



The First Step: Preparing Rural Preservice Teachers to Support Multilingual Learners

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Abstract:

In an era of increasing linguistic diversity in K–12 classrooms, the responsibility for supporting Multilingual Learners (MLs) extends beyond English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual specialists to include all general education teachers. This need is particularly urgent in rural communities, where access to specialized personnel and resources is often limited. Yet, teacher education programs frequently face structural and curricular constraints. In many small, rural institutions, preservice teachers may take only one course focused on ML education, raising important questions about whether they are adequately prepared to work with MLs. This paper examines how a single, strategically designed course can meaningfully prepare future teachers to work with MLs in general education classrooms across various grade levels and content areas. Drawing on research from comprehensive teacher education models designed to prepare educators for multilingual classrooms, this paper shows how a “one-course model” can lay the foundation of preservice teachers’ knowledge, shape their dispositions, and begin to develop the skills needed to foster inclusive practices that support MLs. Through intentional pedagogical design, assignments, and high-impact practices, a one-course model can both introduce essential competencies and prepare preservice teachers to advocate for MLs. This paper, on the other hand, will also acknowledge its inherent limitations. This approach highlights how structural challenges in rural teacher education can be reframed as opportunities for innovation in preparing educators for linguistically diverse classrooms.

Keywords:

teacher education, language minorities, teaching methods, curriculum development, multilingualism

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Introduction

In an era of increasing linguistic diversity in K–12 classrooms, the responsibility of supporting Multilingual Learners (MLs)² no longer rests solely with English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual specialists. General classroom teachers must also be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to support MLs, particularly in rural communities, where access to specialized personnel and resources is often limited. Yet, teacher education programs—especially those housed in small, rural institutions—frequently face structural and curricular constraints in preparing future educators for this critical work. The reality in many such programs is that preservice teachers take just one course focused on the education of MLs (“a one-course model”³), raising urgent questions about how, in such a limited space in the curriculum, preservice teacher training can prepare future teachers for a career in a linguistically diverse school.

Drawing on both research literature and practical experience, this paper examines how a single course within a small, rural teacher education program can meaningfully prepare general education teachers to work with students whose first language is not English. A one-course model can help acquaint future teachers with strategies for differentiating instruction for ML students that are grounded in a deep understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity among multilingual learners and informed by research from fields such as language development and second language acquisition. While there is a substantial body of research (Bunch, 2013; de Jong et al., 2020; Education Commission of the States, 2014; Haslauer, 2010) that outlines what general education teachers need to know to work effectively with MLs, there are fewer studies that examine the specific pedagogical approaches that can support teacher candidates’ learning process in acquiring this knowledge base (Li et al., 2017). This paper explores how to meaningfully introduce essential knowledge for working with MLs within the limited scope of a single course. This paper will also describe how such a course can leverage high-impact pedagogical practices to build essential competencies, turning a challenge into a design opportunity. While one course cannot address all the concepts that general education teachers must know and apply when working with MLs, it can play a vital role in shifting mindsets, building a foundation for inclusive practice, and developing the dispositions necessary to advocate for MLs.

² Students whose first language is not English are referred to in the literature in various ways, e.g., multilingual students, plurilingual students, emergent bilinguals, etc. (González-Howard & Suárez, 2021; Comstock, 2022). In this paper, I chose the term multilingual students (MLs) in order to change the deficit to an asset-based view on MLs.

³ In this paper, I will use “one-course model” to describe teacher education programs, that offer only one course to preservice teachers in their curriculum to prepare them to support MLs in their future mainstream classes.

In this paper, I will first outline the current challenges facing general education teachers in rural schools. Second, I will review the research literature on various program models of teacher education programs that aim to prepare general education teachers to support MLs effectively. Third, I will describe how my teacher preparation program addresses these needs through a one-course model focused on ML education. Specifically, I will highlight the pedagogical approaches, assignments, and course design choices that intentionally respond to the research literature on how best to prepare general education teachers to work in linguistically diverse schools. Finally, I will reflect on the possibilities and limitations of preparing future teachers in a single course for supporting ML learners.

Statement of Problem

In June 2025, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) issued a stark warning in response to the abrupt halt of Title III funds: “Halting Title III funds so abruptly is an unacceptable blow to our schools. The U.S. Department of Education’s notice to delay these critical resources puts over 5.3 million [MLs] – alongside their teachers, schools, and communities – at direct risk just as the new school year begins” (NABE, 2025). Similarly, the new federal fiscal 2026 budget proposal called for a consolidation or elimination of \$2.6 billion in federal support for teacher training, including the Title II state grants. These cuts would have had a stark impact on in-service teacher training and professional development opportunities for teachers (Sparks, 2025).

While the designated funds for the 2026 budget proposal were eventually released (Samuels, 2025), the uncertainty of today’s political climate underscores a longstanding issue: that preservice teachers are often inadequately prepared to meet the instructional needs of MLs, despite their increasing presence in U.S. classrooms. In fact, according to the Education Commission of States (2014), over half of the states still do not require teacher education programs to offer training in how best to support MLs in general education classes (as cited in Stairs-Davenport, 2023). A growing body of research shows that general education teachers often feel underprepared to meet the needs of MLs and that they lack foundational knowledge in second language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogy (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Yet, due to changing policies, K-12 schools may not be able to provide adequate professional development at a time when teachers face the challenges of working with MLs. Therefore, teacher education programs must make sure that general education classroom teachers are prepared for the linguistic diversity in K-12 schools.

This lack of teacher preparation is documented by Lee and Hawkins (2015), who report on the significant and complex challenges of ML education in rural Wisconsin. They found that many general education teachers had little to

no formal preparation to teach MLs and that teachers believed MLs needed to acquire English before engaging in academic learning. Furthermore, Lee and Hawkins (2015) found that K-12 schools were struggling to hire certified ESL or bilingual educators and that ML instruction was handled by teachers trained in foreign languages who lacked familiarity with current research on integrating language and content into general education classes.

These challenges are not unique to the school districts in Lee and Hawkins' study. According to a 2021 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) survey of 2,000 teachers, 67% reported receiving "minimal or no training" on instructing MLs during their teacher preparation programs. Similarly, in a national context, MLs in rural areas were 37% less likely to receive targeted language services than their urban peers (Rural School and Community Trust, 2023). The 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey found that only 7% held any ESL-related certification (NCES, 2022). Moreover, just 43% of rural teachers had taken coursework related to EL instruction – compared to 50% in urban areas (Ruecker, 2021).

This lack of teacher preparation maybe a contributing factor to the persistent low academic achievement of MLs (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023; Alaska Policy Forum, 2023; Robles, 2025). In Wisconsin, only 16.6% of third-grade MLs scored proficient or advanced in reading, compared to 42.5% of non-MLs, and just 4.3% reached proficiency in eighth-grade math (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2023). In 2022–2023, only 77.1% of MLs graduated on time, compared to 91.4% of English-proficient students (WIDPI, 2024). These educational disparities have long-term consequences. In Wisconsin counties with the highest ML populations, college enrollment has declined by a rate of 22% more than the state average (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2023).

In the following section, I will introduce the research literature that guides the development of various program models for preparing general education teachers to effectively support MLs. I will then connect this research to the one-course model that is implemented in my small, rural teacher education program.

Literature Review: Effective Program Models for Preparing General Education Teachers to Work with Multilingual Learners

Comprehensive models of teacher preparation, such as the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model, have emerged as leading approaches to equipping preservice teachers with the competencies necessary for supporting MLs. These models typically include a dedicated course, ongoing integration of ML-related content across the curriculum, and field experiences that provide authentic engagement with MLs.

The Infusion Model embeds ML-specific knowledge and teaching strategies into all aspects of a teacher preparation curriculum. This includes in-

tegrating second language acquisition theory, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, and assessment practices into professional education coursework (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019). In its strongest form, the Inclusion Model aligns with English as a Second Language (ESOL) or English Language Development (ELD) standards, including those created by such organizations as the International Association for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium (WIDA⁴). The Infusion Model ensures that all faculty across content areas are equipped to teach ML-supportive practices.

The One-Plus Model builds on the Infusion Model. It has one dedicated course that is focused on ML pedagogies and includes infused ML-related content across methods courses. For example, Nutta's (2012) Infused ESOL One-Plus Model, as outlined in Ghimire et al. (2022), includes an ML-specific course and various methods and practicum courses that integrate strategically ML pedagogy. This model emphasizes a standards-based approach, guided by ESOL frameworks, and encourages meaningful field-based learning that allows preservice teachers to work directly with students. When implemented effectively, the One-Plus Model has been associated with improved teacher confidence and has been shown positive outcomes in narrowing the achievement gap (Ghimire et al., 2022).

Despite their strengths, the implementation of these models presents significant challenges, particularly for smaller, rural teacher education programs. First, field placements with English learning students may be limited or unavailable due to distances between teacher education institutions and K-12 schools. In addition, rural spaces are less diverse, serving a smaller number of MLs who are spread out across various communities. Second, smaller teacher education institutions often employ fewer faculty members, some of whom may lack expertise in TESOL and second language acquisition or may not have the confidence to implement Sheltered Instruction, which modifies content in general education classes to make it comprehensible for MLs. Third, time and curricular space can be limited, making it challenging to integrate ML preparation into an already full teacher education program. Even when such infusion occurs, quality and consistency vary, and without intentional design, the infusion may amount to only superficial exposure to ML strategies (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019).

Although existing research suggests that extended clinical experiences or multiple coursework opportunities may lead to stronger teacher learning outcomes (Kiramba et al., 2022), a thoughtfully designed, stand-alone course can nonetheless utilize core features of both the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model and lay the groundwork for linguistically responsive teaching (LRT).

⁴ WIDA is a professional organization, part of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education. It offers an integrated system to support educators, serving 41 states, territories, and federal agencies in the U.S. (WIDA, n.d).

The following list summarizes key characteristics of the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model incorporated into my course, “*Meeting the Content and Language Needs of English Learners*,” a three-credit class that meets twice a week for 75 minutes.

- Align course objectives with nationally recognized standards, such as the TESOL PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards and the WIDA English Language Development Standards;
- Highlight the complex intersectionality of identities of MLs;
- Provide a comprehensive exploration of the stages of English language development and language proficiency levels;
- Introduce foundational theories of second language acquisition (SLA);
- Simulate field-based learning through virtual classroom observations, analyses of authentic student work, and video-based case studies accompanied by guided reflection; and
- Apply SLA theory to practical differentiation strategies rooted in Sheltered Instruction pedagogies.

In the “Research Application” section of this paper, I describe how these research-based elements were applied to maximize the impact of the single course my institution offers to prepare teachers to support multilingual learners.

Research Application: Program Features in a One-Course Model for Preparing Rural Preservice Teachers to Support MLs in General education Classes

In this section, I will elaborate in detail on how the characteristics of the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model listed above were implemented in my course, “*Meeting the Content and Language Needs of English Learners*.”

Introduction to the Course Organization

When a single course is developed within a teacher education program, it is imperative that it be strictly aligned with TESOL standards and strategies (Wheeler & Govoni, 2014). To ensure the offering of TESOL-infused content, I adapted the framework developed by Lucas and Villegas (2013), which combines TESOL standards with National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards to create a list of pedagogical content knowledge base needed to work with linguistically diverse students. Lucas and Villegas (2013) emphasize that while culturally responsive teaching is essential, language-related issues are often underemphasized in teacher preparation programs. Thus, it is essential to develop linguistically responsive teachers (LRT) who can recognize and respond to the specific linguistic demands that MLs face when mastering academic content.

Lucas and Villegas' (2013) framework identifies two key components of linguistically responsive teaching: dispositions and orientations toward MLs; and pedagogical knowledge and skills specific to language development. My course, "*Meeting the Content and Language Needs of English Learners*" focuses only on the second component of Lucas and Villegas' (2013) framework because the teacher preparation program at my institution includes a stand-alone course, "*Equity Education and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the Multicultural Classroom*," that addresses the first component, which includes developing preservice teachers' sociolinguistic consciousness, appreciation for linguistic diversity, and advocacy.

The second component of Lucas and Villegas' (2013) includes four pedagogical knowledge and skills (PK&S) of LRTs as presented in Table 1. In order to align my course with these standards, I utilized the PK&Ss listed below to develop the course framework that allows students to develop the skills necessary to work with MLs.

Table 1

Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills of Linguistically Responsive Teachers
(Adapted from Lucas & Villegas, 2013, pp. 101–102)

Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills of Linguistically Responsive Teachers [PK&S]	Explanation	TESOL–NCATE P–12 Teacher Education Standards (2009)
1. A repertoire of strategies for learning about the linguistic and academic backgrounds of ELLs in English and their native languages	Understanding of the importance of knowing about the backgrounds and experiences of ELLs, and knowledge of strategies for learning about them.	Standard 4.c. Candidates know and can use a variety of performance-based assessment tools and techniques to inform instruction...
2. An understanding of and ability to apply key principles of second language learning	Knowledge of key psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural processes involved in learning a second language, and of ways to use that knowledge to inform instruction.	Standard 1.b. Candidates understand and apply theories and research in language acquisition and development to support their ELLs' English language and literacy learning and content-area achievement.
3. Ability to identify the language demands of classroom tasks	Skills for determining the linguistic features of academic subjects and activities likely to pose challenges for ELLs, including identifying key vocabulary, understanding syntactic and semantic features of academic language, and the linguistic expectations for successful completion of tasks.	Standard 1.a. Candidates demonstrate understanding of language as a system, including phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics...

4. Ability to scaffold instruction to make content comprehensible	Knowledge of and skill in using a range of scaffolding strategies to support ELLs' access to meaning and participation in academically challenging work, while promoting language development.	Standard 3.a. Candidates demonstrate knowledge of the components of language and understand the interrelation between language development and academic achievement for ELLs.
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These four pedagogical knowledge and skills (PK&S) of LRTs outlined in Table 1 are embedded in the five modules of my course, as noted below in parentheses.

Module 1: Diversity and background of language learners (PK&S 1)

Module 2: Language development and proficiency levels (PK&S 3)

Module 3: Language acquisition theories (PK&S 2)

Module 4: Program models

Module 5: The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model (PK&S 4)

In creating the course, I modified the Lucas and Villegas' framework slightly: I presented the PK&Ss in a different order and included an additional module – Module 4. The rationale for this modification will be addressed later in the section “Module 4. Program Modules.”

Module 1. Diversity and Background of Language Learners (PK&S 1)

In Module 1 of the course “*Meeting the Content and Language Needs of English Learners*,” students explore the complex intersectionality of MLs' identities through the creation of a concept map. It provides preservice teachers with the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the diversity, backgrounds, experiences, and linguistic assets of MLs.

Module 1 begins with a critical exploration of who MLs are, how they are labeled in K-12 schools, and how these labels affect them. Students learn to critically evaluate various terms about MLs, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, English Language Learners (ELLs), multilingual learners, emergent bilinguals, and plurilingual students. Students must recognize that no single label fully captures the heterogeneity of the members of this group. MLs may differ by language background, race, cultural background, ethnicity, religion, immigration history, socioeconomic status, and academic profile. MLs maybe be newcomers who have experienced trauma or U.S.-born, second-generation students. Their families may hold a range of immigration statuses, and their first languages and cultures may represent various countries. Some may be highly literate in their home languages, while others may have had limited or interrupted formal education. They may be gifted, in need of special education services, or fall somewhere in between.

To understand this complexity, students engage in a reflective activity by co-constructing a concept map that illustrates their initial collective understanding of MLs. After reading a foundational text (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017) that introduces various sociocultural factors that shape EL education, the students revisit the concept map, comparing and revising their ideas in light of this new information. This activity serves multiple purposes:

- It highlights assumptions, biases, and even prejudices about MLs;
- It reveals the heterogeneity within the ML population, countering deficit-based generalizations;
- It highlights the importance of tailoring instruction to individual learners, rather than treating MLs as a monolithic group.

The module also offers preservice teachers a list of activities to learn about MLs in their future classrooms. For example, preservice teachers could collect basic information about students and their families by conducting informal interviews with the students or by having students create illustrated autobiographies, design “All About Me” posters, or participate in storytelling activities about “Family Origins” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). Preservice teachers are encouraged to make connections between linguistically responsive pedagogies and other theories that explore multiple identities, such as multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2019), culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and identity and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

Module 2. Language Development and Proficiency Levels

A common feature of both the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model is that they give preservice teachers opportunities to explore the stages of English language development and associated proficiency levels. Understanding how MLs use English at each stage is essential for designing differentiated instruction. To build this competency, Module 2 of the course examines how MLs progress through the proficiency levels and identifies instructional strategies that support language development at each stage.

Pre-service teachers first learn about how various organizations, such as International Association TESOL and the WIDA Consortium, define English language proficiency levels. The TESOL language proficiency levels range from Level 1 – Starting through Level 5 – Bridging. The WIDA proficiencies start with Level 1 – Entering and progress through Level 6 – Reaching, and all levels include can-do descriptors in the four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Preservice teachers are often surprised to learn that MLs may be at different proficiency levels across these domains. For example, an ML may have Level 3 – Emerging skills in writing but be more advanced in listening comprehension. Understanding these variations helps them think more critically about how to differentiate instruction.

Preservice teachers in the course engage in a collaborative assignment (Bruffee, 1993; Smith & MacGregor, 1992) in order to visualize and internalize the proficiency levels and their classroom implications. In this assignment, small groups design a poster that illustrates the MLs' development of English language proficiency levels from 1 to 5 by describing what MLs can do at each level, broken down by each domain. The groups are also asked to select a metaphor – such as a ladder, a growing tree, or a blooming flower – to represent language growth.

The creation of the poster requires the review of an extensive amount of information. Therefore, students engage in a jigsaw reading activity in which each group member becomes responsible for one level and then shares key takeaways with their peers (Aronson & Social Psychology Network, 2019). This cooperative structure makes the material manageable while deepening collective understanding.

Once the posters are completed, students engage in a series of applied tasks. They are given authentic writing and oral language samples from MLs and asked to identify the writer's proficiency level using their poster's descriptors and justification. As previously noted in the literature review section of this paper, the one-course model design often lacks an immersive or field experience; this activity allows students to connect theory to teaching practice.

To further compensate for the lack of field experience, students in the course complete an additional follow-up activity. They are asked to create a second poster, structured in the same format as the first one, but focused on instructional strategies. On this second poster, students label concrete strategies and practices to support MLs for each domain and proficiency level identified on the first poster.

The creation of the two posters reinforces the idea that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient in accommodating MLs' instructional needs. The poster activity also allows students to understand the need to take into consideration language proficiency levels. Most importantly, the completed posters serve as a practical tool that preservice teachers can use in their future classrooms. By integrating theory, practice, and authentic analysis, teacher candidates are equipped with both the mindset and the tools needed to support the language development of MLs in general education classrooms.

Module 3. Language Acquisition Theories

Module 3 introduces foundational theories of second language acquisition (SLA). Because students do not have a field experience, I utilize a variety of simulation activities to demonstrate how learners acquire a second language.

Designing a module on SLA theories presents distinct challenges. The field of SLA is extensive, and its findings are often complex or inconclusive.

Nevertheless, future educators must grasp foundational SLA concepts in order to better understand how language learning occurs. In designing this course, I strategically selected theories and research that align closely with Sheltered Instruction principles, an approach often employed in general education classrooms to make academic content comprehensible to MLs.

Teacher preparation texts commonly introduce foundational SLA concepts, such as Stephen Krashen's (1982) Monitor Model; Jim Cummins' (1981) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP); and Jim Cummins' (1981) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) framework. In addition, textbooks also mention Larry Selinker's (1972) theory of Interlanguage; Noam Chomsky's (1965) Universal Grammar; Merrill Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis; and Michael Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis and Negotiation of Meaning. These concepts are widely cited in textbooks for preservice teacher preparation (Ariza, 2018; Ariza & Coady, 2018; Freeman & Freeman, 2011; Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2006; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

The challenge of designing a module on SLA theories is to break down the complex concepts listed above into relatable information. In order to solve this problem, I relied on the synthesis of research carried out by Lucas et al. (2008) on the six essential understandings of second language learning for linguistically responsive teachers, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Essential Understandings of Second Language Learning for Linguistically Responsive Teachers

(Source: Lucas et al., 2008, p. 363)

1. Conversational language proficiency is fundamentally different from academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1981, 2000), and it can take many more years for an ELL to become fluent in the latter than in the former (Cummins, 2008).
2. Second language learners must have access to comprehensible input that is just beyond their current level of competence (Krashen, 1982, 2003), and they must have opportunities to produce output for meaningful purposes (Swain, 1995).
3. Social interaction in which ELLs actively participate fosters the development of conversational and academic English (Gass, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2005).
4. ELLs with strong native language skills are more likely to achieve parity with native-English-speaking peers than are those with weak native-language skills (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2002).
5. A safe, welcoming classroom environment with minimal anxiety about performing in a second language is essential for ELLs to learn (Krashen, 2003; Pappamihel, 2002; Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008).
6. Explicit attention to linguistic form and function is essential to second language learning (Gass, 1997; Schleppegrell, 2004; Swain, 1995).

Table 2 is a valuable tool not only because it distills a broad and complex body of research into a manageable set of core concepts, but also because it connects theoretical insights to the functional language demands that MLs must navigate in school settings. Preservice teachers must understand that each “essential understanding” outlined in Table 2 above must inform their support of MLs’ linguistic and academic development. Based on these “essential understandings,” teachers must create environments in which:

1. Students’ academic language development is explicitly supported;
2. Instruction (and what is being said in the classroom) is comprehensible;
3. Students engage in meaningful, interactive communication;
4. The home language is recognized as an asset and used as a tool to support content mastery;
5. The classroom climate is anxiety-free and promotes emotional safety; and
6. Students have frequent opportunities to express language in varied contexts.

In order to demonstrate how these essential understandings can inform teaching practices, teacher educators can employ interactive simulations that foster direct, personal experience and experiential understanding of how MLs acquire a second or additional language. One such simulation illustrates several of the essential understandings outlined in Table 2. The activity begins with a brief lesson delivered entirely in Hungarian. This language was deliberately chosen because students are highly unlikely to be familiar with it, and because I am a native speaker of that language. Upon entering the classroom, students are greeted in Hungarian and exposed to a lesson in which the word “test” (*teszt*) is the sole recognizable term (a loanword). The term is repeated multiple times, which has the effect of increasing students’ level of discomfort with the lesson. The lesson delivery continues for approximately six to seven minutes, during which time students often experience confusion, frustration, and disengagement. When they turn to each other to speak in English, I prompt them to stop. Once the class starts to disengage, I transition to English and facilitate a debriefing session on how the students’ temporary experience of linguistic exclusion might compare to the daily challenges faced by MLs in general education classrooms. It should be noted that this activity could be modified to any other language, or the instructor could choose to construct a lesson based on high-level academic terminology that preservice teachers might not understand.

Another activity that highlights the essential understandings of SLA is based on Krashen’s (1982) notion of Comprehensible Input, which refers to language input that is understandable to learners even though it might contain elements that are beyond their current proficiency. In this activity, a mini-lesson is first delivered entirely in an unfamiliar language, then the content is re-taught using “comprehensible input.” In the second delivery of

the lesson, students understand most of the language spoken to them because I apply strategies to enhance comprehension, such as acting out the content through Total Physical Response (TPR), modeling, and the use of visual aids, drawings, and simplified vocabulary. These demonstrations allow preservice teachers to experience firsthand how teachers can make content accessible to MLs. Playfully, I make a bet with my students that I will speak to them in a second language, typically German, and that they will understand the lesson. Although they do not initially believe me, by the end of the lesson, they are amazed at how much they were able to understand through the use of comprehensible input.

Although Module 3 is short, it provides preservice teachers with a glimpse of the current understanding of how individuals learn a second language. They recognize both the cognitive and affective aspects of language development and understand that language acquisition is a natural process. They also learn that teachers do not have to rely on translation devices because they have strategies at their disposal that support both content and language development of their MLs.

Module 4. Program Models

In Module 4, I introduce students to the various programs that are implemented in K-12 schools to educate MLs, such as ESL Pull-Out, ESL Push-In, or various types of bilingual programs. Lucas and Villegas' (2013) framework does not include any discussion on pedagogical knowledge and skills (PK&S) as applied to program models. Similarly, the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model omit this topic as part of their framework for teacher preparation. Therefore, I intentionally added this issue to the course in response to a critical gap in teacher training. Mills et al. (2020) critique teacher education programs for promoting the value of linguistic and cultural diversity without questioning why dominant language and cultural norms are upheld in schools. For example, K-12 schools default to the use of ESL instruction rather than the implementation of bilingual education. Mills et al. (2020) also argue that preservice teachers are rarely exposed to the history of the English-only movement or to the structural inequalities that shape the experiences of MLs. As a result, even well-meaning teachers may implement supportive strategies without recognizing or challenging the systemic forces that marginalize MLs. Preservice teachers should have a basic understanding of how the historical, social, and political contexts of the United States significantly influence the education of MLs. James Crawford (2000, 2004) and others have written extensively about the history and politics of bilingual education in the United States; some of this content is introduced in Module 4.

Overall, Module 4 introduces preservice teachers to the following program models that are used to serve MLs in the United States:

- Mainstream or General Education English Only
- Structured English Immersion, (ESL Pull-Out, ESL Push-In)
- Sheltered Instruction
- Newcomer
- Early and Exit Bilingual
- Maintenance Bilingual and
- Dual Language

Preservice teachers first learn a working vocabulary of these modules; second, they examine their distinctive characteristics; and third, they learn how these programs are implemented in K-12 schools and how they affect the role of general education teachers in the education of MLs. The module also provides an opportunity for students to critically assess these program models in the light of the SLA theories presented in Module 3. They also explore how competing forces – research versus politics – shape the educational experiences of MLs.

Module 5. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

Research indicates that the most important aspect of both the Infusion Model and the One-Plus Model is their provision of extended opportunities for teacher candidates to put SLA theory into practice. In Module 5, which spans the second half of the semester, I replicate this feature by introducing Sheltered Instruction – a general education classroom method for differentiating instruction for MLs based on SLA principles. Following the course's cyclical structure, Module 5 revisits key concepts from earlier units, reinforces their relevance to accommodating MLs, and provides hands-on opportunities for students to revise lessons and practice the differentiation strategies they may need in their future classrooms.

To help my students develop skills to accommodate their future MLs, I introduce them to the text *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* by Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2017). SIOP, or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, is a research-based framework (Short et al., 2011) developed to support MLs by providing grade-level content while developing academic language. SIOP serves as both a planning tool and an observation rubric. It includes eight interrelated components:

1. Lesson Preparation
2. Building Background
3. Comprehensible Input
4. Strategies
5. Interaction
6. Practice and Application
7. Lesson Delivery
8. Review and Assessment

The SIOP model guides teachers to rethink their lesson plan in each of these eight areas and to adjust their lessons to meet the learning needs of their MLs. Due to time constraints, I only focus on five of these components in my course: Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Interaction, and Assessment. I chose these components because they tightly align with the SLA theories students learn in Module 3.

SIOP Component 1 – Lesson Preparation

This component introduces preservice teachers to the practice of integrating content and language objectives into lesson design. They learn to align instructional goals with the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards (WIDA, 2020), which have a functional approach to language learning, i.e., teaching MLs explicitly how language works and what they can use it in diverse contexts to express ideas appropriately (p. 20). The standards were developed based on sociocultural theories of language development, recognizing that language is used in various sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). After I introduce students to the WIDA Standards, they select a lesson, identify an appropriate WIDA Standard, and write language goals to support the development of either expressive or receptive language skills. This exercise helps preservice teachers see English language development not as a separate subject, but as an integral part of all instruction (Harper & de Jong, 2004). The aim is to help teachers recognize their role in language development.

SIOP Component 2 – Building Background

This component utilizes students' knowledge of the diversity among MLs that they explored in Module 1. It also reinforces the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2018). Preservice teachers explore how to connect new academic content to MLs' prior knowledge and their lived experiences, which might be different from those of their classmates. According to Vygotsky (1978), this connection is activated at the learner's zone of proximal development.

In Module 5, I introduce students to a hands-on activity to better understand the value of building background knowledge. Preservice teachers are provided with a sample text and two ML student profiles that include language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds. Based on this information, they must identify key vocabulary to pre-teach and analyze any cultural references that may present barriers to understanding. They also design strategies to connect the learner's background to the lesson content.

SIOP Component 3 – Comprehensible Input

Component 3 of the SIOP revisits Krashen's (1982) theory of comprehensible input, which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners under-

stand language slightly beyond their current level ($i + 1$). In the ($i + 1$) formula, i represents the student's current language level, and $+1$ signifies the new information that the ML will acquire through the lesson. While Krashen's model has been critiqued (Ellis, 2008), it remains influential in shaping how teachers think about content modification. In Module 5, preservice teachers are provided additional opportunities to practice how to make content in any subject and at any grade level comprehensible to MLs' individual language proficiency levels. Preservice teachers select a lesson and associated instructional materials. They are then asked to design differentiated materials – such as a PowerPoint presentation or handouts – that make content comprehensible for MLs.

SIOP Component 5 – Interaction

The Interaction component of SIOP highlights the central role of social language use in second language development (Swain, 1995). Preservice teachers learn how to create structured opportunities for MLs to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and teachers. Preservice teachers then reflect on why such interaction is often challenging for MLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005) and explore instructional strategies that scaffold MLs' interaction in the classroom, such as grouping techniques, increased wait time, sentence starters, and vocabulary supports. Once again, providing practice opportunities to apply the SIOP to the development of instructional design is essential. Preservice teachers are given a sample lesson and asked to design an interactive, carefully scaffolded activity that encourages oral language production and peer interaction – key elements of what Gibbons (2009) describes as “scaffolded interaction.”

SIOP Component 8 – Assessment

The final component introduces preservice teachers to alternative and formative assessment strategies that are more inclusive of MLs' language development. Due to linguistic barriers, traditional assessments often fail to capture what MLs know (Abedi, 2011). In this part of the module, preservice teachers review what they learned about language proficiency levels and explore multimodal and performance-based assessments (Gottlieb, 2016). The focus is on ensuring that assessments offer MLs equitable opportunities to demonstrate understanding and progress.

Limitations of Preparing Linguistically Responsive Teachers in a One-Course Model

While this study highlights how a one-course model can be strategically designed to prepare general education teachers for working with multilingual students, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the model described in this paper is situated within a small, rural teacher preparation program with limited faculty, course offerings, and access to diverse placement settings. These contextual factors inherently shaped both the design scope and implementation of the course. Therefore, it may not be directly replicable in larger, urban institutions or those with more robust resources and staffing.

Second, the course attempts to replicate a field-based component through the use of virtual learning, videos, and engagement with authentic texts and simulation activities. However, this experiential learning component of the course is relatively short in duration and limited in intensity compared to more sustained clinical experiences. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that students' opportunities offered in this course would yield the same outcomes as an actual practicum or service-learning experience.

Third, this study focuses primarily on course design and implementation, rather than on long-term teacher outcomes or student achievement. While initial reflections and performance-based assessments on student work that I collected over several semesters suggest promising impacts on preservice teachers' understanding of linguistically responsive practices, future research should explore how these experiences translate into sustained practice during student teaching and in-service teaching.

Lastly, although the course integrates research-based frameworks (e.g., WIDA, SIOP, and TESOL standards), it is still bound by the structural constraint of being a single, three-credit course within a broader program. As such, the course's ability to fully prepare teachers to meet the complex needs of MLs is inherently limited.

Despite these constraints, this model offers a realistic example of how programs with limited capacity can still prepare teachers to serve multilingual students more effectively. Further research and programmatic collaboration could lead to the development of one or more additional courses that would expand the curriculum of the one-course model and more sufficiently prepare linguistically responsive teachers for the modern, diverse classroom. Ideally, such a curriculum expansion would also allow for the inclusion of a field experience.

Discussion: Expanding Curricular Offerings for Developing Linguistically Responsive Teachers

The persistence of minimal ML preparation requirements in many teacher education programs may reflect logistical limitations and/or broader questions of institutional and policy-level commitment to linguistic equity. This paper focuses on adaptation within constraints, while also highlighting the continuous need to improve the preparation of linguistically responsive teachers. A well-designed one-course model can meaningfully address the structural constraints of a small teacher education program. By aligning course content with national standards (e.g., WIDA, TESOL) and incorpo-

rating hands-on, authentic assignments into the curriculum, a standalone course can serve as a foundation for preparing all future teachers to work with MLs (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017).

However, a single course should be seen as a starting point – not a comprehensive solution. Teacher education programs can take deliberate steps toward creating Infused or One-Plus models of ML preparation once such a course is established and faculty, students, and partner schools have become more familiar with its stated outcomes. Developing an extended One-Plus Model would offer stronger scaffolding by weaving ML-related content across the curriculum and/or by adding dedicated coursework beyond the foundational class.

A key first step in developing such an extended One-Plus Model would involve first identifying faculty members with expertise in ESOL and/or who have an interest in multilingual education. Those faculty members would then require institutional support and resources for curricular redesign efforts that would integrate relevant content into existing courses. This expanded model could include a special education course that would address the overrepresentation of MLs in special education (Barrio, 2017; Sullivan, 2011; Uman-sky et al., 2017) and the importance of distinguishing language difference from disability (Klingner & Artiles, 2003). Additionally, the inclusion of an educational psychology course could introduce key theories of first language acquisition, providing a conceptual bridge to second language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). Methods courses could encourage students to align lessons with both content and language standards, select appropriate language objectives, and differentiate instruction based on MLs' language proficiency levels (WIDA, 2020; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). These methods courses could also introduce profiles of sample MLs, prompting teacher candidates to consider language background, prior schooling, and English language development proficiency levels when planning lessons. Strategic emphasis across methods courses could further deepen understanding—for example, one course might focus on designing comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), while another could emphasize interactive, scaffolded learning activities that promote academic language development (Gibbons, 2009).

As a second step, teacher education programs might offer optional practicum extensions to supplement coursework. Students who are interested in gaining more expertise in becoming an LRT could engage in additional field hours working directly with MLs. Students for whom an additional field experience is impractical could take advantage of a range of alternatives, such as book studies, case study analyses, or virtual practicum experiences.

Overall, while systemic change requires time and collaboration, the one-course model illustrates how to leverage existing resources. Teacher education programs can move toward more comprehensive, sustainable approaches that better serve MLs by building faculty capacity and gradually expanding both coursework and clinical experiences (Coady et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The persistent academic achievement gap between MLs and their English-proficient (EP) peers remains a critical equity issue in U.S. education. National and state-level assessments consistently reveal disparities in reading, writing, and content-area learning, with multilingual students often underperforming academically in comparison to their peers. This gap is due in large part to limited access to linguistically responsive instruction. One of the most commonly-cited contributing factors to this achievement gap is the lack of adequate teacher preparation. Many general education teachers, particularly those who matriculated from small, rural teacher education programs, report feeling underprepared to meet the needs of MLs, citing limited resources and coursework dedicated to language learners in these smaller programs (Lee & Hawkins, 2015; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; de Jong & Harper, 2005).

This paper illustrates how a one-course model can serve as a feasible and impactful entry point for preparing general education teachers to work effectively with MLs, particularly in small, rural teacher education programs where resources and staffing may be limited. While such a model cannot fully address the complexities of multilingual education on its own, it can establish a strong foundation of knowledge, shift mindsets, and spark institutional momentum. By strategically building on this foundation—through course infusion, faculty collaboration, and expanded practicum opportunities—teacher education programs can gradually move toward more comprehensive and sustainable models of teacher preparation. As the population of MLs continues to grow, teacher education programs must find creative, context-responsive ways to ensure that all future teachers are prepared to meet the linguistic and academic needs of every student. The model presented here offers one viable path forward.

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