



One Size Doesn't Fit All

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Who am I (un)becoming...

- I am “ORIGINALLY” from Korea and have been living in Regina since 1999
- I have never travelled east of Winnipeg before
- I have a husband and a daughter



+ Who am I (un)becoming...

- I am a teacher/researcher/curriculum agent



+ Overview of the Presentation



1. Background of my research project
2. Two main components of the project
3. Preliminary findings of the research project
4. One size for all?

+ Background



- Increase in enrolment
- Curriculum work at the U of R
- Structural change in the program and the bigger academic unit since 2009
- Tracy

+ Two Components of the Research



1. Curriculum evaluation
2. Ethnographic case study

“What is it like to be a university student at the U of R?” “How do my students do in university after graduating from the ESL program at the U of R?”

+ Curriculum Evaluation



- An EAP program based on the CLB
- Integrated core classes + elective A classes + elective B workshops (2004)
- 2009 – 2011 curriculum revision
- Integrated core classes + skills classes three semesters/year (21 hours of classroom instruction/week)



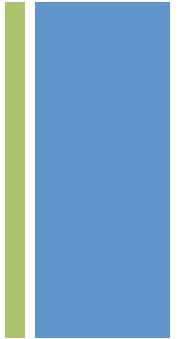
Critique of the ESL Curriculum at the U of R



- View of curriculum in the Curriculum Guide 2004 – a series of things that students “must do and experience by way of developing abilities to do things well” later in their lives (F. Bobbit, 2004).
- The transmission position of a competency-based learning orientation
- “It is the job of curriculum planners to anticipate the exact skills, knowledge and competencies that will stand one in good stead at an imagined point in the future. These predictions about what one will need in the future become the bases of curriculum planning.” (H. Kliebard, 2004)

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A Letter From My Teacher



+ Curriculum Questions



- How is curriculum developed?
- In the discussion of curriculum, what role should ESL students play?
- How/why is it evaluated?
- Who evaluates?

+ Preliminary Findings



1. Literature review
2. Survey questionnaire
3. Focus group interviews



Literature review



- The initial difficulty in L2 students' academic acculturation comes from their **unfamiliarity** with discipline-specific vocabulary and lack of **background knowledge** (social, cultural, academic discourse) of the courses that they take;
- L2 graduate students struggle more than L2 undergraduate students;
- Both L2 undergrad and grad students identified **productive skills** as more challenging and important to succeed in university than receptive skills;



Literature Review



- Successful L2 students employ various **learning strategies** to cope with the academic demands of university courses;
- Successful L2 students develop and maintain **socio-academic relationships** with their peers (both L1 and L2) and faculty;
- Most group work experiences with local (L1) students are unsatisfying to L2 learners; they have **more positive learning experience with other L2 students**

+ Literature Review



- Align students' agendas for learning with EAP programs
- “Sensitize [students] to the salient rhetorical and linguistic features of key disciplinary genre” (S. Evans & B. Morrison 2011, p. 396)
- Offer EAP linked directly to the academic courses students are taking rather than precourse EAP based on an assumption of skills transfer from one context to another (S. Benesch, 2007, p. 660)

+ Survey Questionnaire



- Objectives

1. To assess students' perceived usefulness of the higher level curriculum
2. To investigate advanced level students' understanding of academic demands in university
3. To find out how socially and affectively competent advanced level students feel for university classes
4. To include socio-demographic variables

+ Survey Findings



- Demographics:
 1. Male – 30; female – 20
 2. Visa – 40 (80%); Immigrants/citizen – 10 (20%)
 3. Faculty of Engineering – 16 (32%); Faculty of Business Administration – 18 (36%); Arts 4 (8%)
 4. China – 22 (44%); Saudi – 5 (10%)
- 51 participants – 50 valid questionnaires
- Overall, a very positive perception of the ESL curriculum at the U of R and awareness of the importance of learning strategies

+ Survey Findings



- Essential skills for their discipline identified by all survey participants (out of 7): **reading, writing essays, research skills**
- Engineering - understanding lectures, vocabulary, note-taking, presentation, speaking in group and class, self-management
- Business administration – vocabulary, presentation, speaking in group and class

+ Survey Findings

Students' perceived academic performance before and while taking university classes

	Fall 2011	WTR 2012	In Univ.
a. Writing assignments given at the beginning	3	3	4 (13%)
b. In-class written exams and quizzes	3.4	3	3.3 (13)
c. Class participation (spontaneous)	3.1	3.2	2.7 (25)
d. Class discussions based on reading assignments	3.3	3.3	2.5 (25)
e. Research presentation	3.3	3.1	2.5 (75)
f. Understanding lectures and professors	3	3	3.4
g. Understanding reading texts	3.2	3.5	3.3 (13)
h. Contribution to group assignments	3.4	3.5	3.1(13)
i. Dealing with stress and pressure	3.6	3.5	3.4
j. Understanding assignments	3.4	3.6	3.6
k. Asking the professor before and/or after class	3.4	3.2	3.4

+ Focus Group



- First interview right after graduating ESL
- While studying at the U of R

+ Focus Group Findings



- Most focus group participants selected classes that are less language-focused (their acculturation strategy)
- New skills identified as more important after studying a couple of months in their discipline: Engg - memorize facts, stats and formulae and self-management skills; BA - critical thinking and self-management skills

+ Focus Group Findings



- All focus group participants think they are better prepared academically than other international students who entered the university through other tests (IELTS, TOEFL, etc.)
- All focus group participants listed friends and the internet as their source of information and support

+ Focus Group Findings



- Regardless of their discipline, all undergrad students find the following four areas most demanding:
 1. understanding lectures
 2. dealing with stress and pressure
 3. working with Canadian students (communicating)
 4. talking to the professor

+ Working with Canadian Students



- (BA)“I am not like, like if I participate, if I don’t’ participate like group discussion or something, they [Canadian students] just, I don’t know. I feel like I am far away from them. They speak really well and then they know what’s going on in the class. But me, [...] I don’t know what’s going on...”

+ Working with Canadian Students



(BA)“I hope I can communicate with Canadian student and they can speak slowly and they in our project group, they, maybe after the presentation, we should marked each other and usually international student get lower mark because they, Canadian student, don't think you take part in the in this group.”


+ Focus Group Findings

- All focus group participants feel more comfortable working with international students
- (GR)“they [international students] understand. They try to understand. Canadian, they like to be accurate. Your word, your pronunciation, [...] I mean some student in my class not they are helpful ...[but] Canadian student they do not try to understand international student. But international student we just say few words they catch the idea.”

+ Speaking



- Pronunciation
- Personality
- Not-Canadian-like English
- (BA) “that was kind of shock to me because I learn I was excited to learn and then I [...] used that sentence like that expression to others but they don’t [...] understood but they say ‘umm’”

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- “sometimes, sometimes, I afraid of when I speak, they might judge my English, right? So that’s kind of for me, it kind of painful. They are gonna judge me. So I can’t speak because I know my speaking is not very good but I am getting really improve, improve, I am getting better and better. I wanna speak a lot but I think [...] they are gonna judge my English so I don’t want they laugh at me and make fun of me so I just I thought I’d better not speak don’t speak.”

+ Talking to the Professor



- “it’s SO difficult. Like our teacher like she said, ‘I’m not care whether you are the international students, you are just like the Canadian students... As same as Canadian students, so the mark is sooo low. I have already finished one essay and the score is not good.’”
- “I just don’t know how to speak to the professor.”

+ Focus Group Findings



- Graduate students (Master's and PhD) find reading and speaking difficult
- “(M) too much! I need to read[...] something about my project 6 hour per day.”

+ Reading



- “(S) I didn’t expect that much of the article in business ...”
- “For me it’s demanding because it needs me to read a lot of articles and the textbook. This is my problem. Just to find time and read those articles and because it’s a new... for me it is a different language [...] sometimes when I read a few pages, and I feel I don’t understand ...”

+ Focus Group Findings



- All undergrad focus group participants wish they had practiced more speaking and listening (authentic) in ESL
- Grad students in focus group wish they had more reading (engineering) and speaking (business) practices in ESL



One Size Can't Fit All

The US standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number. Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriates built the US Railroads. Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used. Why did "they" use that gauge then? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.

Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts. So who built those old rutted roads?



Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (and England) for their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. And bureaucracies live forever.

So the next time you are handed a spec and told we have always done it that way and wonder what horse's ass came up with that, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses.



Now the twist to the story...

When you see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs would have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site.

The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track, as you now know, is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major Space Shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a Horse's ass. And you thought being a horse's ass wasn't important? (an email from a friend)

+ Curriculum Agent



- Are any of the preliminary findings a surprise to you?
- What do you think your ESL graduates find most demanding when studying in university and how do you prepare them for those areas?

+ Curriculum Agent

- Targeted EAP support (ESL and university)
- More speaking activities meaningful to students future study (e.g., problem solving activities for engineering students and analyzing activities for business admin students)
- Pronunciation!
- More authentic listening (guest lectures)





Thank you!

Questions? Comments?