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## **The State of the Intercultural Communicative Competence: An Exploration through Trajectories in English Teachers' Discourse**

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### **Abstract**

The history of English language education is punctuated with teaching and learning theories and approaches advocated by different communities of practice. One of such recent trend is the support for the integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the English language classroom. To date, minimal studies have examined this extension of the English language classroom. Hence, to determine the teaching practice of ICC this study looked at the identity-in-practice and -in-discourse, as well as sources of pedagogical knowledge of four English teachers teaching at private institutions in Bangkok. This study employed a discourse analysis approach to first identify the participants' emergent

trajectories and funds of knowledge, and subsequently compared the findings with the fundamental principles of intercultural education, or the community of practice that support ICC. The findings indicated that while some participants' trajectories paralleled the tenets of ICC, there were also divergent ones. This reflected the contextualization of intercultural education, as well as the teachers' (lack of) knowledge regarding ICC. More than this, the findings also indicated the viability of a community of practice, especially for intercultural education, in a disparate educational sector.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence; English Language Teaching; Community of Practice; Trajectories

## **Introduction**

Throughout the history of English language education, shared beliefs and practices gave rise to the notion of an exclusive collective body, or a community of practice (CoP). Communities of practice are groups with homogenous beliefs and practices built upon experts' endorsement, empirical findings, or long-withstanding discourses of a particular field. In the CoP of English language teaching (ELT), there are many language teaching and learning approaches proposed on the basis of efficacy or benefits. One of such proposal is the integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the classroom. The reason for ICC is the view that English is no longer a fixed racial or cultural identifier (Kachru, 2011; Liddicoat, 2011; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Hismanoglu, 2011); instead, it is a medium from which critical understandings of the world are gained through global exchanges via the English language (Pennycook, 2001; Fettes, 2003). In Thailand, the value of ICC is acknowledged through educational planning and policy found in the national educational act (Baker,

2008, 2011; Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016). This is also echoed by the vision of the ASEAN Economic Community (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). While it is a goal that has been identified by the nation, little is known about its implementation. With this as a premise, this study will explore the state of ICC through an examination of English teachers' discourse.

### **Intercultural Education and Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Intercultural education is borne out of the perceived need for ICC. With the influx of cross-cultural communication, development of ICC has been adopted in various curricula. One of the main tenets of ICC is the belief that language users should be equipped with strategies and skills, and develop appropriate attitudes that will facilitate intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2011). Another aspect of this competency is to create an awareness of one's own cultural disposition and those held by others. To achieve this in the English language classroom, culture is not delivered as a body of information; rather, it is treated as a catalyst for students' active engagement in making and negotiating meaning. This can be done through an intercultural pedagogy, which contains the following elements: noticing – where similarities and differences are identified, comparing – where similarities and differences are compared with regards to known knowledge and new knowledge, reflecting – where a person negotiates and interprets meaning of cultural information, and finally interacting – where people are engaged with others on the basis of exchanging meaning. While intercultural competence may seem valuable to develop alongside communicative competency, there are challenges which may impede its implementation, such as the focus on skills and strategies linked with the English language, due partly to the western origins of the intercultural notion; the long-term acquisition of intercultural competence is also unknown (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017); and the difficulty in accounting for

the dynamic nature of intercultural competence, such as that seen through simple exchanges (e.g. knowing *what* is culturally appropriate to say) to complex and layered exchanges (e.g. knowing *why* a word/phrase/idea is suitable or not suitable) (Dervin, 2016).

### **Implementation of Intercultural Education**

Because of the link between language and culture, the language classroom is considered the natural environment for ICC to be developed. Experiences brought into the English classroom from students, teachers, especially non-local English teachers, and textbooks have provided starting points for the discussion of ICC. These experiences have been examined and numerous instances of conflict have been reported. For example, in the context of this study, Thailand, there have been reports of English language teachers focusing only on preparing students to pass national evaluations; furthermore, these teachers would revert to the use of Thai to teach. Another commonly reported issue is the teaching of form and structure, instead of communicative uses of the English language (see Foley, 2005; de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Trakulkasemsuk, 2018). In terms of culture, recent studies pointed out that teachers felt that the development of a national identity should be prioritized, albeit not being explicitly stated (Baker, 2008, 2011). Nonetheless, perceptions may differ even among Thai educators. Some studies have shown that the local culture, which is thought of as being the most relevant to the students, should be taught while regional or national culture, and international culture come secondary. This was seen in regions where social cohesion is at stake, such as in the South of Thailand (see Ding & Teo, 2014; Lo & Bianco, 2016; Arphattananon, 2018). In its relation with English language, teachers have been found to see no direct link between intercultural competence and the development of students' English language proficiency (Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017).

Similar elsewhere, Luk's (2012) study reported English teachers in Hong Kong who were ambivalent towards the integration of culture with English language lessons, yet maintain a positive outlook towards an integration. The reasons are manifold, some of which are the ambiguous expectation of what can be taught alongside English, the overriding value of test-taking skills, the general uncertainty towards which culture to emphasize, and a skepticism towards low-proficient students' ability to grasp cultural matters. Trent's (2012) study reported similar findings as well, where teachers viewed themselves more as teachers of English. This is not only true for the teachers studied by Luk (2012) and Trent (2012) in the Asian context, but it appears to be a general consensus among English teachers in other parts of the world, where many English teachers believe that their primary responsibility is to equip students with appropriate language abilities. Teachers in Europe have reported the lack of preparation in teacher education programs (Ryan & Sercu, 2005), which had led them to question their ICC teaching capabilities (Atay, 2005). Teachers have also cited that materials provided in the classroom, or the working curriculum that lacks ICC objectives. Teachers themselves also admit that they do not think they have sufficient cultural knowledge to be brought into the classroom (Atay, 2005; Arikan, 2011). In certain cases, students appear more interested in improving their language ability since language ability is what is tested in their exams (Arikan, 2011; Sercu, 2005). There are also those who think that ICC does not have a place in the language classroom (Bayyurt, 2006). These examples illustrate that it is impossible to completely segregate 'camps', as there are some groups who are peripherally participating in the integration of ICC. Furthermore, it is not necessarily up to the teacher to make decisions on content and pedagogical approaches as other influential stakeholders need to be considered as well.

### **Communities of Practice and Trajectories**

With a plethora of studies on the areas of ELT and ICC, varied views have emerged to explicate the ways these learning

environments operate and should be managed. These varying views may allow us to discern the types of CoP. As mentioned earlier, a CoP is formed through a collective consensus towards a system of beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices make up trajectories, which consist of mutual engagement, being in a joint enterprise, and sharing a repertoire of approaches. Mutual engagement is a dimension that aims to describe how members of a community of practice are linked through diverse and complex relationships. These relationships are multifaceted and are not easily deducible into simplistic constructs. Instead, these relationships exist as mutually bound, such as the relationship of power and dependence, success and failure, or alliance and competition. Joint enterprise, on the other hand, involves the process of reconciling differences and the manifestation of conformity. Finally, shared repertoire relates to a coherent set of actions and discourse which have become an accepted set of practices within the field of the CoP.

The relationships that form a CoP may be reflected through trajectories found in discourse. A trajectory is a term that alludes to motion – beginning at one point and ending at another. Nonetheless, as Wenger argues (1998), and as illustrated by Liu and Xu (2011; 2013), trajectories do not suggest “a fixed course or fixed destination”, but a journey that is made relevant because “it has coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future.” (p. 154); hence, trajectories may shift. There are several types of trajectories. Typically, newly inducted teachers are said to have inbound trajectories. These newcomers are described as being ‘invested in future participation’ and having ‘peripheral participation’. On the other hand, those who have extensive experiences of teaching, and is well versed with his/her profession as a teacher may be considered as having an insider trajectory, but they still ‘evolve’ along with the innovations their CoP. As mentioned, newcomers may practice peripheral participation, leading to a peripheral trajectory, which is marked by a non-committal participation. The reason for this type of trajectory is to provide access to a CoP as a means to have preliminary guidance

for practice and beliefs. There are also those with boundary trajectories, where beliefs and practices are brokered between different CoPs, and finding value in links created between CoPs. Finally, there are those who may find themselves on an outbound trajectory, moving away from a CoP. This may be experienced by those undergoing a reformation in their practice or work context, or “developing new relationships, finding different position with respect to a community, and seeing the world and oneself in new ways.” (Wenger, 1998, p. 155).

The identification with a CoP is valuable for teachers as it empowers teachers by providing a platform for legitimizing what they practice, or what they perceive as important. Teachers legitimize teaching practices through a critical reflection upon the intersection between broader educational expectations and teacher or student capabilities (Whitehead, 2000). Being granted legitimacy, or having the right to legitimate one’s actions is crucial as this is regarded as competent engagement with the standards of the CoP (Wenger, 1998).

## **The Study**

As stated earlier, the aim of this study is to examine the state of intercultural education through the discourse of English teachers. This study is carried out to add to the limited resources concerning intercultural education, and to form a situated understanding of how intercultural education is perceived and implemented in the region, which may provide an alternate view of the intercultural construct and its pedagogy (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Dervin, 2016). In this section, we will describe the theoretical underpinnings of discourse, the research setting and participants, and analytical procedure.

## **Teacher Talk**

Teachers’ beliefs and practices may emerge from their talk, or discourse, in the form of an image-text, or simply an attribution of the self through titles such as a *real* or *professional teacher* (Trent, 2012), or by description of what a teacher does in relation



to other teachers. While the former is grounded in poststructuralism, the latter is based on social or group theories (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). In both approaches, teachers are seen as possessing the agency to relate to certain pedagogical preferences, or having critical reflexivity in creating knowledge about the teacher self, as well as others involved in the teaching and learning environment. For example, in the studies of Trent (2012) and Luk (2012), teachers actively identified themselves by describing who they are through what they do in their English classrooms, or by aligning with other teachers who practice similar pedagogical approaches and beliefs.

More than just what a teacher believes or does, teachers' discourse may also disclose reasons for their beliefs and practices. This can be done systematically through the examination of sources of knowledge of an individual teacher. Kennedy (2002) proposes three distinct sources that affect pedagogical choices. They are craft, prescriptive, and systematic sources. Craft sources consist of experiences as a teacher, experiences growing up as a student, or spontaneous ideas that come up during a lesson. Prescriptive knowledge can be derived from accountability systems such as curriculum framework or educational policies. The systematic source consists of professional development as a reaction towards empirical findings disseminated through professional bodies. At times, knowledge gained from systematic sources may contradict craft or prescriptive sources. This prohibits the acquisition of new ideas. Gholami and Husu (2010) present another alternative knowledge source to explain teachers' pedagogical choices. The first is the moral ethos, which is driven by praxial knowledge. This ethos involves a careful deliberation of the means and the end, and is done through the notion of care. The second ethos concerns the notion of 'what works', where teachers make pedagogical choices based on what may be convenient for a given teaching and learning situation.

In sum, understanding teachers' beliefs and practices by looking at their discourse identity, as well as their funds of knowledge, could give insight into the trajectories that teachers

follow. Once these trajectories are identified, a link with a particular CoP could be established.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study analyzes the discourse of four private school English teachers who were invited to talk about their pedagogical approaches employed in their English classroom. The participants come from two major types of private educational institutions in Bangkok, which are the international schools and the English programs. The former operates with an international curriculum and receives accreditation from local and foreign educational bodies, and the latter provides more classes taught in English, but retains the use of Thai for some subjects, such as history and social science. In these schools, it is common to find non-local teachers (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

These participants are from a larger group of participants. These participants were recruited through referral sampling, where the primary researcher contacted a few personal acquaintances, and was subsequently referred to other English teachers. The participants are Dan, Lane, Terence, and Chrissie (pseudonyms).

#### ***Participant 1***

Of the four English teachers, Dan is the newest. At the time of the research, he had only been teaching for over six months. While Dan is a Thai, he does not consider himself local; instead, he sees himself as having a third culture, due to his upbringing in different parts of the world (his parents were diplomats). Dan completed a university degree in philosophy. Realizing that it may be difficult to find a job related to philosophy, and because he is fluent in English, Dan decided to take up an English teaching job.

#### ***Participant 2***

Lane has been teaching the longest among the four participants. She has over twenty years of teaching experience in different countries around the world. She has been in Thailand for

over fifteen years and sees herself of a global citizen and not so much an English person from the United Kingdom. Lane completed degrees in language education and had taught in different school settings to students from different proficiency levels.

### ***Participant 3***

Terence, on the other hand, completed a one-month teacher training certificate in Bangkok almost two years ago. Prior to teaching in Thailand, he was a consultant at a business firm. He decided to explore other avenues of work and life after years of working in the business sector.

### ***Participant 4***

The fourth participant, Chrissie, was a teacher in South Africa. She is currently teaching English at the secondary level. Prior to this, she was a kindergarten teacher. Her current job is one that she found three months after arriving in Thailand.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection instrument is a semi-structured interview. Since the aim of this study is descriptive in nature (that is, to explore intercultural education in the English classroom), there were no pre-conceived notions aside from the knowledge that the teaching of English in Thailand is complicated by many variables, as reported by various studies discussed earlier. Hence, the initial questions were kept broad. The interview simply began with the teachers' elaboration of their approach in teaching English. When the topic of culture came up, the interviewer would then request for further details. During the interview, the general term 'culture' was used instead of 'intercultural'. This was to avoid prompting the participants to give ideal responses in order to maintain the veracity of the interview.

There was one interview session, at a convenient time and location for each participant. The interview lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour. The interview data was audio-recorded,

and then transcribed verbatim. To describe the state of intercultural education through the participants' discourse, the researchers followed a three-stage analytical procedure, guided by principles of narrative inquiry (see Søreide, 2006; 2007). First, the researchers read the transcripts iteratively, and compared initial assumptions with relevant literature (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). In particular, reading was done in light of literature concerning the practice of ICC and ELT in Thailand. Second, from the iterative reading of the interview transcripts, the participants' approach towards ICC became apparent. These approaches may range from a full commitment that was in tandem with the tenets of ICC pedagogy, or a form of teaching practice that integrated culture (see Liddicoat, 2011). These also represented the participants as individuals, through their identity-in-discourse and their alignment with the broader scope of ELT and ICC, which represents their identity-in-practice. To understand the participants' pedagogical reasoning for ICC, the interview data was further examined through Kennedy (2002), and Gholami and Husu's (2010) frameworks of sources of knowledge. This was the third step of the analysis. After an account for each participant was finalized, a critical other was invited to evaluate the interpretations of the data. This critical other is an intercultural instructor, who teaches about intercultural communication at the university level. The critical other also frequently gives seminars or runs workshops about intercultural communication at different organizations in Bangkok, Thailand. The reason for the critical evaluation is to ensure resonance of the discussion and to avoid being outlandish in our interpretation. This is an integral aspect to maintain the reliability of qualitative data (see Tracy, 2010).

### **Findings and Discussion**

This section highlights the findings from each participant's discourse about ICC, and inadvertently ELT through the presentation of details about their identities-in-practice and -in-discourse, as well as their funds of knowledge, representing the second and third stages of the analysis.

**Dan**

Of the four participants, Dan is the newest to the teaching field. Dan is a Thai by birth but grew up in Europe due to his father's job as a foreign diplomat. With extensive years spent abroad, Dan found it difficult to relate to the local culture. Dan's academic background is in philosophy and religion but decided that a profession in that area would not give him a good financial return. Though new to teaching, Dan has a critical outlook towards culture, which he attributes to his academic background in philosophy, along with the years spent living abroad. In his discourse, Dan identifies himself by describing what he does as an English teacher. His main objective is to improve his students' language skills, positioning himself as primarily an English teacher. Dan agrees that integrating culture may have a positive bearing on his students, but he views culture as something subsidiary, and relevant only to pique the interest of his students [Excerpt 1].

**Excerpt 1**

That's actually, that actually just happened, twenty minutes ago, so the section we're teaching about, it's more or less present continuous, describing photo, looking at clothes in such colors and the main heading was about music festivals in general, the ones that they focused on were specifically music festivals in the UK, and from that, oh I thought to myself, that will be a great starting point for discussion for the students to improve how they talk about certain events or festivals and that's exactly what we did for the last fifteen minutes in class where I just asked each individual student, have you ever been to any festivals, have you been to concerts, what can you tell me about those concerts, and, I also ask them questions about how or I didn't directly ask it, but I implied that there were differences between concerts in Thailand possibly and concerts in the UK

From Excerpt 1, Dan does focus on the language objectives of the lesson but gives provision for students to take the discussion further by comparing and contrasting information presented in the book with information they know. Dan's students learn about language that is situation specific, and later attempt to transfer the learned language to other similar situations. Dan's intention resonates with the participants in Luk's (2012) study, where cultural discussions are sometimes perceived as appetizers to whet the students' interest to contribute more relevant information to the main content.

**Excerpt 2**

In that sense yes, because if I'm teaching grammar and vocabulary, the voice or the cultural voice doesn't really have as big an effect, even if there is one, and the idea is that, you teach vocabulary, you teach grammar, the sentences are structured in a certain way, the morphemes are a certain way, and that's how it works out

**Excerpt 3**

Not as of yet, just because I'm still trying to settle down, I'm still new and everything, so, so I'm still trying to do everything by the book, but I'm I'm also try to experiment every once in a while to see what works and what doesn't

**Excerpt 4**

Right, that's sort of what I want to get at, I mean, it's entirely possible that other teachers have, or place value on culture, but it's just not something that have been brought up, and it's.. it's entirely possible that they see the discussion and introduction of culture as being purely instrumental in the teaching of English, but I, like I said, I haven't taught long enough to confirm that.

Excerpts 2 and 3 show Dan's perception about the relationship between language and culture, and his view that

language is structural and free of cultural elements. This, plus him being new to the teaching field, somewhat confines pedagogical possibilities to just teaching the English language. Furthermore, as seen in Excerpt 3, Dan's journey in understanding his new working environment appears to be something shouldered primarily by himself. All these considered, Dan may be making pedagogical choices based on the warrant of 'what works', or out of convenience. In such a situation where a teacher is still adapting to teaching, focusing only on what is doable and convenient could appear more appealing. What Dan's discourse reveals is also the lack of interactivity with his other colleagues as most of his pedagogical choices are determined personally [Excerpt 4].

### **Terence and Lane**

Of the four participants, Terence and Lane were two teachers who were open to discuss about other non-English cultures in the classroom, even when not expected by the syllabus. Terence comes from a financial consultancy background. Upon his arrival in Thailand, Terence completed a one-month intensive English language teaching certification.

At first glance, it appears that Terence identifies himself as a teacher of language through the mention of teaching grammar, and other language skills [Excerpt 5].

#### **Excerpt 5**

Okay, so I teach uhm primary six, eleven year-olds in their last year of primary school, uhm in theory, what my job is teaching English as a second language involves grammar, uhm, so there's the normal element of getting them to talk, and helping them to be confident which I love to do, and then there's the grammar and vocabulary element, and I also see my job as helping them develop as people as well, uhm, and my general methods are, to er let them develop the lessons as much as possible, and that they

know far more than what the course would involve, so that's a sort of summary.

Nonetheless, as the interview progresses, Terence delves deeper into what he does in his English classes. From Terence's discourse, it appears that he takes on cultural elements of the target language as bases to talk about cultural elements from other cultures which are of interest to the students [Excerpt 6].

**Excerpt 6**

And and and find what they think as well, so arts for instance, I had students last year critiquing art, and in in the Asian culture, from my limited experience, that's not normal at all, to offer that type of opinion, so I basically said, I want to critique, and left them to it, so there's five minutes of oh my god what are we gonna do, and then they choose their way of doing it, so any cultural, and also er reference stuff they know so if it's football, you know they all know football, so what they know, what excites them

In the school where Terence works, the administrators are local and there is a great regard for the local customs. Hence, having students to critique is atypical and may be considered taboo. The reason for Terence's decision to integrate such learning avenues for his students may have originated from his moral ethos. He explains,

**Excerpt 7**

No no no no no, cause I think because that is just so boring, I can remember schools, uhm, big idiots standing up there talking, and I'd lost interest in ten seconds so no, always what do you think, what do you think it's like, uhm and try and lead into it so if it's clothing, you know okay what do you think the temperature is here what do you think it is in London, what are they wearing, why are



they wearing it, you know, same with art, so always what do you think, what can you find

Terence added that as a young learner, he found lectures particularly boring, and he did not want to see himself doing what he thought was uninteresting. Not wanting to relive his past experiences, Terence ensures that his students are involved by arousing students' senses, in instances where culture is discussed [Excerpt 8]. Gholami and Husu (2010) discuss moral ethos as based on teachers' professional commitment towards the welfare of students. In other words, teachers who ground their pedagogical choices on moral ethos would strive towards providing a conducive learning environment. Terence believes that his students are intelligent, and capable of participating in lessons about senses, and that this learning experience will be of benefit [Excerpt 9].

#### **Excerpt 8**

I think it was childhood, uhm, I came from a poor background, but my parents loved er the senses, and cultural aspects so they told me about opera and travel, and I, it aroused my senses which set my brain going and I've always assumed that that would work with a lot of other people, so if I try to talk about Swiss culture, you know [yawns audibly] if I talk about Swiss chocolate, and mountains and snow, and skiing and lakes and clear water, you know that's much more interesting, so it's not just if it's in the book, you would bring it up, even if it's not in the book

#### **Excerpt 9**

Definitely [okay] definitely and and I mean we probably have to do it in the world today anyway why are they doing that why do we do this uhm but definitely it does, I don't know why, I think it's just because it's interesting, my basic premise with all these students is they're really

smart, and their brains are working, so anything that is interesting, they start to think critically about, I think

**Excerpt 10**

we had a group of students rehearsing for a play in English running back and forth with the English, and the Americans, each telling the other they were wrong, and they came to us and said hang on we don't know what's right because your turn is one so there's that area er but we discuss our cultures as well, and very often say how do you do this, how does this work, so there's a huge amount

Terence, contrary to Dan's experience, appears to still maintain a community of practice where pedagogical discussions take place [Excerpt 10].

Among the four participants involved in this study, Lane had the most experience teaching English and had completed a university degree in teaching. Prior to teaching in Thailand, she has taught in Greece, the United Kingdom, and Egypt. In Thailand, she has worked as an English teacher for more than two decades. Similar to Terence, Lane believes that bridging different cultures together through English can broaden the minds of students [Excerpts 11 & 12].

**Excerpt 11**

Yeah, yeah, I always try and get them, they need to talk about their own experiences, yeah, because otherwise they, you know, that's why they're here, you know

**Excerpt 12**

Yea, of course, it makes them so much more open minded, uhm, I just think it helps them accept people, rather than you know saying you know like oh I, oh Americans, they are like this and uhm, yeah, I think they learn a lot from different cultures

Lane invites her students to share their own personal cultural experiences, and encourage students to understand how these experiences demonstrate differences cross-culturally. The motivation behind Lane's decision to allow culture to be shared in the classroom takes on a moral ethos stance [Excerpt 13]. Lane would like to see her students have more opportunities to talk and build confidence, similar to Terence, as well as to be accepting of other cultures. What is seen here in Terence and Lane's examples are reflective of the findings from Arphattanon's (2018) study, where local Thai teachers sought to teach their students to be more interculturally sensitive and accepting, especially in a region which saw a rift between communities and was conflict-prone.

Perhaps the drive for the greater good positioned Lane not only as an English teacher, but a facilitator with an interest in helping her students build confidence [Excerpt 14].

**Excerpt 13**

Yea, of course, it makes them so much more open minded, uhm, I just think it helps them accept people, rather than you know saying you know like oh I, oh Americans, they are like this and uhm, yeah, I think they learn a lot from different cultures

**Excerpt 14**

Mmm, yeah, I do, well, it's I think, hopefully I it's more of an English teacher but, I think you know like they are having a conversation, or whatever I would expect them to look at each other, uhm, and so I do, I suppose the more British thing, uhm, which maybe I don't know, should I do that, or not, er, yeah, but it's more of a confidence thing, I try to get them to be more confident, so instead of looking down and talk, they don't come across as being confident or, so, but do I do that because I'm English or do that because I'm a teacher.

**Excerpt 15**

Yeah, I think it's more English, we don't get that much chance to discuss things

Nonetheless, when it comes to interacting with her colleagues regarding her practices, Lane states that language teaching issues are the primary concern, and not other 'things' [Excerpt 15]. This implies that the primary objective of Lane, and perhaps her other colleagues, is to provide English language instruction to her students, despite her interest in, and beliefs about intercultural development. This unfortunately renders intercultural matters as being marginal.

**Chrissie**

Chrissie presents quite a contrasting case, when compared with the other three participants. Chrissie subscribes to a purely linguistic approach when teaching English, as she believes that students should be treated as individuals and that the development of their personalities should outweigh the necessity of teaching culture [Excerpt 16].

**Excerpt 16**

Culture for me, uhm, wow, I I prefer not to focus on the culture because every individual have their own personality, so I'd rather focus on their personality than on their culture, if I had to focus on the culture, then, I feel my opinion, there might be problems, if you, if you face the culture, you don't want to mix with the culture, sometimes, it will give you like a block, you won't be able to proceed, so I feel every individual work according to their personality, don't see the culture, focus on the individual, that's what I, my opinion

Chrissie reiterates her stance by suggesting that culture may be relevant only if students ever find themselves abroad [Excerpt 17].

**Excerpt 17**

Uhm, maybe to adapt to the different cultures more easily, uhm, if if they ever go abroad or study abroad, uhm, to make it easier for them to understand the different cultures, might be important, uhm, again when they go out to another country they will experience another way of learning again, so, they have to adjust to all the different cultures, different way of teaching, different way of learning, so I think it might be important for them, even, even if it's a little, just to be able to understand the different cultures

Chrissie (C) further discloses that the reason why culture is not part of her English classes is because of the difference of curricula, in line with the 'what works' warrant. Whereas her teaching experience in South Africa had given her grounds to teach about the local cultures, the school where she works does not seem to put much emphasis on culture, as can be seen from the exchange with the researcher (R).

C: That's a thing, the curriculum, because of the difference from South Africa teaching and Thai teaching, I'm, I have to follow the curriculum of this school, so it will change, teaching experience for me, if I have to teach like I taught in South Africa, it won't work

R: I see, okay

C: So I had to er adjust my way of teaching in the different culture to help the students

R: And and also the curriculum here does not really support you know the teaching of culture

C: No, not really

R: I see, okay, they're more concerned with language proficiency

C: Language and well, focusing on the students' future

R: I see

C: Not really culture that much

In Chrissie's teaching of English, she does consult with her colleagues regarding pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, she implies that teachers' approaches are different, and that she consolidates ideas from her colleagues with that of hers, with the hopes of creating a 'unique' approach [Excerpt 18].

### **Excerpt 18**

Uhm some of us do have co teachers, and like what I said, we are all different, so, when I speak to my co teacher, he will have a totally different idea, so, I do approach him for his ideas and I put my ideas together to form something unique, you can say it like that

### **Culture in the English Language Classroom**

The excerpts taken from each teacher's discourse illustrate their identity-in-discourse and their identity-in-practice, as well as their funds of knowledge. The first two constructs refer to their individual teaching practices, and how their teaching approach relates to the community of English teachers, while funds of knowledge refer to teachers' pedagogical choices' reasoning. To see how intercultural education is carried out in the classroom, we need to consider how culture is treated. It appears that for at least three of the participants – Dan, Terence, and Lane, culture does play a role in their classroom. Though culture finds itself in the teaching practice, it is presented at varying depths. For Dan, culture serves as a platform for language practice. This may be a result of what Dan deems as convenient, or "what works". Practice that is shaped by "what works" is the effect of teachers' knowledge of what is practical and effective for the teachers' personal selves (Kennedy, 2002), without weighing the consequence on students' needs, or on other stakeholders (Gholami & Husu, 2010). In Dan's discourse, students are said to be given the chance to share their knowledge about other cultures. Nonetheless, there is no

opportunity to place themselves in unique and novel cultural contexts to encourage critical self-reflection. Organizing space for critical self-reflection is a vital aspect in the process of developing one's competence in intercultural communication (Liddicoat, 2011).

Similar to Dan, Terence and Lane recognize the possibilities that culture brings into their English language classrooms. In their classrooms, cultural topics serve as a catalyst for discussion, and it appears that they both take an intercultural pedagogy with regards to the topic of culture. What contrasts Terence and Lynn from Dan is that Terence and Lane see that a discussion of culture is more than just comparing and contrasting information. They allow students to divulge personal and evaluative opinions. For example, Terence mentions that he involves his students in critiquing tasks. This approach goes beyond just transmitting, or comparing and contrasting information, and is significant for the development of ICC, whereby students are able to remove the self and take upon other perspectives for the purpose of evaluation (Liddicoat, 2011). Terence situates himself as an inquisitive learner as well – where he acknowledges that students come in with a stock of knowledge, and that this knowledge can be useful not only for language practice, but also for enhancing the 'senses'. Terence's justification for his teaching practice may be found in his craft, or moral ethos, where he believes that students' welfare is of importance. This may encourage Terence to be more susceptible to self-reflect upon his teaching practices, as suggested by Gholami and Husu (2010).

Similar to Terence, Lane, finds worth in deliberating cultural topics in her classroom. More than that, Lane is invested in her students' welfare as well, with hopes that cultural discussions will lead her students to gain more confidence and to broaden their minds so they will be better communicators and world citizens. Finally, Chrissie, on the other hand, believes her primary role is of an English teacher. Her main concern is the language development of her students. This may be a prescriptive reaction, where she is simply carrying out her task based on what

the curriculum or the school administrators expect of her. Chrissie does present herself as a teacher who is involved with her other colleagues, where she describes the process of consolidating different teaching ideas from others into a 'unique' one.

What can be observed here is not only the differing roles culture play in the English language classroom, but also the reflexivity of teachers regarding their teaching profession. Most of the teachers mention that there is an element of sharing with their colleagues. Nevertheless, this sharing is concerned with English. What could be a binding thread for all four participants is the lack of a formalized expectation for teachers to teach students ICC. Many teachers have reported that ICC is not an objective in the language classroom (Sercu, 2005; Luk, 2012). Moreover, language teacher programs have yet to address the value of ICC in the language classroom (Taylor & Sobel, 2011; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

### **Conforming or Diverging Trajectories?**

The discourse of the participants appears to resonate with those from other similar studies. First, Dan seems to parallel participants from Luk's (2012) study where English teachers were found to be ambivalent towards the role of culture or ICC in the English language classroom, in spite of recognizing the value that culture or ICC may bring as useful topics for discussion in the target language. Chrissie, on the other hand, is similar to the participants involved in Bayyurt's (2006) or Ding and Teo's (2014) studies, where culture or ICC (especially foreign cultures) is perceived as having no part in a classroom. Finally, Terence and Lane seem to exude the ideals presented by scholars regarding the integration of ICC in the language classroom. Nonetheless, their decision to involve cultural elements is largely due to personal ethos, instead of systematic knowledge gained from exposure to scholastic constituents (comparable to the study of Arphattanon, 2018). This renders them having an inbound trajectory, instead of an insider trajectory, as they were not explicitly aware of the ICC movement within the field of ELT.



Considering all these, the trajectories as seen from the analysis of the teachers’ discourse could be summarized in Figure 1.

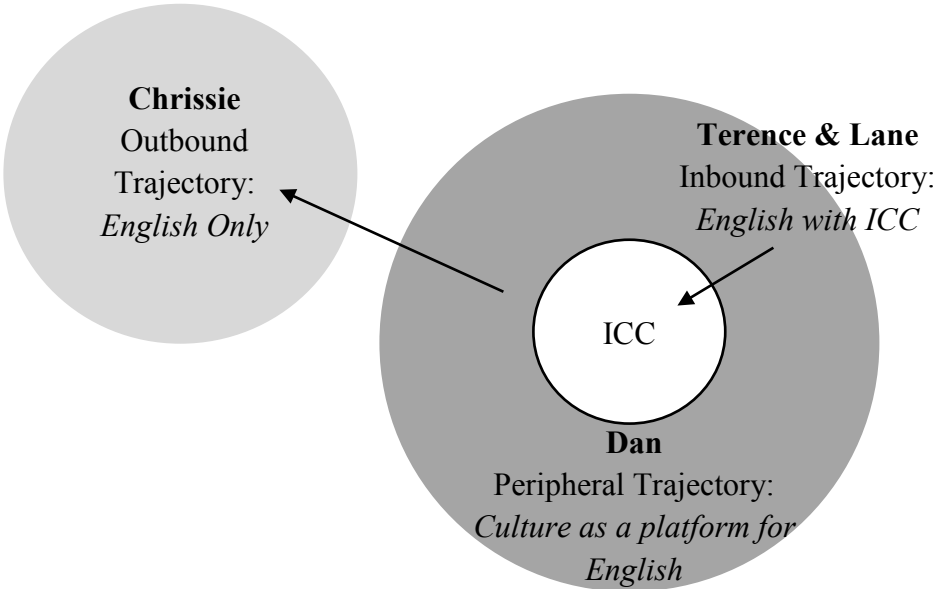


Figure 1. Trajectories of Four Participants

Though the current prevalent voice advocates the integration of ICC in the English language classroom, the professionalism of teachers who decide to focus only on language proficiency should not be viewed negatively. Instead, it gives a clearer view of teachers’ beliefs and practices. For instance, though Chrissie’s trajectory may not associate her with the CoP of ICC, her actions are legitimized as there are other groups of teachers elsewhere who share similar beliefs and practices, even if this particular group is not homogenous. Chrissie’s actions, along with the other participants, could be an example of what Hayes deems as having a teaching competency that involves an awareness of the local needs (2010). In this sense, the approaches of the teachers, though personal, are results of contextual considerations. When considering the broader educational realm in Thailand, the teachers’ contextualization of intercultural education may be a reflection of the mismatch between

educational expectations and realities, or the ambiguity of pedagogical approaches, which led to the individual interpretation of educational goals (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Tandamrong, 2018)

### **Implications**

Looking at teachers' beliefs and practices may offer a rich account into the decision-making process for teaching practice (Golombek & Doran, 2014). This, in turn, may direct teachers to reveal their trajectories with the relevant CoP. Nonetheless, it appears that pedagogical choices stem from personal control, or craft sources. A decentralization of power from stakeholders to teachers themselves may be at play here. This may be perceived as a positive improvement on teacher agency, but they have a counter-effect too, in that they pose as a threat to the viability of the systematic knowledge for language teaching (Furlong, 2013). What is being experienced here could be an epistemic break (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). An epistemic break is a period when formalized knowledge systems that are historically bound are examined and reconceptualized. Within the context of this study, the participants' discourse may be examples of an epistemic break from top-down initiatives. Specifically, what is being put at rest here is the subscription of prescriptive labels and terminologies. Kumaravadivelu (2012) argued that labels and terminologies in ELT, such as ICC or CoP, are preoccupations of scholars. Ideals propagated by academia may only subtly, if not at all affect practicing teachers. Hence, what is observed here could be a scrutiny of ideals which are assumed to be accepted vertically and horizontally. An intercultural pedagogy may be an approach that is prescribed horizontally among scholars, but it may not be something that descends vertically to the level of practitioners. A reason for this may be that these teaching paradigms, which are Western-based, may not be applicable at a global scale (McKay, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). When importing these paradigms, vital influential variables such as educational and sociocultural factors must be accounted for, as failure to do so will undermine

the teaching and learning processes (Hayes, 2010; Tandamrong, 2018). As such, perhaps these teachers who are effectively using ‘traditional’ methods should be considered ‘native’, in the sense that they comprehend the implications of their pedagogical choices (see Hayes, 2009). This may also be the point that Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) and Dervin (2016) argue, whereby intercultural education should never be taken as homogenous; instead it should be approached and delivered relative to its context.

### **Limitation**

This study highlighted the trajectories of four different teachers in Bangkok through the analysis of their discourse in relation with the integration of ICC. Three of the participants claimed to integrate a form of culture in their English language classrooms, though with different pedagogical approaches, and one teacher who emphasized the development of students’ individual differences and personality. Nonetheless, the current study is limited due to its use of only interview discourse. Perhaps a subsequent step that could be taken is to consider the personal and professional variables in light of other sources of discourse, such as their interactions with their colleagues and students, their classroom teaching, and their interpretation of pertinent objects such as the curriculum or the community at large. Other issues worth pursuing, which were implicitly and minimally addressed in this study, are the private education sector in Thailand and the professional lives of non-local English teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Through the experiences shared by the teachers, it becomes more apparent that at least in the case of Thailand, education expectations among private schools appear rather out-of-sync, as illustrated in the different trajectories. Teachers make personal decisions regarding what is being taught in class – which is commendable, but these actions are taken at a personal capacity. The varying interpretations of what the teaching of culture entails, on top of many other variables that affect teachers’ teaching

practices have resulted in very distinct English language classroom (Liu & Xu, 2011). This diversity compels us to call into question the value of top-down academic initiatives, including the acceptance of the systematic notions of CoP and ICC.

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