

Tomorrow's World Language Teachers: Practices, Processes, Caveats and Challenges along the Yellow Brick Road

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Abstract

In this manuscript, the authors discuss multiple issues confronting world language teacher development (WLTD) and suggest options to ensure academic success for all world language (WL) learners. Critics' claims that WLTD programs lack professionalization can be addressed to "get it right" for tomorrow's pre-service students—and for their pre-K-12 learners by the establishment of a National Commission on WLTD. Four questions inform our argument that improved professionalization, together with clinical induction and teacher efficacy, will contribute to learners' success:

1. *How might WLTD build upon—and not repeat—past practices?*
2. *How will standardization initiatives continue to change WLTD?*
3. *How might investigators align research that contributes to student achievement at the pre-collegiate level?*
4. *How does the implementation of such endeavors influence our praxis?*

Keywords: post-secondary, teacher preparation and licensure, teacher characteristics

1. Prolog (nicht) im Himmel [Prologue (not) in Heaven]

Pre-service teacher induction persists as a critical concern of American education. It is a generations-old societal preoccupation with teachers' skills and preparedness, one that reformers, politicians, study groups, and teachers themselves have pilloried, studied, and reported since at least the 1850s (Goldstein, 2014). World language teacher development (WLTD) is not exempt from this history. Despite polemics and earnest recommendations, WL teacher educators have contributed to implementing substantive systemic change through research, association initiatives, and in raising standards. Together with others (Cushman, 2003, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Joint National Committee on Languages, 2009), we share the vision that characterizes the arguments of even the harshest critics of teacher education: there must be teachers of excellence in *all* of America's schools, for *all* of America's students.

Investigating the many recommendations regarding teacher induction and the respective efficacy they may have had in effecting structural reforms is an encyclopedic enterprise. Its yield, however, might be a somewhat ironic harvest of generalities from which, their superficiality notwithstanding, we might reap insights so as to proceed with the tasks to accomplish for WLTD. Continuing our study of past suggestions, we would learn—once again—that no individual or entity has a monopoly on *the* way to educate future teachers. We must remember that originators of transitional moments and earlier movements in education were unwaveringly steadfast in declaring their pathway to be the best if not only *yellow brick road* (Baum, 2010) leading to their idealized Oz-like land of pre-service induction excellence.

Even if those facile assertions may be misguided and/or ill informed, we would do well not to dismiss them out of hand. We must answer with facts, and with action. As educators of educators, we are determined to "get teacher education right."

We must respond appropriately to demands that future world language (WL) teacher induction create the settings and experiences that tomorrow's professionals require—for both teacher excellence and student learning. How we WL teacher educators might prepare for that tomorrow today is the focus of this paper. The action we need begins with the establishment by the leading WL teacher organizations of a *National Commission on WLTD*. A nationwide conversation would thus begin under the aegis of the Commission, and lay the groundwork for change while including other groups advocating excellence in teacher preparation.

2. Perceptions of Teacher Preparation, “Easy Fixes,” and Stakeholder Participation

Klein's recent essay (2014) on identifying and preparing meritorious teachers illustrates the simplistic and inaccurate public perspective on teacher preparation programs that we cannot afford to disregard as we seek partners for change. To attain the elusive but commonly agreed upon goal of superior teacher preparation, Klein argues that the critical component necessary to promote TD advancement is to “professionalize teaching, making it like other well-respected professions, such as law and medicine” (para. 3). He formulates his perspective on the basis of three desiderata: better academic training of pre-service teachers; recruiting new teachers from the top third of our college graduates; and reforming the reward system for instructors, and adds, “Excellence would be the guiding hallmark” (para. 7). Let us examine one of Klein's key recommendations, that teachers establish their own boards to “police the profession” and set their own standards. He either omits or is unaware of the fact that many professional organizations have already purposefully accomplished *exactly* what he suggests.

For Klein, the *Provisional program guidelines for foreign language teacher education* by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 1988) and equivalent documents by other educational entities apparently do not exist. There is no acknowledgement of the 2002 *ACTFL/NCATE Program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers* (ACTFL, 2002; 2014a). Nothing in Klein's commentary refers to the important contributions, which professional organizations that ACTFL or Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have undertaken to improve teacher quality (TESOL, 2010). Pre-service induction challenges, we argue, will neither be remedied by wishing for what Klein describes as a “magic wand” to effect change—nor by offering nostrums similar to those little flasks that Professor Marvel gave the farmhands just before the tornado put Dorothy and Toto on their road trip back to Kansas in “The Wizard of Oz” (Baum, 2010). Lengthy studies, on the other hand, such as Aud, Fox, and Kemal Ramani's (2010) review of racial and ethnic trends, or Aud et al.'s (2010) investigation on the condition of American education are exhaustive, as is Levine's (2006) *educating school teachers*. Each deserves serious consideration, due to the level of detail that their data offer. The specificity of such investigations offers no comfort to those who assume pre-service teacher induction has achieved a state of perfection. Contrary findings are seen in the connection Levine (2006) makes between the efforts of teacher preparers and the weak academic achievements of K-12 students:

The nation's teacher education programs are inadequately preparing their graduates to meet the realities of today's standards based, accountability driven classrooms, in which the primary measure of success is student achievement. [The study]...concludes that a majority of teacher education graduates are prepared in university-based programs that suffer from low admission and graduation standards. Their faculties, curriculums and research are disconnected from school practice and practitioners. (p.1) Levine decries the dissociated state that exists between teacher education institutions and schools. Accountability, no stranger to education debates, is integral to his vision of K-12 education—as it should be. We see accountability as a pendulum force, albeit one with various gravitational vectors rather than just the one arc. This is because parents, educators, legislators, and communities often provide oppositional directional and directive thrusts as their contribution in shaping the path pre-service students take to become exemplary faculty members. The ensuing consternation is further stymied because several stakeholders interact in ways that historically have *avoided* addressing the foundational responsibilities that produce lasting academic success: the elimination of poverty, racial inequality, privilege, and the destiny of (urban or rural) setting, as advocated in *A nation at risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

These societal issues must be resolved before enduring educational attainment can come about. Lamentably, the tasks of teacher preparation reform (and its attendant student success) are placed into the hands of the one collaborating group among the stakeholders whose hands assuredly are not on society's power controls: the teacher preparers at schools of education. They alone cannot adjust the mechanisms that reverse the misdirection that makes escape velocity possible.

3. Im Wesentlichsten Nichts Neues [Most Essentially, Nothing New Going On]

In tandem with affirming our commitment to educating WL teachers capable of providing world-class learning opportunities to all, WLTD must confront multiple structural and pedagogical demands. Each requires that we put our pre-service induction house in order. To characterize these challenges systematically, we employ a structure of four questions. They clarify our position that concurrent implementation of exemplary models of clinical induction sponsored by the Commission, together with increased, sustained research-determined initiatives, will produce optimal WL teacher efficacy in classroom content, delivery, and management:

1. How might WLTD build upon—and *not* simply repeat—past practices?
2. How will standardization initiatives continue to change pre-service teacher development?
3. How might investigators align research projects to contribute to student achievement?
4. How does implementing such endeavors influence our praxis?

Our perspective takes into account the three interdependent macro-issues that frame the historical—and present—challenges of WLTD: We repeat the past; we consciously lower standards of excellence established by leadership; and, we acknowledge the debilitating effects of being a disunited profession. This triad pervades professional conversations. Its continuing existence as a focus of formal and informal discussions is attested to by the authors' collective 60+ years' experience, as well as that of others (Allen, 2002; Schrier, 2008; Vélez-Rendón, 2002), as methods instructors, liaisons to licensure officers, and field supervisors of student interns. Leadership disunity and the lowering of standards are one pertinent instance of dysfunction that militates against a successful future for WLTD. It pervades the nexus between the key areas of language proficiency and teacher certification. Although it is not necessary that disunity and standards setting occur simultaneously, their respective coincident appearance influences pre-service induction requirements and outcomes, as we now illustrate.

Many state departments of education (Kansas, New York, Florida, to name but three) have set *Advanced Low* (AL) on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL, 2012) as the minimum criterion for K-12 teacher certification in Roman alphabet languages. Wisconsin, Maryland, and other states use *Intermediate High* (IH) as their proficiency benchmark (ACTFL, 2014b). Why would one group of states have decided upon a lower standard of language proficiency than other states? A state's statutory responsibility to regulate minimum standards and identify candidates' qualifications for licensure is not the issue here. Rather, it is the integrity of the dissonant decision and the process that determined the benchmarking of those standards that are problematic. Who certifies the candidate's language abilities, for example? Is this certification a local K-12 school district decision or a university-level function? If "yes" to both questions, is the certifying officer officially certified as a rater by ACTFL? If "no," who is the approving authority, and what are the credentials of that approving authority? Further, given the absence of a clearinghouse function to make applicants' compliance transparent and thus uniformly adhered to, WL teacher preparers and future employers must rely on *perceived* or *presumed* language and content knowledge. The unreliability of such a process potentially invalidates established standards; it directly compromises the WL teacher preparers' efforts to provide schools with beginning professionals possessing appropriately verified language skills. Standards, leadership, and pre-service education have interacted. But they may not be in the best interests of education's stakeholders—including the future WL students.

Our first question, "How might WLTD build upon—and *not* simply repeat—past practices," is an essential component requiring coordination at the National Commission level. We could consider implementing past research-driven solutions to assist in preventing matters from creating ill-informed processes, such as the lack of uniformity and opaqueness in teacher credentialing and standards-setting. The Commission would be empowered to manage the steps necessary to determine one, or perhaps more than one, model of how we will prepare tomorrow's WL teachers. We would thereby begin the overdue process of standardization and stabilization for WLTD that has been called for elsewhere (Cooper, 1985; Cummings-Hlas & Conroy, 2010; García, Hernández, & Davis-Wiley, 2010; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014).

The Commission members would come from a community of interest groups. They would review both the pertinent research and the work of extant pre-service WL programs, and evaluate studies, articles, and reports on teacher education, such as those by Liskin-Gasparro (1999), and Raymond (2002). Their focus would be to develop the requisite recommendations and timelines for initiating the desired models of seamless induction. They would consider Parker's exhortation (cited in Schulz, 2000) as a point of departure:

“Education courses must be less theoretical and more practical and specific, ...should stress methods and be conducted by the subject-matter department...should be taught by instructors with secondary-school experience” (p. 498).

Parker’s call is not of recent vintage—it was published in 1935, 80 years ago. The appearance of similar declarations and deliberations from even earlier decades are also traced by Schulz (2000), such as the 1898 “Report of the Committee of Twelve of the Modern Language Association,” the 1924 Coleman Report, and the 1929 Purin Report. Confirming Schulz’ (2000)—and earlier, Kelly’s (1969) views, Wilbur (2007) looks to the future of WLTD through the activist lens that our Commission must make its own. She advocates for the determination of prototypes or models of WL methods class instruction, and recommends a course of action. She asks that WLTD determine the one feature so critical to the pre-service teachers’ classroom success: a research-based discovery/rediscovery of best classroom practices.

Our task force would not only address the triad of macro-issues—repetition, disunity, and standards determination. It also attends to pertinent micro-issues. These day-to-day topics of induction are subsumed in seven framing questions that are the essence of successful WLTD:

1. Who should determine pre-service induction?
2. What has changed in WLTD? In other words, are we building the best ever buggy-whip in a world of horseless carriages?
3. Who are and who will be the methods class audiences?
4. Who is the teacher educator—what are his/her attributes and experiences?
5. Who else participates in WLTD?
6. What should the period of induction be in terms of time and experiences?
7. Who and where are our future pre-K-12 language students?

We do not offer proscriptive answers here. We respect the breadth and depth that this undertaking represents for the profession. Our framework questions are signposts conceived for Commission consideration. In a sense, our yellow brick road to WLTD becomes more river-like and less easily navigable than the paved surface. The signposts serve as beacons that signal our progress in maintaining pedagogical focus—student success, evaluating appropriate subject area content (WL), and measuring outcomes for beginning WL teachers (skill sets, staff retention, student enrollments, classroom management, and more). Our indicators are representational advisories to the Commission that it heeds the warning implicit in Alice’s exchange with the Cheshire cat in Chapter 7 of Carroll’s (1865) *Alice’s adventures in wonderland*:

“Which road do I take?”

“Where do you want to go?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then, it doesn’t matter.”

4. Who Should Determine Pre-Service Induction?

This first of our seven questions is already settled fact. Through the collaboration of ACTFL with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)—now the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), standards for specialized professional associations (SPA) recognition are a reality for WLTD (ACTFL, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c). Their inclusion here is to argue that the Commission continues to publicize, strengthen, and address local ramifications.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many WL departmental colleagues remain unaware of the WLTD program standards and their portent. In concert with other stakeholder demands for accountability and measurable achievement, the standards inevitably will impact all post-secondary WL majors from various concentrations (business, social work, trade)—and, thereby, the teaching approaches used in upper-level WL seminars. On-going popularization of the standards means that we clarify the procedures and requirements of program evaluation to colleagues in literature and linguistics, and to those whose research interests may seem peripheral or not relevant to K-12 teacher preparation.

These internal WL groups will learn that CAEP recognition is advantageous in two ways. First, it raises general faculty consciousness about quality attainment in language for all WL majors and minors. The ACTFL/CAEP standards therefore can lead to or assist in a reconceptualization of university WL learning objectives. Second, because the teacher preparation criteria were established by the leading organization concerned with K-12

teaching outcomes—ACTFL, university-level initiatives to improve WL instruction take on a strengthened and even favorable profile when they are linked to the accepted national benchmarks of language proficiency for pre-service induction, Advanced Low. The revitalized instructional paradigm that Brooks and Darhower (2014) promote would provide both WL teaching majors and other WL students significant language experiences and exposure in all coursework. Adherence to the ACTFL/CAEP standards in these venues would offer WL education faculty demonstrable evidence of achievement, or the lack thereof, that is uniform and not left to a potentially dubious “local alternative.” It forces refocusing what all WL majors should know and be capable of doing in the target language.

5. What Has Changed In WLTD?

We suggest five preconditions for future Commission action:

1. WLTD is a business; we “manufacture” K-12 educators, and sell our product to a national market. Presently, there are some 100,000 WL *units*—teachers—representing our professional brand (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, Table 209.20). How we educate the product today determines our existence and viability for tomorrow.
2. We have and will maintain a continual reshaping of WL study in our nation.
3. We have a continuing WL teacher shortage based in part on the reconstitution of language offerings and types, and an over-supply in other than WL areas.
4. We have a great array of tools available for delivering instruction.
5. We foresee a future WL teacher cadre whose life and schooling will include electronic and personal encounters with native speakers and other cultures—as will their future pupils.

Such experiences will produce an assumed level of cultural sophistication, the discussion of which informs the components of WLTD. It also brings into the conversation the effects of the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) of future WL teachers whose training and classroom experiences must include the use of such technological tools as Skype, Adobe Connect, Google Hangout or similar electronically mediated platforms.

These considerations illustrate the necessity for the Commission’s objectives to be based on mining multiple data sources, a factor that earlier conversations may have disregarded. Demographic information (retirements, changes in local ethnic populations) is one example. Another is the regional importance attached to a second language such as importing teachers from abroad for immersion language schools that have grown in number to 448 K-8 schools in over 30 states (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011; García, 1990, 2009), and the popularity of languages not traditionally taught in the US (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). Pedagogical research on effective practices, and surveys investigating what are the preferred languages require reflection, as do recommendations pertaining to universally accessible technology innovations and their impact on WL education.

6. Who Are and Who Will Be the Methods Class Audiences?

In addition to the Commission formulating recommendations as to what should constitute the program structure of future WL methods courses, its members must consider the third of our seven signposts, that of the course demographic composition that methods instructors such as García and Davis-Wiley (2012) have described. Minimum course registration requirements (e.g., 10 students or the class is cancelled), as well as the aforementioned changes in K-12 language study bear directly on audience composition. In turn, these circumstances influence the pedagogy conversations on WLTD, a reality that the authors have themselves experienced.

We conclude that the “one text fits all” topics of the traditional methods sequence are operationally unsound. Further, in the future, it will also be ineffective. Topics instructors must cover in methods sections are no longer just for traditional WL majors preparing to be teachers of Spanish I or French II or German AP at a high school. Chinese, for example, is among the newer K-12 WL offerings; its instructor may be a new arrival to an American school district, and an enrollee in the local methods program as part of an alternative licensure process.

In addition to encountering that possible divergence of opinion from a graduate enrollee (such as the Chinese teacher), the WLTD courses also may welcome students of other backgrounds and perspectives. They are teachers in U.S. immersion programs and bring another perspective to the program—that of content-based instruction. The immersion teacher teaches language through content, and content through language, as Met (1991) explained.

We also cannot exclude the simultaneous presence in methods of pre-service teacher candidates whose goals are akin to those of the immersion instructors: those wishing to make use of our expertise as they prepare to teach using a method integrating language and content known as *sheltered instruction* (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2008) or teach in a dual-immersion programs for English learners (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2014; Echeverria, Vogt & Short, 2007). The distinctiveness of these groups, assembled in one or two seminars on methods because of minimum enrollment requirements, means that a series of forced choices must be made by the methods instructor, who has to decide what might be beneficial to each audience segment. Lamentably, the choices for discussion topics are packed into one 3 or 4-credit hour course—a wholly insufficient time to devote to vital aspects that comprise methods content. The Commission will undertake a major challenge as it navigates this part of our journey into the future.

7. Who are Teacher Educators? What are their attributes and experiences? Who else participates in WLTD?

The next two signposts for the Commission refer to required qualifications and preparation of the key faculty charged with mentoring the pre-service WL teacher: the methods instructor (the fourth question) and the cooperating teacher (the fifth). Their individual yet collaborative activities are vital (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), but not only because of the complexity of decisions to be made regarding methods course content. Beyond that, it is also because the personnel implications of supervising the practicum student (Bailey, 2009) require that we consider the attributes of methods instructors and cooperating teachers through dispassionate inquiry combined with compassionate reflection.

Regarding the preparation of the future methods faculty, we suggest that the Commission's point of departure for inquiry into what makes an effective WL methods instructor begin by exploring the dual question of "What takes place—and what should take place—in the diverse-types methods classroom?" Among the related topics to be discussed is that of "priority matters" for the teacher candidates during induction (Fry, 2007; National Capitol Resource Center, n.d.). Does the methods instructor provide model thematic units and fully address concerns regarding content-based instruction, both of which are important to an immersion teacher, for example? Or, should priority be given to questions by future secondary WL teachers on how and when one should teach the French partitive, or Spanish verb endings? Are verb positions in German subordinate clauses a priority? What about ways to assist ELL students in acquiring the copular verb "to be" and meeting standards (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium—INTASC Foreign language Standards Committee, 2002; TESOL, 2006)? Should they discuss reasons to put aside mechanical drills and pre-conceived beliefs about teaching (Doolittle, Dodds & Placek, 1993; Fajet, Bello, Alwee Leftwich, Mesler & Shaver, 2005; Lortie, 1975; Wong & VanPatten, 2003)?

And all this attended to in one room in the same time, more or less, for three or four credit hours. How might we produce the necessary quantity of methods professors who would be capable of guiding each sub-group along their respective career paths? How will future methods instruction be devised so as to address the many questions that the diverse future teachers will have raised by dint of their assignment? How will we educate WLTD instructors to provide appropriate insights and promote activities that satisfy students' needs for information on how-to learn strategies (Oxford, 1990)—as well as simultaneously ensure future WL teachers of excellence for each program type represented in the methods seminar? At this juncture, the solutions may be beyond our collective reach. Investigating the possibilities to develop answers is, however, within the Commission's grasp.

And a portion of that endeavor must include identifying the knowledgeable allies at the appropriate levels in education. We would count among them the language department supervisors who deal with teacher observations and curriculum development in several WL areas. Many leaders are members of the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL), which developed the widely referenced "Characteristics of Effective Foreign Language Instruction" (NADSFL, 1999). The contributions of K-12 cooperating teachers who are recognized for their teaching skills cannot be omitted, nor can the building-level administrators who provide internship opportunities for teacher developers (García, 2010).

Undeniably, the career aspirations of language methods enrollees demand a great deal of the instructor/supervisor, as Wallace (1991) and Zimmer-Loew (2000) argue. We believe that adequately responding to the spectrum of WLTD students' interests is beyond the expertise of most WL methods faculty. It is not a lack of commitment and knowledge of standards and performance guidelines for learners (Swender & Duncan, 1998).

The reality is that very few individuals can claim first-hand experiences in having taught ELL *and* EFL students abroad *and* WL (K-12) instruction, *and* science for Spanish immersion at the middle school level that would guide the pre-service WL teacher. To ameliorate that reality, we argue that if methods faculty members were to experience first-hand a sustained and varied K-12 teaching assignment, as could easily be endorsed by the Commission in its recommendations, both instructors and students would benefit from the insights of shared professional development.

Additionally, it is mandatory that the Commission review the factors that deliver a superior induction sequence model with a concurrent task—one not subordinate to it, but of co-equal importance: the delineation of the role and skills that the school-site cooperating teacher has for WLTD. Studies investigating collaboration between the methods instructor and the cooperating teacher describe the valuable working relationship being constructed to benefit the pre-service intern (García, Hernández, & Davis-Wiley, 2010). Theirs cannot function in an oppositional dynamic that deconstructs the connections between theory and practice, say, between discussing the value of input flooding techniques versus explicit instruction and testing the relevant hypothesizes through action research (Ellis, 2002; Hernández, 2011). We insist that our profession—and other disciplines—must do better than what we do now when it comes to assisting and rewarding cooperating teachers for their contributions to teacher education.

8. What Should the Period of Induction be in Terms of Time and Experiences?

The fourth and fifth of the seven signposts form a direct line to the next to last signpost, the sixth: the amount of time needed for exemplary WLTD. The authors and others who work in TD have long agonized over the induction time allocated to WL and other subject areas. Where once a 5-year period of induction was hailed as the answer (Holmes Group, 1995), that number, due to political and economic constraints, has been reduced to the traditional 4-year college experience in some institutions. What does it matter, we ask, if TD does not provide the evidence required of us—student success in K-12, teacher retention and quality, to demand that we look at different induction models of greater duration?

9. Who and Where are Our Future Pre-K-12 Language Students?

The final signpost we offer the Commission to mark the path needed for WLTD in the next decade is to ask about the demographics of America's WL learners. Indeed, we have many children whose home language is not English. What role will the multicultural and often bilingual communities play for a student to choose to study a WL? How do we use WLTD to assist tomorrow's teachers in preparing for the diverse population of WL learners we see today—and will see more of tomorrow? Do we really believe that all students are capable of learning another language, as declared in the preface to our national standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006)? Can we implement such programs? The determination of such questions will assist us in planning WLTD that will make it possible for an inclusive audience of WL learners to thrive as they learn about "the other."

10. Conclusions and Beginnings

As preparers of future WL teachers, we are remiss if we do not consider the influence that the Commission for WLTD would have in creating excellent pre-service induction models. The Commission must simultaneously benefit K-12 schoolchildren, and ensure their academic success as it enhances their interest in and respect for other languages and cultures. By addressing the macro- and micro-issues that we have described confronting our profession on a sustained basis, the Commission can bring about standardized, seamless language teacher preparation to do just that.

Finding the yellow brick road that leads us to a state approaching preparation perfection is not the only education challenge facing our nation, however. Underlying crises affecting schools and pupils—poverty, hunger, crime, and appropriate funding—compel resolution. For if the influence of a teacher is limited to 10% or 20% of the child's experience (Strauss, 2013, para. 14), we cannot meet our challenge for WLTD alone. While WLTD is but one brick in the road to successful teacher education, it is clear that our individual responsibility and collective professional obligation to ensure that our single brick was contributed without flaws during its design and production.

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