LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:
MISTAKES WERE MADE, PROBLEMS FACED, AND LESSONS LEARNED

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ABSTRACT

This paper explains mistakes I made and problems I encountered in language curriculum development over the last 35 years, each of which taught me an important lesson. The mistakes/problems I encountered and the lessons I learned will be discussed in the following categories: problems in curriculum processes (including focusing on language needs and fiefdoms, ignoring students' views, immovability of curriculum, conflict with literature people, & the impermanence of curriculum); problems in JIJOE encounters (including no curriculum at grant renewal time, confusing messages from different people, confusing materials, good teaching, but lots of complaints; & offending an entire culture); and problems in my basic beliefs (including native-speaker teacher & native-speaker (and culture) assumptions. The paper concludes by arguing that mistakes and problems are important parts of any learning process—especially in curriculum development.

INTRODUCTION

Like many others, when I received my PhD degree after 13 years in universities, I thought I had finally arrived. However, it soon became clear to me that a PhD and $4.00 would buy me a cup of coffee at Starbucks. In other words, a doctorate alone is worthless. What matters is what you do with the doctorate. The degree is just a starting point, a starting point for a grand adventure in studying and learning about anything you might find interesting. Part of that learning experience, it turns out, is that you will make mistakes and encounter problems just like in any other human being in any other learning process.

On a related topic, I noticed something about Barack Obama in the first days of his presidency that was very revealing. Several times, he startled me by admitting that he had made mistakes and by explaining what and how he had learned from his mistakes. This made me realize that George Bush and his co-conspirators had never admitted to making even a single mistake. Either Bush never made mistakes, or more likely, he was very insecure and was insulated against admitting or learning from his own mistakes.

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In this paper, I will discuss the mistakes I have made and the problems I have faced over the years in my various language curriculum development efforts. My goal will be to show what I learned from overcoming such mistakes and problems. To do so, I will not only tell you about each mistake or problem I encountered, but more importantly I will focus on what I learned from each. My hope is that these little vignettes will help you spot curriculum development pitfalls and potential mistakes in your own professional world and will thus be able to avoid these particular mistakes. At very least, you will see that confessing mistakes, or facing problems, is the first step in process of learning from them.

PROBLEMS IN CURRICULUM PROCESSES

Many of the mistakes and problems I have encountered have occurred in processes that I set up and applied to foster curriculum development. In this section, I will examine five such sets of mistakes/problems with the goal of explaining how I solved or resolved each one.

Focusing on Language Needs and Fiefdoms

From 1982-1985, I worked with teachers from a Middle Eastern company that I will call Haramco (which translates something like "company where everything is forbidden"). In the process, I had the distinct pleasure of witnessing a US$3,000,000 petroleum English needs analysis followed by a very well-managed materials creation project. Both of these efforts failed miserably for two reasons:

1. The needs analysis focused entirely on the language needs of the company and its managers and overlooked the actual needs of the students and teachers.
2. The materials unit (consisting of some of the best teachers I have ever seen) and the testing unit (made up of some of the least politically sensitive people I have ever known) were separate entities that were run like little fiefdoms.

This language needs analysis carefully documented the petroleum English used throughout the company, but never bothered to ask even a single teacher or student what they thought. The result was a set of objectives, which the materials unit turned into the course textbooks for the program. At the same time, the testing unit was functioning independently without any communication with the other units. The resulting mismatch between what the teachers and students wanted, what the materials contained, and what was assessed was a complete disaster. What happened? This very expensive "curriculum" lasted less than a year before it collapsed under its own disjointed weight, and the company went back to the old

materials they had been using before any of these efforts began. What a waste of money, energy, and other resources.

This experience taught me that any language needs analysis *must* include both language (the grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, functions, etc. that must be covered) and situation needs (the socio, political, cultural, personal factors that affect what people want to learn, how they want to learn it, who they want to teach them, etc.). This experience also taught me that program-based assessment must be directly connected to the students' needs, the course objectives, the materials being used, and the activities that are going on in the classrooms. In other words, the program level assessment must be measuring precisely what the students are learning. It also became abundantly clear to me that independent curriculum fiefdoms (e.g., a needs analysis group here, a materials or testing unit there) can be very counterproductive. In short, all parts of the curriculum must work together. Thus, if there must be separate units for different curriculum components, highly effective communication between and among them will be crucial.

Ignoring Students' Views

Even though I had learned the importance of listening to people in the curriculum development process, I realized at one point that I have generally listened more carefully to teachers than to students, largely because I had a tendency to dismiss students' opinions which I viewed as out-of-date, old-fashioned, or just plain wrong. After all, how right can a student be who prefers learning English through grammar-translation methods? One day however, one of my students in China said, "JD, please to speak more slowly." I answered back, "No, you listen more quickly." That brief interaction with a student is still with me thirty years later. It led immediately to the development of a speaking/listening curriculum focused on fluency (listening *more quickly* if you will), and in the long haul, added a whole new professional dimension to my life that focuses on research and writing about fluency.

Weeks later, another student asked, "Why is it that I can understand you when you speak to us, but not when you speak to another native speaker?" This question led to discussions with my teaching colleagues that soon led further to adding a strand of activities in one of our courses that aimed at improving our students' abilities to decipher what we called "reduced forms" in the flow of spoken native-speaker English. This realization also enriched my study and writing on the fluency issues that I most often call *connected speech*.

The mistake I had previously been making was that I was ignoring or dismissing the importance of my interactions with students. I have since learned the value of carefully

attending to what they say and how I respond. Small nuggets of gold will sometimes peak out of such interactions. That is why I enjoy teaching, even introductory topics like language teaching methods, materials development, or curriculum design, because I just never know what will pop out of their mouths or mine.

Immovability of Curriculum

In my earliest curriculum development experiences, I generally found that teachers resisted my curriculum development efforts. I thought that this might be due to a natural conservative resistance to change, or even to laziness on the part of the teachers. I now know I was wrong. In China for example, Ann Hilferty and I were guiding the development of an English for Science and Technology curriculum at the Guangzhou English Language Center. Initially, we found very little resistance among the teachers, probably because we all needed to develop things to teach the next day. But once the curriculum was fairly well developed, one teacher absolutely refused to cooperate and several others slipped into passive-aggressive stances. One way we dealt with this was to suggest that the first completely non-cooperative teacher find work elsewhere. Indeed, I ended up writing her a glowing recommendation letter because I was afraid she wouldn't find a job elsewhere. Mercifully, she ended up leaving for a new job after one year. The second way we dealt with resistance was to work so hard ourselves on gathering information, analyzing that information, and revising the curriculum that eventually all of the remaining teachers cooperated voluntarily or were at least shamed into going along. The third way we dealt with passive-aggressive behavior was to make it clear at the time of hiring or renewal that each teacher's contract specified that 50% of the job was teaching and class preparation (three hours of teaching) and 50% was curriculum development and research. Even though the salaries were very low, this strategy made each teacher's commitment to curriculum development a part of their job, one that they had signed on for. The fourth way we dealt with resistance was to schedule certain times of day when all of us worked on curriculum together or in groups. We set up regular weekly workshops that helped teachers develop curriculum development skills (e.g., on writing objectives, writing sound test items, developing materials, creating communicative teaching strategies, understanding test/questionnaire results, etc.). We then broke up into groups and worked on curriculum or research projects every single day, as regular as clockwork.

When I became director of the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), the so-called *curriculum committee* was made up of professors who could not get anyone to take their courses. In addition, all of the ELI instructors were

graduate teaching assistants in our department who were accustomed to teaching six hours per week with no other responsibilities. Unfortunately, under these conditions, the curriculum was going nowhere. One of my first moves was to dissolve the curriculum committee and form a new committee made up of me, the assistant director, and three lead teachers (who were selected from the best and brightest teaching assistants and given a one course release to coordinate our reading, listening, and writing skill areas, respectively). My second move was to make it clear to everyone teaching in the ELI that they were hired to work 20 hours per week (as stipulated in their contract with Graduate Division) and that their weekly time would be apportioned as follows: six hours for teaching, six hours for classroom preparation, two hours for office hours, one hour for a weekly meeting of the coordinator and teachers of their skill area, and the five remaining hours were to be devoted to curriculum development and research. There was a good deal of groaning and unhappiness when I made that announcement, but there was less resistance the next semester when I reminded them of their curriculum responsibilities, and in subsequent terms there was virtually no discontent.

The problem that arises almost everywhere is that teachers, like all humans, do not like extra work piled on top of what they are already doing. However, I learned at GELC and in the ELI that teachers can be turned around on this issue if you lead by example, make it clear from the outset in their contracts that curriculum development is part of their job, schedule regular workshops that supply teachers with the curriculum development tools they need, and establish certain times when everyone works together on curriculum.

Conflict with Literature People

In 1987, I was summoned to attend a meeting of the dean of our college, the ELI director, our department chair, as well as the chair and writing course coordinator from the Department of English Literature. The meeting opened with the chair of English Literature saying, “We are here to discuss the ESL problem.” It turned out that the “ESL problem” involved certain international students who had had the temerity to make grammar errors in their writing in a second year literature course (designed for native speakers of English). To English literature professors, such grammar errors were intolerable. These English literature people provided anecdotal evidence about two students who had done very poorly in their literature courses because of grammar errors. The implication was that the ELI, which was responsible for the English language training of all international students, was not doing its job properly.

What ensued was a lively discussion that went back and forth. But, I triumphed by

suggesting in front of the dean that we conduct joint research comparing the writing abilities of ELI 100 writing students (trained by us) and Eng 100 composition students (trained by the literature people) after they had completed their respective courses. The dean saw the benefit of this idea in political terms and offered to find financial support for it.

I volunteered to conduct the study and write the research report, complete with means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, reliability estimates, three-way analysis of variance procedures, etc. (see Brown, 1991). The study had large samples of essays written by their students and ours rated by their raters and ours using their rating scale. Statistical means comparisons (using a three-way repeated-measures Analysis of Variance procedure) between the essays of their students and ours, and between their ratings and ours showed no statistically significant mean differences. I then sent the report to all interested stakeholders including the dean, and we never heard another sound out of the English literature people about the "ESL problem." The bottom line was that I know quantitative research statistics and English professors know metaphors, so when I volunteered to do the statistical analyses, and they agreed, I had won. The lesson? Statistics can serve as a weapon (with no apologies), perhaps the only weapon that can actually silence literature professors who are defenseless against them.

Impermanence of Language Curriculum

I was director of the ELI for five years and during that time I was able to help the teachers develop a very respectable curriculum for our eight courses, including ongoing needs analysis; clear objectives; multi-form diagnostic and achievement assessment; materials adoption, adaptation, and creation processes; teacher support policies; and evaluation procedures for constantly revising and updating all of the above. I then left for a well-deserved sabbatical leave and left the directorship in the capable hands of Thom Hudson, who kept the curriculum development processes rolling along nicely. When he stepped down three years later, the new director scrapped all of those curriculum efforts in favor of a sharing-and-caring approach, where every teacher was given their independence. Incidentally, this approach required far less work on her part. I suspect that my characterization of her approach may not agree with what she would say about it, but let it suffice to say that the formal curriculum that Thom Hudson and I had developed and maintained was gone.

For years after that, I would have teachers come to me and say things like, "Didn't the ELI courses used to have objectives? Do you still have the listening course objectives? Could I have a copy?" At first, it was heartbreaking.

The problem? All that effort, all that hard work, all those long hours, all of it gone down the drain in such a short time. The lesson? As I have aged, I have realized that what we created in the ELI was good. We as teachers should be proud of what we were able to accomplish. We should also recognize that it was good for us personally and professionally. We were changed by those curriculum development processes and made better for having participated in them. We all remember those experiences, and we all have skills that we wouldn't have if we had not worked together in this way. So all in all, I feel good about the curriculum development projects that I have worked on even after they disappear, and I will continue to do so for as long as I am kicking.

PROBLEMS IN JIJOE ENCOUNTERS

In addition to mistakes/problems that I have encountered in applying curriculum processes in my own institutions, I have stumbled across a number of mistakes/problems in curriculum evaluation settings in institutions other than those I was working in directly. In these settings, I was clearly functioning as what Alderson and Scott (1992, p. 25) called a JIJOE (Jet-In Jet-Out Expert). An overriding problem that any JIJOE must overcome is the fact that "most outsider evaluations on the JIJOE model are perceived by insiders as at least threatening to themselves and the future of their project, and at worst as irrelevant to the interests and perspectives of the project" (pp. 26-27). In each case, I think I managed to overcome that handicap by basing all of my recommendations directly on information drawn from the local teachers, students, and administrators and by taking the view that it was not my job to tell them what to do, but rather to help the various stakeholder groups and subgroups communicate with each other through my report. Nonetheless, each situation presented different and unique mistakes/problems, which I will explain in what I hope will be illuminating detail in this section.

No Curriculum at Grant Renewal Time

One day in 1990, I received a phone call from the staff of three local Hawaiian immersion programs for pre-school *keikis* (*children* in Hawaiian). The staff had been funded under a federal grant for the past 2.5 years. They were writing a proposal for renewal of that grant when they discovered that they needed to show that they had evaluated (i.e., shown the value of) the programs they had created under the previous grant cycle. Since they had no idea how to do that, they called me. I suggested that they also consult with my colleagues Fred

Genessee (because of his expertise in bilingualism and immersion programs) and Thom Hudson (because his expertise in testing and curriculum development). When the three of us met with the staff of the preschools, we had several days of wide-ranging and productive discussions, as well as lots of excellent Hawaiian food. The upshot was that we realized that there was a problem: the evaluation would be next to impossible if the program had no learning objectives. Indeed, though their goals and policies were clear to the staff, they had no clearly spelled out learning objectives.

The solution I suggested was that one of the staff (who was working on a PhD in education) go to the UHM graduate library and find every set of preschool objectives he could lay his hands on and bring them back to our meeting. Once we had those in hand, it was relatively easy for the staff of the program to pick and choose from the different lists of objectives from established preschools, then identify those objectives that already fit what they were doing as well as those they would like to add in the future. Given that the example objectives were all aimed at English speaking American preschool children, some adaptation was necessary to make them fit the Hawaiian language and culture, but nonetheless, Hawaiian immersion preschool objectives sprang to life in a very short time. With those in hand, it was a short step to devising checklists and other observational/assessment tools so teachers could determine the degree to which the keikis had achieved the objectives after 2.5 years of instruction. With a good strong write-up, this information became the program effectiveness evaluation report that they needed for improving their curriculum and, of course, for renewing their grant.

In short, with a little guidance from three JIJOEs, the staff of these preschools managed to invent learning objectives from vapor because they were hardworking people of good will and they had example objectives from other programs in hand. Certainly, it is harder to do things ex post facto like this, and it would certainly have been better to have had the learning objectives from the beginning of the program. But a solution was found for a problem that these educators encountered without too much pain. You will be glad to hear that they got the grant and others to follow and that there are now dozens of such preschools throughout our islands. Hawaiian immersion has even moved up into the higher grades in certain of our public schools as well, and more importantly, the Hawaiian language is being reborn.

Confusing Messages from Different People

In 2000, I was invited to Tunisia (sponsored by the US State Department) to evaluate the national intermediate school and high school English language curricula. I met with the Minister of Education briefly and then worked for three days at the beginning of my three week visit and one day at the end with 40-50 inspectors from all over the country (each of which was responsible for a large number of teachers in a particular region). During my three weeks, I arranged to travel to five different regions of the country and visit an intermediate school and high school in each region. In the morning, I would go to one school and, in the afternoon, visit the other.

At each school, I was escorted by the local inspector and met with the principal, had coffee, and talked. Then, I met with a teacher, had coffee, and talked, after which I went to that teacher's class and observed for an hour (without the inspector or principal present). After the class, I met for one hour with the students in the class (without the teacher present). After the class, I met with the teacher again, after which I went to thank the principal. Naturally, these last two steps involved more coffee. I would then have lunch (couscous and chopped salad every single day, followed by coffee). The evenings were reserved for a meeting with any teachers from the region who were interested in talking with me (without the inspector present). Similar days were repeated in each region that I visited.

Two problems arose. One was that I had problems sleeping because of all the coffee, but more importantly, the second problem was that I found that I was getting very different messages from different groups of people. That is, inspectors, teachers, and students clearly had different ideas, and even within these groups, I found distinct opinion factions and power relationships. Since this was my first stab at gathering and analyzing qualitative data on this scale, I was at a loss as to what I should do to make sense of all these different views.

Over the three weeks, I was able to use all of the information that I got from students, teachers, and inspectors, in interviews, observations, and meetings to figure out what questions I should be asking and then to refine those questions. Near the end of my stay in Tunisia, all of this effort led to me writing three separate questionnaires in my hotel room, one each for students, teachers, and inspectors. I then used the last teachers meeting and last inspectors meeting to get feedback from these participants on the quality and appropriateness of the questions I was asking in my questionnaires. The questionnaires were then translated into French (for teachers and inspectors) or Arabic (for students) and distributed to all of the inspectors and large numbers of students and teachers all over Tunisia. Once the data were sent to me in spreadsheet format, I analyzed them and wrote my report.

The problem was that I found a wide variety of opinions. One solution I came up with was to use four types of triangulation (students, teachers, and inspectors; interviews, meetings, observations, questionnaires; junior and senior high schools; and five different regions of Tunisia) and member-checking in the forms of continuously refining my questions by getting feedback from the teachers and inspectors and getting their feedback on the quality and appropriateness of the penultimate version of the questionnaire items. The other solution I used was to make it my goal throughout, but especially in my report, to help these various groups and factions communicate with each other. In other words, I made a point of telling the readers of the report, what the different groups and factions were thinking. Naturally, I made recommendations too, but I did so cautiously, while emphasizing that my recommendations were only the opinion of one JIJOE (yes, throughout the trip, I used the term JIJOE with my hosts in referring to myself). The report was subsequently translated into French and widely distributed among the inspectors and teachers. It is my hope that this document did indeed help them to communicate better with each other. Recent evidence suggests that Tunisians are indeed communicating well amongst themselves.

Confusing Materials

A few years later, I was invited to evaluate a new English curriculum that was being developed for 11 million students in K-12 private and public schools throughout Turkey. A special team within the Ministry of Education sent the scope-and-sequence information and the materials to me ahead of time, so I was able to have a careful look at them. When I arrived in Ankara and sat down to talk with them, I was embarrassed to tell them that I was totally unable to understand their materials, especially how they were organized. Since Turkey was very keen on being admitted to the EU at the time, they wanted their new materials to conform to language teaching expectations within the EU and certainly to be comprehensible to outsiders like me. During our discussions of the scope-and-sequence chart, I asked them what they meant in their column headings by terms like *topics*, *performances*, *language use*, *activities*, etc. As they were explaining, I replaced their labels with labels that more accurately reflected familiar categories within the notional-functional curriculum development framework like *situations*, *tasks*, *functions*, *skills*, etc., respectively. It turned out that the confusion I experienced with the organization of their materials was largely due to the fact that they were using their terminology to describe components of curriculum that had long been labeled with other well established terminology in the language teaching literature. I suggested that they shift their terminology to conform to the more-or-less international set

of terms and everything became considerably clearer.

I also noticed along the way that many of their English lessons were to be based on cultural content that I could not imagine would be of any interest to Turkish children or adolescents. That is when I began to realize that the materials development team had not done any needs analysis or consulted with any real live teachers and students. The problem I was having was that big *C* cultural topics like *Benjamin Britten*, *the royal family*, and *cricket* held next to zero interest for this educated American, so I couldn't imagine that any Turkish children or adolescents, much less those far out in the eastern provinces, would be the least bit interested. I suggested that such content might be problematic, and that the team might want to consider consulting with real students and teachers all over Turkey to find out what content might actually be of interest to them. While I doubt they ever took this last bit of advice, I think back on this experience as the first crack in my assumption that native speakers and their culture should serve as the model and goal for all ESL/EFL language teaching (see the **PROBLEMS IN MY BASIC BELIEF SYSTEMS** main section below).

The problem was clear: the curriculum was confusing. The solutions were equally clear to me: use widely understood terminology when describing curriculum and materials, and consult with teachers and students, especially with regard to what content topics will be of interest to them.

Teaching Good, but Lots of Complaints

In 2005, I was invited to conduct a program evaluation at a major University in the South Pacific. I met with all the teachers in their main English program as a group, observed classes, met with the students in those classes, interviewed the teachers of those classes, worked with the testing specialist of the program and the testing unit in the university, and interviewed the director of the program and even the university librarian. From all those meetings and observations, I discovered that the teaching, materials, and testing in the program were all in very good shape, and that the students and teachers were remarkably happy with their program. Nonetheless, some teachers hinted that there were problems and many students seemed unhappy about something. When I dug deeper with the students and then interviewed administrators and teachers in the other two English programs on campus as well as a provost, I discovered that the unhappiness I had uncovered was related to the other two programs. These two programs were supposed to be articulated with the primary program, but they were not in the same good shape as the primary program, and more importantly they were not articulated with the primary program. One of these programs was supposed to precede the

primary program and the other came after the primary program for students in some majors. The unhappiness I had detected among some students and teachers in the primary program was due to the fact that many students were being required to take courses (before or after the primary program) that were of poorer quality and were largely redundant with the primary program courses. I further discovered that there was a committee of academics from all three programs that was supposed to oversee the articulation of the three programs. Unfortunately, the chair of that committee had a reputation for not calling meetings and essentially doing nothing.

I continued documenting what I thought I was finding and member-checked it with all the teachers in the primary program. From that effort, I developed questionnaires for the teachers and students, which were administered to nearly everyone involved. Once I analyzed these data, I wrote a report praising the main program for doing a very good job and recommending a number of small changes. However, I also pointed to the major lack-of-articulation problem and suggested that the articulation committee be reactivated and chaired by the director of the main program, who I knew was a very dynamic woman, who I know to be especially interested in solving this articulation problem. In subsequent emails, she told me that my recommendations had been followed, especially my major reviving-the-articulation-committee recommendation. I'm sure she has taken the bull by the horns and has worked out that issue. One day, I hope that I will be invited back to evaluate the ultimately successful linking of all the English programs on the campus.

Aside from addressing this issue head on, I found this whole experience to be very revealing. It taught me, that sometimes the problems a JIJOE identifies have nothing to do with the program being evaluated, but instead may come from other related teaching units and their influence on the program of focus.

Offending an Entire Culture

Over the years, I have spent about six years in Japan. In the process, I have often been asked by various organizations to do presentations on language testing in various cities around the country. Inevitably, members of the audience would bring up the university entrance examination problem in Japan. This problem generally involves not only the entrance exams, but also cram schools, test preparation books, etc. In my view, all of these bordered on criminally irresponsible activities in Japan, but I always avoided the topic saying that this was a Japanese problem and was not the business of a foreigner. However, one time, one courageous Japanese teacher of English countered my dodging by saying, "Yes, but you

can't be fired; you can go home to America. So please tell us what you think." I did. Soon after that, I received an invitation to give a plenary address in Nagoya at the 1995 JALT Conference; the invitation pointedly asked me to speak on the entrance examination system in Japan. So I did.

The audience for this plenary was very large. I delivered a blistering attack on all aspects of the Japanese entrance examination system. I definitely enjoyed being able to use hyperbolic language, but I'm afraid I may have gone over the top a bit even from my point of view. Nonetheless, many people (especially foreigners) rushed up to me afterwards and congratulated me, asked questions, argued with me, etc. All in all, I had a great time. That afternoon, I was asked to attend a meeting where the new JALT Testing and Evaluation N-SIG got the fifty votes they needed to be formally recognized as an N-SIG in JALT, and I was appointed "chair for life."

However, the immediate reaction from some Japanese was very negative. In particular, Professor Kensaku Yoshida wrote two scornful responses to my speech in the *Daily Yomiuri* newspaper. I was allowed to respond to the first one. The main thrusts of his criticism were that an outsider couldn't possibly understand anything in Japan and that I was being a cultural imperialist who was applying western standards of language testing to Japan.

Clearly, the mistake that I had made, one that many Americans make, was to criticize another culture by applying the American perspective (as though that is the one true and correct way of doing things). I have since realized that, I could have tempered things a bit by talking about the American perspective and clearly labeling it as such without direct reference to the Japanese way of doing things (while letting the audience in Japan draw whatever inferences they thought appropriate). Then the message might have been better received by Japans professional leaders. In other words, if I could avoid being so American all the time, the message would probably be better received. Ironically, Yoshida-sensei soon became a mover and shaker in reforming university admissions procedures in Japan and is currently working with the STEP organization to create a commercial university entrance examination system that will address many of the criticisms I raised.

PROBLEMS IN MY BASIC BELIEF SYSTEMS

Other mistakes and problems I have encountered have occurred because of blind spots in my fundamental curriculum development belief systems. In this section, I will examine how reality changed my beliefs in several ways, including my beliefs in the superiority of native-

speaker teachers, in the correctness of using native-speaker models of language and culture in ELT, and in the advantages of using communicative language teaching (CLT). My goal will be to show how and why I overcame my own ignorance.

Native-Speaker Teacher Assumption

When I took over as director of the ELI at UHM, that organization had a policy of hiring only native-speaker ESL teachers. The non-native applicants for those jobs were turned down because, it was argued, the ESL students wanted, even demanded native speaker teachers, and besides, non-natives would probably not be able to teach anything but grammar-translation, while we had a communicative/skills-based curriculum. One day, a young, but experienced Thai teacher came to my office to talk about her project for the graduate-level curriculum development course she was taking with me. She asked me point-blank why the ELI did not hire non-native teachers. I gave her the standard arguments, but for some reason, I felt very uncomfortable doing so to her face. She was clearly well-prepared for our meeting, because, on the spot, she rattled off a number of compelling reasons why we should hire non-native teachers. She eventually did her class project on that issue, and, in the process, she convinced me to change the ELI policy. I did so, and have never regretted it.

The shift in my beliefs on this issue got a booster shot last year. I was asked to contribute a chapter (Brown, forthcoming) to an edited book of articles on English as an international language (EIL). My chapter was to be on EIL curriculum development. In the process, I did a lot of reading on EIL and gradually realized how deep my biases still were. For example, consider the fact that I referred above to *non-native teachers*. That very terminology is not only negative, but also suggests that *native* speaker teachers are the standard against which the *others* should be judged. What a strange way I was thinking.

In preparing to write my chapter on EIL curriculum development, I found authors referring to these teachers as *bilingual* teachers, which was clearly much more positive, but also framed in a way that made bilingual teachers superior to most native-speaker teachers, especially those who are not trained or bilingual. In Brown (forthcoming), I provide a list of the advantages of being a bilingual teacher. Drawing largely on Seidlhoffer (1999), Arva and Medgyes (2000), Medgyes (2001), McKay (2003a), Llurda (2004), and Kirkpatrick (2007), I point out that bilingual teachers:

1. Know their students' culture
2. Know their students' first language
3. Know what it is like to have made the L2 their own

4. Can draw on the L1 for efficient explanations
5. Can code switch in class
6. Serve as models of successful second language learners
7. Know what it means to learn the L2 because they have been through the process
8. Remember and understand the influences of interference from L1 on L2 learning
9. Can simplify the L2 (perhaps without even realizing it) for more comprehensible input
10. Understand the roles of English in the local community
11. Understand how local varieties of English have developed and how they compare linguistically
12. Understand that the different varieties are legitimate and complete linguistic systems
13. Can evaluate teaching methods and materials for local suitability
14. Know the educational expectations of students, parents, and administrators
15. Have realistic expectations
16. May be more empathetic with students
17. May be able to better understand and attend to the students' real needs
18. Understand the local educational system and classroom culture
19. May be more committed to the local educational system
20. Can contribute to their institution's extra-curricular life

My mistake was that I had a subconscious, but strong bias against non-native teachers. Fortunately, a young Thai teacher helped me to begin to see the error of my ways and change the ELI policy, but only years later, have I finally understood the depth and wrong-headedness of my bias to the degree that I can advocate for bilingual teachers and the many advantages that they offer.

Native-Speaker (and Culture) Assumptions

I must admit that until very recently, I assumed that (a) British or American native-speaker English should be the target language in all ESL/EFL curriculum, (b) Britain or America should serve as the target cultures, and (c) communicative language teaching (or its task-based variants) are the most productive way of teaching ESL/EFL.

My attitudes on these issues also began to change while I was writing that chapter on EIL curriculum development. In preparation for writing, I read a considerable number of articles on EIL. I was reminded that, in the 1980s, Kachru (1986) had differentiated among three circles of English: the *inner circle*, where English is the mother tongue; the *outer circle*, where English is not the mother tongue but plays an historical or institutional role, e.g.,

Singapore, the Philippines, etc.; and the *expanding circle*, where English is not the mother tongue, and has no historical or institutional role, but is widely studied as a foreign language.

So which English, inner, outer, or expanding circle, should be taught in the ESL/EFL classrooms around the world? Alptekin (2002, p. 57) questions "the validity of the pedagogical model based on the native speaker-based notion of communicative competence. With its standardized native speaker norms, the model is found to be utopian, unrealistic, and constraining in relation to English as an International Language…." This view resonated with me because I had long realized that learning any foreign or second language to a native-like standard requires decades of consistent, focused, and effective effort—characteristics that describe the experiences of very few English language learners. Kirkpatrick (2007, p. 382) put it this way: "The major problem for learners is that a native-speaker model is unattainable for the overwhelming majority of school-based language learners in expanding circle countries." It seemed clear to me that the native speaker target was probably inappropriate in many language teaching contexts, but what should the target be instead of native-speaker English? In writing my little chapter, it became clear to me that many teachers and materials/curriculum developers would correctly be moved by their students' needs if they decided to make some form of EIL the target language.

As for British or American cultures serving as the target cultures for ESL/EFL curricula. I came across the interesting notion that, instead of the cultures of the UK and USA, we might benefit from looking at culture in several ways including: the *target culture(s)* of inner-circle countries; *international cultures* of inner- and outer-circle countries; and *source culture* of the students' country (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, pp. 204-205). But, why would anyone want to study their own culture in English? The answer came from McKay (2003b), who pointed out that people often need to talk about their own culture when they talk to people from other countries. That made clear and simple sense to me.

As for my belief that communicative language teaching (CLT) and/or task-based language teaching are the *best* ways to teach English, I realized that there are a number of problems with this belief. First, I have found much in the literature that asserts the superiority of CLT and/or TBLT, but there is little if any empirical evidence to support such claims. Second, CLT and TBLT are probably much more common in academic discussions than they are in actual language classrooms around the world. And third, people have been successfully learning languages for centuries without the benefit of CLT and TBLT methods. Again, I found insights about this issue in McKay (2003b) where she contends that language learning and teaching beliefs of local communities must be considered, not only in terms of inner-,

outer-, and expanding-circle target language choices, but also in terms of target, international, and source cultures, as well as the culture of pedagogy in the local context.

The mistakes I was making in this case involved fundamental beliefs that ELT should be based on the native-speaker model and on English or American cultures, and that CLT was the way to deliver instruction. The solution was the rather profound shattering of some very fundamental belief systems by the realization that other models and ways of teaching were not only possible in other contexts, but that they might even be more appropriate and desirable in many places.

CONCLUSION

The long and short of all this is that, in the process of writing this paper, I have become comfortable with the idea that people who cannot admit and learn from their mistakes and overcome their problems are missing very important aspects of real life. The fact is that all people make mistakes. The problem is that many of those people hate to be wrong and therefore cannot acknowledge that they ever make mistakes or have problems. Consider George Bush (the lesser) compared to Barack Obama. I have not to this day ever heard Bush or Cheney or any of their co-conspirators admit to making a single mistake. How can they possibly have learned from their mistakes if they never made any. In contrast, Obama makes mistakes, admits to them, and hopefully learns important lessons in the process.

Cognitive psychology has a basis for all this (e.g., see Willingham, 2009). Researchers have found physiological explanations for why it is necessary to practice, make mistakes, recognize them, correcting them, and repeat without the mistakes in a process that builds myelin-sheathed neural pathways in the brain. Indeed, this process is the very definition of *learning* in some circles.

The fact that ex-President Bush, or the Chancellor of the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, or one of your administrators cannot admit their mistakes serves only to make them appear insecure, defensive, and weak because, unfortunately, they can never learn from their mistakes. Even a small child who touches a hot stove can learn from its mistake, even a snail that runs into a wall will turn in a different direction, but people who cannot admit their mistakes appear to be a different life form altogether.

I choose instead to admit my mistakes and face problems so I can use them as opportunities to learn. Table 1 summarizes the major curriculum design mistakes and problems I have discussed in this paper. In that table, I situate the mistakes/problems in space

and time, I label the mistake/problem, and I summarize the lessons I learned from each one. I hope that you have found something personally useful in these reflections. If so, maybe you too can learn something from my mistakes. Most importantly, maybe you will consider reflecting on your own mistakes and face up to your own problems. Try to see them as opportunities for learning and growth, and then benefit from them.

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Table 1
Mistakes, Problems, and Lessons Learned

	Place (and time)	**Curriculum Problem that Arose**	**Curriculum Lesson learned**
Problems in Curriculum Processes	FSU Program (1982-1985)	Focusing on language needs and feifdoms	Importance of language and situation needs analyses; Connect assessment directly to curriculum; Avoid independent fiefdoms or establish close communication
	GELC PRC (1980-1982)	Ignoring students' views	Listen to students and your interaction with them; there may be gold in them-thar hills
	GELC PRC (1980-1982) ELI UHM in HI (1986-1991)	Immovability of curriculum	Lead by example; make curriculum work part of teachers' jobs; schedule regular workshops that supply teachers with necessary curriculum tools, and establish curriculum work times
	ELI UHM in HI (1986-1991)	Conflict with literature people	Use research and statitstics as a weapon with no apologies
	ELI UHM in HI (1986-1991)	Impermanence of language curriculum	Never give up; it's the process that matters; we will always have the skills developed in that process
Problems in JIJOE Encounters	Punana Leo in HI (1990)	No curriculum at grant renewal time	Curriculum can be invented from vapor by people of good will if lots of examples from existing programs can be found; but harder than doing it formatively
	English Curr. in Tunisia (2000)	Confusing messages from different people	Use triangulation and member-checking to find defensible curriculum; make it your goal ot help the various groups and factions communicate with each other through the JIJOE
	English Curr. in Turkey (2002)	Confusing materials	Use widely understood terminology; be sure to get teacher and student points of view
	English Curr. in Fiji (2005)	Good teaching, but lots of comsplaints	Sometimes the problems a JIJOE identifies have nothing to do with the program being evaluated, but instead with the relationships between that program and other related teaching units
	English Testing in Japan (2008)	Offending an entire culture	Clearly label your own cultural perspective and talk about it; Try not to be an overbearing outsider
Problems in My Basic Beliefs	ELI UHM in HI (1986-1991)	Native-speaker teacher assumption	Understand the value of bilingual teachers; be flexible enough to change fundamental beliefs when they are challenged and turn out to be wrong
	Writing an EIL Paper in HI (2010)	Native-speaker (and culture) assumptions	Other models are possible and may even be more contextually appropriate