

Introducing Action Research into the Education of Postsecondary Foreign Language Teachers

Graham Crookes
University of Hawai'i

Paul Michael Chandler
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Abstract: This article reports on the introduction of an action research component into an existing graduate foreign language teaching methodology course for beginning foreign language teachers (graduate teaching assistants and graduate students) at the college level. The authors discuss the implementation, benefits, and caveats of such a project, illustrated with samples of feedback from the graduate teaching assistants' journals, evaluations, and follow-up interviews. Graduate teaching assistants reported positive attitudes about the project overall, at the same time expressing concerns about time constraints and risk taking (e.g., doing action research as beginning teachers). Limitations concerning the depth of graduate teaching assistants' understanding of action research were noted. Four possible options for change are listed, and some conclusions are drawn about the importance of a cyclical and exploratory approach to change in foreign language teacher education programs in general.

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages at the postsecondary level in the United States increasingly reflects an interest in developing communicative proficiency, but at many universities, training for university-level foreign language (FL) instructors may not fully reflect this change. One major problem is that the curriculum for degrees in foreign languages reflects a heavy concern with literature and/or the structural characteristics of language, with little attention to pedagogy or provision for future faculty development. VanPatten (1998), for example, remarks that "*probably less than 1% of the entire [foreign] language professoriat in the US is a specialist in applied linguistics related to language learning and teaching.*" In short, we have no large population of language educators at the Ph.D. level. University language departments are, by and large, departments of literature and culture" (p. 931; italics in original).

Many such FL degrees are obtained by teachers, but these professionals are nevertheless not prepared to engage in a process of life-long professional development. That is, they neither help teachers to use published research on teaching, nor provide them with a reflective problem-solving orientation to their own classroom teaching. This is a recipe for obsolescence; it implies a serious risk that the postsecondary level faculty in training today will not develop in their level of professionalism and use of pedagogy (cf. Berne, 1998).

At the same time, however, there is an extensive literature addressing changes needed in the move toward more proficiency-oriented instruction in U.S. FL programs. Proficiency-

Graham Crookes, PhD, is Associate Professor, Department of Second Language Studies and Acting Director, Hawai'i English Language Program, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Paul Michael Chandler (PhD, Indiana University, Bloomington) is Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii.

based approaches (also called communicative approaches), supporters believe, are likely to produce foreign language learning and teaching that will better serve educational needs now and at the beginning of the 21st century than did the older emphases on structure, translation, and literature (Lee & VanPatten, 1995; Omaggio Hadley, 1993). Many proposals associated with moves toward proficiency-based approaches call for U.S. foreign language teachers to be prepared to assess and modify curriculum, reflect on their teaching using "on a small scale the processes behind successful classroom-based research," or "conduct their own investigative projects" (Nerenz, 1993, p. 190–191).

Calls for initiatives and actions of the sort Nerenz refers to have appeared in the FL literature for many years (at least since Lane, 1962, and more recently in this journal: Zéphir, 2000), and draw on the long-standing tradition of "action research," a line that dates back at least to the work of Kurt Lewin in the mid-1940s (e.g., Lewin, 1946). Much action research goes on in professional fields such as nursing, agriculture, rural development, management, and business. (For a comprehensive review, see, e.g., Selener, 1997; also Atweh et al., 1998.) In education, teachers who reflect on their teaching and conduct such action-oriented investigative projects are known as *teacher-researchers*. Typically, they begin with a general area of concern or an aspect of their practice that they want to examine; thus, research questions emerge from a teacher's immediate needs and concerns, and through an initial phase of reflection on their work. Data is collected and analyzed. This constitutes a further manifestation of reflection, and a plan or decision is made to alter procedures or in some way take action to address the concern. Once the action is taken, its effects on the problem (as to whether it is solved or ameliorated) are evaluated. Further cycles of action may then ensue. The cyclical or spiral aspect is a distinctive characteristic of action research.

The investigative techniques used in teacher research are mainly those of observation, interview, and analysis of written material such as students' journal entries and tests, teachers' anecdotal records, and field notes. Such work can be described broadly as mainly using qualitative research techniques, though quantitative techniques are also employed. (Many handbooks specifying action research techniques now exist, one of the more thorough being Altrichter et al., 1993. See also Anderson et al., 1994; Freeman, 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McKernan, 1996; Winter, 1989.)

Ideally, action research is collaborative (cf. Burns, 1999). Teachers in many contexts attest to the benefit of getting together with at least one other teacher to talk over their concerns, and having a second perspective can be valuable in other aspects of the inquiry as well. In particu-

lar, it can assist in the process of reflection and the development of alternative perspectives for action, a point developed in particular by Kemmis and McTaggart's classic (1988) work (see also Branscombe et al., 1992; Burns & Hood, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Duckworth and the Experienced Teachers Group, 1997.) Another important characteristic of action research is that the findings of such research are immediately incorporated into the programs from which they stem. The immediate audience for action research is the teacher or teachers who conducted a particular investigation themselves, and then their fellow teachers—the other colleagues in the staff room, other teachers in their section, and so on. And after that, or sometimes concurrently, local conferences are the sort of venue where one would expect to see action research presentations. Published accounts of action research in foreign language teaching appear in a number of different media, genres, and locations, including the academic journal itself—at least one FL journal (*Language Learning Journal*) regularly has a section containing such reports (e.g., Johnstone, 1990; cf. Green, 1996). (See Crookes, 1993, and Chamot, 1995, for a more detailed description of action research within second and foreign language contexts.) This approach is increasingly seen as needed and useful in the FL teacher education curriculum (cf. Davis, 1997, for an example). Finally, with recent developments, e-mail discussions have become an increasingly essential part of communication and dissemination among teacher-researchers, and electronic publishing of action research (in, e.g., e-journals such as *Networks*¹) is becoming widespread.

Action research has tended to be conceptualized as something that established professionals do — by teachers with some time in the field, who on the basis of their accumulated experience have questions and are prepared to try something new to get answers. Relatedly, an action research approach has also been seen as one of several major models of in-service staff or professional development (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990), including for university-level teaching (e.g., Robert, 1993; Schratz, 1992, 1993); that is, as something the qualified teacher does to move forward in professional competence and knowledge. In recent years, however, there has been interest in exploring its potential as a part of the early training of teachers, either at the preservice stage or early in a teacher's professional experience. Reports or discussions of efforts of this kind have appeared with increasing frequency in education literature (e.g., Altrichter, 1988; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; McTaggart et al., 1990; Tabachnik & Zeichner, 1991), first appearing in the FL literature at least a decade ago (e.g., Gephart et al., 1987; cf. Bell, 1997).² Nerenz (1993) reports that ACTFL has been supportive of such developments at least since 1991, when a day-long symposium on these

topics for student teachers was held for the first time at the organization's annual meeting.

Besides incorporating action research into teacher education, it is possible to perform action research on teacher education. That is to say, teacher educators, too, as professionals, can reflect on their practices and take action to improve them, reporting their efforts to their colleagues. It is desirable that they do this, and disseminate the results, since teacher education, and research on higher education in general, has been underresearched compared with primary and secondary education. In a 1993 review of research on foreign language teacher education, Hammadou decries the lack of work in this area and calls for efforts on a variety of methodological fronts, especially through action research on FL teacher education, for which (at that time) she could find no actual examples. In this report, we attempt to respond to Hammadou's call for action research on FL teacher education.³

This paper will first present a project description followed by our findings, including the benefits and caveats of teaching and conducting action research with beginning postsecondary language instructors. We cite examples from teacher journals, evaluations, follow-up interviews, and final evaluations that illustrate the strengths and weaknesses that became evident during the life of this project.

Description of the Project

In response to Hammadou's (1993) call for the inclusion of action research in teacher preparation, and in line with growing initiatives in other teacher preparation programs around the nation, we added an action research component to an existing graduate course. This course was regularly taught by one of the authors (the Methods Professor, who was joined in this initiative by the Researcher), and is recommended for new graduate teaching assistants (GAs) in the Department of European Languages and Literature (ELL) at the University of Hawai'i. The course carries credit towards the MA in European Languages and Literature, which is designed as the study of European culture as expressed in languages and literatures.⁴ This class, known informally as "the Methods Course," lasts for the conventional 15-week semester, and typically addresses teaching strategies, skills instruction, the teaching of culture, materials preparation, and assessment.

In the experimental version of this course offered during the Spring Semester, 1997, besides the regular materials and readings addressing an introductory overview of FL pedagogy at the postsecondary level, we introduced and reviewed materials on action research in educational contexts, including extracts from Altrichter et al. (1993), Ur (1996), and others. We ourselves approached the course from an action research perspective, collecting data

from our own observations of each other's classes and those of the GAs and graduate students, interviews with these individuals, GAs' office visits with us, and various documents (e.g., lesson plans, observation notes, student presentation reports, and term papers). During the semester, the Researcher attended about half of the class sessions, and along with the Methods Professor presented the students with a basic introduction to action research. Concurrently, the Methods Professor was teaching one section of a first-semester course in Spanish, as a demonstration class in which GAs regularly participated. As a major component of this experimental offering of the Methods Course, students conducted action research projects on topics arising out of their own teaching practices (in first-year language classrooms). These included improving listening comprehension; adding and enhancing cultural materials; the benefits of reteaching and retesting; what makes students successful; study strategies of successful students; using journals to improve teaching; and the effects on motivation of wanting versus having to take a language.

Teacher Participants

The 13 graduate students in the class were from a variety of backgrounds. Five were from outside the United States (Norway, Mexico, Chile, Sweden, Puerto Rico); the rest were from Hawai'i and the U.S. mainland. Three were from the German section of the Department's M.A. program, the other 10 were from the Spanish section. Two of the students were male and the rest were female, and all were in their 20s or 30s. All but two of these individuals were GAs in Spanish or German first-year language classes in the Department of European Languages and Literature (ELL) at the University of Hawai'i during the course reported on here. As such, they had primary instructional responsibility for these class sections. The remaining two graduate students ("GSs," henceforth) did practice teaching within a Spanish class section taught by the Methods Professor.

Course Description

For most of the semester, one of the two weekly meetings of the Methods Course was devoted primarily to discussion of action research. Initially, we presented basic concepts of action research and research methods. Subsequently, the meeting was devoted to group review of the process of conducting action research. Besides discussion of readings, this frequently included small and full-group discussions of problems and challenges the teachers faced in carrying out a process that was quite new to them.

Although action research can be carried out alone, we think that collaboration is extremely valuable, especially for inexperienced teachers who are becoming familiar with both teaching and action research. We strongly encour-

aged the teachers to develop and carry out their projects in small groups or pairs. As a result of these groupings, they were able to conduct and discuss peer observations of each other's classes. The GAs also made extensive use of student journals, which they requested from their students. These were written mainly in English, with some contributions in the target languages. As the semester progressed, and as the student teachers became more knowledgeable about action research, they utilized additional data collection techniques, such as questionnaires and interviews with their students.

An important feature of action research is the dissemination of findings to other practitioners. With this in mind, we proposed that the Methods Course teachers share their work with other language teachers from around the state at the Hawai'i Association of Language Teachers Conference near the end of the semester. As the date of the conference approached, the teachers began to accelerate the pace of their research and we began to rehearse oral presentations of the findings gleaned from the projects. This involved discussion of appropriate styles and formats for presenting findings to an audience of teachers. It became obvious that the teachers were feeling pressures and anxieties related not only to the process of action research, but to presenting their projects to a live audience of their peers (and senior teachers) — in most cases for the first time in their lives. (GAs whose projects had not yet attained sufficient coherence to be presented at the conference were required to share their findings in class during the final two weeks of the semester.) This phase of the action research project concluded with teachers submitting to us their final written reports, sample materials, completed journal, and evaluative comments on the course as a whole.

Originally we had planned to guide the GAs who had taken our action research training as they moved on to their second semester of teaching, and support them closely in their use of their newly learned action research techniques. We realized, however, that this would tell us little about their ability to make use of the techniques — or about the utility of the techniques — because what the GAs did would have mainly reflected power differentials. The Methods Professor was the immediate supervisor of the Spanish GAs, for example. Accordingly, we decided to take a hands-off approach and simply observe what happened as the following semester unfolded. (An almost identical procedure is described by Thorne and Qiang, 1996.)

Near the end of that semester, we conducted follow-up interviews with the six individuals who had been in our class the previous term and were continuing to teach language courses. We asked the now second-semester GAs questions focusing on what use, if any, they had made or

were making of the techniques or concepts they had been exposed to the previous semester. Subsequently, we conducted informal interviews and consultations with our colleagues about the implications of the project.

Findings

In this section, we present our findings, supported by examples from the teachers' journals, follow-up interviews, and final evaluations regarding specific areas of the project. The findings are presented in temporal sequence: The first five subsections concern the initial implementation of the course, then we discuss follow-up, and finally we consider the project's potential for instigating innovation.

The Action Research Project as a Whole

The consensus of the teachers was that the action research project was beneficial as a whole.⁵ The following are some illustrative comments:

The action research project was a challenge. I saw it as an opportunity to prepare for future projects where I would like to integrate my other field of study, psychology, into my German teaching (maybe for a future thesis).

I appreciate the idea of action research, as it means that there is a level of assessment and evaluation involved, which I believe is critical for analyzing effectiveness in any profession.

I feel this project was a great experience and I put quite a lot of time and effort into it.

Time Constraints and Risk Taking

Although the teachers found the project beneficial as a whole, many did have concerns or problems related to it. The comments centered on (1) time constraints and (2) risk taking. For example:

It was difficult to participate in the action research project because of being a first time instructor as well as conducting research in class. There were many things to conduct at the same time.

I can see the positive aspects for action research but not for beginning teachers who are just getting their feet wet. I think they should be allowed to get used to their new position and be allowed to create a relationship with their students and not be forced to examine every comment they make searching for a research topic.

I think the action research project was a little too much to ask, for us first-time teachers, especially when all the articles written were from experienced teachers. I can't imagine not teaching and having to do one.

The action research project shouldn't be a part of the class grade ... because it's time consuming and it's not very clear. Nor did we have the proper guidance.

The action research project was interesting but the course should state that we need to put in observation hours [e.g., out of class time observing other GSs]. I was not able to observe every week due to my work schedule and my schedule had been already set.

Journals

The general consensus from the teachers was that using journals in their classes helped them work more closely with their individual students. Some teachers reported using the journals for specific functions. For example:

... to have students communicate with me about the class, if they're having problems understanding something

... to find out how students feel about the activities in class, how students study, if students think they're learning, etc.

... to uncover any personal concerns that the student may have.

Most teachers had positive views about journaling. Typical comments were:

I enjoyed the overall process of journaling with my students as I learned more about them as individuals...

Journals are very helpful because they are a place to reflect on my own teaching and on what's going on with my class, students, materials, tools, etc.

Faculty-Student Collaboration

We had assumed that the Methods Professor's participation in the action research project in his own Spanish class would alleviate many of the worries of the two graduate students who worked closely with him.⁶ In that Spanish language class section, the Methods Professor worked with

two graduate students who did not teach their own classes, and he himself modeled the action research process. However, the professor found that in one case, the individual appeared to hold back rather than take initiative, because of the professor/student power differential. Too powerful a model may have inhibited this individual's willingness to explore. The other graduate student in this class also experienced considerable difficulties with the project.

Learner Diversity; Personal Characteristics and Expectations

From the outset, it was clear that the GAs were a relatively nonhomogenous group, with substantial differences in language competence (native and non-native), teaching experience (zero to several years, in FL and SL settings), and academic orientation (at least two students had previous experience with academic social science research).

Among the more successful students, we noted that one had previous experience with both student journals and counseling techniques; she fell right into her action research project with no hesitation whatsoever. Similarly, in one particularly successful pair of GAs — one from the German section and one from the Spanish section — one individual had previous experience with anthropology field research techniques, such as note-taking and the use of journals; and the other was interested in psychology, particularly in learning theories. This turned out to be a natural grouping for productive work.

The GAs who had the most difficulty conducting teacher research were those who had set ways of conceptualizing and carrying out instructions. This pattern may have made it difficult for them to either adapt existing routines or add new routines, thus hindering their ability to effectively investigate concerns arising from their teaching experiences.

The inductive and exploratory nature of action research may have made the project difficult for some of the teachers. Action research requires reflection and interaction to discover areas of inquiry. From such inquiry, the GAs were expected to discover concerns that would be followed up cyclically (i.e., get more data, share further reflections, interview students, etc. — cf. Burns, 1999). Thus, action research grows out of classroom-based concerns or issues. A few of the new GAs were especially uncomfortable with their projects, at least in the beginning, preferring instead a research project of a more a priori, theory-driven nature, though this runs counter to the tenets of action research. For this small group, projects were generated out of a desire to demonstrate the effectiveness of a previously espoused technique or activity type in the classroom (e.g., cultural videos), resulting in an attempt to verify a priori hypotheses.

In general, even a small amount of relevant experience

— whether in teaching or research — was helpful; GAs who were totally new to the classroom struggled the most with the logistics of the project; and those who did not have a class of their own (i.e., they observed and assisted a colleague) had the greatest conceptual difficulty with the project.

Retaining and Using Action Research

At the end of the course (and later), had our GAs retained anything of what they had been exposed to and engaged with, under the pressure of their new teaching responsibilities? We interviewed the GAs who continued to teach the following semester (about half the original group). They were teaching introductory courses in Spanish and German, similar or identical to those they had previously taught, and were continuing in the M.A. program. We asked them to give us an account of what they recalled from the course. Most of them were able to give an informal, though admittedly not highly sophisticated, explanation of action research when asked. For example, one said:

[Action research] means actively researching what goes on in your classroom, documenting, getting feedback right away from the students, trying to figure out the best teaching methods for that particular class, because I don't think what somebody found out in another class — it might help your class but there's always room for growth and improvement and different methods to improve teaching and that's going to depend on the energy of the class, student makeup, everything comes into play. So I think action research is collecting data studying your class getting feedback from them, journals are really good. I think that's really it.

The use of journals for general feedback mentioned by this GA ran somewhat counter to the action research approach we had presented, which emphasized identifying a specific central concern to be investigated over a sustained period. In another interview, one GA remarked:

I'm so hooked up with other problems that I don't have the time to choose one specific point to work on, especially having such a wide variety of students that have different skill levels that I don't see what am I going to work on 'cause they're all different — well they share many things in common but I have a hard time choosing one thing that I'm going to work on to benefit all students. Course, that would be very good finding a topic or something to work on that when I finish my research — I will have gained something that could help me for the whole classroom not just for one or two individuals.

The emphasis that some GAs placed on journaling, when we asked them to explain their concept of action research, led us to worry that journals alone had become action research in toto for these teachers. Journaling seemed to have been the most comfortable technique, and thus the most predominant one used, across the projects. (See also the quotes in the following section.) In our follow-up interviews, most respondents reported that they had found it impossible to conduct action research since the class they had taken with us, because of a lack of time. They merely reported using techniques such as questionnaires, and student journals in particular, to gather feedback from the students concerning the form and content of the class. For example, on the use of journals as a technique, some typical comments were:

I used journals but very general — I'm not going into anything specific just asking them overall how they feel. I'm very concerned about feelings. I usually tell everyone let's talk about feelings in Spanish and they open up and that's very good; I think they do talk about how they feel in class and they do give me suggestion about how to do the class.

I don't do the journals regularly but in the middle of the semester I'll be wondering how the semester is going for the students so I ask them to write a journal, tell me how it's going, what improvements could I make, give me some feedback; and the students did give me some feedback this semester. I guess they felt that the class was a little slow so they said play other games, think of something and ask questions to guess what it is... Last semester I did the same thing, ask them how the class was going. So that I feel is important, to see what the students feel about your teaching, whether they're learning or not, whether things could be better. I like to hear from them because for me it's learning as well.

Umm, I would say just, you know, getting the students' feedback as far as, like, I'll ask them questions like 'how is the class going?', just a general question and then I'll ask more specific questions.

Alternatively, one GA had developed a routine of using a questionnaire with open-ended questions as a homework assignment — as a means of getting feedback on various aspects of his teaching.

Well, basically after the first exam I wasn't sure how they were feeling... the first question was 'how was the class going, overall?'... then I would... ask

specifically about my teaching style, was I comprehensible, do I need to write more things on the board, is there something I should be doing better, do they need more worksheets, that type of thing.... I typed up a little sheet of paper, and asked them to answer the following questions to the best of their knowledge. And I'm about to do it again as a sort of follow up before we get to the new semester to see if there was anything that changed anything that I improved on or anything they feel helped them the most.

During the Methods Course, we had emphasized the importance of the collaborative aspects of action research and had set up most of the GAs in pairs, who either worked on the same topic, or at least were to observe each other's classes and provide feedback on projects as they developed. A few of the GA research teams worked well together, whereas several others were less successful. During the following semester, GAs did not, by and large, observe each other; they were mostly observed by senior faculty (if at all), as a check on performance.

As they looked back on the action research experience, most of the GAs were still convinced that, although valuable, the project had been a very challenging thing to have done in their first semester of teaching. However, even now, after more teaching experience, given the institutional context, they felt it would be hard to find the time to do action research, though several expressed a desire to do so in the future. Several indicated a willingness to engage in sharing action research, but only if time could be formally allocated to it.

The Importance of Visibility

Action research may not fit easily into an established institutional context, and the introduction of action research into an institutional context may require some structural change. Ensuring that an innovative action research project is visible may facilitate such change. We had planned from the beginning to have our students present their action research projects in an appropriate local forum, and we ourselves intended to present a final report on the project. What we had not anticipated was the beneficial effect of the local visibility that the project attained as a result of the students' reports.

As mentioned previously, the teachers presented their work at the state foreign language teaching conference. This resulted in our GAs taking a prominent role early on in the local FL teaching community, and so the project and its implications became visible to that community. Senior members of the language teaching community were not accustomed to seeing GAs or student teachers take an active and exploratory approach to their professional prac-

tice. Subsequent discussions of the project emerged partly as a result of the favorable impression the conference presentations had made, and involved the Dean of the College and the Chair of the Spanish Division. They focused on the limiting aspects of the M.A. in European Languages and Literature curriculum — a 30-credit, two-year degree whose relevance to teaching is questionable. As the Chair explained in an interview:

We really don't have a teaching degree, what we have mostly is a literature degree.... And I think now we've expanded it just a tad and I think linguistics is a little more important, but the pedagogy is something we don't put a whole lot of emphasis on, we're not training teachers, it's not one of our goals, it hasn't been, but in the background it kind of is because we really believe in having good TAs in the classroom.

We were surprised that the Dean rapidly indicated a willingness to involve Chairs and other stakeholders in a review of the status of the course vis-à-vis the wider curriculum.

Autonomy, or, Who Can Do Action Research?

When we explored the possibilities for change with the Spanish Division Chair, familiar themes arose. Time constraints were again an initial concern. However, the independence of the traditional tenured faculty member was suggested as a factor that might aid innovation. In the Chair's view, "[An interested professor] could require [action research] in the class, the pedagogical class.... He has enough autonomy to do that.... Each professor [develops] their own course... If [he] really wanted to, he could devise a course that went over two semesters."

On the other hand, the immediate institutional context for such action research projects is, in one sense, the body of full-time instructors who lie directly above the GAs in the departmental hierarchy. As is common at U.S. universities, the responsibilities of instructors are primarily teaching and associated curricular responsibilities. They are not required to carry out academic research. It is difficult to inculcate an appreciation of an action research perspective in GAs if they see no such appreciation in their immediate seniors in the profession. Furthermore, our Instructors also experience major time constraints. The Spanish Chair was willing to speculate about how action research might be presented as something of interest to instructors, but she could offer no immediate concrete solutions to the problem:

For our own instructors I guess we'd just have to make it feasible, attractive, accessible, and people usually have to get something for their time —

recognition, reputation, [it's] certainly not going to be money and it probably wouldn't be a course reduction — we can barely cover our classes, the Dean's office would be very [skeptical] about giving us a course reduction.

Scenarios for Change?

Our formal and informal interactions with colleagues about this project, at this stage in its development, have helped us think about the next stage in the process of implementing an action research component in FL teacher education. Although our initial intervention was not fully successful, at least four scenarios seem plausible without calling for further funding. First of all, a new course that would permit appropriate coverage of methodological material, both theoretical and more practical (such as hands-on experiences, materials development, action research, etc.), could be added. A second option would be to split the current Methods Course into a two-semester requirement. One semester could be a one-credit practicum in which action research and materials development are the focus, while the other semester would include a two-credit course focusing on the theoretical underpinnings of FL teaching and second language acquisition. A consistent effort to link theory and practice across these two small courses would be crucial.

The third option would entail the inclusion of a series of action research workshops in ongoing teacher development activities, such as those sponsored by the university's Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center or in conjunction with a local FL teachers' organization. The final — and possibly the most desirable — alternative is the introduction of a Master of Arts for Teachers (MAT) in the language of study, similar to those offered at other institutions. (See Appendix A for one possible framework.) This would require students to take a healthy balance of courses in teacher education. Such coursework would address long-term professional development on an equal footing with second language acquisition, as well as review literature, linguistics, and culture of the target language. Including an action research perspective would also ensure the adequate integration of theory and practice (as advocated by, e.g., Tedick & Walker, 1994a, 1994b, 1995).

Some foreign language teacher educators might wish to see the introduction of action research ideas deferred until after students teachers have acquired a grounding in theory and classroom practice. The predominant structure of foreign language programs hardly allows this. Nor will in-service projects necessarily include action research initiatives. So while it is true that action research projects should relate to preexisting theory, it is questionable whether action research concepts should be withheld until some complete understanding of theory has been attained.

Privileging theory over action research runs the risk of preventing student teachers from seeing themselves as the constructors of theory, not just its consumers.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the trajectory of an action research project is often presented as a spiral. One assesses a situation or acknowledges a concern, reflects, possibly consults with others, takes action, and establishes whether the action has been effective. If the action has not effectively solved the problem, the action is refined and reapplied or a different action is taken. Several such cycles may be necessary before a satisfactory position is arrived at. Our initial intervention was not fully successful, a key reason being the nature of the pre-existing course, a first-semester methods course for a cadre of student teachers (most of whom had little or no teaching experience and some of whom were not proficient in the target language).

Nevertheless, enacting a change and reporting its effects, even in a relatively informal manner, may be a more effective instigation of further change than one might expect. There is a lot to be said for "just doing it," then making course corrections or changes that follow from this action research approach. In any case, educational change, when it does occur, very rarely follows upon pure academic research.

The focus of the majority of graduate degrees in foreign languages continues to be literature, in spite of the fact that many of the students in these programs will become language teachers, albeit unprepared to practice their profession. Correcting this recipe for obsolescence requires at a minimum that we provide these future FL teachers with tools, such as action research, through which they can better assess teaching and learning, thus inculcating useful procedures for life-long learning, review, and improvement. Implementing such changes may be difficult, but a failure to attempt rational responses to the problems we know exist will obviously be fruitless. In spite of the drawbacks highlighted, and in view of the benefits cited, including action research in language teacher preparation programs holds promise for the improvement of learning and instruction in foreign and second languages.

Notes

1. <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~ctd/networks/>
2. For a recent substantial attempt of this kind in U.S. ESL teacher education, see Markee (1996a, 1996b); for work under the more difficult conditions of EFL in China, see Thorne and Qiang (1996).
3. The interest and encouragement found in these various related literatures has been taken up by at least two National Language Resource Centers, one in Hawai'i and one in

Washington DC, in the form of inquiries into the possibilities that action research holds in FL teacher education as a form of structured reflection on, or inquiry into, one's teaching. The Washington DC site has concentrated on training teachers in action research. According to Jen Delett (personal communication, 1998), Research Associate there, "The Action Research Project is a mentoring/teacher education project. The papers that result from the project are from the participant researchers." The Hawai'i site has explored action research with student teachers.

4. University General Information Catalog, p. 124. The extent to which the class is or is not specifically intended to prepare students for a career in FL teaching will be important later. The class actually is numbered as belonging to the curriculum of the UHM College of Education.

5. Each of the separate contributions is from a different teacher. These quotes exemplify, rather than exhaust, data pertinent to the finding.

6. Students who cannot research their own teaching obviously are at a disadvantage in a course of this kind. In our case, they expressed greater worries about being able to complete the project.

References

- Altrichter, H. (1988). Inquiry-based learning in initial teacher education. In J. Nais & S. Groundwater-Smith (Eds.), *The enquiring teacher: Supporting and sustaining teacher research*. London: Falmer Press.
- Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (1993). *Teachers investigate their work*. New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, C. L., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. S. (1994). *Studying your own school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Atweh, B., Kemmis, S., & Weeks, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Action research in practice: Partnerships for social justice in education*. Routledge.
- Bell, J. S. (1997). Teacher research in second and foreign language education. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 54(1), 3-10.
- Berne, J. (1998). Examining the relationship between L2 listening research, pedagogical theory, and practice. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(2), 169-190.
- Branscombe, N. A., Goswami, D., & Schwartz, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Students teaching, teachers learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
- Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Burns, A., & Hood, S. (Eds.). (1995). *Teachers' voices: Exploring course design in a changing curriculum*. Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Chamot, A. U. (1995). The teacher's voice—action research in your classroom. *ERIC/CLL News Bulletin*, 18(2), 1-4.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Crookes, G. (1993). Action research for SL teachers—going beyond teacher research. *Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 130-144.
- Davis, R. L. (1997). Group work is not busy work: Maximizing success of group work in the L2 classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 30(2), 265-279.
- Duckworth, E., & the Experienced Teachers Group. (1997). *Teacher to teacher: Learning from each other*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing teacher-research: From inquiry to understanding*. Heinle & Heinle.
- Gephard, J. G., Gaitan, S., & Oprandy, R. (1987). Beyond prescription: The student teacher as investigator. *Foreign Language Annals*, 20(3), 227-232.
- Gore, J., & Zeichner, K. M. (1991). Action research and reflective teaching in preservice teacher education: A case study from the United States. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 7(2), 119-136.
- Green, S. (1996). The professional development of modern languages teachers. *Language Learning Journal*, 14, 75-79.
- Hammadou, J. (1993). Inquiry in language teacher education. In G. Guntermann (Ed.), *Developing language teachers for a changing world* (pp. 76-104). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Johnstone, R. (1990). Case-studies in the assessment of oral competence. *Language Learning Journal*, 1(1), 21-25.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (Eds.). (1988). *The action research reader* (3rd ed.), *The action research planner* (3rd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Lane, H. (1962). Experimentation in the language classroom: Guidelines and suggested procedures for the classroom teacher. *Language Learning*, 12(2), 115-121.
- Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2, 34-46.
- Markee, N. (1996a). Making second language classroom research work. In J. Schachter & S. Gass (Eds.), *Second language classroom research: Issues and opportunities* (pp. 117-156). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Markee, N. (1996b). *Managing curricular innovation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McKernan, J. (1996). *Curriculum action research* (2nd ed.). London: St. Martin's Press.
- McTaggart, R., Robottom, I., & Tinning, R. (1990). Action research in Australian teacher education. In R. B. Stevenson & S. E. Noffke (Eds.), *Action research and teacher education: International perspectives* (pp. 160-196). Buffalo, NY: Research Institute on Education for Teaching, Graduate School of Education, State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Nerenz, A. (1993). Becoming a teacher in the 21st century. In J. K. Phillips (Ed.), *Reflecting on proficiency from the classroom perspective* (pp. 161-203). Lincolnwood, IL: National Teachers Council.
- Omaggio Hadley, A. (1993). *Teaching language in context* (2nd ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

- Robert, J. R. (1993). Evaluating the impacts of teacher research. *System*, 21(1):1-19.
- Schratz, M. (1992). Researching while teaching: An action research approach in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 17(1), 81-95.
- Schratz, M. (1993). Researching while teaching: Promoting reflective professionalism in higher education. *Educational Action Research*, 1(1), 15-27.
- Selener, D. (1997). *Participatory action research and social change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell [University] Participatory Action Research Network.
- Sparks, D., & Loucks-Horsley, S. (1990). Models of staff development. In W. R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 234-250). New York: Macmillan.
- Tabachnik, B. R., & Zeichner, K. M. (Eds.). (1991). *Issues and practices in inquiry-oriented teacher education*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Tedick, D. J., & Walker, C. L. (1994a). Second language teacher education: The problems that plague us. *Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 300-312.
- Tedick, D. J., & Walker, C. L. (1994b). Creating a culture of reform and reflection. *Teaching Education*, 6(2), 81-95.
- Tedick, D. J., & Walker, C. L. (1995). From theory to practice: How we prepare teachers for second language classrooms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 28(4), 499-517.
- Thorne, C., & Qiang, W. (1996). Action research in language teacher education. *ELT Journal*, 50(3), 254-261.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VanPatten, B. (1998). Perceptions of and perspective on the term "Communicative." *Hispania*, 81(4), 925-932.
- Winter, R. (1989). *Learning from experience: Principles and practice in action research*. London: Falmer Press.
- Zephir, F. (2000). Focus on form and meaning: Perspectives of developing teachers and action-based research. *Foreign Language Annals*, 33(1), 19-30.

Appendix A

Working Proposal for Masters of Arts for Teachers: Spanish

Specific courses are being determined with appropriate departments and curriculum committees.

<u>Credit Hours</u>	<u>Course meetings/Requirements</u>
15	Second Language Acquisition and Education: Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, Education Technology, Educational Psychology
18	Hispanic literature, linguistics and Culture Studies at 400 level or above
33	Total credits required