

Chapter 18

Pluriculturalism and Plurilingualism in English for Academic Purposes: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

With global advancements in multilingual and multicultural education, a consideration of context is essential. This chapter explores the particular context of English for academic purposes (EAP) instruction in higher education institutions in Canada. Through a series of anecdotal vignettes from Canadian EAP classrooms, the authors outline several institutional, methodological, and sociocultural challenges, including English-only policies, the hidden curriculum, and cultural stereotyping. Drawing on challenges to inform opportunities, the authors then propose institutional practices around diversity, equity, and inclusion; methodological choices that incorporate universal design for learning; and sociocultural applications of plurilingual and pluricultural teaching approaches. These opportunities are paired with suggestions for classroom activities which can inform critical talks, texts, and tasks in diverse EAP contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Canada's largest city, Toronto, is often regarded as one of the most multicultural cities in the world and is home to several post-secondary institutions. International students increasingly choose Canada as a place to pursue higher education, drawn by high quality programs, relatively safe living conditions, and national policies that promote accessible pathways to permanent residency (Humphries & Knight-Grofe, 2014; Government of Canada, 2020). This positions Canadian educational institutions as particularly

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pluricultural and plurilingual learning spaces. However, the presence of cultural or linguistic diversity alone does not guarantee opportunities for the development of pluricultural or plurilingual competence (Marx & Moss, 2011), which is necessary to be successful in Canada (Krasny & Sachar, 2017). As such, Canadian institutions must critically evaluate their roles in preparing international students for success.

Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to ensure that learners accepted into higher education programs are linguistically and culturally prepared for their studies. Accordingly, many Canadian colleges and universities offer English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, defined as the “teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8). EAP programs are housed in various departments on the post-secondary campus, including student services, libraries, and centres for continuing education (MacDonald, 2016). Although models of EAP programs vary, many serve as bridging programs, meaning learners receive offers to academic programs conditional on the completion of English language studies. EAP programs involve the teaching and learning of the four language skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – as well as academic and, importantly, cultural skills that learners need to succeed in undergraduate courses (Tour, 2010). While valuable, these programs can be a costly and lengthy requirement for international students.

EAP programs, especially those in pluricultural and plurilingual contexts like Toronto, present both challenges and opportunities for learners, instructors, and institutions. In an exploration of the EAP context, the authors of this chapter - who have experience teaching in and developing curricula for ESL and EAP programs in Toronto, Canada - will outline current institutional, methodological, and sociocultural challenges and opportunities related to pluricultural and plurilingual education. In a collaborative narrative approach that privileges lived experiences, prioritises contextual particularities, and critically combines practitioner reflections (Valencia, Herath & Gagné, 2020), the authors of this chapter root their discussion of challenges in a series of anecdotal vignettes from Canadian EAP classrooms; they then propose parallel pedagogical opportunities in the form of classroom activities inspired by a critical pluricultural and plurilingual framework (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020; Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford & Lawrence, 2021). Readers are invited to reflect on and juxtapose their own teaching and learning experiences with the stories and strategies put forward by the authors, who turn now to an overview of the particular challenges found in the EAP context

CHALLENGES

Many challenges related to pluricultural and plurilingual education exist in EAP classrooms. These challenges stem, in part, from the fact that EAP programs and instructors are essentially gatekeepers of admissions (Smithwick, 2014 as cited in MacDonald, 2016), contributing to the power imbalance between instructors and learners. Challenges present in EAP also permeate across post-secondary institutions and departments. Institutional and instructional practices such as prioritising English over other languages and privileging Canadian cultural and educational norms devalue the diverse expertise that pluricultural and plurilingual learners bring to post-secondary contexts. While English language programs inherently require the teaching, learning, and assessing of English, in Canadian post-secondary studies more generally, learners are expected to use it, limiting the expression of knowledge, ability, and fluency they hold in other languages. Beyond EAP classrooms, many post-secondary instructors are unaware of the linguistic challenges that learners face and simply expect all learners in their lectures to

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