The professional development of future professors of foreign languages:

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The Professional Development of Future Professors of Foreign Languages: Looking Back, Looking Forward

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Although the professional development of graduate students in foreign language (FL) departments is of critical importance, discussion of its significance and evolution was all but absent in the 2007 Modern Language Association report “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” a document advocating curricular and structural reforms of FL departments in forthright terms. This lacuna drove the current review, which traces the forms and foci of research appearing from 1987 to 2008 on the professional development of future professors of foreign languages. Empirical studies on the relation of graduate students’ beliefs and identities to their FL teaching experiences have integrated increasingly sophisticated research designs and theoretical frameworks over the past two decades; however, the primary focus of this field remained moving from a training perspective to a professional development perspective and substantiating this change with new practices that address FL graduate students’ long-term needs as teachers and scholars. The authors call for a renewed focus on empirical research in this field and a more symbiotic relationship between research investigating the processes and outcomes of FL graduate student professional development and the practices called for in FL departments.

THE UNITED STATES HAS ENTERED A period of heightened interest in foreign language (FL) education not unlike that brought about by World War II in the 1940s (Berman, 1996; Schulz, 2000; Wasley, 2008a). At present, numerous societal and sociopolitical forces contribute to what has been referred to as a “Sputnik moment” for FL education (Wasley, 2008a) or a language “crisis” or “deficit” faced by U.S. institutions of higher education (MLA, 2007, p. 1; Wasley, 2008b). Chief among these forces are economic pressures of globalization in light of the rise of Asian economies, critical languages initiatives launched in response to post-9/11 national security needs, and steadily increasing heritage-speaking populations within the United States, particularly Spanish-speaking ones but also those speaking Chinese, Russian, Korean, and other languages of South Asia (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007; MLA, 2007; Wasley, 2008b). These facts are confirmed by current FL enrollment trends in U.S. colleges and universities, with numbers at their highest since 1960, representing a 13% increase from 2002. In addition, significant growth in the diversity of FLs studied has occurred since 2002, particularly for Arabic (126.5% increase), Chinese (51% increase), and other African and Middle Eastern languages (Furman et al., 2007).

At the same time that external forces give new relevance to language learning in the 21st century, the FL profession has entered an introspective
period in terms of the goals and means of language study for undergraduate and graduate education. Momentum for change in FL curricula has built since the mid-1990s with the appearance of numerous volumes dedicated to rethinking the FL curriculum (e.g., Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Kramsch, 1995; Scott & Tucker, 2001; Swaffar & Arens, 2005), partially in response to perceived limitations of the approaches and goals of communicative language teaching (Byrnes, 2001, 2006). If any doubts remained as to whether the time had come for reconsideration of traditional models of FL education at the university level, the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) report “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” put those to rest, advocating curricular reform and structural transformations in FL departments. In the year since the report’s publication, discussion has taken place within the profession in formal and informal formats as to whether its prescribed transformations are desirable and, if so, how they might be instantiated in concrete ways.

Yet, largely absent from the 2007 MLA report and resulting dialogue are the implications of its proposed curricular and structural changes on FL graduate students’ professional development (Pfeiffer, 2008; Schechtman & Koser, 2008): The only specific recommendations in the report were “teach[ing] graduate students to use technology in language instruction and learning” and “enhanc[ing] and reward[ing] graduate student training” (p. 296). This lacuna provided a partial impetus for our review, whose purpose was to determine what comprised the research base on the professional development of graduate students in FL departments over the past two decades (1987 to 2008) and to suggest potential avenues for future research. The following questions guided the review:

1. What forms has this research taken?
2. What foci have dominated this research?

To respond to these questions, the contents of all refereed journals in applied linguistics and FL education were searched using the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database. The annual volumes of the American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators, and Directors of FL Programs (AAUSC) were also searched from 1991 (the first year the volume appeared) to the present. Finally, the contents of Dissertation Abstracts International, estimated to contain 95–98% of U.S. doctoral dissertations, were searched. Excluded were publications in journals outside applied linguistics and FL education, book chapters, conference papers, and journals of U.S. regional FL associations. To delimit the review’s content, we focused on publications addressing the professional development of graduate students in U.S. university FL departments. Thus, publications related to other FL educational contexts (e.g., K–12 FL programs) and English as a second language (ESL), bilingual, or immersion contexts were excluded. By not including this research, we do not wish to imply its irrelevance, given important related contributions on second language teacher beliefs and knowledge (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1994), cognition (Borg, 2006), and reflective teaching (Johnson, 1999). Instead, we assert the need for a review focused only on the professional development experiences of FL graduate students. Indeed, the university-level FL department is a context that constitutes an object of study in its own right due to its singular qualities—that is, wherein graduate students are typically novice FL teachers becoming literature professors and, concurrently, experienced students of FL and culture (Barnett & Cook, 1992; Murphy, 1991). This being-and-becoming is truly unique and is at the core of challenges faced by faculty members working with FL graduate students.

The year 1987 was chosen as the starting point for this review based on a comprehensive analysis published that year in The Modern Language Journal on research in FL teacher education (Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987). In their review of 78 publications from the preceding decade, Bernhardt and Hammadou concluded that research on FL teacher education was still largely devoid of theoretical grounding and suffered from a lack of principled data collection, leading them to call for “subject matter specific research in teacher education” (p. 296). However, they did state that among seven categories of research reviewed, teaching assistant (TA) training was the only one supported by empirical data.

In the years following Bernhardt and Hammadou’s (1987) review, the professional development of FL graduate students has gained in relevance as TAs became indispensable for staffing undergraduate FL courses (Azevedo, 1990; Brandl, 2000; Salomone, 1998). The 2007 MLA report emphasized this fact, reporting that the majority of first-year FL courses in doctoral-granting FL departments are taught by TAs. Simultaneously, the preparation of graduate students for entering the FL profession has become “generally the domain of applied linguists or FL education specialists” rather than the duty of junior faculty members in literature (Schulz, 2000,
p. 516)—a change transpiring between 1987 and 2003 (Katz & Watzinger-Tharpe, 2005; Teschner, 1987). This change led to more theoretically grounded professional development such as the FL teaching methodologies (hereafter referred to as “methods”) course, increasingly informed by the fields of SLA, psychology, linguistics, and education (Byrnes, 2001; Schulz, 2000). In addition, research on FL graduate student professional development “entered the mainstream interests of the profession” in the early 1990s with the appearance of the AAUSC annual volumes on research in language program direction and TA professional development (Schulz, 2000, p. 514).

Yet, despite advances in TA education and supervision, the development of a research base on the professional development of FL graduate students may continue to be challenged by several factors. First, a perception may still exist that Bernhardt and Hammadou’s (1987) call for subject-specific empirical research on FL teaching has not been fully realized, and this may, by extension, be the case for research on FL graduate student professional development. Thirteen years after Bernhardt and Hammadou’s review, Schulz (2000) concluded:

Our progress in the area of teacher development has been disappointingly small... FL teacher preparation is still long on rhetoric, opinions, and traditional dogma, and short on empirical research that attempts to verify or test those opinions or traditional practices. (pp. 516–517)

Thus, the FL profession may still remain in its “uncomfortable bind” (Markee, 1997, p. 81) wherein research does little to promote change in FL education or in the professional development of FL teachers (Rankin & Becker, 2006).

This issue is coupled with a second factor, the structural bifurcation of FL departments discussed in the 2007 MLA report, which is also problematic for graduate students’ development as teachers and scholars (Byrnes, 2001; Pfeiffer, 2002). If the time has come for FL curricula and the structure of FL departments to evolve, numerous questions emerge in terms of the preparation of tomorrow’s FL professorate: Are today’s means and models for professional development adequate in light of present and future challenges faced by the FL profession? What types of activities and which frameworks and approaches will best ready graduate students for the changing landscape of FL education at the university level? Before looking to the future of research and recommended practices, this review proposes a critical summary of developments from 1987 to 2008 in scholarship on the professional development of graduate students in university FL departments.

LOOKING BACK: FORMS OF RESEARCH ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FL GRADUATE STUDENTS FROM 1987 TO 2008

In light of Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) lauding the TA education research base in 1987 as the one area of FL teacher research supported by empirical data, we sought to determine the forms that research on the professional development of FL graduate students has taken over the past two decades. Through this analysis, we anticipated responding to the question of whether this research has kept pace. Our analysis of 96 works appearing from 1997 to 2008 pointed to four forms of research: Published position papers, descriptive reports, empirical studies, and unpublished doctoral dissertations (see Appendix for a list of publications in each category). A brief discussion of each publication type follows along with a chronological representation of this research base’s evolution from 1987 and 2008 (Figure 1) and a list of publication venues where this work has most frequently appeared (Table 1).

Descriptive Research: Published Position Papers and Descriptive Reports

The majority of the works reviewed (62 of 96 total) were published position papers or descriptive reports. The 41 position papers discussed graduate student professional development and contained proposals for improving departmental practices. A prototypical publication of this type is Byrnes (2001), wherein the author argued forcefully for the reconceptualization of graduate students’ education as teachers based on her own experiences with departmental curricular reform. In addition to position papers, 21 descriptive reports treated specific aspects of professional development, typically from the view of one department or language program director (LPD). In many cases, these included detailed documentation of tools and activities developed, facilitating sharing of professional development practices across universities. An example of such a publication is Davis and Turner (1993), who presented a rationale for advanced TAs serving as peer supervisors, describing in concrete detail the key components of successful peer supervision. Their report also contains sample materials for peer observation and peer evaluation that could serve as a starting point for LPD and TA discussion.

FIGURE 1
Forms of Research on the Professional Development of FL Graduate Students from 1987 to 2008

Empirical Research: Published Studies and Unpublished Doctoral Dissertations

Thirty-four empirical studies appeared as published articles or unpublished dissertation studies between 1998 and 2007, accounting for approximately one third of the works cited in this review. Among these, 21 published studies presented results of investigations of various aspects of the beliefs, identities, and teaching experiences of FL graduate students. Using Creswell’s (2003) criteria for identifying a research approach based on its theoretical perspective, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis, we determined that these included seven quantitative, seven qualitative, and seven mixed-methods studies.

Although none of the 21 studies were experiments involving random assignment of participants to treatment conditions, the seven quantitative studies included two correlational (Chavez, 1996; Gorell & Cubillos, 1993) and five survey studies (Chalupa & Lair, 2001; Fox, 1993; Gonglewski & Penningroth, 1998; Ryan-Scheutz & Rustia, 1999; Zéphir & Chirol, 1993). The sample size of these ranged from 40 (Chalupa & Lair) to 310 participants (Zéphir & Chirol), and participants included TAs (Chalupa & Lair; Fox; Gonglewski & Penningroth), undergraduate FL students taught by TAs (Chavez), TAs and FL students (Zéphir & Chirol), and FL faculty providing professional development documentation (Gorell & Cubillos; Ryan-Scheutz & Rustia).

Seven of the published studies used a qualitative approach, deriving their meaning from individual and socially constructed experiences as represented through the collection of open-ended, emerging data (Creswell, 2003). Among the strategies of qualitative inquiry commonly used by educational researchers, case studies (Burnett, 1998, 1999; Dassier, 2001; Dhawan, 2001; Kraemer, 2006; Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haele, 1999) dominated published qualitative research analyzed in this review, and one investigation (Rankin & Becker, 2006) combined action research and case study strategies. Both single (Dhawan; Burnett; Rankin & Becker) and multiple case studies were conducted (Dassier; Kraemer; Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haele) with sample sizes of multiple case studies ranging from 2 (Dassier) to 16 participants (Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haele). In all seven studies, multiple data sources were collected, including TA interviews, LPD observation notes, TA lesson plans and teaching journals, videotaped teaching observations, and TA autobiographies.

The remaining seven published studies (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Brandl, 2000; Mills & Allen, 2008; Morris, 1999; Potowski, 2002; Salomone, 1998; Stepp-Greany, 2004) employed mixed methods, collecting multiple types of data, both numeric (surveys) and textual (e.g., interviews, observations, teaching journals, and online discussion transcripts). The sample size of these studies ranged from 4 (Morris) to 56 participants.
The 13 dissertations reviewed included one quantitative, six qualitative, and six mixed-methods studies. The quantitative study (Rueda-Jenkins, 1990) employed survey methods, whereas the six qualitative studies used strategies of inquiry including action research (Supko, 1997), case study (Burnett, 1997), discourse analysis (Dassier, 1997; Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haerle, 1999; Zapata, 2002), and phenomenology (Dhawan, 1997). Sample sizes of the qualitative studies ranged from 2 (Burnett; Dassier) to 16 participants (Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haerle). Finally, six mixed-methods studies were reviewed (Jolivet, 1994; Liaw, 2004; Morris, 1997; Peterson, 1995; Symmes, 1991; Turner, 1988), with sample sizes varying from 5 (Morris) to 104 participants (Liaw) depending on the nature of data collected and the relative importance played by survey data vis-à-vis other data forms. Participants in these studies included TAs (Jolivet; Liaw; Symmes; Turner) as well as TAs along with FL faculty charged with their professional development (Morris; Peterson).

Trends in the Publication of Descriptive and Empirical Research from 1987 to 2008

The chronological development of the research base on FL graduate student professional development between 1987 and 2008 is displayed in Figure 1, which charts the prevalence of the four publication types over 5-year intervals—1987 to 1992, 1993 to 1997, 1998 to 2002, and 2003 to 2008.1 To summarize trends observed, a gradual increase in publication numbers is seen from the period 1987–1992 (24 publications), moving forward for the next decade with 30 publications appearing from 1993 to 1997 and 32 publications from 1998 to 2002. However, a scarce nine publications appeared from 2003 to the present.

Regarding the evolution of specific forms of research, descriptive reports declined gradually from 1987 to the present, with 15 appearing from 1987 to 1997 in comparison to 6 published from 1998 to 2008. This was not the case, however, for position papers, whose numbers remained consistent from 1987 to 2002, falling significantly only in the past 5 years. Published empirical studies and unpublished dissertations, practically nonexistent from 1987 to 1992, gradually increased in the following decade from 1993 to 2002 and have decreased only in the past 5 years. In this article’s final section, in addition to synthesizing the findings of this review and discussing future avenues in research related to FL graduate student professional development, we will comment on possible explanations for these trends.

Major Publication Venues

Of the 96 works cited in this review, 83 were published descriptive reports, position papers, or empirical studies; for the 83 published works, over 90% appeared in one of five publications (see Table 1). The AAUSC volumes accounted for 36 of the 83 publications, or just over 40%—a finding that is, perhaps, unsurprising given those volumes’ explicit focus on research in language program direction and TA professional development. Another quarter of these publications (20 of 83), almost entirely descriptive research, appeared in the ADFL Bulletin, a journal dedicated to essays on pedagogical, professional, and curricular concerns of university-level FL departments. Other journals publishing a number of articles on the professional development of FL graduate students during the past two decades included

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FIGURE 2
Foci of Research on the Professional Development of FL Graduate Students from 1987 to 2008

LOOKING BACK: FOCI OF RESEARCH ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FL GRADUATE STUDENTS FROM 1987 TO 2008

Our review of publications from 1987 to 2008 on the professional development of FL graduate students revealed two major foci (see Figure 2): (a) Research addressing the role of graduate students’ beliefs and identities in FL teaching and (b) research conceptualizing the professional development of graduate students in FL departments and discussing the implementation of specific tools and activities. In the following section, a critical summary of major themes is provided with a focus on published articles representative of each.²

Understanding FL Graduate Students’ FL Teaching Experiences

The first major focus of research emerges from the need of researchers to understand graduate students in university-level FL departments as human beings whose beliefs and identities influence and orient how they teach. This theme can be further divided into two subcategories—research on TAs’ belief systems and research on various aspects of their identities as FL teachers.

TA Beliefs and FL Teaching. According to Borg (2007), the 1990s emerged as a decade of change for research on teacher cognition in second language teaching. This focus also extended to research on the professional development of graduate students in FL departments. Such a shift from “inculcat[ing] idealized, discipline-specific teaching behaviors” (Guthrie, 2001, p. 21) or prescribing “what to do and how to do it” (Dhawan, 2001, p. 89) to investigating the role of beliefs and identities in FL teaching indexes a significant change in theoretical assumptions. In light of the limitations of conducting research focused only on teacher behavior, numerous publications and doctoral dissertations since 1987 have explored the role of TAs’ beliefs in FL teaching.

The relation of TAs’ beliefs to their classroom practices of communicative language teaching was the subject of several studies. Fox (1993) investigated French TAs’ beliefs about FL and communicative competence and found that TAs did not understand language through Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence, instead seeming to equate competent FL use with form correctness while ignoring sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. Similarly, Dassier (2001) explored how two novice TAs applied communicative language teaching principles in the classroom. Analysis of their teaching journals revealed varying ways in which theoretical principles were instantiated, with personal histories figuring significantly in how theoretical ideas were integrated. Both Fox and Dassier proposed enhanced TA preparation—Fox recommended required coursework on descriptive and applied linguistics, whereas Dassier suggested that TAs’ assumptions about and awareness of the FL be incorporated into professional development.

Completing Fox (1993) and Dassier’s (2001) empirical studies, two position papers (Blyth, 1997; Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2008) focused on TA beliefs about language and the teaching of FL grammar. Blyth (1997) advocated a constructivist approach to FL grammar teaching and contended that the key to transforming pedagogical practices is changing teachers’ beliefs about language. Katz and Watzinger-Tharp (2008) argued that to address students’ grammatical questions with coherence and completeness, TAs should be knowledgeable about discourse-level
grammar. For this reason, the authors offered strategies for developing workshops on grammar teaching that concentrate on pragmatic and sociolinguistic elements of the language taught.

Teaching assistant and FL student perceptions of classroom language use have been investigated by a number of researchers (Morris, 1997, 1999; Potowski, 2002; Zéphir & Chirol, 1993). Whereas Zéphir and Chirol, using survey methods, found the perception of TA resistance to teaching in the target language was more myth than reality, Morris’s (1999) study, which incorporated multiple forms of data, revealed that TAs struggled to maintain target language use due to perceived conflicts with curricular goals, student preferences, and their own beliefs about teaching. A third study by Potowski focused on perceptions of TAs and Spanish heritage learners regarding challenges of classroom language use. Her findings showed most TAs cited students’ “faulty spelling, grammar, and questionable vocabulary choices” as varying from “standard” Spanish (Potowski, 2002, p. 39). Hence, she advocated developing TAs’ sensitivity toward heritage learners and their knowledge on the sociolinguistic context of Spanish during preservice orientation sessions.

The nexus of TA beliefs, technology implementation, and classroom language use was explored by Burnett, taking a social constructionist viewpoint, in studies of both novice (1997, 1998) and experienced (1999) TAs. Key findings were that for the novice TA and his students, computers became a distraction, impinging on FL use and communicative interaction, whereas for the experienced TA, tensions existed between her beliefs and previous teaching practices and her experiences teaching in a computer-equipped classroom. Both studies suggested that technology’s availability does not guarantee that its potential will be realized and that listening to TAs’ needs is essential to better understand their responses to these tools.

The relation of TAs’ beliefs and subjective theories to their classroom practices and identities as teachers was addressed in several studies, each explicitly framed by theories from SLA research, educational psychology, or ESL (Dhawan, 2001; Mills & Allen, 2008; Rankin & Becker, 2006; Wildner-Bassett & Meerholz-Haerle, 1999). Dhawan (2001) as well as Rankin and Becker (2006) used action research strategies to explore novice TAs’ development. Integrating concepts from ESL teacher cognition research, Dhawan investigated one TA’s beliefs and practices related to classroom language use and integration of FL texts and ultimately argued for self-reflection and action research as critical professional development components. Similarly, Rankin and Becker’s exploration of how a TA translated theoretical knowledge about oral corrective feedback into his teaching led them to conclude that “[A] model of teacher growth based on knowledge transmission is profoundly inadequate . . . knowledge embedded in published research—is not simply accumulated and then put into action” (2006, p. 366). Thus, this study, along with Rankin’s previous publications (1994, 1999), proposes self-reflection, action research, and reading language acquisition research to increase awareness of tensions between TAs’ personal beliefs and the FL teaching frameworks to which they are introduced.

The role of subjective theories, narratives, and positionality in shaping TAs’ classroom experiences was the subject of novel research conducted by Wildner-Bassett and Meerholz-Haerle (1999) using varied data sources including videotaped meetings and interviews, reflective journals, autobiographies, dialogues, and the authors’ critical reflections. They concluded that LPDs need to integrate discussion about expectations and teaching-related frustrations into TA meetings and they argued that researchers must continue to study the construction of TAs’ knowledge, identities, and agency as teachers.

The question of which sources contribute most to TAs’ self-efficacy as teachers was investigated by Mills and Allen (2008), who found that TAs’ most important efficacy sources were training experiences, observations of others’ teaching, and informal discussions on teaching with their LPD and other TAs. Although they possessed moderately high teacher self-efficacy as a group, several TAs voiced doubts regarding their capacity to teach advanced literature courses, suggesting that teacher self-efficacy is contextually grounded and previous mastery experiences drive efficacy judgments.

**TA Identities and FL Teaching.** The second subcategory of articles related to understanding FL graduate students’ teaching experiences treats specific identity issues. These include the role of native- versus nonnative-speaker status in shaping TAs’ beliefs and practices (Jolivet, 1994; Kraemer, 2006; Liaw, 2004; Mills & Allen, 2008), challenges faced by international TAs (Chalupa & Lair, 2001; Salomone, 1998), and the role of gender biases in TAs’ teaching experiences (Chavez, 1996).

The idea that differences between native- and nonnative-speaking TAs may influence their
teaching experiences was addressed in studies by Kraemer (2006) and Liaw (2004). Kraemer focused on classroom use of English (i.e., the students’ first language) and determined that English was used by both German native and non-native TAs but was used more by nonnative than native and more by novice than experienced TAs. Therefore, she recommended ongoing use of a set of classroom management and administrative expressions in the FL to reduce English use and implementation of the methods course prior to TAs’ first teaching experiences. In a study distinct for its large sample size (n = 104) and incorporation of TAs from six different FLs, Liaw compared the teacher self-efficacy of native and nonnative TAs and found no significant differences between the groups for implementing instructional strategies, engaging students, and managing personal and environment influences. However, significant differences emerged in language teaching efficacy as native TAs felt more capable than nonnatives in teaching advanced FL courses, a finding consistent with Mills and Allen’s (2008) findings: Native-speaking TAs in the latter study had three of the four highest teacher self-efficacy scores, whereas nonnative TAs had three of the four lowest scores.

International TAs’ challenges were investigated by Chalupa and Lair (2001) and Salomone (1998). Based on a survey of linguistic, acculturation, and administrative concerns of TAs in eight FLs, Chalupa and Lair proposed workshops on academic misconduct, sexual harassment, and discrimination and mentorship wherein experienced TAs mentor new international TAs. Salomone explored instructional concerns of international TAs using numerous data sources and found that TAs were surprised about student apathy toward FL learning, not always confident explaining FL grammatical concepts, and not always in agreement with their program’s approach to teaching. Given these results, she argued that familiarization with the U.S. academic context, training in aspects of the FL that pose difficulties for English speakers, and training in communicative grammar teaching are critical elements of TA professional development.

The influence of TA gender on student perceptions of their teaching was studied by Chavez (1996), who used survey data to determine that students of German held gender biases, associating female TAs with empathy and cooperative learning and male TAs with classroom humor, self-confidence, and challenge. The author thus advocated strategies, such as videotaped classroom observation, to better understand what constitutes student bias, and she recommended future research examine the role of TA native-speaker status and its interaction with student bias.

Conceptualizing the Professional Development of FL Graduate Students

The second major focus of research conceptualizes FL graduate student professional development. This area can be divided into two subcategories: One exploring various approaches to professional development broadly and one dealing with specific forms of professional development.

Approaches to Graduate Student Professional Development. The past two decades were prolific in publications discussing the professional development needs of FL graduate students, particularly in relation to teaching. During the 1990s, numerous scholars argued in favor of TA “education” (Azevedo, 1990) or “professional development” (Arens, 1993; Murphy, 1991), broadening its scope to address the long-term needs of graduate students as teachers and scholars. These proposals came at a time of increased presence of applied linguists in FL departments and the required methods course evolving toward more of the rule than the exception (Schulz, 2000). In addition, MLA job postings from the 1990s suggested graduate students could not hope to limit future course offerings to those in their field of specialization, making their professional development experiences even more salient (Gonglewski & Penningworth, 1998). Yet, despite these factors, substantial changes did not ensue at that time in terms of how graduate student professional development was structured or in the amount of professional development activities offered (see Thomas, 1996, for a curious argument against greater emphasis on teacher training). This assertion is supported by many proposals that continued to advocate more desirable models of professional development.

Several scholars (Arens, 1993; Huffman, 1998; Murphy, 1991) called for redefining professional development based on graduate students’ future roles as teacher-scholars. Murphy recommended attention to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency standards, arguing for the creation of “closer ties between graduate-level academic work and the instruction of lower-level language classes” (1991, p. 146). Similarly, Arens advocated not divorcing the “TA-turned-professor’s professional life” from teaching, given the demands of scholarship, advising, teaching, and administration that faculty
The adequacy of TA development for meeting immediate departmental and graduate student needs was questioned by several scholars (Byrnes, Crane, & Sprang, 2002; Gutiérrez, 1987; Magnan, 1993). Magnan discussed the trend of undergraduates enrolling directly in intermediate FL courses as partial impetus for allowing TAs to teach this level in light of institutional realities and TAs’ professional development needs. In fact, Gutiérrez made a similar recommendation for native-speaking TAs of Spanish, proposing that they teach cultural studies courses before lower level language courses. Byrnes et al. discussed FL departments’ responsibility in regard to developing the language proficiency of nonnative TAs and suggested, like Dickson (1996), that TAs teach advanced FL courses to further develop both their teaching and linguistic abilities.

The notion that theoretical insights should be more explicitly foregrounded in graduate student professional development was addressed in several publications (Berman, 1996; Kern, 1995; Kinginger, 1995; von Hoene, 1995). Those theoretical approaches posited as potentially constructive include a multiple-literacies approach (Kern), foreign cultural literacy (Berman), a discourse-based sociocultural approach (Kinginger), and psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives (von Hoene). In each, theoretical insights are envisioned as driving professional development that takes into consideration both the immediate and long-term needs of graduate students as teachers and scholars.

Discussion of the imperative to extend graduate students’ professional development opportunities beyond first-year training and to better integrate teaching with scholarship continued during the past decade in numerous publications (Bernhardt, 2001; Byrnes, 2001; Chaput, 2001; Debicki, 2001; Guthrie, 2001; Pfeiffer, 2002; Van Valkenburg & Arnett, 2000). Byrnes called for departmental responsibility for graduate students’ professional development and advocated partnered teaching between novice and experienced TAs, team teaching for TAs with faculty, and a requirement for two courses in FL pedagogy. Echoing Byrnes’s recommendations, Pfeiffer made a case for a comprehensive model of teacher preparation, deemphasizing methods and techniques in favor of research-based understandings of pedagogy. Bernhardt (2001) also argued for a more comprehensive framework for teaching, insisting graduate students need to see the complementarity of language and literature teaching as acts of “text construction and reconstruction” (p. 197). Like Byrnes, she strongly recommended a second required course for graduate students on teaching literature.

The impact of graduate students’ socialization into FL departments on their resulting conceptions of teaching and research was discussed by Chaput (2001), Guthrie (2001), and Debicki (2001). Chaput objected to a view of language teaching as intellectually empty, given the fact that nearly half of graduate students take faculty positions teaching courses peripheral to their area of specialization. Similarly, Guthrie discussed how graduate students appropriate a discourse of language teaching within FL departments and advocated that departments “look not only at the content of what we teach graduate assistants... but also at the context within which they come to experience themselves as teachers” (2001, p. 23). In the same vein, Debicki cautioned against graduate students being pushed toward
narrowly defined professional goals and advocated mentoring open to multiple career choices.

Several empirical studies, based primarily on survey data, extended the discussion and critique of those activities comprising professional development for graduate students in FL departments (Brandl, 2000; Gonglewski & Penningworth, 1998; Gorell & Cubillos, 1993; Ryan-Scheutz & Rustia, 1999). Gorell and Cubillos, who surveyed 41 universities, found that TAs were only prepared for teaching lower level FL courses, pointing to a tension between “institutional necessity” and “professional desiderata” (1993, p. 101), whereas Ryan-Scheutz and Rustia’s study of 53 Italian graduate programs called for reevaluation of TA development based on language acquisition research. Focusing on the perceptions of graduate students in 28 German programs regarding job-market readiness, Gonglewski and Penningworth discovered a gap between what graduate students considered important for professional development and what they actually engaged in, particularly in developing courses and team-teaching courses with faculty. For this reason, the authors suggested that graduate students set goals for professional development and take part in a mentoring program. In a study incorporating surveys and interviews, Brandl tried to ascertain which training components graduate students in five FLs found most beneficial for teacher development; one of the study’s key findings was that informal discussions about teaching with peers or a supervisor were rated as more influential for graduate students than orientation activities, the methods course, and workshops.

Finally, very few publications have discussed professional development for graduate students in less commonly taught language (LCTL) departments, with only three articles appearing since 1987 (Chaput, 1991; Ramunny, 1989; Rifkin, 1992). Common to these publications are two primary concerns: First, the “vicious circle” (Rifkin, 1992, p. 47) of limited resources and little supervision or teacher training for LCTL TAs and, second, the concern that if TAs of LCTLs participate solely in professional development alongside TAs of more commonly taught FLs, their unique needs may go unheeded.

Tools for Graduate Student Professional Development. The second subcategory of publications conceptualizing professional development advocates the use of specific tools or activities. Beyond proposals for graduate coursework, other elements discussed include peer supervision, mentoring, team teaching, teaching logs, career portfolios, and attention to issues of assessment and cultural diversity.

By the late 1980s, the methods course for novice TAs emerged as a more widely accepted part of professional development and, consequently, a number of articles published at that time emphasized its importance to remedy uneven instructional quality and declining enrollments (Henderson, 1990; Rava, 1987; Waldinger, 1990). Yet, despite the course’s growing prevalence, James (1992) held that all TAs are not offered or required to complete it; for this reason, he provided guidelines to help TAs reflect on the brain and FL learning, the interconnection of learners, the FL, and classroom activities, logical sequencing of classroom activities, and student interaction.

Over the course of the following decade, numerous scholars called for comprehensive professional development, including additional courses on FL and literature teaching beyond the methods course (Bernhardt, 2001; Byrnes, 2001; Fox, 1992; Olsen, 1998; Van Valkenburg & Arnett, 2000), with several publications focused on the rationale and description of such courses (Arens, 1991; Barnes-Karol, 2003; Barnett & Cook, 1992; Lalande, 1991; Mason, 1992; Roche, 1998). Although differing in content, each held the premise that no single course can adequately prepare graduate students for a changed professional landscape no longer favoring narrow specialization but requiring competence in teaching FL, literature, and culture at all levels. Proposed additional pedagogy coursework included a seminar on developing advanced conversation and composition, literature, and FL for special purposes courses (Lalande) and a course on the teaching of FL literature at the advanced undergraduate level (Barnes-Karol).

Other proposals for graduate seminars going beyond the “immediate survival needs of new TAs” (Lalande, 1991, pp. 153–154) and attempting to integrate scholarship and teaching included those by Arens (1991), Barnett and Cook (1993), and Roche (1998). Arens described a course on the cultural history of 19th- and 20th-century Austria designed to introduce interdisciplinary research and teaching methods. Similarly, Barnett and Cook advocated a course on theories and methods of scholarship and teaching of FL, literature, and civilization. Roche argued in favor of a course on scholarly development and job market preparation comprised of such topics as dissertation research and writing, curriculum vitae and cover letters, professional organizations,
articles and book reviews, and sample syllabi. In addition to these three proposals, considering the challenges faced by new LPDs, Mason (1992) advocated a course to prepare graduate students to go on to supervise FL programs, given that those positions are held by specialists in literature, linguistics, and applied linguistics.

The role of technology in FL teaching and learning and its integration into graduate students’ professional development has been the focus of several publications (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Lord & Lomicka, 2004; Rava & Rossbacher, 1999; Scott, 1998). Two articles described the design and implementation of graduate courses on technology and FL teaching; whereas Rava and Rossbacher advocated a project-based curriculum, Lord and Lomicka detailed how computer-mediated discussion between course participants at two universities facilitated course objectives. Also finding great benefits from asynchronous discussion, Arnold and Ducate used surveys and discussion transcripts to demonstrate that TAs’ participation in online discussion led to interaction rather than monologue and facilitated cognitive understanding of pedagogical topics. In a descriptive report focused on the need to prepare TAs for effective technology use in FL teaching, Scott argued that tools such as computer-based writing programs enable TA reflection on their role as FL teachers and on their students’ processes of learning to write in an FL.

Beyond proposals for additional graduate coursework to enhance professional development, scholars have also argued for incorporating collaborative activities such as peer supervision (Davis & Turner, 1993; Lee, Binkowski, & Binkowski, 1993), mentoring (Leaver & Oxford, 2001; Melin, 2000; Siskin & Davis, 2001), and team teaching (Braun & Robb, 1991; Magnan, 1987; Rava, 1991; Stepp-Greany, 2004). Although these proposals vary in focus, each addresses the ongoing professional development needs of graduate students as they progress through the curriculum, and most provide concrete guidance for giving advanced graduate students more responsibility in teaching or supervisory roles. In several cases, authors lamented the lack of a sustained professional dialogue on theoretical and practical dimensions of mentoring TAs and providing substantial, ongoing professional development (Melin; Siskin & Davis). Varied ways to structure team teaching were also described, such as mentored teaching arrangements by faculty–TA pairs (Braun & Robb; Magnan; Melin; Rava) and groups of several TAs sharing responsibility for one course (Stepp-Greany). Although several articles reported that such teaching configurations involve extra time commitment on the part of faculty, positive outcomes were related not solely to graduate students’ own professional development but also to student satisfaction with more diverse teaching styles with two or more instructors working together.

Tools focused on graduate students’ individual development as teacher-scholars were proposed by Wildner-Bassett (1993) and Dykstra-Pruim (1998). TA learning logs were advocated by Wildner-Bassett as a means for novices to grapple with issues of teaching anxiety, gender differences, and diverse learning and teaching styles. In addition, Dykstra-Pruim proposed that FL graduate students be required to compile a portfolio documenting teaching, researching, and departmental service experiences.

Finally, several publications highlighted aspects of graduate students’ professional development as teachers that often are lacking and deserve more attention. These include guidelines to help TAs understand administrative aspects of FL instruction (Chirol, 1999), training in FL assessment (Magnan, 1991; Terry, 1992), attention to issues of teaching in multicultural, diverse settings (Cottenet-Hage, Joseph, & Verdaguer, 1992; Henderson, 1992; Lee, 1994), and awareness of sociolinguistics in FL teaching (Di Vito, 1993). Among these varied contributions, Magnan and Terry discussed the need to direct TAs toward sound practices in assessing students’ FL learning using task-based and process-oriented approaches (Magnan) and holistic and analytic scoring techniques to improve consistency in mutilsection courses (Terry). In addition, Cottenet-Hage et al. made a case for educating TAs to teach culture with an approach that moves beyond the Culture–culture dichotomy. They also advocated for raising awareness of how TAs’ views are anchored in their personal and cultural identity by using reflective activities. The importance of integrating attention to sociolinguistics into TA training was addressed by Di Vito, who contended that LPDs should facilitate effective textbook use by TAs and incorporation of native-speaker norms into teaching materials. Both Henderson and Lee provided recommendations for guiding TAs to teach in multicultural classrooms and strategies to sensitize TAs to their own biases and stereotypes, as well as the strengths and weakness associated with their teaching styles.
LOOKING FORWARD: FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FL GRADUATE STUDENTS

This review of research on graduate student professional development in U.S. university-level FL departments from 1987 to 2008 was intended to respond to two questions: What forms has this research taken? What specific foci have dominated this field of research? The analysis of 96 position papers, descriptive reports, empirical studies, and dissertations requires a bit of discussion to synthesize our findings prior to providing suggestions for future research.

The dominant preoccupation of this research over the past two decades, if judged by the frequency of related publications, was articulating ways to move beyond a teacher training paradigm and its concomitant short-term focus on methodologies and techniques for teaching lower level FL courses and to establish professional development that embraces FL graduate students’ long-term needs as teachers and scholars. At least three concrete recommendations for enhancing professional development recurred since 1987: More extensive graduate coursework related to teaching or linking teaching and scholarship, team teaching opportunities, and opportunities to independently teach advanced undergraduate courses. In total, no fewer than 15 publications reviewed advocated more graduate coursework in teaching FL, literature, and culture, in linguistics or applied linguistics, technology and FL teaching, theories and methods of scholarship, or FL program direction. A clear implication of such proposals is that a one-term methods course has been viewed (particularly by LPDs) as inadequate and that novice TAs’ needs are distinct from those of more advanced graduate students, who should be engaging in coursework looking forward to future faculty teaching assignments. In addition to seven publications advocating TA participation in team-taught cultural studies or literature courses with faculty members, seven proposals made a case for graduate students teaching their own advanced undergraduate courses, particularly in light of the continuing need to develop their own advanced linguistic proficiency.

However, it is questionable whether the desire of researchers and LPDs evident in the publications we reviewed to articulate professional development going beyond methods and techniques for teaching lower level language courses to better meet graduate students’ needs as future FL faculty members has occurred to any meaningful degree. Certainly, this task is gargantuan given the structural constraints to transforming how graduate students are educated as teachers and scholars in university-level FL departments (Byrnes, 2001; MLA, 2007), coupled with a lack of professional discourse between applied linguists serving as LPDs in FL departments and those working in linguistics and education departments (Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2005). Related to and, perhaps, as insidious as those constraints is the dichotomous thinking regarding teaching and scholarship permeating many FL departments and coloring graduate students’ socialization and professional development experiences. Awareness of this challenge is reflected in many publications that have proposed that faculty work to explicitly unravel the perceived separateness of teaching FL versus literature and of teaching versus scholarship in light of graduate students’ needs as future FL professors.

Another, yet less prominent preoccupation of this research was exploration of graduate students’ beliefs and identities in shaping their teaching experiences in FL departments. Although this research remains in its nascent phase (see Figure 1), these studies provide evidence to bolster what has been demonstrated in other educational contexts; that is to say: A model of teacher development based on knowledge transmission is, at its core, “profoundly inadequate” (Rankin & Becker, 2006, p. 366, emphasis added). This was implicit in numerous studies that found TAs’ beliefs acted as filters, orientating their understandings of the FL and language teaching, classroom FL use, integration of technology into teaching, and perceptions of their students’ language use. Empirical research reviewed also pointed to a second observation: A one-size-fits-all professional development model does not reflect the reality of graduate students as diverse individuals with varied cultural and educational backgrounds and unique needs. Numerous differences highlighted in past research deserve further investigation, including the professional development needs of native-speaking FL graduate students versus those of nonnative speakers, LCTL graduate students versus more commonly taught FL peers, and international graduate students adjusting to teaching and research norms in the United States.

To list but a few examples of the types of real-life questions that concern FL departments and could benefit from empirical investigation: What advantages and outcomes are associated with offering the methods course prior to TAs’ first experience teaching versus concurrent with it? Is
the most appropriate first teaching assignment for TAs an elementary-level FL course, and is this the case regardless of the TA’s language background? What role might experienced graduate students play in supervising or mentoring novice TAs or TAs initially unfamiliar with the American university context and its norms of teaching, learning, and assessment? Additionally, more globally, what changes to the graduate curricula could be made to better accommodate the diverse professional development needs of the teacher-scholars enrolled in them? If researchers were to focus on these areas in the future, it would enable FL departments to approach curricular and professional development dilemmas based on empirical evidence rather than to rely only on long-standing traditions. Ideally, this more principled approach would lead to departments requesting and allotting resources based in part on research-based recommendations from applied linguists and LPDs in their midst.

Further, given a lack of existing research on the long-term development of graduate students’ beliefs and teaching practices and the concrete outcomes associated with various professional development tools and activities, we suggest that future research take a longitudinal approach to investigating how teaching expertise emerges, how TAs’ beliefs evolve, and which professional development activities are most useful at different stages of the graduate curriculum. Clearly, collecting multiple sets of rich data over time will be essential to such an approach. Critical questions to be addressed include determining how to establish connections between theoretical knowledge (i.e., “reading the research” and TAs’ experiences in the classroom), what professional development activities can most effectively build on TAs’ experiences teaching language to prepare them for upper level content instruction (e.g., coursework or opportunities for supervision or mentoring), and how technology (e.g., blogs or wikis) might facilitate ongoing reflection by graduate students on teaching practices, evaluation of teaching, and personal professional development goals. A related issue is how to improve opportunities for LPDs to share insights, experiences, and tools across universities, particularly as many are solely responsible for graduate student professional development in their department; others have limited or nonexistent funds to support their own ongoing professional development through attending academic conferences and establishing connections with LPDs and researchers in other universities.

It is challenging to judge whether empirical research on FL graduate student professional development has kept pace in the years since Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) called it the one area of FL teacher research supported by data. In a sense, one answer to this question is affirmative: 21 published studies and 13 unpublished doctoral dissertations appeared since 1987, using increasingly sophisticated research designs, theoretical frameworks, and data collection and analysis, in stark contrast to a few survey studies that comprised the entire empirical research base on FL teacher education in 1987. Yet, if considered in quantitative terms, empirical research amounted to just one third of the works we analyzed; further, empirical studies published in journals accounted for less than 14% of total works reviewed (see Table 1). In other words, at present, this field of research continues to be dominated by position papers and descriptive reports, albeit to a smaller degree than in 1987, when Bernhardt and Hammadou reported that it accounted for a scant 10% of the FL teacher education publications they reviewed. Moreover, when research on FL graduate student professional development is viewed in comparison with research in related fields, much work remains to be done in defining critical concepts, building on research findings from related disciplines (e.g., education, linguistics, psychology), developing research protocols and instruments, and articulating research agendas to respond to the numerous, unanswered calls for change in graduate student professional development that have appeared over the past two decades.

It is similarly difficult to hypothesize why research on the professional development of FL graduate students decreased dramatically in the past 5 years after publication numbers peaked in the 1990s. One cause may be that the AAUSC annual volumes (accounting for 37.5% of publications reviewed) for 2003–2006 only tangentially related to graduate student professional development, as they were dedicated primarily to issues of undergraduate FL education. A second realistic possibility may be that over the past decade, applied linguists and LPDs in FL departments have not been successful in implementing expansion of graduate student professional development proposed in the research we reviewed, for several reasons. In addition to structural and curricular constraints, the hybrid nature of LPDs’ positions—described by Mason (1992) as “teacher, linguist, methodologist, editor, curriculum planner, counselor, psychologist, placement officer, organizer, arbiter, personnel director, supervisor, quality control worker, and evaluator (p. 114)”—certainly does not promote the development of a sustained research agenda that
would lead to department-level change. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in no cases did we see one researcher publishing more than three articles related to graduate student professional development. In many instances, dissertation studies we reviewed incorporated novel theoretical approaches with robust research designs, yet, no related follow-up publications appeared. Why is this? A partial response may be that for many LPDs, no research expectations exist, given their status as non-tenure-stream faculty members. According to Katz and Watzinger-Tharp (2005), 42% of LPDs fall into this category. In addition, LPDs represent a variety of disciplines from applied and theoretical linguistics to sociolinguistics and, to a lesser extent, literature; thus, many may pursue research agendas unrelated to graduate student professional development. A final, more sobering possibility is that applied linguists and LPDs working in FL departments may have learned over time and in light of very real obstacles to enhancing professional development to accept existing means and models, imperfect and limited as they may be.

In conclusion and given the current downturn in published research on FL graduate student professional development, we call for a renewed focus on this subject and a more symbiotic relationship between empirical research investigating the processes and outcomes of professional development and the practices implemented in our departments. Only by engaging in such empirical research can we demonstrate that enhancing graduate student professional development must be a shared departmental priority. Despite the 2007 MLA report’s lack of attention to these issues, we assert the notion that changes in FL departments should not occur only through undergraduate curricular reform. Instead, by committing our energies to researching best practices of graduate student professional development, we call for a renewed focus on this subject and a more symbiotic relationship between empirical research investigating the processes and outcomes of professional development and the practices implemented in our departments. Only by engaging in such empirical research can we demonstrate that enhancing graduate student professional development must be a shared departmental priority. Despite the 2007 MLA report’s lack of attention to these issues, we assert the notion that changes in FL departments should not occur only through undergraduate curricular reform. Instead, by committing our energies to researching best practices of graduate student professional development, we can transform the nature of teaching and scholarship in tomorrow’s FL departments.

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NOTES

1This review does not contain publications after May 2008, although it was expected that additional publications and dissertations would appear in the second half of 2008.

2Space limitations preclude the discussion of all dissertation studies reviewed. However, we chose to reference them all (see Appendix), as many represent fine examples of research design for investigating beliefs and practices of graduate students teaching in FL departments.

3To support this assertion, a recent post to the AAUSC listserv asked LPDs to report the number of required graduate courses on FL teaching, linguistics, or applied linguistics in their departments. Of responses from LPDs in 24 FL departments with Ph.D. programs, 21 required a 3-credit methods course for new TAs, 1 required a methods course for new TAs but did not award credit for completion, 1 required a 3-credit methods plus 1 additional 3-credit course, and 1 required a 3-credit methods course plus 1 additional 1-credit course.

4The notion of investigating how graduate students’ beliefs about FL teaching and their teaching expertise develop using a longitudinal approach assumes that professional development goes beyond a one-semester methods class. Without ongoing professional development activities (e.g., advanced coursework in linguistics, applied linguistics, or teaching in the advanced undergraduate curriculum) as part of the graduate curriculum, it is unlikely that researchers have opportunities to collect rich data sets for studying graduate students’ development as teachers.

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APPENDIX

I. Published Position Papers

II. Published Descriptive Reports

III. Published Empirical Studies
Arnold and Ducate, 2006; Brandl, 2000; Burnett, 1998, 1999; Chalupa and Lair, 2001; Chavez, 1996; Dassier, 2001; Dhawan, 2001; Fox, 1993; Gonglewski and Penningroth, 1998; Gorell and Cubillos, 1993; Kraemer, 2006; Mills and Allen, 2008; Morris, 1999; Potowski, 2002; Rankin and Becker, 2006; Ryan-Scheutz and Rustia, 1999; Salomone, 1998; Stepp-Greany, 2004; Wildner-Bassett and Meierholz-Haerle, 1999; Zéphir and Chirol, 1993.

IV. Unpublished Dissertation Studies

Forthcoming in The Modern Language Journal, 94.4


Okim Kang, Don Rubin, & Lucy Pickering. “Suprasegmental Measures of Accentedness and Judgments of Language Learner Proficiency in Oral English.”

Paul Matthews. “Factors Influencing Self-Efficacy Judgments of University Students in Foreign Language Tutoring.”

Gunna Hansen. “Word Recognition in Arabic.”

