

How Foreign Language Teachers in Georgia Evaluate their Professional Preparation: A Call for Action

Thomas C. Cooper
University of Georgia

In collaboration with:

Joan Kelly Hall, Anne Hawkins, Richard A. LaFleur, Brigitte Rossbacher, Carmen Chaves Tesser, Joel C. Walz, Melissa Young

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to report on a collaborative project among members of colleges of education, colleges of arts and sciences, and high school foreign language departments. The project involved conducting an online survey of 341 current foreign language teachers in Georgia in order to determine how these K–12 teachers perceived and evaluated the effectiveness of their professional preparation. Close to 60% of the teachers in the sample were graduates of colleges and universities in Georgia. Most of the others had received their training from various other colleges and universities in the United States, and 51 individuals reported that they had graduated from foreign institutions. The survey consisted of 42 questions asking teachers to evaluate their preparation in language skills, knowledge of foreign language standards, planning for instruction, methodology, using technology in instruction, meeting the needs of socially and economically diverse students, classroom management skills, and professional growth. The survey results strongly suggest that foreign language teacher development programs should include (1) more

Thomas C. Cooper (PhD, Florida State University) is Associate Professor of Foreign Language Education at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Joan Kelly Hall (PhD, State University of New York, Albany) is Professor of Linguistics and Applied Language and Education at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

Anne Hawkins (MEd, University of Georgia) is a teacher of French and Latin at Grayson High School, Loganville, Georgia.

Richard A. LaFleur (PhD, Duke University) is Franklin Professor of Classics at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Brigitte Rossbacher (PhD, University of California, Davis) is Associate Professor of German at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Carmen Chaves Tesser (PhD, Mississippi State University) is Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Joel C. Walz (PhD, Indiana University) is Professor of French at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Melissa Young (PhD, University of Georgia) is a teacher of Spanish at Brookwood High School, Snellville, Georgia.

time spent in carefully supervised and monitored prestudent-teaching field experiences; (2) more careful mentoring of student teachers during the student-teaching internship; (3) more time spent in language learning experiences in countries where the target language is spoken; (4) more emphasis on developing foreign language proficiency in the requisite university classes; and (5) more effort spent on teaching effective classroom management.

Introduction

One distinct point of consensus has clearly emerged from foreign language professionals' discussions of teacher development over the last few years: Teacher preparation programs must be the result of collaborative approaches designed to maximize the effects of any and all strategies for improvement (ACTFL, 2002; Raymond, 2002; Schulz, 2000). As Schulz stated, alluding to a long-standing argument on this matter:

Part of the problem is that teacher development programs are isolated in schools or colleges of education and that the long-standing schism between education and FL departments has resulted in mutual name-calling; the responsibility for teacher training must be shared equally by the schools (administrators and practicing teachers), the disciplinary departments (specialists in literature, cultural studies, language, linguistics, and applied linguistics), and colleges of education. (p. 518)

The belief that teacher preparation can be improved through collaborative efforts is also one of the guiding principles of the Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Program (GSTEP), a grant initiative funded by the U. S. Department of Education and the Georgia Department of Education involving three institutions of higher learning in Georgia: Albany State University, the University of Georgia, and Valdosta State University. The purpose of the grant is to enhance and improve all phases of teacher preparation by summoning the collaboration of all entities and departments involved. To work on this initiative in the area of foreign languages, a committee was formed at the University of Georgia that consisted of representatives from the Departments of Language Education, Classics, Romance Languages, and Germanic and Slavic Languages, as well as from the foreign language departments of Grayson High School and Brookwood High School in metro Atlanta.¹

The purpose of this article is to report on a collaborative project of the FL GSTEP committee that conducted an online survey of current foreign language teachers in Georgia in order to determine how these K-12 teachers perceived and evaluated the effectiveness of their professional preparation.

Previous Literature

There is a precedent for evaluating teacher education programs with questionnaires that obtain data on various aspects of the programs and elicit suggestions for program improvement. Although most of the published evaluative reports concentrate on teaching fields other than foreign languages (Bensley & Pope, 1992; Israelite & Hammermeister, 1986; Joyner, 1991; Panyan, Hillman, & Liggett, 1997; Parker & Spink, 1997), a study by Lange and Sims (1990) dealt with foreign language teacher preparation. These researchers sent a questionnaire to 800 Minnesota foreign language teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the quality and usefulness of their preprofessional preparation in the areas of general or liberal arts background, the foreign language major, general preservice professional preparation, preparation to teach a second language, and student teaching. Although the questionnaire return rate was 60%, only 95 questionnaires met predetermined criteria for the quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis chosen.

The results of analysis of these 95 questionnaires, especially the teachers' comments in the open-ended response sections, are pertinent to foreign language teaching today. Regarding the foreign language major, for instance, teachers stated that (1) "extended target culture living experiences should be mandatory," (2) there should be an "increased emphasis on listening and speaking skills," and (3) in the foreign language courses "literary analysis tends to be over-emphasized" (Lange & Sims, p. 299). In their comments about general preservice professional preparation, respondents emphasized that more attention should be paid to "matters of discipline, classroom management, and 'practical psychology'" (p. 300). They also indicated that courses in the history and philosophy of education were "not terribly useful," that theory courses were "not very relevant," and that introduction to education courses "left much to be desired" (p. 300). Respondents thought that student teaching was a positive and useful experience but strongly recommended that it be longer than the typical 11-week quarter and become more like an internship (p. 310).

The present study can be viewed as a follow-up and expansion of the Lange and Sims study over a decade later, since we surveyed a larger sample of teachers, whose average length of work experience was greater than the two to four years of Lange and Sims' subjects. From their unique vantage point, teachers in the field can give us the type of feedback from hands-on experience that ought to be taken seriously as we work on refining and revising our teacher education programs.

Method

Survey

The survey consisted of 42 questions asking teachers to

evaluate their preparation in language skills, knowledge of foreign language standards, planning for instruction, methodology, using technology in instruction, meeting the needs of socially and economically diverse students, classroom management skills, and professional growth (see Appendix). The survey had three parts. The first section (questions 1–11) elicited mainly demographic data. In the second section (questions 11–23), the participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the university classes required for certification. In the third section (questions 27–37), the participants rated on a 5-point scale how well their university coursework had helped them develop, in general, the skills and competencies necessary for teaching. These skills are aligned with many of the program standards for foreign language teacher preparation recently developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Finally, to enable the participants to voice more fully their opinions about their professional preparation, a series of open-ended questions was inserted after each one of the two sets of response questions.

Procedures

The survey was conducted between March 6 and April 19, 2002. From a total of 1,611 foreign language teachers in Georgia,² advance letters inviting participation in the study were sent to 1,005 teachers. The remaining 606 teachers received an e-mail invitation to participate. A second wave follow-up of all nonrespondents was conducted two weeks after the initial attempt. From these two sources, 60 advance letters were undeliverable and 108 e-mail addresses were inaccurate. Thus, the actual size was reduced to 1,443, of which 437 teachers responded to the initial invitation. Of those responding initially, 208 (48%) were from the e-mail invitation group, while 229 (52%) came from the advance letter invitation group. The overall response rate for the study was 30.2% (437/1,443); such a rate compares favorably to mail survey response rates using this level of follow-up (Dillman, 2001). Of those individuals responding to the survey, 23 visited the Web site and did not answer any questions. Of the remaining 414 who did begin the survey, 341 (82%) indicated that they were current K–12 public school teachers. These 341 teachers constitute the sample upon which this study was based. However, in the reporting of the survey results below, the number of responses for one item may not be the same as those for another item. This is because the respondents always had the choice not to answer a question. Thus, the total number of respondents who answer specific questions varies from item to item.

Survey Respondents

About 60% of the respondents in the sample were gradu-

ates of colleges and universities in Georgia. Most of the other teachers had graduated from various other schools in the United States, but 51 reported that they had graduated from foreign institutions. Fifty-one (15%) of the respondents were male, and 290 (85%) were female. Their teaching experience can be summarized as follows: Fifty-three (16%) had taught up to 3 years; 117 (36%) had taught for 4 to 10 years; 86 (26%) for 11 to 20 years; 60 (18%) for 21 to 30 years; and 13 (4%) had taught for 30 or more years. With regard to the language taught: 92 (29%) respondents were French teachers, 30 (9%) taught German, 29 (9%) taught Latin, and 171 (53%) were Spanish teachers. Sixty-nine respondents (21%) reported that they were native speakers of the foreign languages they taught, while 259 (79%) said that they were nonnative speakers. Thirty-five teachers (11%) taught in private schools; 296 (89%) taught in public schools. One hundred and thirty (40%) said they possessed bachelor's degrees; 164 (50), master's degrees; 18 (5%), specialist degrees; and 17 (5%), doctorates. Two hundred and ninety-one teachers (89%) reported that they were certified; 35 (11%) were not. Among those who had not been certified, 19 respondents (53%) reported that they were working toward certification, and 17 (47%) were not.

Data Analysis

In the quantitative analysis phase, the dependent variable was the teachers' perception of their professional preparation: that is, with what degree of satisfaction, as measured on a 5-point scale, did these teachers assess the effectiveness of their training to become foreign language teachers, both in terms of the courses they completed during their university study (see Appendix, questions 12–23) and in terms of the teaching competencies they acquired during their university coursework as a whole (see Appendix, questions 27–37).

The independent variables consisted of (1) gender, (2) years of teaching experience, (3) language taught, (4) native speaker status of the teachers, (5) type of school (i.e., private or public), and (6) highest degree earned. In order to look at the influence of these background factors in an integrated way likely to show the effects of the six independent variables as well as any interactions, the study employed a 6-way ANOVA design and a probability level of .05 was selected.

In the qualitative analysis phase, the responses to the open-ended questions/items were analyzed to identify underlying themes and patterns. The GSTEP committee members took part in this phase of the data analysis. To assure interrater reliability, the committee met regularly to discuss the results obtained and resolve any differences in their interpretation. To assure objectivity further, another evaluator, a foreign language teacher with 25 years of classroom experience, analyzed the aggregate of the responses to the items as a whole. Separate coding and interpretations

of responses to items 24, 25, and 26; and 38, 39, 40, and 41 (see Appendix) were compared to establish an interrater reliability of 100% by discussing and resolving any discrepancies in interpreting the teachers' responses to these items.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

Table 1 shows how the respondents as a group evaluated their professional preparation. Most of the scores for questions 12 to 23 and questions 27 to 37 fell in the range of

3.00 to 3.90 on the 5-point scale;³ the average satisfaction score for all teachers was 3.58. Scores of 4.00 and above indicated a high level of satisfaction relatively speaking, while scores of 3.00 or below indicated that the teachers were less satisfied with their respective learning experiences. For example, student teaching (question 17) was rated with a mean score of 4.23; courses in foreign language conversation and composition (question 18), 4.11; courses in foreign language phonetics (question 20), 4.06; courses in pre-twentieth century literature (question 21), 4.09; and foreign language cultural studies (question 23) a score of 4.00. In contrast, two items—classroom management tech-

Table 1

SUMMARY OF TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Survey question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Evaluation of courses			
12.	Educational foundations	3.21	1.11
13.	Educational psychology	3.47	1.10
14.	Methods (pre-kindergarten–8th grade)	3.69	1.17
15.	Methods (high school)	3.69	1.15
16.	Cross-cultural communication	3.57	1.28
17.	Student teaching	4.23	0.98
18.	FL conversation and composition	4.11	1.07
19.	FL linguistics	3.91	1.19
20.	FL phonetics	4.06	1.07
21.	FL literature (pre-20th century)	4.09	1.04
22.	FL literature (20th century and beyond)	3.91	1.10
23.	FL cultural studies	4.00	1.10
Evaluation of FL teaching competencies			
27.	Proficiency in the target language	3.80	0.89
28.	Using the FL Standards	3.44	0.96
29.	Classroom management techniques	2.94	1.05
30.	Planning for instruction	3.44	0.96
31.	Meeting the needs of diverse students	3.13	0.97
32.	Knowledge of target culture(s)	3.69	0.96
33.	Aligning instruction and assessment	3.25	0.92
34.	Evaluating speaking skills	3.23	0.95
35.	Evaluating other language skills	3.35	0.85
36.	Understanding learning styles	3.37	0.90
37.	Using technology in FL teaching	2.88	0.95
Average of all items		3.58	0.60

niques (question 29) and using technology in foreign language teaching (question 37)—received scores below 3.00 (2.94 and 2.88, respectively), indicating that teachers felt that they were not as well prepared in these areas as they could have been.

Table 2 presents the means of the scores for questions 12 to 23 and 27 to 37 by comparison groups and gives global satisfaction scores for the effects of the independent variables. Global satisfaction scores consist of the average of the separate satisfaction scores for questions 12 to 23 and questions 27 to 37. As such, they combine the rating for the specific courses taken by each respondent in a teacher education program with the rating for how well the respondent thought he or she had acquired the competencies necessary for effective foreign language teaching.

Unless otherwise indicated, the differences between the means shown in Table 2 are not statistically significant. Regarding the variable of gender, for example, female teachers rated their professional preparation higher than male teachers (3.59 vs. 3.54). For the group of teachers

with up to three years of classroom experience, the average global satisfaction score was 3.48, while for the group with more than four years experience, the global satisfaction score was 3.60 (i.e., teachers with more experience were more positive about their preparation). The satisfaction scores for the variable of the foreign language taught are rank ordered as follows, from the highest to the lowest: German, 3.71; French, 3.61; Spanish, 3.57; and Latin, 3.57. There was a significant interaction, $p < .04$ ($df = 3/239$, $F = 2.88$), between the variables of years of teaching experience and the language taught. Applying the Scheffé approach to comparing the factor of teaching experience across the four foreign language groups resulted in no statistically significant results. Thus, while the statistically significant interaction involving years of experience and the foreign language taught suggests that the effect of teaching experience is not the same across all language groups, there is not enough evidence to allow us to pinpoint where such differences might clearly exist.

Regarding the variable of native speaker status, native

Table 2

GLOBAL SATISFACTION SCORES BY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable	Global satisfaction scores			
Gender (question 2)	Female (n = 290)		Male (n = 51)	
	3.59		3.54	
Years of teaching (question 3)*	3 years or less (n = 53)		4 years or more (n = 276)	
	3.48		3.60	
Language taught (question 4)	French (n = 92)	German (n = 30)	Latin (n = 29)	Spanish (n = 171)
	3.61	3.71	3.57	3.57
Native speaker status (question 6)	NS of L2 (n = 69)		NNS of L2 (n = 259)	
	3.64		3.57	
Type of school (question 7)**	Public (n = 296)		Private (n = 35)	
	3.60		3.41	
Highest degree (question 8)	Bachelor's (n = 130)	Master's (n = 164)	Specialist (n = 18)	Doctorate (n = 17)
	3.52	3.61	3.54	3.75

* $p < .04$, interaction between years of teaching experience and language taught

** $p < .02$, public schools versus private schools

speakers of the language were more satisfied than nonnative speakers (3.64 vs. 3.57). Teachers working in public schools were more satisfied with their professional training than those working in private schools (3.60 vs. 3.41), and this difference was significant at the $p < .02$ level ($df = 1/239$, $F = 5.79$). The averages for the degree variable are, from the highest to the lowest: doctorate, 3.75; master's degree, 3.61; specialist degree, 3.54; and bachelor's degree, 3.52.

Summary of the Quantitative Data

A rank ordering of the means of the global satisfaction scores for the highest group for each independent variable is shown below:

- | | |
|--|------|
| (1) Highest earned degree: | |
| Teachers holding doctorate | 3.75 |
| (2) Language taught: German teachers | 3.71 |
| (3) Native speaker status: Native speakers | 3.64 |
| (4) Type of school: Public school teachers | 3.60 |
| (5) Years of teaching: | |
| Teachers with 4+ yrs. experience | 3.60 |
| (6) Gender: Female teachers | 3.59 |

Why were some groups more satisfied with their professional preparation than others? Any conclusions based on these results remains, of course, largely speculative, both because the data are self-reported and because due to the confidentiality of the survey, it was not possible to interview the respondents to determine why they answered as they did.

The teachers most satisfied with their professional development and training were those holding a doctorate (3.75). This result is perhaps not surprising since these individuals were most likely very motivated to have completed a course of study involving a considerable investment of time, energy, and financial resources.

The German teachers in the sample were second in terms of satisfaction with their training (3.71), while the scores of teachers of the other foreign languages were fairly close together: French teachers, 3.61; Latin teachers, 3.57; and Spanish teachers, 3.57. The significant interaction between the language taught and years of teaching experience ($p < .04$, $df = 3/239$, $F = 2.88$) points to a lack of consistent results across levels, which may be related to the varying satisfaction scores among the language groups.

The teachers who were native speakers of the foreign language had higher satisfaction scores than the nonnative speakers (3.64 vs. 3.57). These individuals may have constituted a special group. Teachers who were native speakers of the target language and who completed their professional training in the United States may have been more enthusiastic and engaged students than their American counterparts and more motivated than others to succeed in education, because they had to overcome the difficulties of completing university training in a foreign country, the United States. Thus, when they reflected on their professional

training in this country, they may have been more satisfied with the courses they took and with the pedagogical skills they acquired during their training.

It is interesting that teachers in public schools were more satisfied with their training than those in private schools (3.60 vs. 3.41), and the difference between these two groups was significant ($p < .02$ level, $df = 1/239$, $F = 5.79$). One possible reason for this difference is that many of the private school teachers were not certified because certification is not necessarily a requirement for working in a private school. Or it is possible that the normal course of study for an individual wishing to become a teacher is more geared toward the public school venue than toward private schools and requires a greater professional commitment.

Concerning the variable of years of experience, it is important to note that beginning teachers were definitely less satisfied than their more experienced colleagues (3.48 vs. 3.60). It is common knowledge that beginning teachers are faced with many challenges and may feel overwhelmed and not adequately prepared for the task. Hence, when they assess their preparation, they may be more critical than teachers who have already overcome most of the difficulties and vagaries that their newer colleagues are still facing. More experienced teachers may, therefore, have a more positive attitude, if not a nostalgic one, toward their training when they reflect on it.

In this sample, female teachers were slightly more satisfied with their professional training than their male counterparts (3.59 vs. 3.54), and the number of female teachers was also much higher than the number of male teachers (290:51). Perhaps there is a relationship between these two findings. Teaching as a profession has traditionally been the domain of women and, to this day, there are more female teacher trainees than male teacher trainees. It would not be too surprising to find out that—in spite of the great strides in gender/minority/womens' studies and the concomitant sensitization to issues of the opposite sex—the few and isolated male teacher candidates, finding themselves in the minority, do not experience the same sense of belonging and affirmation as their female counterparts who constitute the vast majority.

Satisfaction Scores and Teacher Knowledge

What do these satisfaction scores mean? Above all, we have to keep in mind that they are subjective, for they issue from self-reported data and were not obtained by a researcher observing and assessing teacher performance in the classroom. Nevertheless, self-reported data are valuable in their own right, because in the evaluation of the multifaceted process of professional preparation and training, the teacher as principal subject and principal agent needs to be given a voice and a vote.

Summary of the Open-Ended Responses

This section summarizes the responses to items 24 ("Please

comment on any other classes you've taken that have not been mentioned"), 25 ("Please comment on what aspects of your training helped you the most in your teaching"), and 26 ("Please comment on what you would like to see added to the requirements for teacher preparation"). These three items deal with how well required university classes provided the teachers with the knowledge, skills, or training that they use most often in their instruction. Items 38 ("Please list and grade any other classes not mentioned above"), 39 ("Please comment on what aspects of your teacher preparation were most beneficial to your present teaching assignments"), 40 ("Please comment on what aspects were least helpful"), and 41 ("In your opinion, what should be added to the teacher training experience?") are the second set of open-ended questions. They address how well practicing teachers think they acquired the competencies and skills requisite for being effective and successful in the classroom. When the responses to the two sets of open-ended questions, items 24 to 26 and 38 to 41, are considered together, certain patterns emerge.

Among the classes and experiences that teachers considered not to be useful for their preparation were:

- (1) *General education courses, including educational psychology, foundations of education, and history of education.* These were often discussed in a negative light, because they dealt with "too much theory and not enough practice" and, thus, said little to teachers about how to succeed in the classroom;
- (2) *Courses in methodology, as well as courses in literature, phonetics, and linguistics.* These were also singled out as not being helpful, because according to many teachers, these courses too often stressed knowledge they judged too theoretical to be applicable to public school students;⁴
- (3) *General preparation in the use of the target language.* Several respondents noted that college and university literature courses did not further the acquisition of foreign language skills necessary for communicative language teaching.

Among the classes and experiences that teachers assessed as useful for their preparation were the following:

- (1) *Student teaching.* This was mentioned most often as the most helpful component of teacher training with only one respondent speaking of "being discouraged by student teaching;"
- (2) *Study abroad programs and experiences abroad such as trips to the target language countries.* These opportunities were singled out unequivocally as being beneficial for foreign language teacher development.
- (3) *Foreign language classes, mainly those emphasizing grammar, culture, and the development of foreign language conversational skills; storytelling; and attendance at professional conferences and workshops.*

Respondents also made recommendations concerning classes, requirements, and experiences that should be added to teacher development programs, such as:

- (1) *Future teachers need a longer training experience.* These comments referred to practical teaching experience and not coursework. Generally, respondents felt a need for more time spent in front of K–12 students, beginning early in their academic careers and perhaps ending with a full year in an authentic K–12 classroom setting. Future teachers need more hands-on activities and contact with experienced teachers through extended observations, group planning periods, and mentoring. Teachers also commented on preparation for the real work world that is replete with nonacademic issues, such as dealing with paperwork, lesson plan writing, school meetings, and extracurricular events.
- (2) *Future teachers need more training in classroom management and discipline, including how to run a classroom and keep records efficiently.* Several teachers mentioned needing help on how to meet and work constructively with parents.
- (3) *Student teachers need more study abroad.* Many teachers, in fact, stated that the study abroad experience, ideally with included coursework, should be a requirement in all teacher development programs. In addition, teachers recommended that college programs include more language courses designed to develop and enhance target language skills.

Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

Many of the themes and concerns expressed by the survey respondents have been underscored by other foreign language educators. Schulz (2000), for instance, pointed out that there is professional consensus on the need for extended study abroad. She wrote:

The ability to use the target language fluently, competently, confidently, and with a high degree of accuracy is an essential qualification for FL teachers . . . We must require (and financially support), as part of pre-professional FL development, an extended term of study abroad, aimed at developing an adequate level of language and cultural competence. (p. 518)

The need for greater foreign language proficiency and study abroad experience is also strongly echoed in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999) and in the *ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (2002).

Raymond (2002) emphasized the need to provide extended practice teaching that is highly connected to the required university coursework in literature, linguistics, and methods; both Schulz and Raymond called for greater communication between the mentor teacher and university faculty concerning the best practices for foreign

language teaching. Mentor teachers and university faculty need to work collaboratively to provide field experience settings in which preservice teachers can utilize and apply what they have learned in their courses. Education theory and methodology should not be removed from the practice of teaching of real students in real classrooms.

In addition to stressing that the preparation of teachers is the joint responsibility of departments of foreign languages and education, the *ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards* (2002) state that foreign language teacher development programs need to promote the development of foreign language proficiency as a primary goal, to include field experiences prior to student teaching that incorporate experiences in foreign language classrooms, and to offer candidates opportunities to participate in study abroad programs and/or intensive immersion experiences in a target language community. The teachers in this survey also maintained that these characteristics and components should be included in optimal foreign language teacher education programs.

The goal of this survey was to gain from teachers in the field recommendations for improving the professional development of future foreign language teachers. A call for action, grounded in an empirical approach to creating better teacher education programs is strongly suggested by the survey data. Foreign language programs should include:

- (1) More time spent in carefully supervised and monitored prestudent-teaching field experiences;
- (2) Longer student teaching internships;
- (3) More time spent in language learning experiences in countries where the target language is spoken;
- (4) More emphasis on developing foreign language proficiency in the requisite university classes; and
- (5) More effort spent on teaching effective classroom management.

The GSTEP committee that conducted this survey plans to enact the suggestions listed above at the University of Georgia, where about 20% of the respondents received their professional preparation. For example, the prestudent-teaching field experiences will be expanded to include partnerships with area elementary, middle, and high schools so that senior-year students enrolled in foreign language elementary school and secondary school methods courses in the fall semester can gain teaching experience before the student teaching internship in the spring semester. The student teaching internship will be increased to 15 weeks (i.e., a full semester). Although there exist several options for study abroad experiences, many students are not prepared to incur the considerable financial expense. Although there has not been a concerted effort to locate and procure funds to establish study abroad scholarships for prospective foreign language teachers, the effort will be

made now. With the publication of the *ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards*, there are clear guidelines for aligning foreign language courses with the proficiency goals. Finally, methods courses will better help foreign language teacher candidates develop classroom management skills so that they can better establish an optimal classroom environment. One way to accomplish this goal is to have the candidates observe model classes in which the teacher has been able to establish and maintain the desired order. These initiatives will be a continuation of the collaborative work already accomplished by the GSTEP committee.⁵

A larger question arises: Are good teachers born or made? If one believes that the ability to teach is a gift like musical or artistic talent, then one will maintain that those individuals born with an intuitive understanding of the teaching process are destined to become good teachers; any kind of training will have no or little effect on their development as teachers. On the other hand, if one takes a more scientific approach, it may be argued that individuals can learn in a systematic, logical fashion to become effective teachers by taking courses in pedagogy and subject areas and by completing supervised internships. The answer to the question probably lies somewhere in the middle (although perhaps closer to the “teaching is a science” side): that is, most individuals can learn through conscious effort to become more effective teachers, even those who are naturally gifted and do not seem to need any help.

This view is also what Schulz (2000) found in her survey of articles in *The Modern Language Journal* on foreign language teacher development from 1916 to 1999. She wrote: “During the early 20th century, the belief was still prevalent that teaching was an art and that teachers were born rather than made” (p. 495). Summarizing the major changes that occurred in foreign language teacher preparation and development in the last century, she stated:

Teaching is no longer seen exclusively as an art, as it was during the early parts of the century. Although the “creative element” will always play an important role in good teaching, we currently believe that there are principles, processes, skills, behaviors, techniques, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes that impact on teaching and learning and that can be empirically studied and “taught.” (p. 516)

In the introduction to the *ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards* (2002), Schreier also underscored the belief that the teaching process is perhaps more of a science than art by writing:

A critical role of teacher education programs is to make the complexity of teaching visible. This occurs through well-crafted teacher preparation programs that prepare candidates in subject matter and pedagogical content so that they are ready to assume the

ultimate challenge of practice teaching and the first stages as beginning teachers. (p. 14)

Hearing how teachers in the field evaluated their professional preparation and their suggestions for improving the foreign language teacher training process indeed supports the conviction that such improvement is possible and can be achieved.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Dr. Joe Wisenbaker, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Georgia, for his patience and expert assistance in the quantitative analysis of the survey data.

Notes

1. The members of the FL GSTEP committee were: Dr. Thomas Cooper and Dr. Joan Kelly Hall (the Department of Language Education, the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia), Ms. Anne Hawkins (the Foreign Language Department, Grayson High School, Loganville, GA), Dr. Richard LaFleur (the Department of Classics, the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia), Dr. Brigitte Rossbacher (the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia), Dr. Carmen Tesser and Dr. Joel Walz (the Department of Romance Languages, the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia), and Dr. Melissa Young (the Foreign Language Department, Brookwood High School, Snellville, GA).
2. The names of the 1,611 teachers were compiled from membership lists of professional associations such as the AATs, the Classical League, and the Foreign Language Association of Georgia. Other names of foreign language teachers were obtained from county foreign language and language arts supervisors in Georgia.
3. In the tables reporting the results, the 1–5 scale has been reversed so that 5 represents the highest rating and 1 the lowest.
4. Teachers may think, first of all, of direct, overt application of things learned in college classes, such as effective management techniques. They may not credit literature classes, for example, with providing them with content and/or cultural understanding that should be part of their teaching, or they may not credit linguistics classes for helping them diagnose pronunciation difficulties and teach students new vocabulary through morphological recognition.
5. For example, the committee has also created a Web site (not yet complete, however) that serves as a resource for foreign language educators and students. This site contains teaching resources, such as links to online worksheets, dictionaries and classroom materials, and can be found at <http://www.gstepfl.uga.edu>. The creation of a schools liaison position designed to connect the College of Arts and Sciences to the Department of Language Education in the College of Education was another accomplishment of the committee. This new position was written into departmental by-laws and will consequently remain in effect past the life of the GSTEP

grant. Projects for the immediate future include aligning foreign language education curriculum in the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences with the new *ACTFL/NCATE Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* and creating models for paired courses between the Departments of Language Education, Classics, Germanic and Slavic Languages, Romance Languages, and the Foreign Language Departments of Grayson and Brookwood High Schools. As a first step in determining which model(s) would be most feasible to develop and implement, the foreign language curriculum committee will compare course syllabi from Language Education with course syllabi from the arts and sciences departments by using the standards for foreign language learning and the ACTFL/NCATE Standards as frames of reference. Such a comparison can lead to the development of various models of paired courses such as corequisite courses, complementary courses, and frameworks or mechanisms to enhance field experiences that can be incorporated into existing courses.

References

- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2002). *ACTFL/NCATE program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers*. (2002). Yonkers, NY: ACTFL.
- Bensley, L. B., & Pope, A. (1992). A self-study instrument for program review of graduate programs in health education. *Journal of Health Education, 23*(6), 344–46.
- Dillman, D. (2001). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. New York: Wiley.
- Israelite, N. K., & Hammermeister, F. K. (1986). A survey of teacher education preparation programs in education of the hearing impaired. *American Annals of the Deaf, 131*(3), 232–37.
- Joyner, V. G. (1991). Research into practice: The use of a student teaching study to develop and improve mathematics methods courses for pre-service teachers. *School Science and Mathematics, 91*(6), 236–39.
- Lange, D. L., & Sims, W. R. (1990). Minnesota foreign language teachers' perceptions of their pre-professional preparation. *The Modern Language Journal, 74*(3), 297–310.
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1999). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*. Yonkers, NY: Author.
- Panyan, M. V., Hillman, S. A., & Liggett, A. M. (1997). The role of focus groups in evaluating and revising teacher education programs. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 20*(1), 37–46.
- Parker, J., & Spink, E. (1997). Becoming science teachers: An evaluation of the initial stages of primary teacher training. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 22*(1), 17–31.
- Raymond, H. C. (2002). Learning to teach foreign languages: A case study of six preservice teachers. *NECTFL Review, 51*, 16–25.
- Schulz, R.A. (2000). Foreign language teacher development: MLJ perspectives—1916–1999. *Modern Language Journal, 84*(4), 494–522.

Appendix

Online Survey

Invitation to Participate in the Online Survey

Dear Foreign Language Educator:

The Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia, in conjunction with the Department of Teacher Education, invites you to participate in an important state-wide project called GSTEP (Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Program) to study and recommend ways to improve foreign language teacher education in the state of Georgia.

You have been selected to participate in this study due to your association with foreign language education, and we value your experience and knowledge as an educator. Please give us a clear picture of what is currently good about teacher training programs in foreign languages as well as what can be improved in these programs. The survey should take only 10–15 minutes of your time.

All data that you provide will be kept strictly confidential, to the extent possible using the Internet as a data collection medium; only summary data will be reported at the conclusion of the study. To increase confidentiality of data, a unique ID number is contained below. This ID number serves as a password to allow entry into the survey and to protect confidentiality. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information is deleted.

Online Survey of Professional Preparation

1. Before we begin, we need to ask if you currently teach in a public or private school in Georgia (kindergarten through 12th grade).
 1. Yes
 2. No
2. We'd like to begin by asking you some demographic questions so that we can compare your answers with others across the state.

What is your gender?

 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Choose not to answer
3. How long have you been teaching?

Number of years as of 2002 _____ years
4. What language(s) do you teach?
 1. French
 2. German
 3. Latin
 4. Spanish
 5. Other
 6. Choose not to answer
5. What other languages do you teach?
6. Are you a native speaker of the language you teach?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Choose not to answer
7. Do you teach at a _____?
 1. Private school
 2. Public school
 3. Choose not to answer

This next section is about your educational background and teacher preparation.

8. What is the highest level of education you've attained?
 1. Bachelor's degree
 2. Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.Ed., etc)
 3. Specialist degree (Ed.S.)

4. Doctorate (Ed.D., Ph.D.)
 5. Choose not to answer
9. Have you received your certification?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Choose not to answer
 10. Please indicate your area of certification.
 11. Are you working toward certification?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Choose not to answer

Considering your present teaching experience, we are interested in knowing which required university classes provided you with the knowledge, skills, and/or training that you use most often. For the following courses, please indicate whether you (1) got a lot out of the course, (2) got what you needed, (3) what you got was okay, but nothing great, (4) you got something, but not much from it, or (5) you got nothing.

12. Educational foundations
 1. Got a lot
 2. Got what I needed
 3. What I got was okay, but nothing great
 4. I got something, but not much from it
 5. I got nothing from it
 6. Choose not to answer

(These response choices also followed questions 13–23)

13. Educational psychology
14. Methodology (pre-kindergarten–8th grade)
15. Methodology (high school)
16. Cross-cultural communication
17. Student teaching
18. FL conversation and composition
19. FL linguistics
20. FL phonetics
21. FL literature (pre-20th century)
22. FL literature (20th century and beyond)
23. FL cultural studies
24. Please comment about any other classes you've taken that have not been mentioned.
25. Please comment on what aspects of your training helped you the most in your teaching.
26. Please comment on what you would like to see added to the requirements for teacher preparation.

Now that you are a teacher with some experience and are aware of the many skills necessary for teaching, grade your university coursework in giving you these skills. For the following questions, please indicate whether you think they were (1) Excellent, couldn't be better, (2) Very good, (3) Okay, (4) Definitely lacking, (5) Not useful, waste of time.

27. Proficiency in the target language
 1. Excellent, couldn't be better
 2. Very good
 3. Okay
 4. Definitely lacking
 5. Not useful, waste of time
 6. Choose not to answer

(These response categories also follow questions 28–37.)

28. Using the FL standards
29. Classroom management techniques
30. Planning for instruction
31. Meeting the needs of diverse students
32. Knowledge of target culture
33. Aligning instruction and assessment
34. Evaluating speaking skills
35. Evaluating other language skills
36. Understanding learning styles
37. Using technology in FL teaching
38. Please list and grade any other classes not mentioned above.
39. Please comment on what aspects of your teacher preparation were most beneficial to your present teaching assignments (e.g. items from the above lists, study abroad, service learning, etc).
40. Please comment on what aspects were least helpful.
41. In your opinion, what should be added to the teacher training experience?
42. In your university experience, was the balance between target language content classes and pedagogy classes appropriate according to your needs?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Choose not to answer

That's all of the questions. Thank you very much for your assistance.