Preparing the Future Professoriate in Second Language Acquisition

by Amy S. Thompson

University of South Florida

Shaofeng Li

University of Auckland

Benjamin White

Marshall University

Shawn Loewen & Susan Gass

Michigan State University

This paper is a response to the call for a more complete graduate education to include both teaching and research preparation. Given the importance of discipline-specific training of graduate students, it is surprising that very little has been written about the role of training graduate students to teach content courses in second language acquisition (SLA). Rather, in the general area of applied linguistics, the focus has been on the training of language teachers, as evidenced by volumes such as Mentoring Foreign Language Teaching Assistants, Lecturers, and Adjunct Faculty (Rifkin, 2000). To address this issue, a team-teaching project was implemented using the mentor/TA construct described in Nyquist and Wulff (1996). This paper reports the results of that project and, additionally, includes a discussion of the challenges and benefits encountered as this teaching design was implemented. To prepare for the implementation of this team-teaching project, two questions were posed: 1) What are the existing practices of SLA teacher preparation? and 2) To what extent do junior faculty members perceive their preparedness for their current teaching assignment as adequate? The results of two surveys are presented, one dealing with current practices of second language acquisition (SLA) programs in preparing graduate students to teach SLA courses as part of their future professorial responsibilities, and the other aimed at determining feelings of preparedness for such teaching by junior faculty members. Finally, the results of the team teaching project are presented, followed by a discussion of the implications for the field of SLA.

1Corresponding author contact: athompson@usf.edu
...the surveys and reports on TA training are noteworthy for their alarmism. The overall impression is one of crisis: future college professors are not being prepared for teaching; undergraduates are being taught by poorly-prepared TAs. Why should this be the case? (Sisken & Davis, 2001, p. 9).

In 1998, The Modern Language Association (MLA), in response to a perceived need to place greater emphasis on teaching in academia, appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching. This committee was “charged with making recommendations about the ways the MLA can provide additional support for the improvement of teaching in a variety of institutional settings and contribute to what is known about effective teaching in the field” (Modern Language Association, n.d., paragraph 3). In 2001, they issued their final report which focused on the role of teaching from a variety of perspectives. In that report, the committee “in the strongest possible terms points to the urgent need to develop graduate programs whose scholarly emphases are explicitly linked to teaching concerns in a range of instructional settings…” (paragraph 17). They go on to encourage “greater attention to exploring how graduate courses can be designed to include professional and pedagogical issues as well as subject matter” (paragraph 17). As a result, they recommend “that graduate programs give higher priority to and strengthen programs in the teaching of language, literature, linguistics, writing, and culture that will orient and train new faculty members in the art and science of teaching and learning” (paragraph 39). This evidence of the perceived need to better train the future professoriate is the impetus of the current report.

In the field of education, the preparation and training of graduate students to teach has evolved from a state of neglect to one in which there is concern for preparing graduate students to be future teaching faculty (Van Note Chism, 1998). Since the early 1990s, there has been a trend for universities to have an intentional focus on preparing graduate students for future faculty positions (Lane Tice, Gaff & Pruitt-Logan, 1998), something which is seen as more than helping Teaching Assistants (TAs) with their current courses. Currently, it is considered best practice for universities and departments that offer doctorates to also
offer a faculty preparation program. Access to these programs as well as sufficient graduate teaching experience is crucial for the ultimate success of the future graduates.

While it is beneficial for universities to have general programs for TA training for the classes currently being taught, it is also imperative to have departmental initiatives for purposes of future faculty preparation, given that at least some training will be discipline-specific, with responsibilities varying according to discipline (Bartels, 2002; Byrnes, 2005; Gorsuch & Beglar, 2004; Healy & Jenkins, 2003; Ronkowski, 1998). Indeed, some disciplines have established traditions of both implementing and researching the preparation of graduate students for teaching (see also Speer, Gutmann, & Murphy, 2005 for mathematics, and the journal *Teaching of Psychology* for psychology). In psychology, for example, Irons and Buskist (2008) examined 207 job advertisements for university positions, looking specifically at the types of courses that prospective applicants would be expected to teach. They found that four specific introductory-type courses comprised 45% of the courses mentioned in the job advertisements. As a result, Irons and Buskist recommended that graduate students be given the opportunity to acquire experience in the teaching of these courses before going on the job market.

Given the importance of discipline-specific training of graduate students, it is surprising that little has been written about the role of training graduate students to teach content in applied linguistics/SLA. Rather, in this field more attention has been given to the training of language teachers, as evidenced by edited volumes such as *Mentoring Foreign Language Teaching Assistants, Lecturers, and Adjunct Faculty* (Rifkin, 2000). In fact, the MLA report has also served as an impetus for a re-evaluation of the training of foreign language teachers as it is recognized that many doctoral students are not trained to teach higher level language, culture, or content courses, even though most jobs will require such teaching (Wurst, 2008a, 2008b). While the issue of training language teachers is a worthy and necessary area of investigation, teaching a second/foreign language is not the same as teaching SLA content courses (Bartels, 2002; Borg, 2006; Byrnes, 2005).
Evans (2009) makes the important and relevant point that “a vast majority of people earning doctorates…will land at institutions with high teaching loads…they will be expected to be strong teachers and good campus citizens more than scholars and creators of new knowledge” (paragraph 5). Despite this inevitability, the focus in many graduate programs is mainly on research and scholarship and less so on teaching (Byrnes, 2005). In fact, in most universities, emphasis on excellence in research (as opposed to excellence in teaching) for junior faculty abounds. Illustrating this attitude is a comment by Mooney at the 1990 meeting of the American Association for Higher Education: “Any junior scholar who comes in and pays attention to teaching at the expense of research and publishing ain’t going to get tenure” (Mooney, 1990, p. A1). With faculty and university administrators who have such attitudes towards the teaching/research dichotomy, it is logical that the same sentiment is passed on to graduate students. Because graduate students are “already time-pressed and well socialized by the doctoral-granting university” (Boyle & Boice, 1998, p. 160), many students see teaching as a necessary evil of graduate school. Graduate students, thus, might perceive efforts to implement mentoring programs as time taken away from their research.

The underlying premise of the present study is the fact that new faculty are expected to be adroit at teaching as well as research. Universities have an excellent history of research preparation, but do not rise to the same level of preparation when it comes to teaching. It is the MLA call for excellence in teacher preparation that prompted the search for a model that would lead to a better understanding of how to prepare the future professoriate.

2“SLA content courses” include introductory or advanced topics courses that give an overview of the research involved in second language acquisition and in which the primary focus of the course is theory (as opposed to pedagogy). These courses would also include special topic courses on various areas of second language acquisition theory, such as Learner Language, Formal Approaches to SLA, Instructed Language Learning, Individual Differences, as well as courses that delve deeper into theoretical underpinnings of various L2 teaching methods.
Theoretical Framework

The model used for this project was adapted from Nyquist and Wulff (1996). This model incorporates a three-stage process of TA development: “senior learner,” “colleague-in-training,” and “junior colleague.” In order for the TAs to successfully move through these stages of development, three behavioral principles must be followed: be collaborative, view the TAs as decision makers, and provide ample opportunities for dialogue.

According to Nyquist and Wulff (1996), “Unfortunately, one of the biggest issues that TAs have expressed to us about [the mentor/TA relationship] is the lack of supervisory openness to a collaborative relationship” (p. 14). The authors then give suggestions about how to foster a balanced collaborative between the TAs and the mentors. Part of a successful collaborative relationship is viewing TAs as decision makers. Decisions about teaching styles and other issues will ultimately shape the TAs as they become faculty members, and this decision-making process needs to be nurtured by the mentors. In order to create a collaborative relationship and help TAs to become decision makers, opportunities for dialogue are essential. According to Nyquist and Wulff (1996), “…when you are in dialogue with TAs, you should find yourself listening more to their ideas and asking lots of questions that will help them be reflective about their decisions as opposed to telling and showing them what they ought to be doing” (p. 15). It is the implementation of these three aspects of the mentor/TA framework that creates a positive working situation for all involved.

According to Nyquist and Wulff (1996) graduate students first have the label of “senior learner,” then move to the “colleague-in-training” phase and end in the stage of “junior colleague,” which is the final stage before entering the academic arena as faculty. The “senior learners” are classified as those TAs at the beginning of their careers who are mostly concerned about gaining the approval of students. A TA in this stage of development may also try to over-simplify concepts when teaching. In the “colleague-in-training” stage, the TAs are most concerned about how the lecture should be prepared and are more detached from the students. The TAs at this stage also tend to lecture using academic language or metalanguage, and are not concerned with
student comprehension. This is in part due to the fact that they themselves are not necessarily secure in their own knowledge of the subject matter. In the “junior colleague” stage, the focus shifts from the TAs themselves to the students. Within the realm of teaching, they are most concerned about whether the students understand the material and students are treated with respect and professionalism. At this stage, the TAs are also able to convey complex ideas without using jargon.

According to the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework, TAs should be provided with an understanding of basic instructional design, should have help in creating the syllabus, and should be sufficiently prepared for the first day of class. The mentor/TA guidelines as discussed above also indicated that the mentor/TA relationship is developed “… usually when they [the TAs] are able to interact with you [the mentor] more as a peer. This is an important stage for the TAs because it provides an opportunity for them to learn collegial roles, ask questions, seek information, express concerns, or suggest ideas in ways that they would not when working with you primarily as a manager or a model” (Nyquist & Wulff, 1996, pp. 13-14). It is the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model, along with the necessity to promote excellence in preparing the future professoriate of SLA, that motivated the research questions and data collection for this study. Based on the need of fostering mentor/TA collaboration, empowering TAs to make crucial decisions, and providing a chance for ample dialogue between the TAs and mentors, the idea of a team-teaching model was born.

Research Questions

Following the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model of the mentor/TA relationship, the following research questions for this paper were developed:

1. In a university climate in which new faculty are expected to be adroit at both teaching and research, can the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model be successfully implemented in a team-teaching approach to better prepare the future professoriate for success?

2. What challenges and benefits can be identified in the implementation of a team-teaching mentoring project?
Contextualizing the team-teaching project is a crucial component of this study. As a preliminary step to understanding the appropriate components of a model for teacher preparation, two additional questions were posed:

3. What are the existing practices of SLA teacher preparation?
4. To what extent do junior faculty members feel prepared with regard to their current teaching assignments?

The first two sections below present the results of surveys that address these two questions. These questions, as well as the surveys resulting from these questions, were used to contextualize the research questions of this study. Once the context was clarified, the research questions could be addressed in the form of a teacher preparation project that is based on the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework. It was during this team-teaching project that the components of the framework were scrutinized and employed. Details of the implementation of this model are discussed in the third section that follows.

**Part One: Survey of Programs**

*Method*

To determine what training is currently available for graduate students as they prepare for their careers as SLA researchers and teachers and to contextualize the current mentoring project, a questionnaire was distributed to administrators of SLA programs at 44 universities. Universities were selected by first looking at the list of graduate programs that appeared in Antrim (2005), which comprised a survey of SLA doctoral programs in Canada and the USA. As noted in that article, some of the programs surveyed focused on subjects other than SLA, most notably language teaching or linguistics. Those programs that had a more focused emphasis on SLA were chosen since the goal was to determine what is being done with regard to preparation to teach SLA content courses. Thus, from that list, only those universities that had programs focused on SLA were included.

To locate potential SLA programs that were not included in Antrim’s study, an extensive search was conducted by visiting the websites of associations and organizations related to language
learning or applied linguistics and by searching the Internet using popular search engines such as Google and Yahoo. The key words and combination of key words used included, but were not limited to, Ph.D., second language acquisition/studies/learning, applied linguistics, TESOL, and foreign language education. The search was limited to institutions that provided information in English. In order to be included in this study, a Ph.D. program was required to meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) be titled Second Language Acquisition, Second Language Studies, or Second Language Learning; (2) offer an SLA concentration; (3) require students to take multiple courses in SLA in order to graduate. This search yielded a list of 44 universities to whom a request to participate in the survey was issued. Thirty-eight responses were received yielding an 86.36% return rate. The distribution of the programs included one in Asia, two in New Zealand, six in the U.K., and the remainder in North America. The survey was constructed using esurveyspro (see Appendix A for survey questions).

**Results**

In the review of SLA programs, responses to those questions directly related to the concerns of preparing graduate students to teach SLA courses were identified. The first area that was examined considered current practices; the relevant questions and the summary of responses are given in Tables 1 and 2. As can be seen, many students in the surveyed programs have teaching assistantships, but the opportunity to teach an SLA course before graduation is not widespread.

---

3Responses came from: Birkbeck University, Carnegie Mellon University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Columbia University, Edinburgh University, Georgetown University, Georgia State University, Indiana University, Iowa State University, Lancaster University, McGill University, Michigan State University, Northern Arizona University, Oklahoma State University, University of Oxford, Rutgers University, The Pennsylvania State University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Arizona, University of Auckland, University of Cambridge, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Hawai‘i, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, University of Oregon, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Reading, University of South Carolina, University of South Florida, University of Toronto (OISE), University of Wisconsin, Victoria University of Wellington, York University
For the purposes of this report, the question of the type of mentoring or supervision that the students received was crucial\(^4\) (*What type of mentoring or supervision is provided to those students teaching classes?*). Although the categories for the responses were not pre-determined, a content analysis of the responses from the universities resulted in five categories:

1. Current TAs receive supervision and feedback from a professor or foreign language supervisor.
2. Prospective TAs observe classes prior to the beginning of the course.
3. TAs receive a general orientation to philosophies and methodologies of teaching.
4. TAs participate in regular meetings with faculty.
5. Prospective TAs shadow an experienced teacher before teaching their own course.

**Table 1. Approximately what percentage of your Ph.D. students has teaching assistantships?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>&lt;25</th>
<th>26-50</th>
<th>51-74</th>
<th>75-100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Numbers refer to number of respondents in each category.*\(^5\)

**Table 2. If your students have teaching assistantships, what types of classes do they teach?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLA</th>
<th>Linguistics</th>
<th>Foreign or second language</th>
<th>Language teaching methodology</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\)In some cases, it was not always clear what type of mentoring was being referred to, that is, whether mentoring experiences referred to teaching SLA courses specifically, or, to teaching more generally.

\(^5\)Not all participants responded to all questions; hence, the variability in the total number of responses.
In many instances, multiple categories could be identified from a single response. Below are quotes from each of the five categories:

1. Supervision and feedback from professors:

   *They work under the supervision of a full time professor, and are responsible for conducting tutorials. The purpose of these is determined by the professor.*

   *Observation of classes at least once a year, followed by feedback.*

   *Faculty members observe and provide feedback on syllabi, grading, and content.*

2. Classroom observations prior to the beginning of the class:

   *Students first observe relevant classes for one semester, before they teach. They then write the course syllabus in consultation with the professor they have observed.*

3. General orientation to teaching:

   *General orientation to university teaching, provided by our Centre for Staff Training and Development.*

   *The university organizes training centrally.*

4. Regular meetings:

   *Once their teaching gets underway, they will meet with the professor on a regular basis to ask questions related to the content of their teaching, and/or discuss issues arising from their students.*

5. Shadowing of experienced teachers before teaching on their own course:

   *They usually [assist with] our courses before they take up their own teaching of similar courses. Faculty members are also available for mentoring and support. We also have a strong informal peer support culture.*
In many instances, the responses indicated that supervision is less structured and is dependent on individual faculty members, as can be seen in the following response:

*The extent of the mentoring and supervision really depends on the faculty member the students are TAing for. Some faculty members provide a lot of mentoring; others do not.*

The next question addresses more specifically the likely future teaching requirements of students. The question of how many students in their respective programs are likely to teach SLA content courses in an academic setting in their future careers was posed. See Table 3 below. Approximately 28 out of 37 (75%) of the respondents predicted that some or even most of their students would be teaching SLA courses as part of their future career responsibilities.

Finally, respondents were asked in what ways they felt that the students in their program were prepared to teach SLA content courses in their future careers. See Table 4. As can be seen, all of the responses indicated the primary importance of knowledge of the field and conducting research in the field as ways of preparing students for future faculty positions. Focusing on actual teaching (such as attending teaching workshops) received some responses, but clearly there was less emphasis on teaching or teacher training than on academic knowledge. The concept of interning was not prevalent, although at least one program provided the following quote which does suggest an emphasis on a long mentoring context as preparation for teaching:

*To teach the SLA course, advanced standing Ph.D. students must intern with a faculty member who is teaching this course. Interning*

**Table 3. Approximately how many of your students are likely to teach SLA content courses in an academic setting in their future careers?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Few</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Numbers refer to number of respondents in each category.*
means attending the course for an entire semester, meeting with the faculty member teaching the course on a regular basis, and possibly teaching a few sessions of the course while they are interning.

At the end of the survey, there was an open-ended question that allowed for further comments related to preparing the future SLA professoriate. One response to this question was as follows:

*It would be nice to offer a methods course or workshop on teaching SLA, and to have a formal system in place that allows the ‘trainees’ to be observed on a regular basis.*

This, as well as other comments, suggests that there is a desire to prepare students to teach SLA courses, but systematic preparation programs are not in place, most likely due to time and budgetary issues. Perhaps the most interesting comment, however, comes from one North American university representative who says:

*We have begun a seminar/practicum for doctoral students to gain experience in teaching via a practicum which is supervised by a full-time…instructor. There is concern that not enough support*

Table 4. How are the students in your program prepared to teach SLA content courses in their future careers? Please mark all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take courses in SLA</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct research in SLA</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend academic conferences</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete fellowships in university teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend workshops on university teaching</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a methods course on teaching SLA</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Numbers refer to number of respondents in each category.*

*Follow-up questions regarding the nature of the methods courses were posed to the university programs that responded to this category. Subsequently, two of the program representatives said that they had interpreted the question as referring to a language teaching methods course. The third university did not respond.*
& guidance for teaching experience is provided compared with the considerable support, guidance and mentoring as research assistants. Therefore, more support for teaching experiences/mentoring has begun to complement the extensive mentoring students receive as research assistants. We are also working toward providing more TAships for students to assist in teaching a variety of courses in our undergraduate programs with supervision from a full-time faculty member responsible for the course.

In the next section of this paper, the focus is on new faculty members as they reflect back on their preparation for teaching. These new faculty members were uniquely positioned to understand how their graduate education prepared them for the realities of their new positions because they had recently moved from the phase of “colleague-in-training” from the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework to junior faculty members in which they were in the position to become the mentors for their own students.

Part Two: Junior Faculty Survey

Method

In the fall of 2008, a survey of junior faculty with Ph.D.s in applied linguistics or SLA was conducted to gain an understanding of their experiences during their first years as university faculty. Participants were identified using existing social networks. Responses were received from 21 people (16 female and 5 male) from 15 different universities. The average age was 35, with a range from 26 to 45. Half of the respondents had completed their Ph.D. degrees in 2006 or later, and the others had completed their degrees between 2001 and 2005. Seventeen had an assistant professor position; one was an associate professor; and four had non-tenure track positions. The average length of time in their current position was 2.25 years. The average distribution of responsibilities in their current positions was 48% teaching, 32% research, and 20% administration.

This survey was part of a larger classroom research project conducted by Shawn Loewen, Grace Lee and Emma Trentman.
Results

The survey consisted of 42 questions related to junior faculty perceptions of prior graduate school preparation in relation to their current employment responsibilities. Table 5 below shows the results from eight of the questions that are relevant to the current study. The Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework specifically addresses the need for strong communication between graduate students and mentors so that the students will have the needed skill set to effectively make the transition from student to professor as well as from mentee to mentor. The responses to the eight questions below are insights on the current state of preparing the future professoriate in SLA from the unique perspective of those who have made this transition. Responses were given on a 6-point scale with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 6 being “strongly agree.” There was also a “not applicable” option.

From Table 5 it can be noted that the respondents felt that preparation for the teaching of SLA courses should be a part of graduate school training (question 1, $M = 4.8$) and regretted not having had the opportunity to teach more SLA courses in graduate school (question 2, $M = 4.6$). They also felt that they were not adequately prepared in a variety of aspects of teaching,

Table 5. Results of Junior Faculty Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teaching SLA content courses should be an important part of</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduate school training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I wish I had taught more SLA content courses as part of my Ph.D.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It will take a few years of being a faculty member before I</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel confident teaching SLA content courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When I graduated from my Ph.D. program, I felt prepared to</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teach an introductory second language acquisition course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I think teaching SLA content courses is easy.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. As a Ph.D. student, I had opportunities to teach SLA content</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. As a Ph.D. student, I received guidance in designing syllabi</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for SLA content courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. As a Ph.D. student, I received guidance on ways of assessing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students in SLA content courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The second column shows the number of respondents, the third the $M$, and the fourth the $SD$. 

150 / Working Theories for Teaching Assistant Development
such as syllabus preparation and assessment (question 7, $M = 2.1$
and question 8, $M = 1.6$). The most revealing answers are those
to questions 4 and 5. It appears that new faculty, upon gradua-
tion, felt that they were prepared (question 4, $M = 4$), but when
hit with the realities of teaching an SLA course, recognized the
challenges of teaching SLA (question 5, $M = 2.7$).

Results of the survey of junior faculty as well as that of SLA
programs indicate that there is a need for training SLA graduate
students in preparation for their future teaching of SLA content
courses. However, thus far there has been no literature in SLA
journals that addresses this issue. To fill this gap, a model of
teacher preparation involving mentoring in a team-teaching
context based on the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework was
developed. This mentoring project is described in the next sec-
tion of this paper.

Part Three: Mentoring Project Method

Participants

The participants for the mentoring project in the present
study included one senior faculty member, one junior faculty
member, and three graduate students in their second-year of the
second language studies (SLS) doctoral program at a large Mid-
western university. The doctoral students, under the supervision
of the two faculty members, co-taught an undergraduate course,
“Second Language Learning.” These graduate students all had
previous teaching experience and were “colleagues-in-training”
on the cusp of reaching the “junior colleague” level according
to the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) framework. The participants in
this project followed the mentor/TA guidelines as discussed in
Nyquist and Wulff (1996) which we recap as: 1. be collabora-
tive; 2. view the TAs as decision makers; and 3. and provide
ample opportunities for dialogue. This model was followed
starting from pre-course meetings and syllabus design to end-
of-semester reflection meetings. Details on how this framework
was incorporated into the team-teaching project are given in the
following sections.

Description of the project. The mentoring project was imple-
mented as a result of a funding initiative in the College of Arts
& Letters at the university. One objective of the initiative was to provide innovative and integrated graduate student training. Doctoral students were given the opportunity to teach “Second Language Learning,” a required undergraduate course for students enrolled in the College of Education TESOL endorsement program. Three doctoral students (referred to from now on as TAs) were chosen through an application process to teach the course, and to work with two faculty members in doing so.

In planning the course, the TAs were provided with several previous course syllabuses. However, they were allowed and encouraged to structure the course as they deemed appropriate. The only stipulation was to maintain the required textbook (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), since it had already been ordered, and to adhere to the official university course description. Thus the TAs were given autonomy, which is in correspondence with the principle of viewing TAs as decision makers (Nyquist & Wulff, 1996). Furthermore, it was decided that each TA would be responsible for five consecutive weeks of teaching and 25% of students’ total assessment; the remaining 25% was determined by a common final exam worth 15%, and attendance and participation worth 10%. Throughout the semester, the faculty mentors attended as many classes as feasible, and the TAs observed one another as frequently as possible. During the classes, the observers used an observation log (see Appendix B) to take notes and record their impressions. After each class, the TA who was teaching made notes in a reflective journal. Observation meetings were held every two weeks to discuss the course and to deal with any issues that arose. These longitudinal observation logs, reflective journals, and discussion meetings were congruent with the proposal by Nyquist & Wulff (1996) that there be ample opportunity for dialogue between TAs and mentors.

Upon completion of the semester, the five participants met for a series of reflection meetings. The objective of these meetings was to review what had transpired over the course of the semester, identify challenges in the implementation of the project, and share points of individual growth. The input for these sessions came from a variety of sources, including the observation logs, reflective journals, and notes from the bi-weekly meetings. During this post-semester period, each of the TAs wrote a reflection
paper in which they addressed the following themes: syllabus construction, development of activities, classroom management, evaluation/grading, and one additional area of his or her choosing. Writing the reflection paper provided the TAs with the opportunity to not only address the practical issues involved in teaching a course but also to reflect on other thoughts and feelings that arose throughout the semester. According to the model, the mentor’s job should not end immediately upon the termination of the course. For TAs, reflection and discussion is needed after the course is concluded so that the teaching style and confidence of the TAs can continually be improved, for “teaching may be the only human activity which a person can practice and practice and actually get worse at” (Campbell, quoted in Nyquist & Wulff, 1996, p. 41). The overall design of the team-teaching mentoring project can be seen in Table 6 below.

Implementing the model. This section considers the themes that emerged through the reflection meetings. Challenges are addressed first, followed by what were identified as benefits. The section closes by addressing practical matters to consider before undertaking such a project.

Challenges in negotiating roles. One major theme was that of participant roles in the project. From the first meeting onwards, the TAs and mentors had to negotiate the parameters of their own contributions to the project. From the mentors’ perspectives, one of the goals of the first meeting was to ensure that the TAs had a sense of ownership of the course. According to Nyquist and Wulff (1996), the mentor’s job is to state the following: “You make the decision. Let me know if I can be of help to you. I am

Table 6. Team-Teaching Mentoring Project Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-semester</th>
<th>Meetings to plan the course content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Classes (2 per week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation meetings (bi-weekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation logs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher reflection journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-semester</td>
<td>Reflection meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New Forums GTA Development Series / 153
interested in the outcome” (p. 27). This attitude is crucial in allowing the TAs to make the transition from “colleague-in-training” to “junior colleague.” However, both mentors noted that they found it difficult at times not to intervene in the planning stages, as can be seen from the following faculty comments:

An initial meeting was held in December...the goal of this meeting was to get the students thinking about the course and make them understand that it was their course and that the faculty members were there to provide guidance, but not to make decisions. [Faculty]

The difficulty in adhering to this is apparent in another entry:

[The other faculty member] and I sat (mostly) quiet while they negotiated the syllabus. As a supervisor, it was difficult to let go of my own beliefs and let the students negotiate the course. I had to repeatedly tell myself that this was their course and that I should let them talk it through and only respond when it seemed that a mistake could be made. [Faculty]

Precisely where to intervene and where not to became a constant internal debate, and there were times when the faculty members felt the necessity to negotiate with the TAs:

One place where I felt it was necessary to interject came when they were talking about giving students (undergraduates) research articles to read and report on. They needed to recognize that this might not work so well with this group given the students’ lack of background and that it might be better to have them draw on their own experiences of learning languages, at least at the early stages of the course. After the meeting, I thought of other assignments and wrestled with the extent to which I should make suggestions or not. This is something that I felt I would have to deal with throughout this process. For example, one thing I realized we had not talked about was a background questionnaire for the students so that the teachers would have some idea of their students’ backgrounds. I decided that this was important enough to mention and might not be thought of. But I left it to the students to decide if they want to do it. At the early stages, I was trying very hard not to impose my will. Not only do the [graduate] students need to understand that it is their course, not mine, but so do I. [Faculty]
Allowing the TAs to make the course their own proved challenging for the mentors. For example, during the planning meetings before the start of the semester, one of the TAs proposed a Metaphor Fair, for which students would design posters to illustrate metaphors for SLA. Both mentors questioned whether this activity would succeed and wondered if they should intervene in the planning:

*When thinking about what I would do if faced with such an assignment, I was unable to think of anything that quite fit the picture.* [Faculty]

*I was not as skeptical as [the other faculty member], but did have some reservations about the idea.* [Faculty]

However, the results of the Metaphor Fair were remarkable. Not only did the student posters display learning that had taken place, but also student feedback on this assignment was thoughtful and gratifying. The students had been creative in coming up with their own metaphors for second language acquisition. Additionally, the faculty member who had been most skeptical did an about-face, finding the Metaphor Fair to be a rich learning experience. In sum, the outcome turned out to be a good learning experience for both mentors:

*In seeing the posters and certainly in reading the evaluations, this assignment made me realize how wrong I had been in predicting the success of a particular assignment. As a mentor, I had been more focused on the content and less so on the actual assessment part of the course. The metaphor assignment clearly showed a novel way of assessing understanding.* [Faculty]

The TAs, too, had to resolve role relationships amongst themselves and between themselves and faculty. For example, one TA seems to have undergone some change in his expectation of participant roles in the syllabus construction stage; his sentiment is expressed below. His primary point again reflects participant roles (as discussed in Nyquist and Wulff, 1996) in

---

8The idea for the Metaphor Fair came from a M.Ed. course one of the TAs had taken with Professor Jerri Willett at University of Massachusetts-Amherst.
that he expressed his pleasure at the relationships, noting the support and concern on the part of the mentors:

*Another thing I feel strongly about is that participation of each member of the team was valued and encouraged. In the construction of the syllabus, everyone’s ideas were incorporated, so the end product was the result of the joint efforts of the whole team. When I was called cross-continentally to attend the 2nd ‘syllabus meeting,’ I felt so important. The supervisors’ serious attitude about this team-teaching project made me more motivated and enthusiastic.* [TA]

The efforts (including tongue-biting) that the faculty members put into the process of negotiating roles and of making sure that the TAs took responsibility for the course paid off as can be seen in the increased motivation and enthusiasm expressed in the quote above.

In particular, from the TAs’ perspectives, there was uncertainty in the planning stages over how far they could deviate from earlier versions of the course. Although they had been told at the outset that it was their course, they felt obliged to follow previous syllabi. It was through continual reminding and encouragement from the mentors that the TAs began to introduce their own ideas for class activities and course structure. Only after the syllabus had been completed did they experience a true sense of ownership over the course. With the week-to-week responsibilities of teaching, the TAs became more comfortable in their instructor roles and began to view the mentors more as helpful observers and less as authority figures.

**Challenges in learner assessment.** Another identified challenge concerned learner assessment. Although assessing student performance in general can be challenging for TAs, such evaluation is made even more difficult when three instructors are involved. The majority of students in the course received a 4.0 for their final grade. Whereas the TAs felt these grades reasonably reflected the high quality of student work, the mentors believed that the grading was too lenient, given the fact that there was virtually no differentiation among students. Although there had been considerable discussion regarding the types of assignments and activities to include in the course, there had been limited discussion about criteria for assessing those assignments. Furthermore, the mentors wondered if there might have been an
element of competition among the TAs. That is, were the TAs vying for classroom approval by consciously (or unconsciously) rewarding students with high grades? It was clear that the topic of assessment was not discussed thoroughly enough at the beginning of the semester.

Despite the inevitable difficulties in a project such as this, the mentors were generally pleased with the levels of responsibility that the TAs assumed. The mentors by and large resisted the urge to intervene directly and the TAs gained confidence in selecting their activities and following through, helping the TAs by the end of the semester to make the transition from “colleague-in-training” to “junior colleague,” as defined in Nyquist and Wulff (1996).

Benefits. One goal of the project was to create a learning forum for the TAs within a collaborative context. The benefits of collaboration were evident from the beginning planning stages, where the discussion of ideas and sharing of experiences generated new ideas. For example, after a mentor commented that it would be beneficial if students could communicate with “real” L2 learners, one of the TAs designed an “interaction analysis” project, in which students in the course were paired with English as a Second Language (ESL) students to examine the occurrence of negotiated interaction and episodes of corrective feedback.

Another benefit was exposure to a wide range of teaching styles and class activities. Through regular observations, the TAs and mentors saw different approaches to teaching the content of the course. In his reflection paper, one of the TAs wrote:

Let me start this section by mentioning a few of the activities from my colleagues. [One TA’s] panel discussion and language sample analysis and [the other TA’s] interaction analysis and classroom observation are all assignments that I would use again (if asked to teach an introduction to SLA). These were engaging, fun, and highly relevant to the content of the course. Furthermore, they mesh well with the concept of experiential learning in that they push learners to do more than read and memorize; students actively experience issues and questions current in SLA. [TA]

Another example of the benefits of observing a variety of teaching styles and activities is the fact that one of the faculty
members has incorporated the previously mentioned interaction analysis project into his teaching of the course in subsequent semesters and that one of the TAs uses the Metaphor Fair project in one of the SLA courses she currently teaches. Additionally, those doing the teaching received continual feedback from the observers, as suggested in the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model. While it is always possible for instructors to talk to one another about their teaching, in reality we imagine these conversations do not occur regularly. The model employed in this project enabled consistent and regular feedback from TA to TA and from mentor to TA.

Teaching a content course for the first time is difficult for any TA, and the difficulties are compounded when the TA comes from a different cultural context than the students. "International TAs have been educated in instructional settings that are somewhat different from the American context, and they bring varied cultural backgrounds, and thus educational models, with them" (Bauer, 1996). The Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model used in this project helped one TA in this project anticipate the demands of teaching an undergraduate course in an American context.

As an international teaching assistant, working with my American colleagues and supervisors made it easier for me to be acculturated onto the right track of teaching in this country. I had the chance to observe and learn from the teaching of my colleagues and to attend team meetings to discuss all the aspects of teaching, from syllabus construction to grading, from activity development to classroom management. I learned what to prepare before teaching a class, what types of projects and activities to include in my teaching, how to design and organize group discussions and projects, how to keep students focused, what to expect from students, and so on. Without the support from my colleagues and supervisors, all these would never have happened. [TA]

An additional benefit of the model was enhancement of TAs’ organizational skills. Although the presence of four regular observers sometimes created anxiety for the TA who was teaching, it also pushed each individual to be well-prepared. Not only was there pressure to perform in the classroom, the TAs were expected to be able to explain what they did later in the observation meetings. In providing the rationale for their own
actions and classroom activities, the TAs were able to 1. push their thinking on the theoretical motivations for their actions; 2. consider alternative perspectives in discussion with others; and 3. feel more confident about their decisions. Thus, actively participating in the actual course execution was beneficial for both the observers and the instructors.

Practical Matters and Suggestions

For those interested in implementing a team-teaching mentoring model, there are some practical matters to consider. While students may benefit from exposure to multiple instructors in a single course (as did the TAs and mentors in this project), the issue of fragmentation should not be ignored. Maintaining a certain level of coherence and unity throughout a course taught by multiple instructors is a challenge for any team-teaching project. It is also necessary to understand the time commitment involved in a team-teaching project. The model of team-teaching involves a great deal of coordination, and, of course, coordination requires time and an increased workload.

Finally, there is the difficulty of determining appropriate compensation for students and mentors. In this case, one of the faculty members was scheduled to teach the undergraduate SLA course when funds became available for the mentoring project. It was determined that that faculty member, as compensation, would be released from teaching the course and that the funds available would be split three-ways among the students (the other faculty member participated out of interest). However, there is a variation on this model that would work (and which could be implemented at universities on a voluntary basis): Release one faculty member from a scheduled course with the idea that he or she would serve as a mentor, observing all/most classes and conducting regular meetings. TAs would participate solely for the experience and without financial remuneration. This would be voluntary, but the experience obtained would be sufficiently valuable to make this an attractive option. Another

---

1It was noted, however, that the students did not appear to be disturbed by so many people in the class. In fact, it was quite surprising that even in group work, faculty presence did not deter students from going off topic.
possible variation would be for Ph.D. programs to require some sort of supervised teaching project of a content course, much like most MA TESOL programs require a teaching practicum. In this case, the faculty member would be the instructor of record and would mentor the student or students who would do the teaching. For this option, no extra funding would be needed, as the students would receive credit towards their degree and the faculty member would be paid his or her regular salary for the course.

**Recommendations**

There are a number of design recommendations for developing various kinds of mentoring programs that stem from the surveys as well as from the team-teaching mentoring project. These are:

- A shadowing assignment of faculty or other graduate students for a full semester prior to teaching.
- Written reflections on the ‘shadowing’ experience.
- A specific methods course for teaching discipline-specific courses. This might have different sections, with one devoted to teaching SLA.
- A series of workshops devoted to specific aspects of teaching SLA courses, for example:
  - Selection of textbook
  - Selection of outside readings
  - Appropriate reading assignments
  - Engaging activities
  - Syllabus construction
  - Assessment

There are also specific recommendations arising from the team-teaching mentoring project itself, which were congruent with the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model:

- Openly discussing each member’s role at the beginning of the project.
- Starting to plan the semester prior to actual teaching.
- Discussing the topic of grading thoroughly during the syllabus construction phase.
• Incorporating a conversation of how tasks will be assessed in all discussions of specific activities.

Frequent reflection and collaboration, TA autonomy and frequent dialogue between the TAs and the mentors are all crucial to the success of moving the TA through the three stages of the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model of TA development. In addition: “...it is the TA who most often introduces the undergraduates to a discipline...interaction with a TA may constitute the total impression that an undergraduate has about what a particular discipline values, investigates, and contributes to human understanding” (Nyquist & Wulff, 1996, p. 34). Knowing the content material that is to be covered in a course does not ensure the successful transmission of this content to a room full of students, just as being a native speaker of a language does not guarantee successful teaching of the language. It is only with a careful application of a mentor/TA model of supervision and communication that TAs can make the transition from “colleague-in-training” to “junior colleague.”

Conclusion

Within the context of many graduate programs in the area of SLA, most of the emphasis with regard to teacher training has been on training language teachers; however, there is a distinction between training teachers to teach content classes and training them to teach language classes (Bartels, 2002; Borg, 2006; Byrnes, 2005). The fact is that most students who receive their Ph.D. will not be language instructors, but will get faculty positions which will require them to teach content courses. Although there has been some documentation of how doctoral students in general are being prepared for faculty positions (e.g., Bartels, 2002; Byrnes, 2005; Gorsuch & Beglar, 2004; Healy & Jenkins, 2003; Ronkowski, 1998), there should also be a concern for how future faculty members in SLA are being prepared to teach domain specific content courses. The two surveys discussed in this paper suggest that specific preparation is needed but may not be pervasive among programs as we, as a field, would like.

As stated by Nyquist and Wulff (1996), “To supervise teaching assistants...who are moving from novice to professional
levels, you should take time to think about where the individuals you supervise are in the developmental phase of *aspiring teacher/scholar*” (p. 18). Mentoring programs need to take into consideration the difference in attitude of those TAs in the various stages of development. The model that we have proposed would not necessarily be successful for those TAs in the “senior learner” stage; the technique and support would have to be modified accordingly.

This project responds to the needs expressed in the 1998 *MLA Report* to provide more extensive preparation for graduate students in teaching. In so doing, we have applied a model for teacher training, and we have presented reflections of a team-teaching mentoring experience. All three graduate students who were participants in the team-teaching model of mentoring all currently hold faculty jobs at four-year universities. Now in a position to further reflect upon their TA experiences in graduate school, the importance of their participation in this project has become even more evident. One TA had the following to say about her transition from Ph.D. student (“junior colleague”) to faculty member:

> When I applied for tenure-track positions, I was confident that I was exceedingly prepared for whatever type of teaching experience awaited me in my hypothetical new position. After all, I had taught 2-3 ESL and content courses a semester for almost every semester of my graduate studies – how could I not be ready for my role as a faculty member? My confidence waivered as I stepped into the classroom for the first time as a faculty member and was faced with 18 pairs of eyes from eager (and for some, overconfident) graduate students only to realize that I was no longer one of them. It was at that moment that I realized that these students viewed me as “the expert.” As a faculty member, they expected me to have all the answers and to conduct the class flawlessly. The safety net of being a TA, a student, was gone. In their eyes, I had no excuse not to live up to their expectations of “a professor.” Over the course of my first semester, I became increasingly more and more thankful for the mentoring experiences I had had during my time as a TA. The first semester was difficult, but I believe it would have been exponentially more difficult without the training and mentoring from faculty members that I had previously received during my graduate studies [TA].
As seen in the previously discussed survey of other new faculty members, this TA’s experience is not unique. There are other anecdotes of those starting their careers thinking that they were prepared for their role as a “professor-instructor” only to realize that more mentoring during their times as TAs would have been helpful in easing the transition into their professional careers. This paper documents a specific project of student team-teaching following the Nyquist and Wulff (1996) model and the relationship of professor/student mentoring. We hope that more graduate programs will take the initiative to train doctoral students to teach content courses. Turning students into capable faculty members will not only benefit the current graduate students themselves, but also future doctoral students, Ph.D. programs, and the field of SLA broadly construed.

References


Wurst, K. (2008a). How do we teach language, literature, and culture in a collegiate environment and what are the implications for graduate education? *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German, 41*, 57-60.

Appendix A

Questionnaire for Ph.D. Programs

1. Name of University
2. Name of Program
3. Does your program have required courses as part of the Ph.D. program? If yes, please respond to 4; if no, answer 5.
4. Please list the required courses below or provide (in the bottom box) a website where the course list is clearly illustrated.
5. If your program does not have required courses, what requirements do students have to meet in order to complete their Ph.D.?
6. Approximately what percentage of your Ph.D. students have teaching assistantships?
   0
   <25%
   26%-50%
   51%-74%
   75%-100%
7. If your students have teaching assistantships, what types of classes do they teach? Mark all that apply.
   SLA
   Linguistics
   A foreign or second language
   Language teaching methodology
   Other
8. If you chose “Other” for question 7, please specify. Otherwise, skip this question.
9. What type of mentoring or supervision is provided to those students teaching classes? Please describe below.
10. Approximately how many of your students are likely to teach SLA content courses in an academic setting in their future careers?
    None
    Few
    Some
    Most
    All
11. How are the students in your program prepared to teach SLA content courses in their future careers? Please mark all answers that apply.
   - They take courses on the study of SLA
   - They conduct research in SLA
   - They attend academic conferences
   - They complete fellowships in university teaching
   - They attend workshops on university teaching
   - They take a methods course on teaching SLA
   - Other

12. If you chose “Other” for question 11, please specify.

13. With regard to preparing the future SLA professoriate, is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding your program and the teaching of SLA?
## Appendix B

*Observation Log*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What you have learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>