

# The FL Methods Course: Where It's Been; Where It's Headed



Mark K. Warford, *State University College at Buffalo (SUNY)*

## Introduction

As the foreign language (FL) methods course strives to define the foundations of language teacher development, the profession continues to grapple with the central question: What knowledge and skills count? Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987), in their review of the literature on FL teacher education, underscore the haphazard state of methods curricula, a statement that is echoed by Hammadou (1993) in a more recent discussion of the state of language teacher development programs. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to suggest that the profession has not evolved over the years in its approach to instructing pre-service teachers in FL pedagogy. In fact, Strasheim (1991) suggests that the FL methods course has indeed progressed from methodological prescription to a more socio-educational approach that emphasizes teacher beliefs and decision-making in the preparation of language teachers. While there is some anecdotal evidence to support Strasheim's view, the paucity of empirical research into exactly what foundation teacher educators are using in the construction of their methods curricula prevents us from making any conclusive statements regarding where we have been and where we are headed in the preparation of future FL teachers. In Spring 2000, I administered a census to the entire known population of FL teacher educators in the Southeastern United States (Warford, 2000). Several items were designed to elicit a portrait of what respondents deemed topics and texts essential to the FL methods canon. In addition to linking these results with findings from a review of the literature, this report will offer some thoughts regarding implications for the future of FL teacher development.

## Review of the Literature

### The FL Methods Course: From Prescription to Post-Modernism

The evolution of the modern FL methods course (1940s-present) follows a progression from a prescriptive approach focusing on an essential core of pedagogical knowledge to a way of seeing FL teaching that puts teacher beliefs and decision-making at the core of the curriculum. Schulz (2000), traces the earliest framing of FL teacher training around those teaching practices deemed to be representative of "good method" (p. 496, citing Johnston, 1918). However, as portrayed by Schulz (2000), the study of a FL methods course prior to the 60s is rendered incoherent by

flawed research, the randomness of defining course content, and the simple fact that FL learning had not yet attained a significant level of acceptance in the American educational system.

Strasheim (1991), in characterizing the evolution of what we refer to as the FL methods course, describes the first stage as focused around whatever method was in fashion: teacher reproduction of Grammar Translation methodology in the 40s and Audio-lingual Methodology in the 60s. In contrast, she describes how the eclectic approach of the 1970s gradually changed this dogmatic conception of the methods course, with its demand of conformity to a particular method, to one that put the individual teacher (or preservice teacher) at the center. This individualized approach, in its early stage, encouraged the "mixing and matching" of methodologies in order to develop a teaching style. In this way, there is the beginning of a respect for "professional decision-making" (p. 104) as opposed to indoctrination in the method of the day. Strasheim (1991) describes this approach:

The purpose is not to indoctrinate or convert anyone to any single methodology; it is rather to help each individual to develop his or her own teaching style, one that will certainly be eclectic, but hopefully, one that will also be a logical and coherent while contributing to students' cognitive-affective-creative growth. (p. 105)

A problem with eclecticism, according to Strasheim (1991), is that it did not necessarily engender deep conceptual mastery among teachers. Reflecting back on the eclectic era, Warriner (1978) describes an dizzying assortment of methodological prescriptions, each asserting itself as the essential method for teachers to follow.

De Lorenzo's (1973) description of a partially programmed approach to the FL methods course reflects an individualized focus illustrative of the 'eclectic' period. He describes an efficient, practical assembly line of videotaped microteaching modules that students complete out of class in order to demonstrate technical mastery of various activities. Within this model of FL teacher preparation, there is evidence of a way of preparing FL teachers that recognizes not just one, but many ways of teaching. Part of the rationale for the microteaching modules is to find more time for the methods instructor and students to discuss the "how and why" of these eclectic teaching approaches. In

this sense, teacher beliefs are now addressed in the methods course. Still, a pragmatic, positivist epistemology dominates, since the aim of discussion is to move students toward the adoption of the techniques they are learning. Instead of reproducing a single method, developing teachers are expected to conform to a plethora of techniques in developing a teaching style. Thus, technical reproduction of methodology continues to drive the methods curriculum, even in within the eclectic period. Under this conception, individualizing is interpreted as a means of finding more efficient ways to address an ever-growing core of methods and techniques.

A gradual shift from eclecticism to integration in individualizing the methods course led to the design of methods course curricula that would not only offer prospective teachers a variety of methods, but also challenge them to critically examine the various teaching methods within their own personal belief systems and teaching styles (Strasheim, 1991). Over the years, this approach has evolved a social constructivist epistemology of FL teaching, one that respects the primary role that personal belief systems play in teacher development as well as the complexities of accommodating teaching to a wide-range of learners. Ironically, an appreciation for the principal role that teacher beliefs and attitudes play in language teacher development is rooted in earlier ideas that span the twentieth century. Schulz (2000), for example, refers to an article by Cerf (1922) that questions the usefulness of a methodological framework in teacher training since the personality of the teacher is the primary determiner of how someone will teach. However, it was social psychological research in the 70s that perhaps gave root to an appreciation for teacher beliefs as the seat of language teacher development (Cooke, 1973; Papalia, 1973). Horwitz (1985) offers the first glimpse of a FL methods course that recognizes the primacy of the preservice FL teacher's preconceptions about FL teaching and learning. Through the administration of the Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), students' assumptions are made manifest for subsequent discussion and reflection.

One prediction of the integrative stage advanced in Strasheim's (1991) article is the influence of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) in bringing all the dimensions of FL teacher preparation together. As predicted, proficiency—as

portrayed in the professional literature—became the integrating principle in developing language teachers. Horwitz et al. (1997) describe a shift in the discourse on methods from “What is the best language teaching method?” to “What is the best language teaching method for a particular type of student?”, and most recently to “How can we best promote learner autonomy in the FL classroom?” (p. 518). The introduction of student FL proficiency as a consideration in methods course development is an important aspect of the integration stage. In place of technical conformity, the focus shifted to interweaving teaching techniques around the advancement of students’ language proficiency. According to Hadley (1993), instead of discussing which method is the most effective, the focus is on the FL teachers’ ability to advance the proficiency of their students in using the language: “This shift from methodology to measurement questions marks a significant change in direction for the profession” (p. 75). Hadley’s proficiency-oriented methods text, *Teaching Language in Context* (Hadley, 1993; Hadley, 2001; Omaggio, 1986), perhaps the most widely-adopted of its kind (Warford, 2000; Grosse, 1993; Schrier, 1989), frames itself around the proficiency guidelines, offering hypotheses of proficiency-oriented instruction and even filtering the various foreign language teaching methods through a proficiency-oriented lens. Still, there is very little discussion in the research literature regarding the influence of the proficiency guidelines on the FL methods curriculum. Bacon and Humbach’s (1989) portrayal of the FL methods course as “evol[ving] to reflect meaningful, communicative, functional proficiency, and even integrative language goals” (p. 1071), seems to address the Guidelines’ influence, though they might also have been referring to the growing popularity of a communicative approach in FL pedagogy concurrent with the Guidelines’ design and dissemination. Muyskens (1984) was perhaps the first to propose a proficiency-based methods course. Her plan essentially follows three stages:

- (1) Familiarization with concepts related to teaching for proficiency.
- (2) Application of these concepts.
- (3) Materials construction.

The content of her curriculum includes teaching across the four skill modalities, developing communicative activities, a contextual presentation of grammar, TL (target language)-medium instruction (conducting class in the language the students are learning), as well as merging proficiency- and achievement-oriented assessment strategies.

In more recent articles, the discourse on developing language teachers goes a step further. Beyond integrating methods, the more contemporary post-modern view questions the viability of framing FL teacher development around a monolithic methodological core. Some even call for abolishing methods altogether as a focus in the FL teacher education curriculum. Kinginger (1997), a proponent of this position, makes a case for discourse analysis of teachers’ written reflections as a worthy direction for FL teacher preparation. Orienting research on teaching around methodology, according to Kinginger, is indicative of an outdated, applied science view of teaching, one that undermines the active role of the practitioner in the teaching process (citing Pennycook, 1989). Kinginger argues that the new epistemology of language teacher preparation centers around the more abstract, less prescriptive realm of teaching approaches (Richards & Rogers, 1986), giving the teacher greater flexibility in connecting theory and practice. Kinginger (citing Linde, 1993) refers to this highly personalized area in teacher cognition between theory and practice as the *coherence system* and heralds this construct as the alpha and the omega of FL teacher development. In other words, the focus is not on what developing teachers know about FL teaching but rather what they believe about it and how these beliefs are reflected in the decisions they make in leading FL instruction. This post-modern view of FL teacher preparation has opened doors for a socio-educational perspective. In questioning the primacy of an essential methodological foundation, there is now room to recognize that teaching is essentially constructed in a complex socio-organizational context (see Markee, 1997), one in which pedagogical values and experiences are the products of teachers’ educational beliefs and experiences in interaction with a diverse socio-educational context. Dimensions of this context include students, parents, administrators and colleagues, as well as professional organizations and curricular frameworks that range from the local to national level.

### **Two Empirical Studies: Schrier and Grosse on the FL Methods Course**

While there is substantial discussion in the literature regarding past and present conceptions of the FL methods course, research studies regarding the current state of the FL methods course are in short supply. To date there are only two empirically significant investigations that address that question. In her nation-wide survey of FL teacher education programs in small colleges (defined as 2500 students/fewer, N=228, 45.6%), Schrier

(1989) found that only 71.74% of the respondents reported a FL-specific methods course offering in their program, either offered exclusively or in addition to a general methods course. While most of the respondents indicated that a technology component was addressed in the general education coursework (56.52%), 41.84% of the responding institutions reported some sort of computer-assisted instruction component within the FL methods course. Omaggio’s *Teaching Language in Context* (1986) was, by a narrow margin, the most widely adopted FL methods textbook at that particular time (19.56%), with Allen and Valette’s *Methods of Teaching a Foreign or Second Language* (1977) a close second (17.93%). The most common assessment method taught in the FL methods course was the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). The combined prominence of *Teaching Language in Context* and the integration of OPI assessment, as well as the prominence of the proficiency guidelines in the discussion of FL methodologies, offer some evidence of the impact of the proficiency movement on the FL methods course within the integrative stage of its evolution.

Grosse (1993), in a later study of 157 FL methods course syllabi collected from 144 colleges and universities, analyzed and compared results with a similar prior study on the state of the TESOL methods course (1991). Many programs did not specify whether they targeted primary- or secondary-level teachers; of those that did, K-12-gearred programs outnumbered FLES methods courses two to one (12 FLES vs. 24 K-12). The course goals revealed a greater emphasis on the topics of TL culture, professional development, assessment, reflection, FL advocacy, and program building than did their TESOL counterparts (p. 304). Instructional materials analysis revealed, as in the case of the Schrier (1989) study, that Omaggio’s *Teaching Language in Context* (1986) was the dominant text (79 syllabi cited), with the Allen and Valette text (1977, cited in 55 syllabi) a close second. The table of contents of *Teaching Language in Context* appeared to influence the order of topics on a number of the syllabi reviewed. Several included a state curriculum guide among required readings, indicating a growing concern for real-life practical considerations. This is perhaps the first known evidence of the influence of state frameworks on FL teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1992; Earley, 1993; Pesola & Curtain 1988, Schrier, 1993; Strasheim, 1991, citing Kelly, 1969). Findings regarding course content indicated the following topics in order of frequency: culture, testing, methods, oral proficiency development, lesson planning, language learning

theory, writing, listening, grammar, and finally, reading (p. 306). Regarding course requirements (130 syllabi), Grosse (1993) notes the following rank order with regard to frequency of graded assignments: exams, curriculum development (planning), peer teaching, participation, reading-focused activities, and classroom observations. Overall, course requirements indicated a more practical than theoretical emphasis. The topic of FL evaluation represented “the most heavily weighted” (p. 309) course requirement, and averaged about 30-40% of the grade. Weight of grading was ranked in the following order: exams, materials evaluation, field experience, curriculum development, teaching demonstrations, reading-focused activities, papers, observations, and participation. Grosse (1993) concludes with recommendations for reforming the FL methods course: more emphasis on technological innovations for the FL classroom, “greater linkage between schools and universities,” “less emphasis on traditional exams,” more journal use, and “more involvement with professional organizations and conferences” (p. 310). Such recommendations echo social constructivist perspectives on the FL methods course curriculum.

### Summary Thoughts Regarding the Literature Concerning the FL Methods Course

Conventional wisdom regarding the FL methods course has evolved over the past few decades in a way that suggests the following phases of development:

- I. Prescriptive Stage: The teacher is expected to conform to a particular method.
- II. Individualized-Eclectic Stage: The curriculum is individualized around technical mastery of an eclectic variety of methods.
- III. Individualized-Integrative Stage: Moving from eclecticism to integration, teachers are expected to integrate various methods into their belief systems; emphasis is on improved student proficiency as the end goal.
- IV. Post-method Stage: Recognizing that FL teaching is constructed by the practitioner in a given socio-educational context, methodology is dethroned as the essential mediator between theory and practice; teachers create coherence between theory and practice in facilitating student learning.

Missing from this history is a substantial corpus of solid research data to verify that such a progression was indeed fol-

lowed in reality. The only two empirically significant research studies available in the literature appear to validate the influence of the proficiency movement on FL methods coursework. Overall, however, we are left with more questions than answers. Grosse’s (1993) study suggests that—at the time of her survey—technology had not yet been adequately integrated into the curriculum, nor had the theme of participation in professional organizations. With regard to the former, Schrier’s (1989) study also underscores a lack of integration of a technology component in the FL methods course. While trends suggest that teacher belief systems now occupy the center of the methods course curriculum, why is a reflective component missing from the syllabi Grosse encountered? Also, with the recent proliferation of national standards and state frameworks, what, if any, impact have such curricular innovations had on methods course content?

### Methodology

The population under study in my research investigation included the population of southeastern FL teacher educators (N=83), defined as full-time college faculty responsible for instructing the course on teaching FLs at the secondary/K-12 level in eleven southeastern states (see Table 1). The Southeast was selected for several reasons. First, given the logistical complexities of determining a given population of FL teacher educators, it was essential to focus on a region with which the researcher was familiar. Second, the variegated nature of the region’s socio-educational context (SERVE, 1986) lends itself to a rich source of information about the status quo of FL education. For example, while North Carolina and Louisiana were among the first states to adopt mandated FLES (Foreign Language in the

Elementary Schools) education and Florida was one of the first states to incorporate the proficiency guidelines in its FL framework, states like Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee have only just recently published state frameworks for FL teaching (Warford, 2000).

A mailing list of FL teacher certification programs from the region was compiled from a variety of sources: an the *U.S. Directory of Foreign Language Teacher Education Programs in the United States* (Grosse, 2000), *The Peterson’s Guide to Graduate Programs* (Author, 1999), *The College Blue Book* (Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), and the solicitation of respondents at the SCOLT 2000 Annual Meeting. The previously mentioned sources provided a means to determine the population under study as previously defined. Institutions represented in the final list included K-12 / secondary-level FL teacher certification programs based in four-year institutions of higher learning ranging from small colleges to Research I universities. Prior to being mailed, the questionnaire had been reviewed by five higher education professionals with experience in FL teacher development and records of publication. Additions and changes were made based on their suggestions. Follow-up mailings were carried out until a total of 60 returns was received (a response rate of 72.3%). The return rate for each of the states was between 50% and 100% with the exception of Kentucky (37.5%); therefore, the results of this census study may not apply to this state. While the overall questionnaire focused on the FL teacher educator’s role in the diffusion of educational innovations, the following results and analysis section will focus on three particular items (Appendices A, B, and C) that sought to investigate how respondents approach the FL methods course. Thus, a limitation of this study is that it does not speak to

**Table 1:** Comparison of Questionnaire Return Rate State-by-State

State	Possible # of returns	Actual # of returns	Response rate %
Alabama	6	5	83.33%
Arkansas	4	4	100%
Florida	7	5	62.5%
Georgia	9	8	88.88%
Kentucky	8	3	37.5%
Louisiana	6	3	50%
Mississippi	2	2	100%
North Carolina	1	9	75%
South Carolina	6	6	100%
Tennessee	9	7	77.77%
Virginia	14	8	57.14%
<b>Total = 11</b>	<b>Total = 83</b>	<b>Total = 60</b>	<b>Avg. = 72.3%</b>

the true nature of each program's FL methods course in terms of how method is defined and the goals of the methods course in relation to the overall FL teacher education curriculum. With regard to individual respondent characteristics, the median level of service in the FL teaching profession is around 25 years. Most work in a language department (37), 13 indicated working in a college/department of education, and six indicated working in both contexts. The degree background of the respondents is roughly even between foreign language or literature doctoral degrees (25) and doctorates in education (Ph.D.=20, Ed.D.=5). Only five respondents reported a Masters as the highest degree obtained. A more detailed analysis of the FL teacher educator background variables is forthcoming (Warford, 2002).

## Results and Analysis

The data gathered in the census of FL teacher educators in the Southeast U.S. provide a portrait of the contemporary methods course, particularly with regard to text and topical selection.

### Text Selection

With regard to course text selection (Table 2; Appendix A), it should be noted that, unlike the previous studies (Grosse, 1993; Schrier, 1989), newer editions of three of the texts which appear in all three rankings (Allen and Valette, 1994; Hadley, 1993; Pesola & Curtain, 1994) had been in circulation for some time prior to conducting the study; the questionnaire does not distinguish between the newer and older editions. Having noted this limitation, *Teaching Language in Context* (Hadley, 1993; Hadley, 2001; Omaggio, 1986) was the most widely adopted text (41). The second most popular text cited is the state FL framework (26), which lends some credence to Earley's (1993) argument that states are playing an increasing role in educational policy and suggests that this trend toward incorporating state frameworks noted in Grosse (1993) has continued. Both state and national frameworks appear to be gaining influence in deciding what counts as knowledge in the preparation of teachers in our profession. A relatively recent arrival in the methods text circuit, *The Teacher's Handbook* (Shrum & Glisan, 1994), was mentioned 14 times, while Curtain and Pesola's *Languages and Children: Making the Match* (1988; 1994) followed close behind with 13. The prominent presence of *Teacher's Handbook* and *Making the Match* suggests the arrival of a social constructivist perspective on FL teacher preparation. The former emphasizes the social context of teaching through discussion of case studies and the inclusion of topics like

**Table 2:** Rankings of Texts Cited as Used in the FL Methods Course Curriculum

	Schrier (1989)	Grosse (1993)	Warford (2000)
1	Omaggio (1986) <i>Teaching Language in Context</i>	Omaggio (1986) <i>Teaching Language in Context</i>	Omaggio (1986; 1993)* <i>Teaching Language in Context</i>
2	Allen and Valette (1977) <i>Classroom Techniques</i>	Allen and Valette (1977) <i>Classroom Techniques</i>	State curriculum framework.
3	Rivers (1975) <i>A Practical Guide to the Teaching of French/German/Spanish</i>	Curtain and Pesola (1988) <i>Languages &amp; Children: Making the Match</i>	Shrum and Glisan (1994*), <i>Teacher's Handbook</i>
4	Chastain (1976) <i>Developing Second Language Skills</i>	Chastain (1976) <i>Developing Second Language Skills</i>	Curtain and Pesola (1988, 1994) <i>Languages and Children: Making the Match</i>
5	Richards and Rogers (1986) <i>Approaches &amp; Methods in Language Teaching</i>	Rivers (1975) <i>A Practical Guide to the Teaching of French/German/Spanish</i>	Allen and Valette (1977, 1994)* <i>Classroom Techniques</i>

\*It is not known whether respondents had adopted either or both editions. The 2001 (3rd Ed.) version of *Teaching language in context* had not yet been published; same with the 2nd Ed. of *Teacher's handbook*.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a systemic view of planning instruction, and issues related to teaching for diversity. The latter, *Languages and Children*, within a FLES context, addresses the need for FL teachers to understand the complex socio-organizational forces they need to work within to advocate lower-level FL instruction. In interpreting these results, it is important to keep in mind that respondents often checked off more than one text, so assumptions of exclusive adherence to a social constructivist approach are highly questionable. *Classroom Techniques* (Allen & Valette, 1994), which figured prominently in Grosse's (1993) and Schrier's (1989) studies and which is arguably representative of the more prescriptive stage of the FL methods course, was reported by only 10 respondents.

### FL Methods Course Curriculum: Selected and Ranked Topics for Inclusion

With regard to the curriculum for the FL methods course, respondents were asked to select and rank their top five topics for inclusion (Table 3; Appendix B). Teaching methods was most frequently cited (N=40) as a topic, followed closely by second language acquisition (36), the national standards for FL learning (35) and lesson/unit planning (35). The least frequently cited

topics included: The ACTFL OPI (5) and participation in professional organizations (3). The low frequency of the former may be explained by the presence of assessment/test design as a category. The relative absence of professional organizations as a topic suggests that Grosse's (1993) call for attention to facilitating pre-service teacher's introduction into such associations remains to be integrated. However, given differences between Grosse's study and this one as well as the somewhat restrictive way the questionnaire item was phrased (top five topics for inclusion in the FL methods course), there is nothing to suggest that a study of the respondents' syllabi would not produce more favorable results for this topic. Recent attention to the evolution of the FL teaching profession designs (see Byrnes, 2000; Schulz, 2000) should help facilitate the integration of this topic in future FL methods course designs. In a comparison with Grosse's (1993) findings, it appears that lesson and unit planning, as well as teaching methods and developing proficiency, continue to be among the most common topical areas. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were reported by roughly one-third (21) of the respondents as a topic worthy of inclusion in the methods course as compared to 27.71% reported in Schrier's (1989) study. However, comparisons with Schrier's survey are complicated by the fact that she framed her question regarding content

**Table 3:** Frequency Ranking of FL Methods Course Topics

Rank	Grosse (1993)	Warford (2000)
1	Culture	Teaching methods (40)
2	Testing	Second language acquisition (36)
3	Methods	The National Standards for FL Learning (1996) & Lesson/Unit planning (tie) (35 each)
4	Developing oral proficiency	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) (21)
5	Planning lessons	Teaching speaking/Developing a Philosophy of FL teaching (tie) (18 each)

around two dimensions: which FL teaching methods and which approaches to assessment were used in the methods courses of her respondents. A clearer picture of respondents' concept of methodology and which methods are valued in their curriculum is not directly addressed in any of the three studies (Warford, 2000; Grosse, 1993; Schrier, 1989).

Culture, which was most often cited in Grosse's (1993) study as a topic area in the methods course is also difficult to assess in relation to the present study since it was not listed among the choices for topical rankings. However, the high ranking of the national standards for foreign language learning (1996), a document that was not in circulation at the time of Grosse's (1993) and Schrier's (1989) studies, frames culture as a key component of language teaching, intricately woven into the additional areas of Communication, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. With regard to Assessment, an item that figures prominently in both Grosse's (1993) and Schrier's (1989) surveys, this topic is missing from the top five of the current study. However, it is possible that the high ranking of the proficiency guidelines is related to their inherent applications in proficiency testing.

In terms of frequency of first place rankings, teaching methods received the most first place votes (18), followed by second language acquisition (11), the national standards for FL learning (9). In a mean ranks analysis, only one topic emerged with mean rank in the first to second place range: teaching methods (1.92). Though it would appear that methods have not lost their prominence in the FL teacher education curriculum, this result may reflect the obviousness of the choice given that the questionnaire item was framed around topics for inclusion in the FL *methods* course. The overall prominence of second language acquisition (SLA) next to methodology is intriguing considering published concerns over a possible disconnect between SLA research and the world of language pedagogy (see Crookes, 1997; Ellis, 1997). This may be due, in part, to the recent boon in classroom-relevant SLA studies (Lightbown, 2000). The implication of negotiating between research and practice as a focus suggests greater expectations in developing language teacher thinking, one that reflects Kinginger's (1997) notion of teacher—not method—as mediator between theory and practice. As a point of fact, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford have published a FL teacher education text, *Beyond Methods: Components of Language Teacher Education* (1997), a text that matches

SLA research findings with pedagogical implications and case studies.

The questionnaire concluded with two questions that directly pertained to what educational innovations FL teacher educators have determined to be important enough to pass on to future FL teachers and what made them important (Appendix C). In an inductive analysis of the responses, innovations related to communicative language teaching emerged as the most frequently cited category of innovation of significance to the respondents (8) in a tie with an array of technological innovations such as the World Wide Web, E-mail, and CD-ROM software. The proficiency guidelines and proficiency-oriented instruction received seven and six mentions respectively. Other categories, each of which were mentioned a total of four times, included: comprehensible input-based methods, the national standards for FL learning (1996), and innovations stemming from a social constructivist approach (found in such phrases as "Vygotskian or ZPD").

It is worthy of note that technology, which certainly does not fare well in the ranking of methods course topics, figures prominently in this particular questionnaire item. This may have been an indirect result of the restrictive nature of the questionnaire item related to methods course topics (top five topics for inclusion in the FL methods course). Thus, as with the question of participation in professional organizations as a topic for inclusion, it would be erroneous to conclude that technology has been undervalued or excluded from the knowledge base for FL teaching within this population of FL teacher educators. In any case, despite Schrier's (1989) attention to its absence in language teaching settings and Grosse's (1993) call for its integration, interest in the pedagogical applications of technological innovations is a relatively recent phenomenon in teacher education (International Society for Technology in Education National Educational Technology Standards, 2000; INTASC Foreign Language Standards Committee, 2002;). In a recent study of state requirements for technological competency (Terry, 2000), only eight states indicated having no such requirement for teacher certification. In such a climate, efforts within the FL teaching profession to promote the integration of technology in language instruction (Bush & Terry, 1996; LeLoup & Ponterio, 1998 on relation to National Standards for FL Learning, 1996) may find a more prominent place in the methods syllabus for this topic.

In analyzing the data, I also coded respondents' reasons for citing a particu-

lar educational innovation as important. This produced a list of eight descriptors that were discerned inductively. Most respondents described the worth of their favorite innovation in terms of

- the facilitative/integrative effect they perceived it to have on instruction (13);
- its benefit to students (11);
- its positive impact on teachers (including methods students) and teaching (8);
- or, the way it reinforced a theory or ideology the respondent favors (7).

Other reasons why respondents selected an innovation to share with students included bringing focus to an allegedly neglected area of FL pedagogy (5), getting results or having the quality of being well-tested (4), and improving the learning process (3). It would appear, then, that the integrative principle and the focus on student learning outcomes continue to be important considerations in FL teacher preparation.

## Conclusions

While connections between this research investigation and previous studies are limited by differences in population and research design, one can discern trends that suggest where the FL methods course has been and where it is headed. The current context, as suggested by this study, portrays a profession that is learning to cope with a socio-educational reality full of dynamic forces that will shape its future. Such forces include increased policy-making and framework design activity at both the state and national level as well as the increasing pace of innovation. There is a shift in focus—from content prescriptions to a coherence system able to integrate a steady stream of curricular innovations into the demands of the local teaching context. Nonetheless, the methods course, as its very title suggests, is still framed around teaching methods.

In describing educational reform in America, Hall (1992) uses the term *innovation overload* to describe the present state of our teachers. Clearly, the foreign language teachers of tomorrow will not be immune to that trend. With ACTFL currently working with NCATE (National Council on Accreditation in Teacher Education) on developing guidelines for FL teacher education curricula, the profession should first pause to take stock of the burden innovation overload may be placing on future FL teachers. With a plethora of considerations in teacher preparation, perhaps the time has arrived to articulate a course sequence beyond the one-semester methods course.

Acknowledging the primacy of teacher belief systems in determining how one teaches, the profession should perhaps start thinking not in terms of a single course, but rather in terms of a course sequence that guides pre-service teachers through the content and processes that characterize the demands of being a FL teacher in the twenty-first century. This is a journey that must be carefully designed to engage future educators in increasingly sophisticated reflective inquiry into evaluating reforms and innovations in language teaching according to their socio-educational context, one that follows them from the clinical practicum to their first years of in-service teaching. Since the present study does not purport to fully measure the progress of new social constructivist approaches to the FL teacher preparation, future studies should include surveys that balance the FL teacher educator perspective of the present study with a more comprehensive, program-level focus. Perhaps such studies will lead us to new models for designing coursework in FL teacher preparation. Shulz (2000) states: "The content of FL teacher development courses no longer consists exclusively of the study of various 'methods'" (p. 516). In an ever-growing foundation for FL teacher training, the profession will need to deliberate on a more comprehensive framework to guide the development of future teachers.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A:** Questionnaire item related to text selection

If your program offers (the) FL methods courses, which texts are assigned?

- Teaching Language in Context
- State framework for foreign languages
- Classroom techniques: Foreign languages & English as a second language
- Other(s) (Please list): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B:** Questionnaire item related to methods course content

10. Please rank your **top five** most important topics for inclusion in the foreign language methods course curriculum (i.e., 1=Most important; 5= 5th most important):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> L1 theories of language learning              | <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in professional organizations               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Second language acquisition theory & research | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing a philosophy of FL teaching                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching methods                              | <input type="checkbox"/> History of teaching foreign languages                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching reading                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment/Test design                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching writing                              | <input type="checkbox"/> The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching listening                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson planning/Unit planning                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching speaking                             | <input type="checkbox"/> State guidelines  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nat'l Standards for FL learning               | <input type="checkbox"/> ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Technology in the FL classroom                | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing textbooks/materials for proficiency-orientation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s) (Please describe & rank): _____      |  |

**Appendix C:** Questionnaire items regarding most important language teaching innovation.

11. In your experience as a foreign language teacher educator, what has been the most important language teaching innovation you have passed on to your students? \_\_\_\_\_

What made it important? \_\_\_\_\_