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# **GLOSAS DIDÁCTICAS**

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## **Teacher portfolios as a tool for assessment and professional development**

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### **1. Scope and motivation of the research**

This study was motivated by concrete concerns originated by the restrictions a single foreign language methodology (henceforth, FLM) course imposes in the preparation of language instructors. In order to provide more support, especially for those TAs who feel isolated from their program, the portfolio was implemented as a tool for professional development as well as assessment in the course for graduate teaching assistants. The use of such an instrument for assessment is not only meant to evaluate how well the graduate students integrate theoretical concepts discussed in the course into everyday teaching practice, but also as a way to develop a conceptual teaching philosophy that reflects application of knowledge. The original model was enhanced three years ago with the assistance of Judith Liskin-Gasparro (2000-2002) who shared her ideas on the subject. The portfolios used for this study include several items that were prepared by the students for the course. These samples were considered a work in progress, that is, the final version was the result of several revisions which number was left to the discretion of the students.

As graduate students in a postgraduate program at an American university many participants whose focus is literary studies—as opposed to applied linguistics or pedagogy—do not have an opportunity to take more than one methods course, therefore most of their training comes from trial and error in the classroom, learning to teach the hard way. The idea of using portfolios for assessment in the methods course arose from the realization that a long term project or exams were left for the last moment, students only regurgitated information, and there was no evidence of integration of theory and practice in their classes when observed. Year after year, some TAs were getting many of the same comments in their evaluations making it evident that they were unable to incorporate the expected knowledge and modify their teaching practices. Such results indicated that some students were teaching to get by—obtain a tuition waiver and a stipend by teaching one to three sections of a language class three days a week—and were not realizing that their responsibilities as educators go beyond covering the material and grading exams. The consequences of such conduct had undesirable effects on the rest of the program because language students left their classes with poor preparation, unrealistic expectations about their next instructor, and, in many cases, undeserved grades. The need to provide all students who enter a course not only with quality of instruction, but also with a coherent sequence that will ensure a smooth transition to subsequent levels and ensure long-term learning presents several challenges among them, class size, the integration of false beginners into elementary language classes, self-placement,

and instructor preparation for foreign language teaching. As we have observed, teacher preparation is not the solution to all these challenges (Sullivan, 2004). However, professional training involves several players “many educational administrations have yet to recognize (or act upon) their responsibilities for promoting change in the way teachers teach, in the sense of promoting increased teacher expertise and insight.” (Crookes, 1997: 70). Although there is no ideal solution to these problems, this article will consider measures that can facilitate professional development in less-than-ideal conditions.

## 2. Review of the literature

Following Johnson’s (1997) notion, “if we create opportunities for teachers to make sense of theory in terms of themselves, their students, their classrooms, and the broader social contexts within which they work, then theory becomes relevant for practice because teachers make it their own” (p. 780), the reflective component of the portfolio clearly serves a purpose of integration of theory and practice. In order to implement strategies for addressing teacher’s needs and the transfer of knowledge into the classroom, the portfolio was chosen, as suggested by Antonek, McCormick and Donato (1997: 18), as a developmental tool that permits teachers to regulate their professional progress and: (a) document the teaching experience for those students who were teaching, and to develop and compile items that could be used in the future for those who were not teaching yet; (b) outline the development of a professional identity; and (c) articulate their beliefs about foreign language teaching.

Some of the challenges that these TAs confront have no easy solution. The problem of class size is rooted in financial difficulties that institutions are experimenting nationwide. Of course, other factors have pedagogical repercussions in language learning, but during observations of novice teachers it has become clear that they have more difficulty managing and organizing larger classes. Many inexperienced TAs end up giving teacher-fronted lessons that allow them more control over the class but restrict the kind of student interaction necessary for language development. Others, have turned to technology—if they are fortunate enough to teach in a classroom with a computer—and have integrated lessons using Power Point presentations or the Internet in order to capture students attention. Another concern is the time instructors spend correcting homework, compositions, and tests. This work added to their other responsibilities such as planning lessons, holding office hours, contributing to exams, as well as preparing for the courses they take as graduate students is adverse to their schedule. The consequences of such demands on inexperienced TAs are usually evident: they either spend less time preparing lessons or take too long to return graded work, thus depriving students of prompt and useful feedback. This, of course, does not account for personal repercussions that the stress of this environment places on them.

Another obstacle new instructors face is the varied backgrounds of students who enroll in language classes. The practice of self-placing in a lower level to achieve an easy grade is wide-spread, many students view the course as a way to enhance their grade point average (GPA). The implications of this practice, as Byrnes (2000) points out, are more serious than many are willing to acknowledge:

The practice of placing students with extensive previous instruction into beginners’ classes once more—a frequent practice in secondary and postsecondary education—is not only devastating from the standpoint of learner motivation and, thus, educationally totally unsound, it is ultimately fiscally irresponsible (p. 489).

In addition to Byrnes’ arguments, what most students—and some instructors—do not realize is that this custom increases the number of elementary sections offered, diverting resources from the teaching of intermediate and advanced courses, and promotes course duplication. Students who need to complete a two- or four-semester language requirement in

many occasions have no real interest in learning the language. This lack of motivation, the diversity of students' background, and class size are some of the problems that new instructors come across that increase stress and diverts attention from learning objectives.

To understand the relationship between academic knowledge and teaching practices, one must explore notions of construction and change in teacher coherence systems as discussed by Kinginger (1997) and take into account what Fairclough (1995) calls the *naturalized ideology*. This term refers to ideas about teaching that novice teachers have which are based on intuition or "common sense." Kinginger points out that "the more a particular idea becomes naturalized, the more difficult it will be to interpret it as one among several alternatives" (p. 7). This adherence to ideas pertains also to another realm that comes into play, that of social identity that is shaped by previous experiences in classrooms and schools. The language teaching experience that some of the participants have by the time they enroll in the seminar hardly conforms to the concept of *novice teacher* enrolled in teacher education that seems prevalent in the literature documenting pre-service and first-year in-service teacher development. Often, students who are most experienced as language teachers endure identity struggles as they become equated with novice or pre-service teachers giving up their previous status of expert teacher. In many cases, there is also a confrontation with a new context for language teaching that is likely to conflict with their previous philosophies of teaching and preexisting educational cultures as mention in Gorsuch (2000). Finally, some graduate students experience for the first time a new professional role as TAs of their native language after teaching English as a foreign language in their countries.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how TAs use theoretical knowledge, and following Kinginger's research look at how they "achieve a coherent system of knowledge to inform their own practice, how they make sense of expertise, and which discourse from among those available achieves prominence in their minds" (p. 8). As Crookes mentions, teaching should not be at the level of coping, teachers should not be forced to adapt to new demands, and function less and less like "learning institutions". He proposes self-study, evaluation and action research as possible requirements to encourage and support professional development. (p. 75)

There are two Research Questions:

1. How do TAs make sense of the theoretical background to which they are exposed in one course and begin to see professional development as a process?
2. What are the best tools this courses can make available for TAs to ease the transition between their multiple roles (teacher-learner)?

In exploring these two questions, one has to pursue an understanding of the range of sociocultural variables that influence these processes. The salient variables that were considered in this study are related to (a) teachers' dynamic construction of professional identity reflected in the portfolio, and (b) teachers' personal history and sociocultural background.

### 3. Method

Following standard interpretive qualitative practice as found in Davis (1992, 1995) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000), and to ensure research credibility, data was collected from a multiplicity of sources. The work was spread out during three years and ensured that the students who were teaching had a chance to use their own materials in the classroom and fine-tune them later on. For the non-teaching participants, the opportunity was given to present their activities to the class for discussion.

This study was conducted in the methodology course for foreign language teaching assistants (henceforth the FLM course) offered in a Department of Modern and Classical Languages. This seminar was a required course for those graduate students who hold, or expect to hold, a teaching assistantship in the department. They teach a variety of languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, and Russian.

The role of the TA is that of the instructor in record and he will be fully responsible for holding office hours, preparing lessons, contribute to writing and editing exams, grade assignments and exams, calculate and give final grades

#### 4. Participants

The participants are 45 graduate students who enrolled in the seminar during the past four years and completed a teaching portfolio. Eighty-five percent of the participants are females and fifteen percent male. Thirty-three percent of the participants are native speakers of the languages they teach, forty-six percent are non-native speakers and twenty percent taught they native and another language. Seventy-three percent of the participants were teaching at the time they took the seminar, twenty six percent were expected to teach the following semester but were tutors in the language lab. Fifty-five percent had some teaching experience including High School or teaching ESL abroad, forty-four percent had no teaching experience. All participants granted written permission for the use of their documents for this study; nevertheless the documents were primarily manufactured as evidence of integration of theory and class discussions into their teaching (i.e., assessment) and not for research purposes.

**Table 1: Participants' profile (N = 45)**

Gender		Language							Target Language			Teaching experience	
m	f	Ar	Ch	Fr	Ger	Jap	Sp	Ru	NS	NNS	NS/NNS	Y	N
7	38	1	4	9	4	3	22	1	15	21	9	20	25
15%	66%	2.2%	8.8%	20%	8.8%	6.6%	48%	2.2%	33.3%	46.6%	20%	44.4%	55.5%

m = male; f = female; Ar = Arabic; Ch = Chinese; Fr = French; Ger = German; Jap = Japanese; Sp = Spanish; Ru = Russian; NS = native speaker of the language taught; NNS = non native speaker of the language taught; NS/NNS = teaching two languages, being a native speaker of one and a non native of the other one.

#### 5. Materials

The data collection instrument for this study was the complete student's portfolio that contains: a Philosophy of Teaching Statement; eight activities: one for each of the four language skills, and one for each, technology, error correction, testing, and lesson planning; three reports on peer observations; two reports on expert-teacher observation; and critical analysis of journal articles. Many of these items included a reflection statement or the rationale for choosing an approach to teaching or testing.

The items for the portfolio were chosen to in an attempt to uncover the emic perspective of the participants. Some of the factors were adapted from Freeman and Freeman (1994): (1) Philosophy of Teaching Statement to see a narrative of teacher's foreign language experience, personal views of learner and learning, and to record previous training (when appropriate); (2) Eight activities to record teachers reaction to new ideas and the use of materials available. The

researcher also conducted class observations and videotapes of teaching (teaching participants), interviews with all participants, and the researcher's journal.

## 6. Findings

Since the purpose of this research is to examine the portfolio as a tool for assessment and teacher development, this section presents some findings from free writing and portfolio items that document the development of a critical approach to teaching.

During the first week of classes, the participants were asked to express their beliefs about foreign language learning and worries related to their teaching in a university setting. They were asked to complete some of the statements. In this section only a few representative samples are presented:

Item #1. I think that people learn a foreign language by...

The majority of the participants mentioned practice, all of them mentioned speaking, some included more specific terminology referring to the four skills and tasks. The use of terminology does not necessarily belong to those with teaching experience, but to those who had taken Methods or other Second Language Acquisition courses.

Item #7. The difference between knowing a language and knowing how to teach a language is that...

"When teaching you have to know (or try) to answer why..." (S 8/NS/NTE)

"Teaching methods are required..." (S 43/NS/TE)

"One can speak it because he/she always heard it that way, but not know the reason behind it. There is a reason why a feminine noun which begins with stressed "a" does not use definite article "la." There is a difference between haber + de + infinitive [verb] and deber + infinitive [verb] (S 36/NNS/TE)

"I, as a teacher, have to know how my students feel like and how they think in their target language." (S 41/NS/TE)

"The ability to explain and transfer information to the student." (S 9/NS/TE)

"When teaching a language one has to be able to not just comprehend the language, but also to function in the language in all aspects." (S 10/NNS/NTE)

"You are responsible for other people when you teach." (S 21/NNS/NTE)

"They are two completely different things." (S 4/NS/TE)

When the groups discussed this item in class, the recurrent notion was that one has to be able to understand and transmit knowledge to others. Some participants seemed to have a vague idea about training and mentioned methodology, approaches, and techniques. Many of them did not address the differences but seemed to be aware of their existence.

Item #9. If a student makes an error, the teacher should...

"Correct it, but she should make sure not to embarrass the student." (S 45/NS/NTE)

"First, give them the opportunity to correct themselves; second, give others the opportunity; finally, provide the answer." (S 17/NNS/NTE)

"Be politely and patiently indicating to the student what his/her mistake is. If the error is unavoidable, then let it be for the time being." (S 44/NS/TE)

"Correct the mistake, have the student repeat it correctly." (S 34/NS/TE)

"Correct it immediately, give another context where they can use the structure correctly." (S 33/NNS/NTE)

It is evident that as teachers gain experience in the classroom, the idealistic views of error correction become less contradictory and more pragmatic. At the time, most first-year language classes had 30-35 students, and the demands of a common syllabus and common exams prevented TAs from spending all the time they would like correcting errors, especially in writing assignments. Error correction was also an item they had to write about in their portfolio drawing differences between lexical and sentence level errors and oral and written production. Ninety percent of the participants modified their initial statement after reading Lyster and Ranta's article on instructor feedback and learner's uptake. In their reflection on error correction they manifested that they had been shocked when they learned that recast—the most widely used form of error correction—was also the least effective, but they were willing to implement new strategies, such as elicitation, that seemed to make more sense.

Item #10. Think of the beginning of the semester in your own class. What specific concerns do you have about your teaching?

"Being able to communicate clearly, accurately and concisely..." (S 8/NNS/NTE)

"I am concerned about effective use of time, I am also concerned about the use of technologies." (S 19/NS/NTE)

"If I am being understood—whether or not the students can handle the topic or activities given." (S 9/NS/TE)

"I would like to know if students enjoy the class." (S 30/NS/TE)

"Explaining grammar in English, how to get students attention." (S 3/NS/NTE)

"Teaching the students incorrectly, forgetting what to say in the target language and reverting into English." (S 21/NNS/NTE)

"That students might get bored of my class." (S 23/NS/TE)

"Not being able to understand the jokes of the students, since I am not very familiar with idioms." (S 44/NS/TE)

A pervasive comment among the international students was their hesitation regarding their ability to communicate with undergraduate students in English, on the other hand, those students who were not natives of the language they teach, expressed concerns about their ability to maintain the discourse in the target language. This performance anxiety was a determining factor in the TAs tolerance for errors, during the follow up interview after observing their classes, some of them assured me that their strategy was not to discourage students because even advanced learners make mistakes.

In subsequent weeks, participants were prone to bring up anecdotes from their classes or their language learning experiences. In order to direct the discussion to a more productive venue, rather than just allowing them to vent their frustration, the participants were asked to relate the incidents to what they had read. Particular stress was put on developing a reflective approach when talking about their classes. In order to accomplish this, some of Posner (1989) questions were asked:

"What happened? Why did it happen? What was my role? What beliefs did my actions reflect? Did my actions reflect beliefs and assumptions about which I was not aware? Did the consequences of my actions raise doubts or reinforce my beliefs? How should I want to act in the future on the basis of what happened?" (p. 26).

It is crucial for *novice teachers* to find a "healthy balance between seeing teaching as a complex whole and focusing on manageable small aspects of one's teaching for growth and development" (Sullivan, 399), for that reason, the participant were required to revise many of the portfolio items during the semester and several showed active reflection and reconsideration of beliefs.

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The following items illustrate appropriation of knowledge and the emergence of a professional identity:

Philosophy of Teaching Statement. The first draft was, in most cases, a lengthy narrative of their experience as language learners, disproportionately longer than the discussion about the role of the teacher, learner, curriculum and materials. Subsequent revisions rendered in most cases a more polished and balanced essay.

“Now after teaching and taking this course, my passive impressions about teachers and classes have developed to concrete ideas by learning pedagogic philosophy and practical methods. I often experiment at new methods and observe the students’ reaction. I tried to bring communication opportunities and cultural aspects into the classroom, and I realized that the students became more interested and motivated than before. I am also trying to interact with the students. Although I do not have any experience as an actress, I sometimes feel that teaching is somehow similar to acting in plays.” (S 3/NS/NTE)

“Being aware of [different learning styles] relates back to our expectations of students. I know that it is impossible to cater to every student’s needs individually, but I do think it is important to be somewhat aware of the different abilities within your class. I prefer to start the class at a faster pace and ‘push’ the students in order to see how much I need to slow down.” (S 1/NNS/NTE)

“My primary goal is to help my students see how exciting it can be to learn about and to experience another culture. I want them to look at language acquisition as an exciting and fun adventure. It is my job to make it so. I understand that no teacher can inspire and motivate every single student. But for those who are interested or simply curious, I want to make them glad they decided to study French.” (S 17/NNS/NTE)

Lesson plan. This item was completed in pairs. Teaching participants carried out the lesson in their classrooms and made pertinent modifications so their non-teaching counterparts could present it to their classmates. This exercise proved to be challenging for all of them. The diversity of language backgrounds made it impossible for the presenter to rely on pre-existing knowledge. After the presentations the students had to fill out a peer evaluation, in many cases indicating that they had not followed the lesson at all. Some participants mentioned that they now knew how it feels to be completely lost in class. The feedback from these presentations was taken into consideration by most participants who developed a more organized, intelligible lesson the second time around.

“Analysis: 1. Students were very interested and excited about the game. They seemed to forget that they were learning, but concentrated on the listening for their own interest.

“2. It was not clear how to estimate the time it would take to complete the activity; however, when the game started, I could easily control the speed by pausing or asking questions. (Ex. How many people are on “reach”?)

“3. I did not plan ahead what to do with winners. The student who won first had nothing to do during the rest of the activity. It would have been better that the winners would call numbers instead of me so that they could also have some pronunciation practice.” (S 3/NS/NTE)

“Reflection: With the exception of the “class activity”, the lesson was a success. The magazine grabbed their attention, and the demonstrations using peers maintained their interest and seemed effective. The class activity simply lasted too long. It did allow them to practice the adjective agreements (gender only) and the personal pronouns “He/she” that they had only recently learned, but it was slow, and **tedious**. As the game progressed, they became restless and bored – a big disappointment! I would not do an exercise of that

nature again with beginners. Articulating sentences was painstakingly slower than I anticipated. However, the pair work activity was productive.” (S 7/NNS/NTE)

Writing. The task consisted in designing a writing assignment for a first-year course. About fifty percent of the participants wrote a very detailed set of instructions, including vocabulary and grammatical structures that had to be used, the rest wrote very succinct instructions, one or two lines. None of the participants set a word limit. The assignments were then exchanged and the participants had two tasks: (1) write a composition, and (2) indicate the problems they had had—if any—completing the task. After they received the compositions back, some participants realized that they were inadvertently asking for too much or too little, the way they phrased the instructions forced students to use complex grammatical structures that they were not ready to use, the lack of set boundaries regarding content was inadequate, and they had not make plans for situations in which a student could write twenty-five words and complete the task, while others could do it in two-hundred. These are some examples:

“Describe every member of your family. What does he/she look like, what do they do, what they like to do in their free time, and how often you see them.” (S 36/NNS/TE)

“Your friend is coming to visit you during the school break. Write him a letter telling him what you will be doing in your hometown. Use at least five words from the list: museums, movies, restaurants, sports, parties, coffee shop, stores.” (S 11/NNS/NTE)

“In a letter, describe your home to your pen-pal, Marcel. [Tip: Be sure to write about what you have in your home by using the *there is* and *I have* structures, as well as their **negative** equivalents]. Vocabulary theme: the house: rooms, floors, and furniture. Grammatical item: Negation and affirmation” (S 7/NNS/NTE)

Article commentaries. This last component of the portfolio has been the most difficult for ninety percent of the participants. They were asked to write a critical analysis of four of the nine-ten articles they read during the semester. Most participants at the beginning approach this task in a very superficial manner, often commenting on the format of the article, summarizing it, and relapsing to accounts of their own language learning experience. It was immediately apparent that the participants lacked the background necessary to critically analyze articles, and sometimes even understand them. This and other issues will be addressed in the following section.

Student data gathered over the past six years, as well as regular observations of actual classroom teaching, suggest that some teaching assistants in the FLM class might find it difficult to engage in the process of incorporating the pedagogical theories addressed in the seminar into their own teaching. The portfolio has also provided the program with useful information about instructors’ self-perceptions, and modified teaching practices, and has become an invaluable tool to determine continuation or termination of appointments.

**Table 2: Distribution of appointments**

Semesters after taking course (N = 45)	TA	HS	Not teaching	Other
1-2	84%	2%	8%	4%
2-4	61%	23%	2%	13%

TA = Teaching assistantship; HS = High School teacher; Not teaching (not allowed to teach because of performance in the course or termination of appointment due to performance in the classroom); Other (withdrawal from the program, change of financial situation, appointed as Visiting Instructor, etc.)



The second year after the students had taken the methodology course, it becomes evident that, at least, 25% of them plan to pursue a career as middle- or high-school teachers. Eight out of nine students used their Portfolio when looking for a teaching job. Several used their prepared lessons when doing a teaching demonstration and commented on the value of reflection on their own teaching. Of this group, 13% were hired as Visiting Instructors in the department. Also, 17% will pursue a Ph. D in Literature or Linguistics and have used the philosophy of teaching as part of the application materials. Four of the students prepared for interviews reviewing their portfolio and used some of the materials to secure a teaching assistantship at their new institution.

It must be said that of the 8% who were not considered prepared for teaching or whose appointment was terminated, one participant continued taking methods and approaches courses and is now teaching in the department and receiving excellent evaluations from supervisors and students.

## 7. Discussion

As mentioned in the previous section, the completion of the portfolio does not automatically prepare students for teaching. There must be some notions of language learning and a departure from the personal experience in order to develop a professional identity based on knowledge and not on purely on assumptions or intuitions.

As in Pennington and Richards (1997) study, inexperienced teachers had difficulties integrating theory and practice—some of them were convinced that they were applying the principles discussed in class while it was evident that they had misunderstood the concepts—they also reacted to unexpected problems in the classroom by going against what they have learned: reverting to English, becoming antagonistic toward their students, or giving into students' request to give a lengthy grammar explanation.

Like Antonek, McCormick and Donato found out, teachers modify instruction based on the content of their portfolios, and the autobiographical nature of this instrument begins to emerge when teachers change their own practices and start constructing a professional identity. From a Vigotskian point of view one has to look at the thought processes of the teacher in order to understand teaching behavior. Thus the portfolio must contain both examples of teaching attitudes and written evidence of reflection on teaching practices. For this reason, many of the portfolio items are considered work in progress, that teachers have an opportunity to revise after they have implemented their ideas in the classroom. The self-evaluation exercises, especially the videotape, were particularly useful for those novice TAs who are insecure about their teaching. The compilation of materials is also used as a means to pull together all the aspects that are involved in teaching, such as class-preparation, exam development and evaluation of student performance. Upon examination of the portfolios, evidence was found that is consistent with Schartz (1993), who asserts: "Once they have experienced their classroom as a valuable resource for assessing the learning process, the participants improve their own teaching by becoming more reflective about what is occurring in the interaction between the students and the teacher" (p. 107).

If TAs do not accept the methodology of the program, their performance in the classroom will suffer. Language program directors frequently come to appreciate this from complaints raised by undergraduate students who report that their TAs do not conform to departmental policies, exams or methodologies. For example, the policy of not providing students with the script for language lab exercises arose during a meeting because students were unhappy with this practice and demanded access to scripts the way they have access to answer keys for the rest of the workbook. The rationale for this practice—not making scripts available to students—is to prevent students from copying answers and forfeiting listening

practice (Glisan, 2002). Two TAs strongly disagreed with the decision, and, based on their learning experience of German, asserted that when they were able to read the script they understood much more. They failed to see that greater understanding came from a different skill: reading. Only one TA, who was familiar with Glisan's claims, openly supported the decision, while seven others remained silent. This standpoint reflects a teaching philosophy based purely on personal experience that had not integrated many of the principles discussed in the literature presented in the required methodology seminar, again making clear the need for additional development of the professional identity of TAs.

## 8. Conclusions

At the outset of this study, the intention was to find out how TAs make sense of the theoretical background to which they are exposed and begin to see their professional development as a process. Another interest was to find the best tools that can be made available to them in order to ease the transition between their multiple, and sometimes conflicting, roles. The portfolio provided some of the answers, but most importantly, some new questions. Several ideas suggested by the portfolios can now be implemented in the continuous training of the TAs.

An emphasis is placed on the critical analysis of journal articles because, as Gass (1995) notes, "teachers need to have the background to measure what is happening in the classroom against research findings." (p. 13). As mentioned before, this particular component of the portfolio asks students to write a critical analysis of four of the ten articles they read during the semester. In order to avoid the problems presented by this component, a portion of the seminar will be devoted to developing the basic analytical strategies needed to negotiate this task successfully.

This study has presented some of the problems inexperienced, and experienced teachers, confront in the foreign language teaching. From the analysis of the samples, one can see how there is a need to go beyond the methods course in order to further professional development. Although, the researcher could not follow the progress of each of the participants, many of them still come back for support when needed, often starting their request saying: "In the methods course we read something about..." which indicates that they saw the course as an important part of their training.

To improve the quality of teaching—at least in the Spanish program—and to provide TAs with much needed support and resources outside the methods course, an on-line forum was implemented to promote further discussion of journal articles to help the TAs in their professional development. The department recognizes its responsibility in the preparation and success of TAs under less-than-ideal conditions, their accomplishments will only bring benefits to the undergraduate students who take their classes, to the lower division program, and to the university.

Often TAs feel constrained by the inflexibility of a program characterized by large multi-section classes that require some uniformity. The observation of TAs has been consistent with findings on the qualities of processes in formal language teacher education that enable teachers to appropriate disciplinary knowledge considered relevant in their teaching contexts. The reflective aspect of the portfolio has been especially important in the development of a professional identity. The ultimate goal of the portfolio has been provide a sample of teaching competency, to entice participants into seeking professional renewal and develop expertise by maintaining healthy reflective practices of their own teaching.

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