Connections across Campus: Bringing Together Students from Intensive English and Teacher Education Programs

Lonna Summers Rocha[1] and Mike Garnett[1]
University of Kansas[1], Kansas, USA // lonnasue@ku.edu // mike.garnett@ku.edu

ABSTRACT: Multilingual learners of English (MLEs) enrolled in Intensive English Centers (IECs) have the goal of improving their English but may have limited interactions with US students and cultures. Pre-service teachers need to build awareness about MLEs and develop skills and strategies to work with them. Through an instructor-initiated collaboration students studying at an Intensive English Center and in the Department of Curriculum & Teaching at The University of Kansas came together during a shared class session to practice language, get to know each other, and address course outcomes. The benefit of the collaboration was not only that students met course outcomes but also that instructors gained professional growth through discussions, and departments strengthened communications to foster further collaboration. The process for planning, carrying out the session, and debriefing the collaboration is detailed in the article.

Keywords: Intensive English Programs, international students, pre-service teachers, education, interdisciplinary connections

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher education serve populations of students with varied career goals. On one hand, Multilingual learners of English (MLEs) studying at the Applied English Center (AEC) at the University of Kansas (KU) aim to improve their academic reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to prepare for their courses in their selected disciplines. On the other hand, most students enrolled in C&T 100: Introduction to Education as a Profession are interested in education; some may want to teach in elementary or secondary schools; and others are interested in learning about teaching and learning in other contexts. Rarely do students in these two groups have a chance to interact with each other. The purpose of the collaboration, a structured discussion in a shared classroom space between the AEC and C&T 100, was to encourage productive and positive interactions between the two groups of students.

2. Literature connections

2.1 Intensive English Programs (IEPs)

International students in IEPs have varied goals for studying in the US, central to all is the aim to improve English language proficiency. Mostafa & Lim (2020) found that international students want to be in US schools for personal growth and development and found that positive engagement experiences could

support student retention. Grosik and Kanno (2021) reported that university-based Intensive English Programs (IEPs) can allow for "legitimate" peripheral participation while students gain competence and knowledge to participate fully in their degree programs later. However, the extent to which IEP students were able to participate in the larger university community was limited by the IEP's own marginality in the university community and the fact that the IEP is ultimately not a discipline-specific community of practice (Grosik & Kanno, 2021).

To combat the isolation and marginalization, IEPs have considered plans for student integration or engagement with other units across campus. Salerno et al. (2024) supported the idea of positive engagement experiences by showing that international students who interacted with US students and culture felt less stressed and experienced less anxiety. Fox (2020), while recognizing isolated or temporary interactions did not suffice for building social relationships outside of co-national students, found that international students recommended that IEPs create more structured opportunities for interactions. The literature recommends ongoing partnerships in which involvement from "native speakers" is integrated with IEPs.

Particularly focused on KU and the AEC's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, Berardo (2013) dissected the various contexts that contribute to the perceived lower standing of EAP. Berardo (2013) summarized factors, including "the short-cut mentality" and "the deficit perspective," that shape how this EAP program is viewed by stakeholders in the institutions and TESOL professionals. EAPs are often seen as a quick fix to enable international students to move onto "real" academic work. This underestimates the complexity and time required for true academic language proficiency. Berardo provided a nuanced view of EAP's position at KU. While the requirement for international students to pass AEC classes positions it as a pre-academic unit, the granting of general credits and the fulfillment of the foreign language requirement suggest a degree of institutional recognition. However, the lack of a major or minor in applied English further reinforces a perceived lower status compared to other disciplines. Berardo strongly argues that EAP should be considered on par with other academic disciplines. He emphasizes that an EAP is a "knowledge generating organism" that investigates and teaches the fundamental relationship between language and disciplinary knowledge.

With reference to "the deficit perspective", viewing EAP students as having a "linguistic deficit" relegates the profession as only being able to offer pre-academic, remedial classes where students are 'brought up to speed.' This view ignores the diverse knowledge and experience MLEs and international scholars bring with them to the AEC. Faculty at the AEC sought to conduct actionable research to inform curriculum and assessment revision, but most importantly, to connect the AEC to other academic units on campus.

The collaboration between the AEC and C&T 100 began with the Ideas-to-Action department research program sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), which helps "academic units develop actionable plans for curricular improvements that promote equitable student growth, discovery, and success" (Center for Teaching Excellence, Ideas to Action section). AEC researchers interviewed students enrolled in their advanced courses, thirty-one faculty members, and eight graduate teaching assistants, and they found that students and faculty throughout KU wanted to increase interactions among MLEs (educated either domestically or internationally) and English-proficient students educated primarily in the U.S. (Carvajal-Regidor & Garnett, 2025). What MLEs reported through surveys reflected what Salerno et al. (2024) and Fox (2020) found; students want structured opportunities for interaction that promote positive engagement experiences, which are not isolated or temporary.

2.2 Pre-Service Teacher Education

With approximately 10% of the total student population in public schools being MLEs in schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021), teachers must be prepared to meet the academic, social, and linguistic needs of students (De Jong & Harper, 2005, Lucas & Villegas, 2013, García & Kleifgen, 2018). Teacher preparation and expectations can impact instruction and student learning. Gándara et al., (2005) found that teachers with professional development specific to MLEs were more confident in their skills and recognized challenge in resources ("lack of appropriate tools and materials" and "lack of adequate support from local, state, and federal policies") more readily than those without training (p. 11). Teachers without sufficient training can have negative perceptions about MLEs, which then contributes to inferior instruction

and shapes student outcomes (Blanchard & Muller, 2015). While Wong Fillmore and Snow's (2000) outlined what teachers need to know about language, others have added aspects such as language and content objectives (Echevarria & Short, 2017), teacher advocacy with a sociopolitical agenda (De Costa & Ustuk, 2023), and culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015). In addition, De Oliveira (2011) noted pre-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs were shaped by a lack of empathy and argued that teachers must have language learning experiences.

Early experiences in teacher education programs highlight the need for additional preparation. Shaw and Andrei (2020) found that even though pre-service teachers thought teaching English in K-12 classrooms would be a "worthwhile and meaningful process", they felt unprepared, recognized the challenges of teaching English as a second language, and overlooked the assets of MLEs, "such as their L1 and culture" (p. 7). Experiences in schools early in the program can support preservice teachers in developing cultural sensitivity and ESOL strategies (Khoshnevisan & Mojgan, 2021), and practicum experiences near the end of teacher education programs show that pre-service teachers are still figuring out how to bring together the theoretical with the practical application (Torres, Arrastia-Chisholm, & Tachett, 2019) As evidenced by the literature, the pre-service teachers need to develop their skills, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and dispositions.

The collaboration between the AEC and C&T 100 was created in response to the challenges noted in the literature and by our own experiences teaching in the two departments.

3. Goals

As part of these conversations, we (the authors) explored ways we could better support the few international students who enrolled in C&T 100. From there we brainstormed several ways we could collaborate: having students from the two areas talk with each other, advertising paid and volunteer positions, and distributing information about conversation partners. An idea that we were excited about was planned conversation time with students from the AEC and C&T 100. In developing this shared discussion time, we hoped that students from the AEC would gain practice in communicating with students in English, learn about American culture and customs, and have a chance to share about themselves, their language, and culture. The shared conversation aligned with the goals of the course to have students leading discussions. The goal for students in C&T 100 was to develop their skills to communicate with MLEs, use some of the language negotiation strategies, and build their awareness of the need for their own professional development in order to work with MLEs in the future.

4. Positionality

Mike, a lecturer and academic program associate, teaches courses on academic English skills, US culture, and service learning for speakers of other languages. At the AEC, he collaborates on the English language proficiency assessment of graduate teaching assistant candidates and is responsible for academic program duties including curriculum development and faculty mentoring. In the past 20 years, he has taught MLEs at universities both domestically and internationally.

Lonna, an associate teaching professor, specializes in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She has taught English in a variety of contexts both in the US and internationally and has been involved in providing teacher education and professional development for 20 years. In addition to C&T 100: Introduction to Education as Profession course, Lonna teaches courses related to assessment, curriculum, and second language acquisition in the TESOL program.

Our experiences, educational background, and cultural knowledge helped us understand the potential benefits of the collaboration and informed how we structured the activities (moving from simple to more complex language), how we grouped students (allowing for a variety of interactions), and what topics we asked them to discuss (creating questions that all students could respond to).

5. Overview of Collaboration

5.1 Planning

Planning for the shared session began in the summer before the semester started. In identifying a date, we wanted to have the shared session midway through the semester so that students in both groups had built up knowledge and skills. Partway through the semester, students enrolled in AECL 140 would have experience leading and participating in discussions. Students in C&T 100 had already completed some teaching demonstrations and were familiar with some basic teaching ideas. Though initial conversations started in the summer, most of the planning was completed within three weeks of the session. We had a shared document to record our conversations, ideas, resources, and topics.

In creating the plan for the day, we wanted to make sure topics were accessible and relevant to all students. For example, the question, "How did you need to adjust when coming to college?" allowed all students to talk about their experiences.

5.1.1 Preparing students – 1 week out

Before the day of the shared class session, instructors for both groups prepared students. Instructors shared the purpose of the shared session and shared details about the meeting location. In addition, the AEC instructor connected the activity to student learning outcomes (SLOs) and discussed students' needs and concerns. The SLOs, adapted from Pearson's Global Scale of English for academic English (2022), were: "Can lead a discussion, expanding and developing ideas, if given time in advance to prepare" (p. 43), "Can understand main points and check comprehension by using contextual clues" (p. 25), and "Can understand scripted/unscripted speech delivered quickly if the accent is familiar" (p. 24). The class also discussed the timing needed to arrive at the new meeting space and talked about routes to take to arrive. Students in C&T 100 were told they would be meeting with students from the AEC to learn about their experiences as MLEs at the university.

5.1.2 Framing the activity – On the day of

Each class had about 30 minutes for preparation before coming together for the 45-minute shared class time. The day of the event, AEC students prepared for the interaction tasks (i.e., participating in icebreakers, leading and asking questions during discussions) and shared their feelings and thoughts. They also reviewed an assigned reading on social enterprise, revisited the SLOs related to discussions, and considered Crabbe's (2007) language learning opportunities. The AEC instructor modeled leading a discussion.

Students from C&T 100 had a conversation about how teachers could support MLEs in the classroom. Students were asked to read an article (Gonzalez, 2022) to understand a few ways to value the language and experiences of MLEs in the classroom. The instructor provided information about the TESOL field and highlighted a few topics (such as methods, family engagement, immigration, policies, culture, etc.) related to TESOL.

The instructor conducted a short lesson about the food chain in Spanish. The lesson was conducted in another language to help the students build empathy with language learners and consider how access to language could shape access and opportunity to learning in the classroom. Spanish was chosen because the instructor has working knowledge of the language, and several students in the classroom could

leverage their own knowledge of the language during the lesson, and other students could experience a lesson in another language. The food chain was selected as a topic because it offers some academic language, allows for visual representation, and permits students to use their background knowledge to experience the lesson.

The lesson was first conducted in Spanish without including any visuals, metalinguistic attention, translanguaging, or scaffolding. Students mentioned they felt lost, confused, and unmotivated to try to learn. The same content was taught again using some of these supports. Students from the AEC arrived during this second lesson, and a short discussion followed about students' experiences, feelings, and takeaways from the demonstration.

5.2 Shared session

To begin the shared session with AEC and C&T 100 students, we established the purpose: AEC students were developing their discussion skills and C&T 100 students were learning about MLEs. The sessions started with a few icebreakers to encourage students to warm up and talk about things that were "easy," fun, and simple to discuss.

5.2.1 Find someone who

As an icebreaker, students were asked to find someone in the room who met each statement. Statements were broad enough to be experiences common for AEC or C&T 100 students; find someone who likes sleeping, likes spicy food, plays an instrument, prefers to go off-campus for fun, is a first-generation student, is in their first semester at KU, etc. Each of the statements was projected and stated by the instructors.

5.2.2 Pick one. Why?

Instructors had planned a "Pick one" activity where students would select which item they preferred when given two options. For example, they would be given the option of choosing between a private pool or a beach, or coffee or tea. Students were asked to explain their choice. Although we had several scenarios and options, we reduced the number provided to students to allow for more time for small group discussions. Although we had several slides, we condensed these sections because of the time constraints.

5.2.3 Discussion Topic 1: Education

After the icebreakers, we created groups with one person from the AEC and three or four students from C&T 100. Each group was given a card with one discussion question related to education. Students were asked to explore this question and share their experiences with each other. When finished, they came to the front to exchange their card for another card with a different question related to education. There were three subtopics: Education experiences, language learning-related experiences, and adapting to new situations (Appendix A).

5.2.4 Discussion Topic 2: Business with a heart

As the AECL 140 course had been exploring the topic of Business with a Heart in their course, the second set of discussion prompts centered on these ideas. They were studying social enterprises whose mission combines addressing a social need while making a profit. Unfortunately, given the time constraints, few students engaged with each other about these topics (Appendix B). In a future collaborative session, we revised the format to reduce the amount of time for icebreakers and allow for deeper discussion.

5.2.5 Debriefing

After the session, we facilitated a discussion among the students. We asked students what challenges they had as they communicated and how they were able to overcome them. We also asked students to talk about what they took away from the conversation. Students shared that they enjoyed the experience

of getting to know each other better. AEC students reported feeling understood and that they were able to negotiate meaning and be a part of the conversation. They were nervous about this beforehand. They noted they found the discussions helpful, and it helped them feel more confident. AEC students expressed being glad that the event was set up for them and that they had a chance to interact with students not attending the AEC. Several students found each other on social media and stayed in contact over the semester.

Students also recognized they had some gaps in their experiences and cultural knowledge. For example, C&T 100 students were talking about dressing for Halloween and a potential costume idea from a popular TV show. When the AEC student mentioned it was her first Halloween and she was not familiar with the show, the students provided some context and shared pictures.

Instructors noted that while most of the MLEs met the SLO on understanding main points and checking comprehension and the SLO on understanding unscripted speech delivered quickly, only one MLE met the SLO on leading the discussion and expanding and developing ideas. This MLE was an advanced student and had already earned a bachelor's degree. We noted that the AEC students sometimes deferred to the C&T 100 students to lead the discussions. It is possible that given the ratio in small groups (1 AEC to 4 C&T 100 students), it was difficult for the MLEs to lead the discussion. Additionally, C&T 100 students were already in the space when the AEC students entered the class, so they may have felt they were visiting and may have felt they should not lead their discussions.

6. Conclusion and Reflection

6.1 Summary

Through an instructor-led collaboration between the AEC and C&T 100, students participated in a shared session where they could talk about their educational and language learning experiences. In addition to the main goals of the session (AEC students practicing English and C&T 100 students building empathy and awareness of MLEs) being achieved, instructors experienced professional growth from the collaborative effort.

6.2 Successes

Students were active participants in the discussions, enjoyed spending time together, took pictures together, and some even followed each other on social media. The collaboration was successful in allowing all students to participate and contribute to the discussions. From our perspectives as instructors, the shared session between the AEC and C&T accomplished our intended goals of providing an opportunity for students to practice English and contribute to discussions. Students in C&T 100 gained experience communicating with MLEs and had the chance to develop awareness about the potential support that MLEs might need in classrooms. The collaboration initiated further discussions with the pre-service teachers and helped them identify concrete ways (e.g., scaffolding, translanguaging opportunities, visuals) to support multilingual learners in their lesson plans.

A success from the shared session was the collaboration, debriefing, and discussion of teaching among the two instructors. The plan benefited from the ideas and contributions of both instructors. In addition, we shared ideas for icebreakers, strategies for engaging students, and techniques for calling students back together. As we met regularly before and after the shared session, we also had space to talk about issues related to TESOL and to further our own professional development and growth. For example, we talked about how to describe students in ways that would not privilege one group, we explored various ways to describe English-learning students and what each term highlights about the students, and we discussed the assets and experiences that students from both groups brought to the collaboration. Through ongoing conversations, instructors wrestled with topics relevant to the TESOL field.

Another success from the collaboration was addressing the isolation and marginalization, described by Grosik and Kanno (2021), of some IEP students and one faculty member at the Applied English Center. The learning opportunities we provided MLEs were also in line with the positive engagement experiences supported in Salerno et al. (2024). We also found, as Fox (2020) did, that the IEP students recommended more structured opportunities for interactions based on their positive experiences.

6.3 Challenges

We noted some challenges in planning and carrying out this shared session. With the combined number of students exceeding the room capacity, we had to move to a classroom. The new location may have led to some feelings of unease for students. Students in C&T 100 shared that they forgot about the location of the classroom space or had other challenges getting there.

In reflecting on the experience, we noticed that students from the AEC needed some encouragement and a rationale to participate fully in the shared session. AEC students were hesitant to spend their time just interacting with other students, so the instructor talked to students about the academic and linguistic nature of these conversations. The student experience may be reflective of what Berardo (2013) discussed about the peripheral nature of IEP program on campus, in which the relationship between language and disciplinary knowledge is questioned not only by the university stakeholders but AEC students as well.

The number of students in the two groups was unbalanced, which led us to putting one AEC student with three or four students from C&T 100. It would have been beneficial for students to hear multiple perspectives from the AEC and interact with students with various English proficiency levels. In addition, the time for interaction between the two groups of students was limited to just one session which diverges from Fox's (2020) recommendation for ongoing and integrated interactions among international students and US students.

Another challenge we experienced was capturing the thoughts and experiences of students. While we had a debriefing conversation at the end of the shared session, we did not distribute student surveys or interview them about their experiences. A systematic process for collecting data would help us understand the students' perspectives of the session.

6.4 Next steps

To align with the recommendations of Fox (2020) to provide sustaining partnerships, we have continued the collaboration between the AEC and the Department of Curriculum & Teaching. In the following semester, we held another shared session with a panel structure and came together during a class party. We have also considered including other AEC classes and former students. We have also explored inviting other C&T teachers and students. In our future iterations, we would like to encourage "positive engagement experiences" in the interactions (Salerno et al., 2020) by spending the whole class time (75 minutes) together, include community-building activities, such as a snack and tea, and fully integrate the experience into our classes by adding a follow-up activity, assignment, or opportunity for students to continue to connect.

The Authors

Lonna Summers Rocha, an associate teaching professor, specializes in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. She has taught English in a variety of contexts both in the US and internationally and has been involved in providing teacher education and professional development for 20 years. In addition to C&T 100: Introduction to Education as Profession course, Lonna teaches courses related to assessment, curriculum, and second language acquisition in the TESOL program.

Mike Garnett, a lecturer and academic program associate, teaches courses on academic English skills, US culture, and service learning for speakers of other languages. At the AEC, he collaborates on the English language proficiency assessment of graduate teaching assistant candidates and is responsible for academic program duties including curriculum development and faculty mentoring. In the past 20 years, he has taught MLEs at universities both domestically and internationally.

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Appendix A

Topic 1: Education

Education experiences
- Describe your early experiences in school.
- What have you heard about education in other parts of the world? What have you learned about school from movies? Are these stereotypes true?
- How is your university experience the same or different from your high school experiences? (Think about the ways you interact with teachers, responsibility and expectations, assignments, time, social life, activities)

Language learning-related experiences
- Talk about your language learning experiences. When did you start learning a language?
- What has helped you learn a language? What hinders your language learning? What have teachers done to support your learning? How do you feel when communicating in a second language?

Adapting to new situations
- How did you feel when you first arrived?
- How have you had to adapt when coming to KU?
- What parts of KU or the US have surprised you?

Appendix B

Topic 2: Business with a heart

Local impact and impactful products
- Local Impact: "Are there any local social businesses in our community that you think are making a significant impact?"
- Impactful Products: "Can you think of a product or service from a social business that has positively impacted your life or community?"

Role models, personal connection, & inspirational stories
- Role models: "Who is a social entrepreneur you admire, and what about their work inspires you?"
- Personal connection: "Have you ever supported a social business or a cause-driven company? What was your experience like?"
- Inspirational stories: "What's the most inspiring story you've heard about a social entrepreneur making a difference?"

Future visions, challenges & solutions, & global perspectives
- Future vision: "If you could start a social business, what cause would you focus on and why?"
- Challenges and solutions: "What do you think are the biggest challenges social businesses face today, and how can they overcome them?"
- Global perspective: "How do you think social businesses can address global issues like poverty or climate change?"