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### Linguistically Responsive Instruction in Corequisite Courses at Community Colleges

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**Abstract:**

English Learners (ELs) attend community colleges at a greater rate than four-year schools, making community colleges primary sites of ESL education in American higher education. These institutions' recent embrace of the corequisite structure – a pairing of a non-credit developmental course with a credit-bearing disciplinary content course in order to accelerate students' progress in their coursework – has direct implications for ELs. As corequisites are enacted in a wide range of content areas, professors will need to attend to students' language development in a wide range of disciplinary courses. This qualitative study applies Linguistically Responsive Instruction as a framework to understand corequisite instructors' beliefs about students' learning, knowledge of teaching language, and understanding of the broader contextual factors at community colleges, including institutional policies and definitions of students' readiness and success. Drawing on ongoing interviews conducted with faculty members throughout one semester, it offers faculty members' perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of teaching ELs in the corequisite structure and provides a framework for professional development and institutional support.

## **Linguistically Responsive Instruction in Corequisite Courses at Community Colleges**

Community colleges serve a crucial role in higher education by offering associate degrees, technical credentials and adult and continuing education to over 11 million full-time and part-time students in rural and urban communities across the United States. Open access policies, along with low tuition, geographic proximity to students' homes, and part-time scheduling options, have turned community colleges into an important pathway to higher education for young adults, including first-generation college students, immigrants, students of color, and students from low-income families, as well as adults returning to school to obtain additional training or credentials. Among these groups are a significant number of English learners (henceforth: ELs) (Raufman, Brathwaite, & Santikian Kalamkarian, 2019). While ELs can be found at many tertiary institutions, they attend community colleges at a greater rate than four-year schools (Kanno, 2018; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011), making community colleges primary sites of ESL education in American higher education. The aim of the current article is to show how the framework of Linguistically Responsive Instruction (henceforth: LRI) reveals the challenges and potential of teaching ELs at community college in the current climate of widespread reforms designed to improve college persistence and completion rates.

Despite the large number of ELs currently enrolled in community colleges and their projected growth (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2015), the TESOL scholarly community has widely overlooked this critical context (for exception see Avni & Finn, 2017, 2020; Bunch, et al, 2020; Kasper et al, 1999; Kibler, Bunch, & Endris, 2011; Siegal & Gilliland, 2021), resulting in a situation in which we know too little about ESL teaching practices at community colleges. This gap is particularly concerning given the sweeping reform efforts

community colleges are undertaking to reduce or eliminate developmental courses in reading, writing, and ESL, which are seen as gatekeeping courses, in order to accelerate course credit completion and increase graduation rates.<sup>1</sup> One result of these acceleration efforts is that community college faculty members will be called upon to take on dual classroom roles as both experts in teaching disciplinary academics and language educators supporting their students' English language needs. While the topic of K-12 mainstream teachers teaching core-curriculum subject-matter content while supporting ELs has been amply addressed in K-12 contexts (Bunch, 2013; Haan, Gallagher, & Varandani, 2017), the knowledge and expertise that community college instructors will need have not been addressed. This article focuses on one of these acceleration models, the corequisite approach, which pairs a non-credit math, English or ESL course with a credit-bearing disciplinary content course, and applies principles of LRI to the corequisite class. As corequisites grow in popularity in various content areas, professors will need to attend to students' language development in a wide range of disciplinary courses.

## **Literature Review**

### **Corequisite Classes at Community Colleges**

Scholars of higher education in collaboration with educational think tanks and policy centers have identified developmental education, or classes designed to support the development of reading, writing, and math skills for underprepared students, as the “largest single academic block to college student success” (Logue, 2018) since only a small proportion of these students successfully complete their developmental requirements and move on to college-level, credit-

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<sup>1</sup> We differentiate between the terms developmental and ESL. The former is often used interchangeably with remedial, which assumes a student has not adequately mastered writing, reading, or math skills taught in K-12 education.

bearing math or English (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Faced with this troubling evidence, higher education institutions across the United States began rethinking the effectiveness of developmental education, and even in some cases, states such as California enacted legislation restricting colleges from requiring students to enroll in non-transferable developmental courses that lengthen the time to complete the degree. The idea for corequisites emerged from this context as a popular reform strategy to reduce the length of developmental sequences and has dramatically impacted community colleges' structures and curriculum. What was originally designed for students to be able to advance in their studies but still receive extra support in mathematics, reading, and writing has also affected ELs, who often slipped into categories of under-preparedness. Other community colleges have intentionally developed corequisite courses for ELs as a means of accelerating college completion.

By definition, corequisites in ESL are co-curricular courses designed to teach academic literacy and language development as well as disciplinary/curricular content.<sup>2</sup> Rather than seeing academic language proficiency as a prerequisite to participation in disciplinary college-level courses, the corequisite structure integrates language and content learning, with the ultimate goal of streamlining the college completion process. While corequisites may be a novel concept in tertiary settings, the model of combining language learning and subject matter is not new to the field of TESOL (Stoller, 2004; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010). Indeed, integrating content in language (henceforth: ICL) has taken on various forms, including sheltered instruction (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) and content-based instruction (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012), and has been a widely applied methodology of language learning and teaching in K-12

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<sup>2</sup> We are aware of the controversial nature of the terms academic literacy and language in applied linguistics. We intentionally use the term academic literacy and language throughout this paper because these are the terms used in this particular context and more widely in community college discourse.

classrooms (de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008) and at college programs internationally (Kim & Park, 2020; Murray, 2016). Brinton, Snow, and Wesche's seminal work (1989) identify three variations on content-based instruction (i.e., theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct models) that differ according to the degree of integration of content and language instruction, the authenticity of the materials and classroom activities, and the need to modify language for the English-learning students. Used primarily in secondary and post-secondary settings, the adjunct model consists of two linked courses, a content class and an ESL class, and most resembles the co-requisite model, which also seeks to meet the dual objective of providing language support in parallel with teaching rigorous college level content. In one example in a summer bridge program at UCLA, first year ELs took an introduction to psychology course, in which the psychology teacher and the English language teachers identified language objectives that would help students to successfully complete their reading and writing assignments, with a long-term perspective that such a course could help students in the general demands of college-level academic courses. Among the language gains, "adjusting to UCLA" was identified as the highest rated benefit of the class, raising questions about the tangential or residual outcomes of co-curricular models, which may or may not be focused on language learning gains.

While studies point to the benefits of integrating content-based, credit-bearing work and developmental work for ELs (Razfar, & Simon, 2011), there is little recent research directly looking at teaching corequisite classes to ELs in which one teacher may teach both the content and language components, nor is there research related to LRI and corequisite classes at community colleges, as often the focus is on four-year BA granting institutions where the social, academic, and linguistic conditions are different. Focusing on the new iteration of content-based

instruction at the college level, this article seeks to bring attention to the community college context and highlight the specific dynamics at play in these settings which are at the epicenter of educating students who have a wide variety of demographic backgrounds, goals, needs, and circumstances, including low-income students, first-generation college attenders, part-time learners, working students, older students, students with families, and students coming diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Juskiewicz, 2020).

### **Linguistically Responsive Instruction**

LRI directly addresses the pedagogical implications of increasing numbers of multilingual students in the education system by delineating the enhanced set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to respond to and support these students' linguistic needs in content area classrooms. The knowledge base for LRI garnered significant attention in the elementary and secondary educational contexts, theorizing that professors need to understand students as language learners, develop pedagogical techniques grounded in second language acquisition theory, and recognize contextual factors in which teaching and learning are occurring (e.g., Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). More recently, Gallagher and Haan (2018) applied LRI principles to the tertiary level, looking at faculty members' beliefs about emergent multilingual students' language proficiency at a midwestern bachelor-degree granting university. Among their central findings was that faculty held views that emergent multilingual students were deficient, vulnerable, and insufficiently supported. The overwhelmingly negative responses on the survey showed that faculty linked language proficiency with cognitive and moral capacity, and saw instructional accommodations designed for multilingual students as remedial, with grave concerns about the lowering of academic standards and an increase in already full workloads.

Overall, faculty rejected the idea that language instruction fell in their purview of professional responsibilities, and they opted for external support for these students outside of class time.

Unlike the faculty in Gallagher and Haan's study, community college faculty may have few options in opting out of serving this population, given the large numbers of ELs and other students in need of literacy development in their classrooms. For that reason, the principles of LRI are particularly appropriate when exploring pedagogy within the corequisite class since they provide the theoretical framework for investigating corequisite community college instructors' bodies of knowledge. Drawing on de Jong & Harper (2005) and Gallagher & Haan (2018), we apply the knowledge base for LRI as it applies to three areas: knowledge of students' language proficiency; knowledge of second language acquisition pedagogy; and knowledge of the broader contextual factors that shape the teaching and learning experiences at community colleges – including institutional policies and definitions of students' readiness and success.

We see LRI with its focus on the language learner, pedagogical practices and beliefs, and context as rooted in Shulman's (1987) seminal articulations of pedagogical content knowledge – the overlap of knowledge of the subject and knowledge of how to teach that subject in particular contexts. LRI also extends the theoretical work on pedagogical language knowledge (Galguera, 2011) later defined by Bunch (2013) as the “knowledge of language directly related to disciplinary teaching and learning and situated in the particular (and multiple) contexts in which teaching and learning take place” (p. 307). The LRI framework is a template for looking at important questions about the types of knowledge that community college instructors require, which are different from the second language educator who is primarily focused on a language-based curriculum or the traditional college instructor teaching who is focused on disciplinary subject matter. By bridging pedagogical content knowledge and TESOL knowledge, LRI is a

window into community college instructors' understanding of who their students are, what it means to teach corequisites, and how the context of teaching at community colleges (including institutional policies) intersects with both.

### **Research Questions**

Given that LRI offers a constructive framework for seeing teachers as active decision makers who make daily pedagogical choices that draw on a complex matrix of knowledge, orientations, and beliefs about their field, their students, and the condition of their teaching (Gallagher & Haan, 2018), we sought to use LRI as a lens to understand pedagogy within corequisite courses. The following research questions guided our exploration:

- 1) How do community college corequisite faculty members describe the types of linguistic knowledge their students need as college students to be successful?
- 2) What do corequisite faculty understand about language pedagogy?
- 3) How do corequisite faculty understand reform efforts and trends regarding ELs in the broader community college culture?

Through these questions we provide a more nuanced and critical understanding of the intersection of LRI and co-curricular coursework in the community college context, showing that the dramatic new reform of corequisite classes is largely still embedded in monolingual perspectives that ignore the benefits of multilingualism. We also argue for bringing corequisites into the broader conversation within the TESOL community since this unique – and growing – model of instruction may soon subsume stand-alone models of ESL instruction at community colleges across the US.

### **Context**

The context for this study is City Community College (CCC), an institution that serves approximately 25,000 students each year and is one of the 7 community colleges of the City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY consists of 26 colleges and serves more than 500,000 undergraduate and graduate students, making it one of the largest university systems in the United States in terms of enrollment. With 70% of its student body coming from the New York City public schools (City University of New York Master Plan 2012, 2016, p. 61), the university is exceptionally diverse: students hail from over 210 countries and speak over 190 languages.

CCC initially implemented corequisite courses in 2016, with a focus on math and first-year English composition courses (Finn & Avni, 2017). While corequisite course structures can vary, at CCC, the model was to combine a three-hour non-credit class with a three-hour credit class for a total of six hours of instruction taught by one instructor. Since the courses were taught by only one faculty member and commonly didn't require collaboration across departments, the course was easy to scale up, and college administrators enthusiastically embraced this new model, requesting that departments develop additional corequisite course offerings and reduce the stand-alone developmental course offerings. As a part of this push, Critical Thinking for English Learners (CTEL100), the first co-requisite course specifically for ELs, was piloted in spring 2018. This six-hour, three-credit course combines ESL 100, the highest level intensive writing course for ESL students prior to first-year composition (a six-hour course), with Critical Thinking (CT100), a three-credit content-bearing course that is a common course in Philosophy departments whose curriculum covers learning epistemological approaches to identifying valid arguments, detecting fallacious reasoning, understanding inductive and deductive logic, and constructing and evaluating arguments. A popular course at the college because it fulfills part of the degree requirement for most majors at CCC, CT100 attracts many first-year students looking

to complete their non-major requirements. Whereas previously ELs taking CT100 had to take two classes—an ESL class as well as CT100—resulting in 9 hours of instruction, the corequisite CTEL 100 blends the two classes and is taught by the same professor with combined learning outcomes for Critical Thinking and ESL Intensive Writing. Since both Critical Thinking and ESL writing courses were offered in the same department, the course was offered to instructors with Philosophy and TESOL backgrounds, with preference given to instructors who had taught both stand-alone courses.

### **Methods**

As two faculty members at CCC within the department where CTEL 100 was piloted, we reached out to those instructors teaching the course prior to the fall 2018 semester to see if they would be willing to participate in our study on a voluntary basis. Focusing on CTEL 100 was a natural progression of our prior research, where we were among the first faculty at CCC to study curriculum and pedagogy within the first corequisite course at the college, a class that combined developmental English with English composition (Avni & Finn, 2017; Finn & Avni, 2021). With terminal degrees in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, we also had extensive experience teaching ESL 100 as well as expertise in working with ELs.

Individually, we conducted three interviews with the four faculty members teaching CTEL 100 over the fall 2018 semester (see Table 1 for the instructors' backgrounds), and we divided the interviews equally. Semi-structured interview questions focused on the ways in which faculty planned to balance both the Critical Thinking course content and the language needs of students. Questions at the start of the semester included inquiry into the faculty members' curricular planning, the design of assignments, objectives and expectations, and the choice of materials. Mid-semester interviews concentrated on challenges and benefits related to

the corequisite model and end-of-semester interviews addressed assessment of both content and language and questions to define how instructors thought about students' college readiness and future academic trajectories. Interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes to one hour each, and they were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis and grounded theory. Key themes were identified from the transcript and then revisited and refined. Using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), our initial code list was culled and expanded to reflect our evolving understanding of LRI and faculty approaches to pedagogy within the corequisite course. Data analysis ran parallel to our fieldwork and coding was iterative. Faculty members were also asked to submit copies of their syllabi, various essay assignments, and student work.

We recognize that the number of instructors participating in this study is small and acknowledge this limitation in making far-reaching generalizations with such a small sample. However, the limited numbers reflect the reality of how reforms are enacted at community colleges, where classes often begin as a pilot and then grow exponentially after the first year shows their feasibility and value.

**Table 1: Faculty Background Information**

<b>Faculty Member Name</b>	<b>Years Teaching at the College-Level</b>	<b>Years Teaching at CCC</b>	<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>
Adam	20	12.5	MA in ESL
Lisa	12	2.5	M.Ed. in TESOL
Valerie	20	12	MA in TESL
Nathan	12	4	Ph.D. in Philosophy

## **Findings**

With our research questions guiding our analysis, we identified three major themes in the faculty interviews that reveal the different types of knowledge instructors had about their students' language needs and challenges, their pedagogy regarding the integration of language development and content learning, and the broader community college context. Together, these themes build a portrait of how instructors understand the complexity of blending the teaching of academic language support with disciplinary content in corequisite classes.

### **Corequisite instructors' beliefs about what linguistic knowledge students need to develop**

One of the major themes that emerged in the data is what corequisite faculty believed about their students' development of academic language proficiency. Throughout our interviews, it became clear these evolving points of knowledge had to do with the instructors' academic and professional backgrounds. Not surprisingly, the instructor who was trained in a content area rather than TESOL or second language acquisition was not as prepared to address both the academic content and students' language needs, an issue common in K-12 settings (Lucas, Villegas, Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Likewise, the same instructor had ideas about what it meant to know and use a language, but these notions were more restricted to specific kinds of writing or uses of particular sentence structures.

Adam, for example, had strong academic and professional preparation in TESOL, and he recognized that this group of students has particular linguistic demands that differed from students who were not classified as "ESL" and were enrolled in the stand-alone CT class, which he also taught. Similarly, Lisa emphasized that the needs of her students in the corequisite class were different than the majority of students in the stand-alone course, and she also recognized that her background in TESOL was an asset in terms of seeing this distinction. She explained:

[A]s a natural ESL person, when I'm teaching regular CT, I'm like "ambiguous," let's talk about what that [word] means. I can't undo that, so I know I'm building that in. But that's not necessarily happening in other CT classes. So I think it's good that they're afforded the opportunity to be with someone who specifically understands their skill set.

Lisa acknowledged that other faculty teaching this course do not necessarily have the same training in TESOL, and her students benefit because of the explicit attention to language-related matters that she naturally incorporates into her classes and her awareness based on her experience of some of the language minefields that pose particular challenges to students. While Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008), in their discussion on LRI approaches, argue that not all teachers who are responsible for teaching subject matter must become language experts, they do point out that teachers "can learn to identify and articulate the special characteristics of the language of their disciplines and make these explicit to their ELLs" (365).

Being able to integrate language learning into content teaching is one area that Nathan focused on throughout the semester as he adapted to delivering content with an ESL focus. As the only faculty member with a Ph.D. in philosophy, Nathan's interviews revealed many of the challenges that community college faculty will face as corequisite courses become the *de-facto* first-semester option for students. Unlike studies that show that college professors do not necessarily see language development as their responsibilities (Gallagher & Haan, 2018), Nathan understood this need to some degree and had participated in a college-wide training to make courses "Writing Intensive" – courses with an increased focus on writing, reading, and critical thinking (along with a more intensive writing requirement). Recognizing that students could use writing as a means of learning content, he had incorporated short, paragraph-length writing assignments and long-form responses to articles in his stand-alone CT100 class. In CTEL 100,

he added formal, multi-draft essays; however, when it came to grammar, Nathan's approach differed than the faculty with training in TESOL. He explained:

I'm using a couple of worksheets and printouts from ESL materials, so for instance, I'll be using a grammar worksheet on article usage. I've got a handout on some sentence structures, run-ons, fragments, and I think choppy sentences, and that kind of stuff. Just short handouts, that we will do a couple times this semester.

For Nathan, much of the "nuts and bolts" aspects of writing, and in particular, grammar, were areas on which to focus sporadically after the students had grasped important Critical Thinking concepts. For him, "academic writing" entailed paragraph and/or essay composition. He explained his thinking about the two content areas as follows:

So, the way that I'm thinking of critical thinking, it's basically the ability to distinguish between good and bad reasoning, and the ability to articulate one's reasons for believing things in a sort of persuasive manner. ESL writing, I view mostly as, we want our students to write good expository or explanatory paragraphs and whole essays. In addition to argumentative essays, I view those as two of the most kinds of academic writing.

Nathan's approach to addressing his ESL students' writing needs was focused on the broader writing assignments. Sentence-level issues were addressed through supplemental handouts and exercises. Rather than integrate grammar instruction into various writing assignments, Nathan viewed grammar as a skill to be taught separately from academic writing. Lisa, on the other hand, discussed how grammar was infused in her assignments, though she also recognized that she couldn't focus on grammar as much in the corequisite course (compared to her stand-alone ESL class) because of the content demands. However, she found a way to focus on grammar that

was utilized within common genres of Critical Thinking essays. She explained, “[T]here are still things I’ll talk about, like modals in argumentative writing, and things they are still going to need from a CT perspective.” Nathan and Lisa’s differing perspectives on language reflect their understanding of what it means to know and learn a language. Without significant training or background in TESOL or LRI, Nathan isolated grammar instruction from teaching academic writing, whereas Lisa understood that grammar needed to be integrated or “infused” into her writing assignments because the students came to her class with a wide variety of language needs, and an understanding of particular kinds of sentence structure and language forms, she believed, was essential to college writing success.

As evidenced by the faculty interviews, training and experience in TESOL versus a content area (in this case, the faculty member trained in Philosophy) affected instructors’ knowledge of their students, including the nuanced ways in which students’ linguistic needs, like grammar and sentence-level instruction, were addressed. Knowledge about what “needed” to be taught in the class also varied among instructors, particularly as they felt pressure to ensure that students understood key course concepts in Critical Thinking and were prepared for English 101. However, this variation was less apparent in the ways in which faculty approached literacy demands of assignments in the corequisite course.

### **Corequisite instructors’ knowledge of language pedagogy**

Knowledge about their students’ learning was never fully removed from how these instructors understood their pedagogical decisions, choices, and practices. In the corequisite courses, language pedagogy was a reflection of how instructors conceived of academic language as a more expansive set of competencies: one that was inherently connected to writing, reading and critical thinking, and one that also best positioned students to be successful in future classes

at CCC. One of the strongest themes to emerge was how corequisite instructors saw scaffolding as an essential piece of their language pedagogy (Gallagher & Hahn, 2018). Scaffolding was part of a broader process of “slowing down” the course content given the additional hours of instruction, including spending more time on readings, adapting prior writing assignments, and careful review of vocabulary.

In particular, instructors invested effort in scaffolding reading assignments. Since there was no required textbook for CTEL 100, faculty had the flexibility to select their own reading material, and given that CTEL 100 was comprised exclusively of ELs and there were additional hours of instruction, faculty adjusted their reading choices accordingly, assigning less complex readings and an increased number of shorter readings. Longer readings, if used at all, were discussed at a much slower pace. Lisa explained some of the ways in which she adapted her reading material:

There’s a book called *Philosophers Take on the World*. It’s these really great one page type readings, they’re really short readings on all sorts of philosophical conundrums. I’ve done a couple of them in my regular CT class, but in this class, because I have more time and because it allows me to reinforce the vocabulary and the concepts by using them, I’m using more of them, like probably every other week, so that’s something that I’m sort of expanding upon from CT into this.

Nathan also described how he adjusted his reading to meet his students’ needs, and like Lisa, he mentioned vocabulary as a key concern for students when grappling with more difficult Critical Thinking reading material. He explained his approach in our first interview:

I was reading it [the first reading assignment], and I was thinking, there's going to be a lot that the students aren't familiar with; it used words like *propaganda* and *devising* – words

that are not used typically by people in everyday conversation. So, I addressed that in class, asked the students how they felt about the reading, and I described a little bit of my experience coming into college, when I first started getting assigned things, because I actually didn't know a lot of these big words, although my native language is English. Still I was trying to emphasize to them that this isn't just an ESL thing, this is a big word thing. You're coming to learn new concepts that most people don't talk about in everyday conversation.

Nathan perceived certain words as “academic” in nature in the sense that they were not utilized in everyday conversations, and he recognized that these types of words could pose challenges for new college students. Within CTET 100, there was more time to engage in discussions about vocabulary, and Nathan therefore slowed down the pace of the reading in order to focus more on vocabulary. He also emphasized the necessity of giving students tools to acquire new words, including explaining when and how to use a dictionary.

Faculty emphasized vocabulary review as an integral part of language pedagogy – both at the start of the semester when faculty were planning for the class, and at the end of the semester. In our first interview, Valerie noted that she anticipated a greater focus on vocabulary in the class:

I think I figured I will be doing more working directly with the text because of the vocabulary... and reading paragraphs aloud, talking about the vocabulary, discussing it as we go along, rather than assigning something and then just talking about it.

She recognized that the ways in which she assigned and then discussed work was quite different in the corequisite course as opposed to in the stand-alone CT100 course. Valerie therefore understood her role in the classroom not only as an instructor within a corequisite class, but as an

instructor of linguistically diverse students. This knowledge of language pedagogy in turn informed her practice, resulting in the breaking down of reading, addressing difficult vocabulary and discussing main points, all of which were crucial to helping ELs understand the material.

Nathan touched on this idea as well in our second interview, when he noted that he tried to make the reading material “gentler” for ESL students by using a supplemental worksheet to help break down the author’s argument. He explained:

They were given an essay to read. Their task was to pick one of three major claims that's made in that essay and to discuss the author's argument for those claims, to discuss whether those arguments are good or bad and then to give their own reasons for thinking that the conclusion of the arguments are true or false. It's similar to what I've done in my Critical Thinking writing intensive class before but to make this a little more gentle with the ESL students I gave them a sort of planning worksheet in class.

Through his use of supplemental worksheets that helped scaffold the class material, Nathan’s sense of language pedagogy was that in order for students to grapple with sophisticated content having to do with argument making strategies and the truth value of arguments, he felt that the course material was more comprehensible for his ESL students. Like the other faculty interviewed, Nathan didn’t want to “water down” the content of the class, so he utilized the additional three hours of instruction to break down the readings and work through passages more slowly and carefully, what faculty across interviews deemed as a necessity for the ELs in the corequisite course.

Like the reading assignments, faculty also scaffolded the longer writing assignments. Nathan’s understanding of language pedagogy led him to an approach which built on each essay

assignment as the semester progressed and provide students with the tools to complete the assignments more independently. He explained that, in the first essay, he created a series of questions for students to answer, and this essay was worth the least amount of their grade. In this essay, he asked students to use their own transition signals – one area which Nathan highlighted as integral to academic writing – so that it would seem like a more formal academic essay, rather than simply the answers to questions. He described how his next essay would expand on these skills:

And then the second essay, will also be an expository, explanatory kind of essay, where they choose their own topic, I don't ask them questions. So, it's their job to get an appropriately narrow topic, and do a similar kind of thing as the first essay, but just without my explicit guidance for the questions that they answer.

Nathan also found that the additional time with students gave him the opportunity to continue supporting their writing process, including answering questions when students were in the early stages of writing. He explained that using a planning worksheet in class gave them the opportunity to start thinking through the writing process early and to discuss nascent ideas:

I think if they have me there, and they're like, "I'm not sure what I think about this." And I can ask them guiding questions, things like that. I think it helps them to get motivated and inspired, and also feel like they're on the right track.

Valerie also noted that she broke down the writing material in detail for her students; although many of her readings mirror those used in her CT 100 class, she scaffolded the writing process more in the corequisite course in order to support students. She explained:

I've done things where I give them three articles that explain three different reasons why the crime rate plummeted in New York City in the 90's. They have to summarize the three theories. They have to talk about what facts make one or the other more or less plausible. What cherry picking is. What descriptive arguments and perspective arguments are. Do this, now do this, now do this, now do this, now say who do you think would be more ideologically inclined to favor one or the other.

As Valerie described, her knowledge of language pedagogy had her walking students through the various steps of the assignment, indicating when students should include certain pieces of information in their essays. Similarly, Lisa discussed the ways in which she adapted a writing assignment from her original CT class about students' "world view":

I had to comb everything from my ESL class and my Critical Thinking and see were there things from Critical Thinking I could trim, and were there things from ESL 100 I could change... Before we get into advanced stuff, like "who shaped your world view and why do you think that way?" "What barriers do you think there are to changing it?" And then we learn about all this Critical Thinking material, and then they re-write it at the end of the semester with how did I change. So that's been modified in terms of length and what I'm expecting from them.

Here Lisa discusses how she re-conceptualized an assignment that she typically required in her CT class by building in scaffolding and revision, which was also highlighted by instructors as an integral component of the course. Valerie emphasized the importance of revising, noting that, as she thought about planning for the class, she felt she would have students re-write "everything." She continued, "They will have to do the additions and the rearranging and all the different

things that I suggest.” This contrasted with her approach in CT 100, where revision was not emphasized to the same extent.

The ways in which faculty conceptualized feedback also varied. Nathan, for example, concentrated on broader issues related to coherence, explaining his anticipated process:

I want to write things on papers like, "unity." Or I might write something like, "No central focus." When the students get the papers back, we'll have a general discussion where I talk about what those things mean. What you should target in your paper. So if I mention something about unity it means that you're kind of sliding off topic.

Lisa, on the other hand, focused on both broader structural and content-based challenges as well as sentence-level feedback. She discussed the role of corrections in the co-requisite course as opposed to the stand-alone CT 100 class:

In CT 100, there would be no corrections, which generally horrifies me because of my ESL background. In this class, there are going to be – there have to be – corrections. We have to do things in multi draft.

Lisa mentioned “corrections,” which referred specifically to grammar errors, and Valerie also emphasized the importance of “correcting” and giving feedback in an ESL class. Valerie explained, “I just continued with the same kind of ESL correcting that I always do and required revisions after revisions,” and in our final interview, stated that she would emphasize writing and revisions even more when she taught the class again. Likewise, Lisa pointed out that “multi drafts” were an integral part of her language pedagogy.

As faculty thought about additional and adapted writing assignments, they also grappled with how best to assess students within the corequisite model. They recognized the need to provide feedback on both how the assignment was written (i.e., language) as well as what the assignment had to say (i.e., the disciplinary content). These decisions about assessment were embedded in broader pedagogical considerations, primarily that the students' grade was meant to reflect their ability to effectively discuss course content. Lisa discussed the challenges she anticipated with assessment when we spoke in our first interview:

It's definitely different in terms of writing – I'm looking at it like ESL writing. I'm almost looking at it in two different ways. I haven't decided what I'm going to do because I was considering giving them a content grade over a grammatical grade. I feel like the first draft I'll probably grade for grammar with maybe a couple of comments on content if it's off. And the second will be more holistic –that's what I think I'm doing.

Adam also talked about evaluating students on both areas, explaining his rubric for essays as doubling the grade for content while simultaneously factoring in language. He noted that he wanted to show that grammar counts, so it was part of the rubric. He explained, "I hold them responsible for the points I've covered, like comma splices, adjective clauses, typos." Lisa struggled with how best to address both areas as she graded:

That was my thing with a lot of these assignments when I'm grading them, is am I looking at this for content, and am I looking at this for ESL? With the first essay I literally gave them a content grade and a stylistic grade. "Okay, you've got the content, but you can't write like this." Then I had them do rewrites, and then both of those grades changed.

Lisa touched on a critical issue with the corequisite class, which was how to best help students who were still developing proficiency in English be successful within a content-based class. Much of this focus is often overlooked in the national and university-level discourse on corequisite courses, so faculty are left to make critical decisions on their own. Overall, the instructors' internal debates about how to assess students' writing reflect an understanding of language pedagogy that is aware of the tension between the ideas that students write about and the way in which these ideas are expressed in language forms.

### **Corequisite instructors' knowledge of the community college context**

The LRI framework reminds us to look at instructors' knowledge about the broader context in which teaching and learning is happening. What was abundantly clear in our interviews was that the wider CCC context and its singular focus on growing the corequisite model and reducing stand-alone developmental course work was ever-present in the minds of the instructors as they thought about their students' language use as well as their pedagogical practices. This is perhaps not surprising since discourses about these topics took up much of the monthly departmental meetings, and faculty were well aware that imminent changes were happening both within the department as well as on the college level. As corequisite courses began to scale up across the country, CUNY distributed guidance to faculty at the seven community college campuses regarding implementation of corequisite structures for CUNY colleges, which recognized that while corequisite courses could take different structural and curricular forms at individual campuses, there was a firm policy to move away from stand-alone developmental classes, which would directly affect student eligibility and what passing (or failing) a corequisite course meant for students. Moreover, faculty members were asked to participate in professional development workshops on the topic of teaching corequisite courses

and scaling up this model throughout the college. The focus on growing corequisites saturated the general college discourse, and no doubt shaped the way CTEL 100 instructors thought about their work. Though they embraced being the vanguard of this new reform effort which they widely supported, there was also an element of knowledge that the days of more traditional models of ESL classes at the college were coming to an end, or at least would be dramatically reconfigured, and that more importantly, they had to evolve with the changes or be left behind.

However, within these detailed documents and conversations about corequisites, ELs were never explicitly mentioned, which added some degree of confusion and ambiguity to the whole process. In one of the earliest memos from the Office of Academic Affairs dated 5/18/2018, *The Principles of Corequisite Remediation* stated in regard to developmental support “to provide ‘just in time’ support for the college-level course,” and emphasized that “the corequisite support should be focused only on building skills that are essential for success in the college-level course.” However, what “just in time” support meant for ELs was not delineated, leading many faculty members to believe that the language in this document was intended for students who were already proficient in English, since teaching ESL could not easily be classified as “just in time” support. Further, the focus on “essential skills” was primarily directed at instructors of math corequisite courses, noting that faculty in those content areas should only focus on the mathematical skills necessary for students to pass the course and the subsequent ones in the college. The document also noted ambiguously that “Corequisite instruction can be designed to serve not only students whose remedial need is light but also students who have significant work to do before they are ready for college,” raising the question about what this means for ELs in corequisite classes. As this widely circulated memo illustrates and that many

ESL faculty understood, corequisites themselves were not designed for ELs, yet the nation-wide push for this model has extended into ESL education.

Since faculty were well-aware that this course structure was the new “normal,” they therefore approached the course simultaneously with enthusiasm and trepidation. Valerie expressed that the new direction was an exciting one:

I do think that this is an exciting direction for it to be moving if this is what it is. If it's not getting rid of ESL, not necessarily, it's sort of giving students the opportunity to have richer content early. I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing.

Adam felt very passionate about the corequisite course as a new offering for students, particularly because of the college credit option. He opted to teach the co-requisite class over a stand-alone ESL class, explaining that he felt he had greater control over the final grade (since the ESL class grade was heavily determined by a standardized writing exam) and enjoyed the variety of CT material that could be integrated into the class. Likewise, Valerie appreciated the natural connection between ESL and CT, expressing her enthusiasm:

I think it's excellent because the critical thinking skills are very basic to academic literacy. I think it's going to improve their writing so much and the systematic nature of it. In a regular ESL class you may have a novel or you may have a textbook. People pick stuff from *The New York Times*. There isn't a course material that you're working your way through. It's a little bit random.

This comment also reflects a pushback on ESL courses at the college level that have been siloed from specific subject-matter content and expresses support for the integration of language

learning and content development. However, the ways in which to best address the linguistic needs of ELs within corequisite courses remained a constant discussion and point of concern among faculty, even though they recognized the benefits of receiving college credit and a greater likelihood of degree completion.

Adam, despite his enthusiasm for the class, stressed the difficulties, particularly for ELs, including class size: “It’s an extremely challenging class because there are two content areas. Mostly because there are 25 students so it’s doubly challenging in terms of the size and instructionally what they need.” In our final interview, he reflected on what he would have liked to do differently but acknowledged the limitations given the class size and time constraints. He explained:

In terms of ESL, I would’ve liked to do more grammar. If I do more, am I not adequately preparing them for 101? Because critical thinking skills are more important [for English101: freshmen composition]. Twenty hours/semester for grammar work in the lab would be ideal. I’d like to find a way to make them accountable and incorporate it into the grade.

Adam’s perspective of the skills that students need to be successful in college included not only critical thinking, but also an emphasis on grammar. He expressed uncertainty about students progressing without a strong foundation in grammar, though emphasized that much of this could not fit into the corequisite course because of time constraints. Instead, he hoped that the students would take advantage of college-wide resources, like tutoring, and acknowledged that they might only do so if it was a requirement for the course.

Lisa also recognized that the stand-alone ESL class would likely “go away” within the next three to five years, so it was important to look closely at what was happening regarding

curriculum and pedagogy within the corequisite class. When discussing assessment, she reflected on the students who passed the course, noting, “They’ve done the work, they’ve done the reading, they’ve earned the CT credits. Is the ESL quite there? No. But they have been writing all semester.” Her concerns centered on preparing students for the linguistic demands of a course like English 101, where the pace would be much quicker, tutoring would not be required, and attention would not be paid to students’ individual linguistic needs. Lisa also felt that the variety of assignments students would typically have in a stand-alone ESL class were not given in the corequisite because of the demands of the content, and she was concerned about the adverse effects of this in terms of preparation:

So my only concern is how are they going to do in English 101 compared to someone who just took ESL 100. Are they going to be as prepared because they’re not like analyzing literature in the way they would be doing in 100? They’re not reading short stories, they’re not focusing on narratives. All of that, which I think is valid, goes away.

Despite a general embracing of the corequisite course model, Lisa’s concerns echoed those of other faculty members teaching corequisite courses at the college who had concerns about students’ preparedness and whether the learning process was rushed (Avni & Finn, 2020). Among faculty teaching CTEL 100, knowledge of institutional policies and the zeitgeist of the push to corequisite teaching shaped their approaches to teaching, and raised questions about whether this new model emphasized certain measures of student success (i.e., college retention and graduation rates) at the expense of other types of learning.

## **Discussion**

Given the increase in ELs in K-12 education across the United States, the integration of ELs into disciplinary courses at the tertiary level is a trend that is likely to continue in the foreseeable future (Kanno, 2018; Raufman, Brathwaite, & Santikian Kalamkarian, 2019; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Likewise, community colleges will remain gateway institutions of higher education for millions of students, especially as tuition increases and full time requirements prevent students from choosing bachelor-granting institutions. Finally, despite the voices critical to the acceleration efforts taking place at community colleges across the country, there are no signs of corequisite abatement. LRI, therefore, will continue to have direct implications for the community college setting.

This study points to the benefit of applying the LRI framework to community college teaching as a way of revealing how teachers draw from their knowledge about their students, their own pedagogical approaches and the community college context in their efforts to navigate the new terrain of corequisite courses. Part of this navigation entailed instructors' own conceptualizations of language, what it means to teach it, and how this works within the broader sociocultural context of community colleges undergoing dramatic change. Specifically, findings demonstrate the differences that faculty held regarding the development of writing and academic language at the college level, which was attributed to their backgrounds in and training with ELs. Yet, regardless of academic training, faculty viewed scaffolding as an integral component of LRI. Findings also revealed that covering the CT100 content and addressing students' language needs was a constant balancing act, and the result was that the instructors with training in TESOL felt that students were not receiving as much targeted language instruction as they needed and had concerns about their students' future success in community college classes. As instructors came from different types of training (including TESOL and Philosophy), the

question is not only what teachers need to know about language to enact meaningful and effective instruction, but also what teachers need to know about the disciplinary content and curriculum in order to best figure out ways to integrate language into this material. In this way, these faculty members can be seen as cross-boundary academics (Ilieva, Wallace, & Spiliotopoulos, 2019), who can potentially serve an important translational function at the college in bringing their disciplinary knowledge of language pedagogy to faculty from other disciplines at the college. Additionally, despite their different disciplinary backgrounds, the instructors saw the corequisite CTEL100 class as perhaps the only and last opportunity for students to master language skills, which they were firmly convinced would be needed in their future studies and careers.

A wider angle of this study also points to the changes underfoot in ESL education at the community college level and the accompanying training that will be required for faculty teaching these corequisite courses (Siegal & Gilliland, 2021). While this study included only the small number of sections which were piloted at CCC, we do not see the small numbers as a negative characteristic of this study, but rather as a benefit in that it afforded an opportunity to empirically study a reform effort in real-time in its start-up phase, and in doing so, provide baseline data which will be needed to effectively evaluate how these programs evolve in future years. As community college instructors begin to navigate a new era of reform efforts that are focused on student success as measured by retention and graduation rates, there are many unknown variables and questions. Findings point to a new area of ESL higher education research, and in this article, we argue for an increased focus on LRI in this context since it provides a critical lens to understanding the sets of knowledge that instructors will need to draw from as corequisite

courses for ELs are scaled up at community colleges nationwide.

### **Conclusion**

As an increasing number of ESL classes are converted into corequisite models and students are encouraged to move through their studies at a faster pace, greater emphasis will need to be placed on training faculty to approaches that best address the highly diverse linguistic needs of their students. However, the notion of acceleration at community colleges takes on multiple meanings (Avni & Finn, 2020; Finn & Avni, 2021). On the surface, it refers to a faster and more efficient way for community college students to complete their coursework and graduate. But as this study shows, acceleration also raises questions about what it means to learn a language and the time that it takes for ELs to master academic English. In many ways, these two meanings of acceleration contradict each other. Moreover, acceleration through corequisite structures means that linguistically diverse students with a wide range of different language needs will be mixed together without the ability to address specific language challenges. This article shows how instructors teaching corequisite classes for ELs balance these tensions. Hence, this study contributes to the ongoing national dialogue on current reforms in college ESL, particularly at the community college level, where the majority of ELs are located and which are currently at the forefront of undertaking dramatic reform measures of which the field of TESOL should be a part (Anderst, Maloy, & Shahar, 2016; Siegel & Gilliland, 2021).

Building on prior research related to LRI in K-12 educational contexts (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008) as well as scholarship on the adjunct model in higher education (Snow & Brinton, 1988), LRI shines the spotlight on community college students and advances a

framework in the community college context that can address many of the challenges faculty within the corequisite model face and what skill set instructors need to be successful in meeting ELs' needs. While scaffolding, for example, plays a critical role in the ESL reading and writing classroom, focusing on other aspects of the needs of ELs in these classes can push faculty to consider their assumptions about what language is and about students and teaching when designing curriculum and reflecting on pedagogical strategies. Further, as faculty without training in TESOL might be called upon to teach corequisite courses (or faculty in upper level courses find that students might need sustained language support), training that is focused on LRI can provide a framework to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students and to recognize faculty at community colleges who have the expertise in working with this population of students and degrees in applied linguistics and second language acquisition. Perhaps it is not only a matter of disciplinary professors being trained in approaches that foster language and literacy development, but an active collaboration between ESL and other faculty, with the former performing a translational role within the college in bringing their TESOL knowledge to faculty across the disciplines (Ilieva, Wallace, & Spiliotopoulos, 2019).

As community colleges move towards a new model of training faculty for corequisite teaching, the benefits of multilingualism or the use of students' first languages in the classroom also merits discussion. Surprisingly, the instructors did not bring these topics up in all of the interviews. This absence is particularly glaring given that the CUNY university system is committed to being a "clearinghouse for global education" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (CUNY Master Plan, p. 48), and that approximately 70% of CUNY students speak a language other than English at home. Hence, as acceleration reforms move forward, it is necessary to think about if and how these structures allow for new ways of pushing beyond monolingual norms which have widely

dominated discussions in academic readiness and college success measures. Until these conversations emerge, the discourse about corequisite teaching and learning cannot take advantage of the abundance of research in TESOL showing multilingualism as a resource for teaching and learning. Nor can it effectively benefit from the knowledge base that faculty trained in TESOL or Applied Linguistics can bring to the goals of community colleges to advance their students' academic success. Without this pivot, corequisites, while on the cutting edge of curricular reform in community colleges, may miss a tremendous opportunity to bring linguistically responsive teaching and learning to the community college context.

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