Praxial Interlanguage Experience: Developing Communicative Intentionality through Experiential and Contemplative Inquiry in International Education

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Abstract: *The following paper reports on a research and development dissertation into the language learning experiences of Education students as they use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at an International College in Thailand. The purpose of the research is to improve classroom practice by contextualizing language activities in accordance with students' language learning experiences and reflexivity. Eight "glocal" students from the Faculty of Education, Burapha University, following a double degree program with an American university, explored their language learning experiences during three terms; Sumer Intensive English, Fall English for Academic Purposes, and Spring Contemplative Education. In addition, the "insider" teacher-practitioner inquiry was conducted from an HRD perspective by combining various qualitative methods, gathering data from Experiential and Contemplative classroom activities. The data was analyzed and categorized into three perspectives; first-person subjective, second-person intersubjective, and third-person objective. Learning a second language (L2) as a young adult can be fraught with anxiety and trepidation, nothing like the natural experiences of a child learning their native language (van Lier, 2014).Using open, axial, and theoretical coding, the data shows that students' fears and anxieties hindered their language development. In addition, the results indicated that contemplative practice, compassionate support, and contingent perspectives helped students replace their anxiety with communicative intentionality to become active classroom learners and participants in the International campus community.*

Keywords: Axial, Contemplative Education, Communicative Intentionality, Contingencies, Interlanguage, Praxis, Praxial

Introduction

Non-English speaking college students using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), like all college students, have "limited and fallible cognitive and emotional capacities", and experience the world as subjective autonomous agents effected by their socio-cultural context (Johnson, 2015, p. 1: Thompson, 2007). As subjective agents, their perceptions and beliefs vary according to their experiences, effecting their beliefs, predispositions, and dispositions which are directly connected to the immediate language and culture (Peirce, 2012: Bacon, 2012: Hayes, 2005). Moreover, local language learners' dispositions are experienced intersubjectively along with their community's normative and objective frameworks which influence their intentionality (Bacon, 2012). Subsequently, as local students enter international or global colleges they acquire a new glocal identity and interlanguage, and must adapt to their new community (Illeris, 2013: Norton, 2013: Peirce, 2012: Wenger, 1998). In an international college these glocal students typically group with likeminded individuals interlinked with the majority community which has its own normative ground and community of inquiry that has become the dominant socio-culture (Peirce, 2012: Lewin, 2010: Wenger, 1998).

Glocal L2 learners are limited in three crucial language learning areas; Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) (Cummins, 2000). Moreover, due to their decontextualized language learning experiences, lack communicative intentionality, as suggested in the Shared Intentionality Hypothesis (SIH) (Tomasello, 2014). Subsequently, learning everyday and scientific concepts while using a second language is problematic, making it essential for glocal students to learn contextually

and experientially (Vygotsky, 1978: Cummins, 2000). Moreover, there is a contingency and interdependence they must become aware of that enfolds with language, based on self-organization and autonomy (autopoiesis) (Bohm, 2013: Thompson, 2007: Introna, 1998) which makes language experiences a crucial determinant in how students acquire, learn, and develop knowledge in a second language (van Lier, 2014). Therefore, within students' past and present language experiences are contingency, autonomy, and solidarity that make understanding experiences critical in how students respond and relate to the world, while at the same time being contingent on their subjective experiences (Rorty, 1989, 1986: Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). After all, humans are hardwired for cooperation, interdependence, and compassion (Tomasello, 2014: Hanson, 2009). Therefore, it is through cooperation, experience, and compassion that glocal L2 learners develop communicative intentionality which eventually leads to adequate BISC, CALP, and CUP, as argued in Jim Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 2000, 1979). Nevertheless, developing these areas are contingent on students' experiences which experientially includes their intentionality, awareness, and the classroom activities planned for them (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Glocal students typically have limited *communicative intentionality*, along with low *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* (BICS) in the target language, but are expected to demonstrate Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which requires years of academic practice (Cummins, 2000). Additionally, teachers must engage students in a way that allows for language development and academic learning, which according to Vygotsky can be accomplished by discovering a students' *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Subsequently, teaching should be dialogic and experiential, which allows students to learn both language and academic content through natural inquiry (van Lier, 2014: Johnson, 2008). Therefore, the main problems associated with the EMI context are students' lack of language awareness and communicative intentionality, decontextualized classroom practice, and inappropriate research methodology. This suggests that teachers develop dialogical relationships with students that are supportive and conducive to language development (Freire, 2011). By better understanding students' prior experiences, and their learning context, problems in EMI classrooms can be overcome. This would include interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of Education, HRD, and cognitive science which consider language acquisition, learning, and development (Kolb & Kolb, 2017: McLean, 2005: McGoldrick, et al., 2003: Swanson & Holton, 2001).

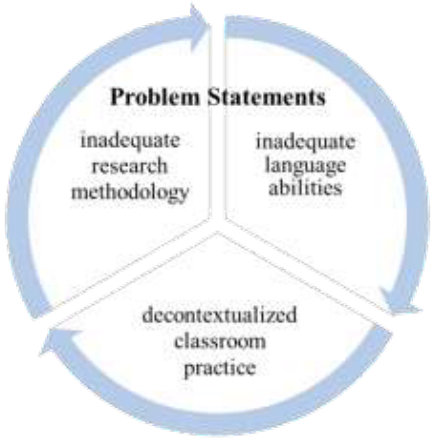

Figure 1: Problem Statements

Research Objectives & Questions

The purpose of this Actionable Research was to explore, better understand, and delineate some of the essential qualities of glocal students' experiences while they use *English as a Medium of Instruction* (EMI). Moreover, as a practitioner research the objective was to utilize an *insider* perspective that would help cut across language and cultural barriers which conceal finer details in the

students' experiences. In addition, I wanted knowledge-gain to be easily applicable to both HRD & Education by merging the two fields'emphasis on learning and development. In addition, the knowledge gained would be beneficial for the glocal students learning a second language in educational institutes, and for colleagues, while at the same time the knowledge could be used in training programs where employees were trying to learn a second language. Not only did I want a better understanding of the students' lived experiences, I wanted them to have a better understanding of their own experiences, through a self-reflective process that would lead to self-awareness and transformation. Eventually I settled on three forms of knowing; subjective, intersubjective, and objective which I believed would triangulate the qualitative data. Therefore, the purpose of this study is threefold:

1. To gain a better understanding of the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) context by exploring glocal students' intentionality through their language learning experiences;
2. To improve classroom practice based on the students' experiences in the areas of language acquisition, learning, and development while they use EMI;
3. To develop a praxis-based, *insider* classroom research model that can be used for teachers to; explore and improve their teaching practice during regular classroom activities that result in student language learning & development.

Literature Review

From the beginning of this research the main focus is on improving the classroom experience for glocal students using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Subsequently, my first topical searches were in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), a field that has merged from linguistics and cognitive science (Johnson, 2008). Traditional SLA research is typically based on the individual learner, and the computational model inherited from the early days of cognitive science (Johnson, 2008). I used five main sources to initiate a review of research involving Second Language Education & Pedagogy; M. Johnson's Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition (2008), Schleppegrell's The Language of Schooling (2004), Atkinson's Alternative Approaches to SLA (2011), Lantolf & Poehner's Sociocultural Theory and the Pedagogical Imperative in L2 Education (2014), and Leo van Lier's Interaction in the language curriculum (2014). All five emphasized the importance of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theories which combine theory, practice, learning, and development.

After this initial review, I determined that traditional SLA research did not adequately explore the scope of the classroom, so I broadened the search to include interaction and relational theories, which I organized as L2 & Education. In addition, I believed it was crucial for this study to use a developmental perspective from the field of Human Resource Development (HRD), with an emphasis on adult language learning, development, and change. This topic search is labeled L2 & HRD. Within this search I included adult learning theories, change initiatives, and institutional learning communities. Swanson's The Foundations of Human Resource Development (2001), Knowles' the Adult Learner (2014), and McGoldrick, Stewart, and Watson's Understanding Human Resource Development (2003) were used as guides for better understanding the interdependent relationships involved between theory and practice which I believe have been underexplored in HRD. Most of these sources have a foundation in the works of Lewin (2010), who's Field Theory, Action Research, and Group Dynamics, have informed HRD for decades. Lewin's influence has been seen in Argyris (2008),Schon (1987), Knowles (2014), and Kolb (2017), all significant contributors to HRD theory and practice.

In a third focus area, I believed it was important to search topics related to research methodology in general, especially in educational settings. van Manen's Researching lived experiences(1997), became a clear and distinct voice, along with another dominate voices from van Lier (2014), and others who have influenced pedagogy, and the importance of classroom experience (van Manen, 1997: van Lier, 2014). Moreover, I began to recognize the significance of second and third generation cognitive science, and their reconceptualization of the cognitive-computational model as connective, and embodied (Varela et al., 1991). Embodied & Enacted theorists have given voices to situated cognition, the evolutionary processes of variation, adaptation,and change. I labeled this search as L2 & Inquiry. Within this search, relationships are seen as holistic&dynamic, in which

there exists an interdependence between subject, object, the environment, and language (Tomasello, 2014). I believe these three areas; L2 & Education, HRD, and Inquiry can be used to inform classroom research, that is fluid, practical, and designed to solve real issues and problems associated with the EMI context.

Figure 2: Search Description

Solving problems associated with glocal students using EMI have been a concern in the Thai educational system for decades. While there has been some success in international programs, this can be associated with affluent programs where students have outside support, and begin their international process at an early age. Nonetheless, according to the Thai National Qualification Framework English language education for the less affluent is a key component for success in ASEAN. Moreover, if Thailand is to progress in this area, they must identify the root issues which will require an interdisciplinary approach that is supported philosophically, and scientifically, based on contextual classroom research, and student experience.

Research Methodology

The direction and motivation for this research was due in part to my experiences teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Thailand for over twenty years. Those experiences had convinced me that teachers should research their own classes in order to overcome three major concerns related to *English as a Medium of Instruction* (EMI); students' lack of communicative intentionality, inappropriate curriculum, and legitimizing *insider* inquiry. All three areas can be traced back to SLA's divide between theory and practice (Johnson, 2008: Atkinson, 2011: Lantolf, & Poehner, 2014). With this in mind I wanted to improve the students' *communicative intentionality* through their classroom experiences by using a *praxis* based approach to improvement, learning, and development (Carr & Kemmis, 2003). The type of *praxis* I had in mind would involve teachers' and students' conscientious self-reflection as posited by Dewey (Dewey, 1998: Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

In other words, I believe there is a clear link between reflexivity, our intentions, attentions, and actions that cannot be overlooked in the process of learning a second language. From my own reflection on the issues surrounding glocal students in the EMI context, I was concerned with the following questions:

1. What are the language learning experiences of glocal students in an EMI program?
2. To what extent can teacher actions improve classroom practice that positively affects the glocal students' language acquisition, learning, and development while they use EMI?
3. To what extent can a praxis-based, insider classroom research model be designed for teachers to; explore and improve their teaching practice during regular classroom activities that result in student language learning & development?

To answer these questions, I combined the fields of Human Resource Development (HRD) and Second Language Education (SLE). For the HRD component I used the traditions of Lewin's action research, and Revans' Action Learning (Lewin, 2010: Revans, 2011).

Furthermore, for the SLE component I explored Freire's Participatory Action Research (PAR) which combines critical pedagogy and conscientiousness (Freire, 2011). For the SLA component I explored Tomasello's usage-based language theory that is conceptualized in the Shared Intentionality Hypothesis (Tomasello, 2014). Ultimately, the research focused on exploring three different voices: first-person subjective found in individual intentionality, second-person subjective found in joint intentionality, and third-person objective found in collective intentionality (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Data Collection

The data was collected during three distinct time periods that coincided with the students' courses. The first course was a non-credit Intensive English program that lasted 8 weeks, and 4 hours a week of class time per session. The second course, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) came during the first term that lasted for 16 weeks, with 3 hours a week class time. The third course, Contemplative Education came during the second term that also lasted for 16 weeks, with 3 hours a week in which students were asked to maintain weekly contemplative practices that focused on contemplation and compassion (Figure 7).

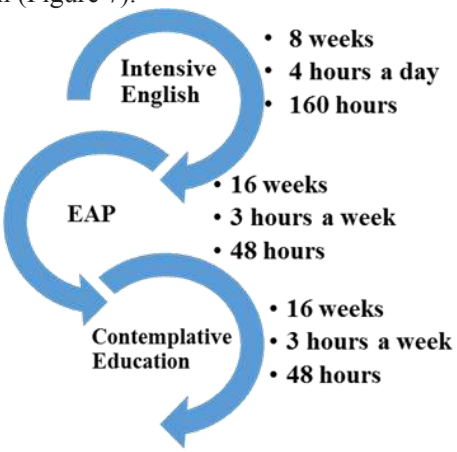

Figure 3: Data Collection Stages

Following the actionable research guide, I collected data during the three terms of regular classroom activities which were typically in the form of writing assignments and interviews that addressed the students' language learning experiences, and could be categorized and analyzed as three triangulating voices (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This included the students' subjective inquiry into their prior language learning experiences, beginning with a time line, including a mind map, and first-person writing assignments throughout the year. Based on embodied phenomenology, students explored their language learning experiences using the five Buddhist aggregates (Varela et al., 1991). For the second-person intersubjective, students used Paulo Freire's problem-posing, and action learning to engage each other and the academic content. In addition, third-person objective data was collected during dynamic assessment, and my own personal observation.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative data analysis, I used *open*, *axial*, and *theoretical* coding to interpret the student experiences, and was able to identify patterns and themes that could be used to answer my research questions while following basic guidelines of qualitative analysis:

1. I was not guided by universal rules;
2. The process was fluid and it was dependent on the experiences of the students who participated, and the context in which their experiences were situated;
3. The analysis changed and adapted as the study evolved and emerged (Frechtling, 1997).

To maintain these three guidelines, I processed and recorded the data immediately, and I began the analysis as soon as the data was collected while following the guide I established (Figure, 4). The analysis for the data began by first categorizing the data according to first-person subjective, second-person intersubjective, and third-person objective (Figure 5).

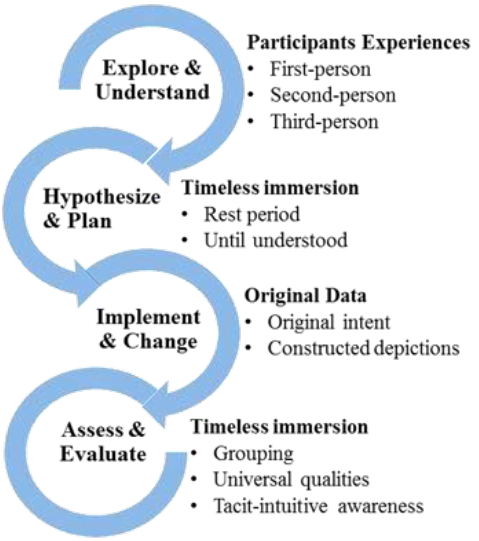

Figure 4: Collection & Analysis

Following the collection & analysis guide (figure 4), I included principles from Moustakas to analyze the heuristic data (Moustakas, 1990). As I followed the guide (figure 4) I began a "timeless immersion" until I understood the data by analyzing data from each individual which included interviews, writing samples, mind maps and timelines. This was followed by a rest period during the hypothesis and planning stage. Following this, during the implement and change stage I began to construct a depiction of the experiences that I first encountered during the explore and understand stage. Towards the end of the study, during the assess and evaluate stage, I was able to notice common qualities and themes which exemplified the experiences as a whole which led to a tacit-intuitive awareness (Moustakas, 1990).

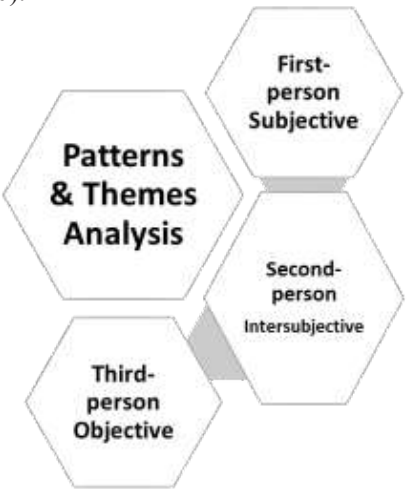

Figure 5: Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in accordance with a qualitative pragmatic approach that looked for *patterns and themes* that emerged from the data (figure 5). Throughout this process, I was constantly reminded of Dewey's advice: Reflection is a meaning-making process; Reflection is systematic and rigorous with roots in scientific inquiry; Reflection must be done in community; Reflection requires compassionate attitudes (Rodgers, 2002).

Findings and Discussion

Using embodied phenomenology, students explored their individual capacity for self-discovery, language awareness, and communicative intentionality. What I was hoping to see was a

progression from their own *individual intentionality* to *shared intentionality* in group work, to *collective intentionality* in a community of English language speakers (Tomasello, 2014). Subsequently, students began by exploring and describing their language learning experiences beginning with primary school, to include middle, and high school. The purpose was to initiate a critical exploration of their experiences with the intent of gaining more in-depth language awareness, self-knowledge, and self-awareness that are pertinent to language usage, learning, and development.

While exploring and better understanding the context through students' language learning experiences, I used *open* coding to discover that students' fears of making speaking mistakes kept them from wanting to use English. In Addition, using *axial* coding I categorized their experiences into first, second, and third-person voices, and discovered that their fears affected their relationships in the classroom which affected their learning, and how they participated in the community. Moreover, using *theoretical* coding, in reference to the *Shared Intentionality Hypothesis* (Tomasello, 2014), I discovered that students lacked individual, joint, and collective intentionality which contributed to their lack of wanting to participate, and directly affected their language development.

Improving Classroom Practice

To improve my classroom practice, and answer question 2, I followed the PIE four step actionable guide: 1) *explore & understand*; 2) *decide & plan*; 3) *implement &activate*; 4) *assess & evaluate*. After phase one was completed, and I had a better understanding of my students' language learning experiences, I decided that activities should be *goal oriented*, *contextual*, and *socially supportive*(Kolb & Kolb, 2017). In addition, two aspects were added; first, for students to make their external conditions match their goals, and second, for students to change how they experience their external conditions (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: Cummins, 2000). Subsequently, an emphasis was placed on emotional well-being which I believed was essential if they were to overcome their lack of BICS and CALP. In any event, most of their classroom learning was decontextualized, and was focused on grammar and vocabulary. Language educators understand that vocabulary learned out of context lacks sustainability, and comprehension must go through a process of contextualization if the learner is to consider the vocabulary their own (van Lier, 2014). Language educationalists also know that concepts need to be learned socially, typically through a scaffolding process, and because of glocal students' limited BICS, they struggle with CALP (Cummins, 2000).

In the second stage (*decide & plan*), I determined that student development was as significant as learning academic content, as suggested by the Thai National Qualification Framework. Moreover, student development would involve change and transformation that is self-driven or self-directed, making students responsible for their own learning (Swanson & Holton, 2001: Knowles, et al., 2014). Furthermore, it was decided that classroom activities would be designed to resemble Freire's problem-posing, and Revan's action learning, viewing both of these approaches as constructive, in which learning and meaning-making are the result of interaction. Nevertheless, it wasn't until students were well into their contemplative exercises focused on compassion that students began to engage others.

***Insider* Practitioner Research**

Insider research evidently begins with the researcher, and their positioning within the context where the researching professional or the professional researcher is conducting the research (Atkins, & Wallace, 2012). In addition, an extra purpose of insider research is to make positive changes in a practitioner's own practice which causes a researcher to consider methodological as well as ethical considerations. However, a researcher's objectivity may come into question due to the researcher's subjectivity, which requires an extra emphasis on settling issues that are "systematic, credible, verifiable, justifiable, useful, valuable and trustworthy" (Ibid, 2012, p. 53). As has been indicated before, this research began as an exploration into the EMI context, but evolved into *insider* classroom research, which allowed me to overcome the gap between theory and practice which are associated with classroom research. This Actionable research followed feedback steps that included planning, action and fact-finding about the planned activities (Lewin, 2010). For organizing and coding the data I followed Figure 1, which included the literature review around EMI, BICS/CALP, and adult learning theories. I essentially categorized the student experiences as (a) first-person subjective; (b) second-person intersubjective; and (c) third-person objective (Figure 8) (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

In order to properly utilize their experiences, I decided that students must participate as authentic communicators with both interlocutor support, and group support. Based on the *decide & plan* stage, I planned classroom activities that would both improve the classroom activities, and the

students' well-being. This consideration was the result of the*Timeless immersion and rest period* that allowed me to better understood the context (Moustakas, 1990). This was followed by a period of implementing the classroom activities with the intent of change. Participation as an outcome became more important than academic outcomes. This change can also be precipitated by the research methodology (Anderson & Braud, 2011). Through the research process, participants can experience change attitudes about oneself, and the world in general, as long as the research is inquiry based (Ibid, 2011).

Conclusion

In International Higher Education, the growing use of *English as the medium of instruction* (EMI) has major implications for learning and development, especially for students in countries from the *expanding circle*, where English is seldom used culturally but learned as a foreign language in classrooms(Kachru, 1992). Nevertheless, international colleges proceed with EMI even though the implications have not been adequately explored. When using EMI, a student can expect three types of teaching approaches: *imposing*, *enabling*, or *permissive* (Guilar, 2006). Nevertheless, each approach has significant consequences for the students' language acquisition, learning, and development. For this reason, it is crucial that instructors in an EMI context have the best teacher-training available, and are proactive in their own classroom inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). While some believe EMI is a passport to English acquisition, learning, and development, major issues and concerns must be considered, including students' *communicative intentionality*, their Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), and their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2000).

However, most stakeholders agree that in the area of EMI, something must change. Deciding what to change, and how to cultivate transformations are difficult undertakings. In life, *driving* forces and *restraining* forces are always in play, and change managers must first be aware of these dialectical forces that either promote change or maintain the status quo in relations to our students' intentions, and their social groups (Lewin, 2010). As a starting point, determining the campus atmosphere can be recognized and conceptualized using learning metaphors, specifically the acquisition metaphor (AM), and the Participation metaphor (PM) (Sfard, 1998). Simply put, under the AM, the student's mind is a container filled with knowledge by a teacher, or what Freire referred to as *banking education* (Freire, 2011). On the other hand, the PM suggests a process of participation which begins by experiencing parts of the whole (Sfard, 1998). Thus, by examining experiences, teachers can explore their teaching practice and determine if their teaching activities encourage AM or PM, while students can explore their experiences to determine if they are using the AM or PM.

To discover or uncover the structure of these experiences, and what needs to be changed, both students and teachers are encouraged to become phenomenologists (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Herein lies the foundation of this research, that the instructor explores his teaching experiences, while teaching and guiding the students to explore their own learning experiences. With phenomenology at the heart, foundation or umbrella of this research, experiences can be discovered, and the proper steps can be taken to transform these experiences to improve student *communicative intentionality*which is a catalyst for language acquisition, learning, and development.

Researching lived experiences can be performed using *Contemplative* or *Mindful* Inquiry, in which the researcher as "scholar-practitioner" is encouraged to be the center of the research process as both *applied philosopher* and *knowledge broker* (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Thus, social contemplative research, or mindful inquiry begins a process of inquiry with the researcher as participant-observer who not only views his own experiences and practices, but the participants' within the classroom environment, and the affects related to their interactions. According to Varela, et al., "the new sciences of mind need to enlarge their horizon to encompass both lived human experience and the possibilities for transformation inherent in human experience" (1991, kl. 1026. Nevertheless, it is the lived experiences that are explored by the participants themselves along with the researcher that makes this research unique. In this sense the phenomenology overlaps with ethnography, or what has been called ethnomethodology in which participants navigate the everyday world in which they live (van Manen, 1997, 2014: Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Throughout ASEAN, students attending international colleges are tasked with learning academic content in a second language while having limited BICS and lacking *communicative*

intentionality. This is highly problematic, and raises concerns for all stakeholders. For the past seven years, I have helped prepare education students for a double degree program with a university in the United States. These science students from the Faculty of Education join us at the International College to use *English as a Medium of Instruction* (EMI). Having the privilege to teach these students, who I affectionately refer to as *glocal*, have had limited or no experiences using English authentically outside the classroom. For these reasons, they collectively exhibited the same shyness and reluctance to speak English, followed the same learning path, and inevitably struggled with EMI. In the past two years, due to a forward thinking member of the Education Faculty, Contemplative Education was added to their required courses, and I was chosen to teach the course. Preparing to teach this course has changed my life, and the direction of this dissertation.

These eight students' limited English abilities, led to what typically takes place in most EMI classrooms, an unstated arrangement in which *glocal* students use their native language to understand the content, and then use rote memorization in English for test taking. While there is nothing essentially wrong with learning content in the native language, it is not the purpose of EMI, and limits second language acquisition, learning, and development. However, this arrangement can be transformed when instructors contextualize the academic content by socializing the learning activities. Subsequently,students' communicative intentionality is improved which eventually leads to student learning and development. However, developing communicative intentionality takes time, and typically falls outside curriculum and learning outcomes. While instructors can improve classroom practice, the students must essentially transform their intentions, attention, and actions. This requires a change in individual, shared,and collective intentionality which was accomplished using problem-posing, action learning, and introspection through contemplation while others were supportive through compassion.

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