

Chapter 12

Islands and Bridges: Why and How TNE Universities and EMIs Generally Might “Bridge” Into Their Local Communities

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ABSTRACT

It is recommended that EMIs, including TNE institutions, should formalise ‘bridging’ between their institutions and the local community, if possible. A definition of ‘community’ is extended to include non-faculty/local staff within the university. The rationale for this recommendation is that it is predicated upon a win-win-win result: non-local faculty benefit because bridging assists with their integration into the local community; the university benefits because establishing links with the wider community is an invaluable PR initiative; the local community benefits. The authors’ own experiences of bridging, formal and informal, official or otherwise, will be offered as examples of what might be achieved. At the same time, a section of this paper notes the challenges which one might experience when bridging, and how an individual and her institution might avoid such difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Transnational Education (TNE) Universities and English Medium Institutions (EMI): The Same Model for Bridging

Strictly speaking, transnational education (TNE) is when learning takes place where “learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.” (Council of Europe, 2000). According to this definition, TNE is not limited to higher education (HE) institutions: the document in question goes on to note that TNE includes not only “all types of higher education study programmes”, but also “sets of courses of study, or educational services.” (Banner, 2016; Mc Burnie & Ziguras, 2006). However, this chapter restricts TNE to a narrow definition, that is, where it operates in HE institutions.

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This is for the reason that the content of the current chapter is based completely on the author's experiences, and the greater percentage of these experiences have been gained while he was employed at HE institutions.

Where a formal definition of TNE might also be narrow is in the proviso that learners are in another country from the 'awarding' institution. Regarding HE, this would rule out the large number of HE English medium institutions (EMI) which operate courses of study in English in a country where English is not the first or official language but which have their own degree programmes; institutions, that is, which are regulated by the HE system of the host country. However, the current study includes such places of study, subsuming them, for convenience's sake, within TNE. This is because many overlaps exist, especially with regards to English teaching, between TNEs and EMIs. The first of these is obvious: English is the medium of instruction at such institutions. Second, the majority of learners are based in their home environment (with the exception of a sprinkling of international students). Third, the university and many of its faculty are operating in a foreign environment. Points one and two should be clear. Point three, however, requires some clarification.

A TNE/EMI university operating in a country other than a native English-speaking country would normally include English language support classes, perhaps an English foundation or Preparatory programme (but not always), for which many, probably the majority of instructors, are native English speakers. Second, such a university would normally employ subject teachers, lecturers and professors, who are either native English speakers or who would be using English as a second language, both in the classroom and, as a language of convenience, outside, too. Third, English would normally be the language of academic management in such an institution. Fourth, although such institutions would employ local staff to facilitate HR, administration, security duties, and so on, many of these would nevertheless be expected to have a good working knowledge of English, if only because they work for, and alongside, faculty who might not be confident with local languages. It might even be the case that such staff are encouraged to use English as a usual medium for operations. Taking all the above together, TNE/EMIs would usually operate and function in a language other than that of the country in which they are located. Or to put it another way, they are, linguistically speaking, small alien territories, or islands, within a foreign ocean.

It might be the case that many of the above-mentioned foreign teachers, lecturers and professors, living and working in a foreign country, do not fully avail themselves of the manifold cultural opportunities which day-to-day living in an alien environment might afford. Maybe they don't want to (Bodycot & Walker, 2000; Garson, 2005). That's their choice. However, what about their place of work, the university itself? What formal measures, if any, do TNE universities have in place to 'bridge' between themselves and local communities? Actually, it might be argued that such institutions operating in a foreign country should have a duty to bridge locally, this being in their own PR interests; they might also have a duty of care to staff who require assistance to reach out, explore and integrate. And to turn this round: what of the local communities themselves? Would not local people, adults, schoolchildren, academics and other professionals want in some way to be a part of the operations of a university, to benefit, that is, from its location within their community?

The current paper is based on the author's experiences of bridging between three English medium institutions where he has taught and the local communities. It is focussed on English language teaching, the author's profession. Of the three institutions that are written about, all offered different and varying degrees of opportunity to bridge. First, an English language in Kazakhstan had a contractual clause that required its English foundation English programme teachers to undertake two hours of so-called 'community service' per week. However, it was not specified what form this should take. Moreover, there

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