Hi- my name is Paula Kristmanson and I am a professor in the Faculty of Education and a member of the Second Language Research Institute team at the University of New Brunswick. I wish to recognize and respectfully acknowledge that all UNB activities take place on unsurrendered and unceded traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik.

A big thank you to Meike and Jeff for organizing this panel and for inviting me to be a part of a conversation about a very important topic. I look forward to interacting with my colleagues on the panel and colleagues from the ACLA membership who are attending.

I have been asked to describe what our teacher education program does or doesn’t do to prepare pre-service teachers to work with multilingual learners. I will start by saying that this has become a hugely important topic to me in the last 5 years. Although I always ensured that students in the TESL courses had a good grounding in ways to make their classrooms welcoming and accessible to learners coming from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, I began to think much more deeply about this important subject more recently.

First of all, I realized that it was not only my TESL specialists who needed background in developing intercultural competencies. As our schools became more and more multicultural and multilingual, it was obvious that all teacher education candidates required this type of preparation. In our Bachelor of Education program, we have a required course called cultural contexts, that addresses important issues pertinent to today’s educators. Included in this course are readings and discussions related to topics such as anti-racist pedagogies and diversity education.

Additionally, and more recently, we have been redesigning our Inclusive Education course to expand the range of topics to include a broader view of inclusion. Among the new modules in this course, which features guest speakers from outside our faculty, is a one
called “Strategies for the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the K-12 environment”. Last year I worked alongside two colleagues, Chantal Lafargue and Kathy Whynot, to prepare and deliver this inaugural session and this year Kathy will be doing this remotely with all students in the current cohort.

In my own courses, I have become much more intentional about not only including but highlighting this topic. For example, I begin the introductory course, using a video called “Competencies for Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms” that I created along with my team at L2RIC and a designer/animator from UNB. This video represented a culmination of learning, reading and discussion in which we had engaged over the last few years. This video with the accompanying conversation guide is a springboard for rich discussions with and among my pre-service teachers. This year, in my online class, we each shared our own culture through a cultural/linguistic info-graphic that served as a wonderful glimpse into the diversity present in this class as well as an opener for subsequent conversations about the need to create inclusive and supportive spaces for diverse learners in our practicum and future classrooms.

This talk about the video allows me to turn to the second prompt provided to us related to theorizing this concept. We wanted to ground our thinking and storyboarding for this video in theory. Certainly, there are several ways to theorize this work. In the video, and the accompanying article we wrote for CASLT Reflexions magazine, we chose to examine this issue through Byram’s three strands of intercultural competence- openness, knowledge and adaptability. We found these three central ideas to be a comprehensible and coherent way to introduce the concept to pre-service teachers and to anyone wishing to explore these ideas. As per the first strand, openness, we want to begin this journey with self-reflection and an opening for exploration and dialogue. In order to co-construct our knowledge related to working with learners from diverse backgrounds, it is crucial to embed our pedagogical practices in theoretical principles.
Of late, I have been doing a lot of reading related to culturally responsive pedagogy and embedding these ideas into my work with pre-service teachers. Our required Indigenous Education course uses some of these theories in order to allow pre-service teachers to understand the shifts and stances necessary to ensure indigenous students are included in a meaningful way in our classrooms. Attention paid to culturally response pedagogy in our foundations courses allows us to bring this topic into sharper focus in our methods courses.

Another huge step forward in our faculty has been the addition of a graduate certificate in Bilingual and Multilingual Education, which includes two foundational courses that, we believe, address these issues in a deep and deliberate way. Although this is not part of the initial teacher preparation, it is a response to the growing need that educators have identified for their continued professional growth.

I will conclude by addressing the last prompt- what changes are needed to better prepare pre-service teachers for multicultural classrooms? Indeed, we can do more. As the saying goes, the more we know, the more we realize we do not know. I believe we have made great strides in the last few years, but I think we can all be more intentional about including this multi-faceted topic in all of our courses. Being more intentional also means being more collaborative, so as to ensure our pre-service teachers are participating in learning experiences that feel more connected. Additionally, representation of diversity in our faculty and in our student demographic is an issue we need to be mindful of as we prepare teachers for teaching in multicultural environments.

In closing, I just want to share with you one of the key quotations from the video I spoke about- it is a statement that resonates with me every time I hear it, is: "Intercultural Competence is the ability to recognize and value difference and build upon the strength that diversity affords." This seemingly simple statement reminds me
regularly of the opportunities and challenges that are presented to us when we reflect upon and engage in discussion on this topic. THANKS!