestions for follow up.

## Workshops and Other Program Events

### University of Khartoum

Oct. 4-7, 2010

Visa in hand, I arrived in Sudan on October 3, 2010 with 50 pounds of EFL books/materials, including two CD-ROMs with free-ware and share-ware compiled by Dr. Deborah Healey for Self Access Centers (SACs). The following day I began presenting lectures and conducting workshops approaching autonomous language learning from multiple perspectives: those of the SAC manager, user, volunteer/staff, and EFL instructor. The overarching focus of the program was promoting the understanding of the theory of learner autonomy through EFL praxis. The sessions were highly interactive and often involved applying creative and critical approaches to group work, pair work, and large group discussions. The sessions were sponsored by the U.S Department of State - English Language Programs, and held at universities and schools in Juba and the Khartoum area.

When Dr. Hala Nur, Head of the University of Khartoum English Department, and I first met, she informed me that she had just received word that, by departmental vote, the English Department was to become the English Institute. Recent teacher training initiatives currently underway to offer intensive English courses to university faculty members from other disciplines have necessitated this change in focus. More recently, a faculty senate vote on the proposed restructuring of the department was successful; a few days ago Dr. Nur reported that the senate (300 present) voted to move forward with the English Institute last week. I wish Dr. Nur and her team the best of luck as they proceed with plans for the English Institute and elevate the quality and level of English instruction at the University of Khartoum and many other institutions.



*Fig. 01-From Left to right, Dr. Hala Nur, S C Mullooly, Dean of University of Khartoum*

University of Khartoum graciously sponsored 2 days of intensive workshops on Autonomous Learning, Self Access Centers, Learning Styles: practical applications and Learning Strategies and 2 days of consulting on topics such as establishing, operating and managing Self Access Centers (SACs), using SACs to promote English acquisition, English Language Teaching (ELT) best practice, and Individualized Directed Learning (IDL).

Some workshop topics were drawn from the “Shaping the Way We Teach English” video-based training materials, introduced by Dr.Opp-Beckman in 2008, and focused on the following areas not covered in the first English Language Specialist’s visit:

Held at Khartoum University

- Managing Large Classes
- Individual Learner Difference
- Learning Strategies

Held at SELTI

- Younger Learners

Participants will be able to freely copy and use all materials from these workshops in their own future training events. Many reported already having access to these materials on a departmental basis. When I inquired if “Shaping the Way We Teach English” was regularly implemented in ELT training, there was mention of past events, but my question went largely unanswered.

However, I was left with the strong impression that, especially at the tertiary level, class sizes of anywhere from 100 to 200 plus students in lecture halls with benches that can not be moved are widely viewed as the main obstacle to adapting Shaping to the local context. Participants pointed out that all of the classes featured in the Shaping video series were incredibly small from their vantage point, even the classes used to demonstrate techniques for managing large classes.

Consulting took place on an ongoing basis with faculty and PhD students. We discussed the potential for action research that the University of Khartoum’s future Self Access Center brings with it, the Center’s potential dual function of promoting English learning and teaching, the essential role of the SAC manager, and opportunities a PhD dissertation on Autonomous Learning or EFL and Peace Studies might bring amongst many other topics. I highlighted the attention to detail, need for systems, procedures, task-based training and continual upkeep and maintenance (i.e. use of anti-virus software on a very regular basis, e.g. hourly, is a must) that a SAC requires. We discussed repurposing EFL materials already available and discussed recommended acquisitions successfully implemented in other SACs.

When we went to view the newly co-opted space for the SAC, we addressed the need for security (e.g. there is a small room in the back that will work ideally for a secure check in/out room for the SAC manager and staff), and discussed space use (e.g. skill corners or areas), as well as scheduling and flow of Center users. At the time of my visit, the English Department had negotiated use of the largely unused computer lab, which technically belongs to the Computer Science Department but had not officially been allotted this space for SAC use. The English Department has permission to use the space when it is not in use by the Computer Science Department. Apparently, the computer lab, which currently houses 25 PCs, is too small to accommodate most Computer Science classes and the location is considered an inconvenient distance from the Computer Science Department. With any luck,

the department's new status as English Institute will aid efforts in establishing a permanent Self Access Center for the autonomous study of EFL teaching and learning.

In terms of SAC use, the space works very well. It is located across from one of the campus' food courts, where many students regularly gather to have lunch and catch up. A number of tall trees provide a natural space to gather or rest in the shade just outside the proposed SAC location. The Center could easily hold more computers in addition to shelves for self-access materials, an area for reading, a desk for tutoring and language learning advising and goal setting (i.e. 3 are recommended). It is essential that the SAC be proactively managed, regularly staffed, and appropriately used by learners (e.g. no logging into software to 'put in time' while chatting/texting on the cell phone, etc. should be permitted). Efforts to cultivate an environment of autonomous EFL learning begin with the continued training, buy-in, and support of the faculty, staff, and, in turn, students.

Through dialogue many program participants came to the conclusion that Self Access Centers were part of the solution to the challenge of overcrowded classrooms. If students can be taught to be more autonomous learners, they can more actively benefit from a learner-centered classroom approach to EFL instruction. Designing a SAC-specific Familiarization Exercise that guides learners to explore a wide range of SAC resources and equipment, ideally with a SAC staff member to consult for guidance, would be a very good starting point.

The future SAC manager, staff and current English faculty were advised to introduce learners to learning style inventories and promote strategy instruction. Most learners benefit greatly from opportunities to learn how to learn. Learning style inventories provide an excellent opportunity to teach vocabulary and generally produce very interesting discussions amongst students. Of course, it will also be necessary to have a database and regularly updated reference lists that faculty, learners and SAC staff can use to easily match learner wants and needs with Center resources. This is the best way to provide access to the materials and strategies that best suit each learner's learning style and present goals.

Dedicating some wall or shelf space in the SAC to introduce Center staff, showcase user projects, document SAC best use, and highlight student achievements is a fine idea, which goes a long way to creating a welcoming, supportive environment. Remember, while students are often very willing, they may be lacking in confidence and cannot be expected to be autonomous learners without first having been taught to be experimenting and bold. Mistakes are to be welcomed as learning opportunities. Opportunities for reflection in the form of learner logs or journals are another very useful tool in being able to self-evaluate, peer evaluate or assess the progress a learner is making in any given skill area.

*Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Introductions, Background on Local Context, and SAC Consulting*

*Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*"Advice for Teachers on Autonomous Learning" PPT and Workshop*

*"Self Access Centers: place of individualized directed learning" PPT and Workshop*

Approximately 18 members of the English Department and 1 member of the English Literature Department, who subsequently departed for a new position at a university in KSA, were actively engaged in the 2-day professional training opportunity.

*Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*“Learning Styles: practical applications” PPT and Workshop  
Learning Strategies and Best Practices for Self-Study and Interactive SAC Planning Session*

*Oct. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Tour of Campus, Meeting with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Khartoum, SAC Site Visit, SAC Consulting, Follow-up Q&A Session with Program Participants*

### **Other Workshop Locations**

**Juba Oct. 8-9, 2010**

*Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Meeting with Undersecretaries of Higher and General Education to discuss coping with problems of teaching English in Southern Sudan at the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels*

*Workshop “Best Practices in English Language Teaching” for Secondary School Teachers, followed by a brief meeting to discuss challenges of English teaching at secondary schools*

11 English teachers from Juba Commercial Secondary School, Juba Day Secondary School, Nile Model Secondary School, and Juba Girls Secondary School attended this session.

*Courtesy call on the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology.  
H.E. Joseph Ukel*

Note: Ukel is himself an English teacher and was released from political detention in order to participate in developing materials for Sudan Practical Integrated National English (SPINE) Series, a Sudan basic and secondary English language course book series under tremendous time pressure, as the sole contributor from southern Sudan. He also expressed disappointment with the results of this effort and mentioned that this textbook series had to be developed by the government in a hurry once international embargos made sourcing textbooks nearly impossible in Sudan.



*Fig. 02-Sudan Map-Juba is Located Southern of Sudan*



*Fig. 03- S C Mullooly with Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Consulate Juba, J. Kruzich and Team*

*Chance meeting with Valentino Achak Deng, co-author of What is the What, (“found man” of Sudan seems a more apt title than “one of the Lost Boys of Sudan”) and discussion of his newly constructed school, the partnership with USAID to provide textbooks for the school, and the school’s on-going need for EFL curriculum development, materials, and teachers*

*Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Workshop for English teachers at the University of Juba on promoting learner autonomy, followed by a brief meeting on the challenges of teaching English at the tertiary level.*

6 English Department faculty and 1 professor of English Literature participated in this very lively workshop and exchange.

### **Sudan International University**

**Oct. 11, 2010**

*“Advice for Teachers on Autonomous Learning” PPT and Workshop*

*“Self Access Centers: place of individualized directed learning” PPT and Workshop*

There were 23 enthusiastic participants from the following institutions and departments present: Sudan International University, Sudan University of Science & Technology - College of Education, Khartoum College of Medical Sciences, National Ribat University, DAW Hajooj, Nile College – Physics Department, Gifted Student Secondary School, Sahafa Primary School, Ahlia University, Sudan University – English Department, Neelain University – English Department, Nile Valley University, and Bayan College. Dr. Ishriga Bashir and other active members of TESOL Sudan kindly coordinated the workshops on both Oct. 11 and 13.

### **SELTU**

**Oct. 12, 2010**

I offered a workshop on “Creative CLT Approaches to Teaching Younger Learners” for 2 groups of around 50 teacher trainers. One remarkable participant was a dual Canadian/Sudanese citizen, a professional social worker, who returned from Canada to become an English teacher at the primary school level.

### **Al-Neelain University**

**Oct. 13, 2010**

*“Learner-Driven EFL Curriculum Development at the Classroom Level” Workshop*

*“EFL Error Correction Symbols, Error Correction Logs and Teaching Academic Writing Skills” Roundtable Discussion and Demonstration*

Around 24 senior faculty members, lecturers, and PhD candidates attended and greatly contributed to these round tables and workshops. Our analysis of examples of classroom management and instructional delivery for evidence of the role of the EFL teacher as either ‘curriculum transmitter’, ‘curriculum developer’ or ‘curriculum maker’ at the classroom

level was particularly successful. Because of a present lack of national or regional curriculum to guide standards, addressing curriculum development at the classroom level is most appropriate and was suggested as a workshop topic by participants on Oct. 11, 2010. They represented these institutions: AlNeelain University, Sudan University, ElAzhiri University, AlFashir University, and the FM of General Education Training Directorate.

### **Omdurman Islamic University Oct. 14, 2010**

*“Advice for Teachers on Autonomous Learning” PPT and Workshop*  
*“Learning Styles: practical applications” PPT and Workshop*

Both workshops included a lot of lively discussion and contextualization of content thanks to Dr. AlBadri and his mentor, who was able to join us in spite of his advanced age and health challenges (Dr.?). Around 15 faculty from Omdurman Islamic University and 10 students participated.

### **Challenges and Opportunities In and Around Khartoum**

- Very large class sizes, especially at the tertiary level
- Low English level of in-coming university students
- Small number of EFL teacher-student contact hours, e.g. 2 hours a week for 1 to 4 terms
- Access to EFL teaching materials at the primary and secondary school levels
- Infrastructure challenges
- A lack of accessible opportunities for continued EFL teacher training and professional development
- The emphasis on oral English communication skills provides fewer opportunities for learners to develop reading and writing skills
- A general dissatisfaction with the SPINE curriculum and textbook series
- Many university faculty members, e.g. the entire English Literature Department at the University of Khartoum, are choosing to take teaching posts abroad, commonly in KSA and other Gulf States
- A recommitment to English education on behalf of the Sudanese government
- The demand for college graduates with English skills by multinational organizations operating in Sudan



*Fig.04-Crowded Classes at Ahlia University*

- The potential opportunity for international students to study Islamic Studies, as well as other subjects, in English at universities in northern Sudan e.g. Omdurman Islamic University
- The ELT and training currently offered to university faculty from other disciplines (from universities from all regions of Sudan) at the University of Khartoum, present English Department soon to be English Institute, with the aim of offering a wider range of university subjects in English e.g. History
- ELT for faculty from other disciplines such as the Sciences may result in better access to opportunities for postgraduate study abroad.
- Committed educators, administrators, ministers of education, and partners
- Secondary and tertiary faculty and staff with outstanding English skills
- Remarkable teams of individuals, like the English Department Dr. Nur heads, who seek new structures and systems to meet educational goals

### **Challenges and Opportunities In Juba and Southern Sudan**

- Interrupted learning and teaching due to issues with health and nutrition, poverty, transportation, weather and road conditions, etc.
- Serious infrastructure challenges
- Widespread need for basic educational materials and classroom supplies
- Lack of security for donations once they do arrive
- Large class sizes
- Gaps and/or lack of professional opportunity for elementary school teacher training
- A general dissatisfaction with the SPINE curriculum and textbook series
- Committed educators, administrators, ministers of education, and partners
- Secondary and tertiary faculty and staff with outstanding English skills
- A proposed new curriculum for Southern Sudan in need of materials development/a new textbook series
- Plans to hire English teachers to provide intensive EFL training to teachers in secondary and tertiary education, who current instruct in Arabic, in preparation for the more wide-spread shift to English as the medium of instruction in Southern Sudan
- Plans to attract, employ and support the families of English-speaking educators who resettle from northern to southern Sudan
- Remarkable individuals such as Valentino Achak Deng

### **Follow Up and Closing Remarks**

Below are some suggested directions for follow up, along with some brief closing remarks.



## Digital Videoconference (DVC) Series

PAS has been offering monthly DVC sessions for ELTs in its Khartoum offices. These have continued despite the challenge of the embassy's new location and the advanced planning required on behalf of ELTs wishing to attend. The workshop participants seemed to favor a more central location, preferably on a local university campus or at some other venue in downtown Khartoum, for DVCs/training in the future.

## Bilateral Exchange

Participants were enthusiastic about renewed opportunities for academic Exchanges to take place between the US and Sudan. A number of participants expressed their appreciation of the E-Scholarship Program, which makes online distance learning courses offered through the American English Institute University of Oregon accessible to local ELTs, and the PAS's monthly DVC Series in particular. Hope remains that the Fulbright Program and English Language Fellow Programs will operate in Sudan one day in the not too distant future.



*Fig. 05-Mullooly and Deputy PAO Khartoum, standing among Sudanese participants*

Topics for future ELT training events that would likely be well received in by the ELT community in Sudan include the following:

- ELT pedagogy and classroom practices of any kind
- Classroom management strategies for very large classes (e.g. 100-200)
- EFL curriculum, materials, and textbook development
- Teaching academic EFL writing skills
- Writing and speaking assessment, rubrics, and evaluation practices
- English for Special Purposes (ESP) materials evaluation and development
- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) materials evaluation and development
- Computers and Language Learning (CALL) theory and practice
- Bullying, peace education, conflict resolution, perhaps in the context of school wide behavioral management systems

## Closing Remarks

It was a deep pleasure and real honor to work with colleagues in Juba and the Khartoum area. I hope to hear more from both PAS and university associates as they explore learner and teacher autonomy in self-access centers, self-access corners, and inside the EFL classroom. Many committed EFL educators I spoke with enthusiastically described changes they were already making in their English classes, departments, and teaching techniques; my hope is that continued collaboration and support will result in even more positive change. Thank you for this enriching opportunity to teach and learn.

Please note, given the high context nature of Sudanese cultures, it would be particularly effective if one of the English language teaching specialists who had already established a working relationship with the local EFL community were to return to offer follow-up workshops. In this instance, a companion series on autonomous curriculum development for EAP and ESP might be particularly useful. Additionally, this would provide the opportunity to provide more in-depth support to the SAC at the University of Khartoum once it was operational, and, in turn, perhaps provide input and advice to others seeking to establish SACs.

### **Suggested Bibliography**

Those interested in autonomous language learning/teaching and the role of self-access centers may wish to consult the following sources:

Barnet, L. & Jordan, G. (1991). "Self-Access Facilities: what are they for?" *ELT Journal*, 45 (4), 305-312.

Benson, P. (2007). "Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press, Volume 40, Issue 01, January 2007 pp 21-40 [Online] Available: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?aid=642476>

Benson, P. (2001). Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Benson, P. & Voller, P. (Eds.). (1997). Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning. London: Longman.

Available: <http://ec.hku.hk/autonomy/> . Site includes an online bibliography about autonomy in language learning ([ec.hku.hk/autonomy/bibliography.html](http://ec.hku.hk/autonomy/bibliography.html)) and a list of self-access centers ([ec.hku.hk/autonomy/centers.html](http://ec.hku.hk/autonomy/centers.html)).

Healey, D. (2007). "Theory and Research: autonomy and language learning. "In J. Egbert & E. Hanson-Smith (Eds.). CALL Environments: research, practice, and critical issues (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

- Healey, D. (2002). "Are Technology-using Students Better Learners?" [Online] Available: <http://oregonstate.edu/~healeyd/t2t.html>.
- Healey, D. (1992). "Theory and Practice in a Learning Center." *CAELL Journal*, 3(2), 28-38.
- Kell, J. & Newton, C. (1997). "Roles of Pathways in Self-Access Centers." *ELT Journal* 51, (1), 48-53.
- McClintock, R. (1992). "Power and Pedagogy: transforming education through information technology." [Online] Available: <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/acdemics/texts/mcclintock/pp/title.html> .
- O'Dell, F. (1992). "Helping Facilitators to Use a Self-access Center to its Full Potential." *ELT Journal*, 46(2), 153-159.
- Schank, R.C. & Cleary, C. (1995). Engines for Education. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Warschauer, M. (Ed.) (1995). Virtual Connections: online activities and projects for networking language learners. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.
- Warschauer, M. & Meskill, C. (2000). "Technology and Second Language Teaching." In J. Rosenthal (Ed.), Handbook of Undergraduate Second Language Education (pp. 303-318). New Jersey: L. Erlbaum. [Online] Available: <http://www.gse.uci.edu/mark/tslt.html> .

## **Recommended Links**

Deborah Healey's Attic

<http://www.deborahhealey.com/index.html>

English Language Teaching Expert Advice: regarding what to put in a Self Access Center

<http://www.eltextpert.com/complab/index.html>

E-Teacher Scholarship Program: building teaching skills through Interactive Web

[http://umbc.uoregon.edu/eteacher/webskills/assignments\\_su10.html](http://umbc.uoregon.edu/eteacher/webskills/assignments_su10.html)

Shaping the Way We Teach English

<http://oelp.uoregon.edu/shaping.html>

Self-Access Centers: Maximizing Learners' Access to Center Resources

<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/ETD/image/etd966.pdf>

Self Access Language Learning Centers

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self\\_access\\_language\\_learning\\_centers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self_access_language_learning_centers)

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

<http://www.tesol.edu/>

TESOL CALL Interest Section Software List

<http://www.eltextpert.com/softlist/index.html>