

# "Visions" of K–12 Foreign Language Teacher Recruitment in Higher Education

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## **Abstract:**

***This article addresses the role of college and university professors in foreign language teacher recruitment (K–12) and lobbies for increased involvement in recruitment efforts. The discussion includes explanations of why many foreign language professors who are not affiliated with Schools or Colleges of Education frequently do not recommend foreign language teaching careers to their students. Also delineated are the benefits of more participation in recruitment efforts by foreign language professors from traditional, humanities-based departments of foreign languages and literatures. The article concludes with 22 reasons to be a foreign language teacher — a resource for presenting the positive aspects of the foreign language profession to potential foreign language teacher candidates.***

## **Introduction**

To protect and propagate the interests of college and university professors of foreign languages, higher education must expand the current K–12 foreign language teacher recruitment effort. Postsecondary faculty affiliated with Schools and/or Colleges of Education must be joined by their foreign language colleagues in traditional departments of languages and literatures — most of which are located within the humanities on U.S. college campuses — to promote K–12 foreign language teaching as a career. An alliance among foreign language faculty members from all academic units will help stem the current and coming foreign language teacher shortage, which reflects on this generation of professors in the field and will certainly have an impact on them. The need for K–12 foreign language teachers is here, and the need must be met. The foreign language teacher shortage will be a component of the general teacher shortage: It has been estimated that 2.2 million new teachers will be needed to fill K–12 classrooms during the next 10 years (Bradley 1999). From 1993 to 1995, K–12 foreign language teachers left foreign language teaching positions in public schools at a rate of 7% per year (Zoroya and Hartzell 1999).<sup>1</sup> This percentage will grow with anticipated foreign language teacher retirements. The projected increase in the overall K–12 student population over the next 10 years will exacerbate the shortage. Local mandates to expand foreign language programs also have contributed to the current teacher shortage (García 1999). With recruitment and training, the shortages of foreign language teachers can be diminished.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (ACTFL 1996) have advocated for more foreign language instruction in grades kindergarten to 12, with the core idea that all U.S. students should develop proficiency in English and at least one other language. Foreign language instruction is increasing at the elementary level and remains steady in secondary schools (Oxford 1998). A recent survey states that 40% of elementary schools would like to add a foreign language program (Branaman and Rhodes 1998). With such numbers, no wonder there is concern about the supply of foreign language educators! Much discussion centered on this issue in June 1999 and again in June 2000, at the "New Visions in Foreign Language Education" meetings, which hosted K–12 and postsecondary U.S. foreign language educators from diverse languages and demographics. At these meetings, teacher recruitment and retention of future and current K–12 foreign language teachers was designated as one of five professional priorities.<sup>2</sup>

## **Why Recruit?**

Postsecondary foreign language educators should recruit future K–12 foreign language teachers because with growing demand, quality language instruction is at stake. Now is the time to address the quality of future teachers by recruiting the best possible candidates into the field. Talented foreign language students from diverse backgrounds in our classrooms should be targeted.<sup>3</sup>

- Postsecondary faculty must be proactive in K–12 recruitment to ensure quality of instruction. With a "shortage mentality," there is a tendency to hire underprepared individuals — which will inevitably lead to a decline in the quality of instruction in the classroom. Alternative certification programs that

do not adequately prepare foreign language teacher candidates damage the integrity of foreign language disciplines and should be avoided. Foreign language teacher preparation demands expertise in both advanced language proficiency (which can be a lengthy process) and sound pedagogical training that leads to effective classroom teaching.

- With more K–12 foreign language teacher candidates, there will be increased enrollment in college and university foreign language courses in the years ahead. More teacher candidates working toward foreign language certification and more in-service teachers seeking professional development credits, advanced degrees, and enrichment will lead to the development and expansion of college courses to fill the need.
- A long-term benefit of attracting and producing more good K–12 foreign language teachers is that their students will be more likely to continue to study foreign languages at colleges and universities. We all belong to a cycle of educators who interlink and benefit each other. Foreign language professors must participate fully in the cycle.
- Institutions of higher learning will no longer be able to depend on employing nonfaculty members to teach foreign language classes. Part-time and adjunct language instructors in college and universities will be lured away to K–12 teaching posts. The pool of individuals who teach foreign language part-time in higher education will be enticed to teach K-12 learners for more money and benefits. Higher education's supply of "cheap labor" may be disrupted by the anticipated shortage.<sup>4</sup>

### **Why Many Professors Hesitate**

Too many members of the current generation of foreign language professors in traditional foreign language and literature departments do not recommend K–12 language teaching to their students as a career path.<sup>5</sup> There are a variety of reasons for this hesitation.

- Many traditional humanities-trained professors of foreign languages and literature do not want to associate with Colleges or Schools of Education. K–12 language teaching preparation requires classes in a School or College of Education. Reflecting a general societal attitude, whether we like to admit it or not, teacher education has come to be perceived as every student's second choice (Labaree 1999). School of Education professors are treated as second-class citizens in today's academy, as Labaree (1999) points out in his hair-raising article, "The Trouble with Ed Schools." Those of us in foreign language departments who work in or collaborate with Schools of Education on foreign language teacher preparation are aware of this stereotype. Pervasive snobbery continues in foreign language departments, where some professors teach literature and others teach language, second language acquisition, and pedagogy.
- Most foreign language departments have been downsized recently, making it hard to enthusiastically promote growth in K–12 foreign languages. Economic and psychological resources to recruit teachers are scarce in higher education. With cuts in college and university foreign language departments, it is difficult to initiate teacher recruitment efforts because of time, money, and fewer faculty members.
- Low salaries are a reason for discouraging students to become K–12 educators. In June 1999, an American Federation of Teachers study reported an average starting salary of \$25,735.00 for nine months of instruction (Gonzalez 1999). Perhaps the teacher shortage will drive teachers salaries higher, and there are schools currently offering signing bonuses in states such as Texas to foreign language teachers. Nevertheless, at this writing, K–12 foreign language teachers dislike the difficult economic choice that one makes to practice their chosen profession.
- Working conditions and educational climate could be better in many K–12 schools. Keeping teachers safe from violence<sup>6</sup>, unappealing working conditions, a myriad of disciplinary issues, and fairness of workload are daily concerns for many K–12 teachers.

- Over the last 15 years, most postsecondary institutions have broadened their curricula to include teaching foreign languages for the professions (i.e., business, law, health), and, by doing this, have automatically recruited for fields other than teaching. Many foreign language students never consider teaching because foreign language students have increasingly diverse career options presented to them. With the U.S. economy near to full employment in many regions, students with foreign language proficiencies are attracted into a variety of fields by more aggressive employers.

### **Recruitment Efforts**

As educators, we must articulate the importance of the role of foreign language teachers in society. It is time to recommend foreign language teaching as a legitimate goal of foreign language study. The need must be met. Educational issues have been at the center of much recent societal and political debate. With education on the minds of the public and a serious overall teaching shortage on the horizon, K–12 teachers' salaries and benefits have been slowly rising in many states. Societal attitudes and the mindsets of foreign language teachers (K–16) will have to change to maximize our impact on the foreign language teacher shortage.

Given limitations of time, money and energy, the benefits of foreign language teaching need to be clearly articulated. I would like to suggest that foreign language educators can recruit with the following tenets in mind. The list below is divided into two subsections. The first section lists tangible benefits to teaching foreign languages and the second section enumerates intangible benefits that are associated with the values that we share as foreign language educators.<sup>7</sup> This list can be used to focus students, community members, and faculty on foreign language education as a career path.

### **Twenty-Two Reasons to Be a K–12 Foreign Language Teacher**

#### **Tangible Benefits**

1. Many foreign language teachers enjoy a substantial degree of job security. Many schools offer tenure to accomplished teachers with seniority.
2. Foreign language teachers' salaries improved by 18% (on the average) in inflation-adjusted income from 1983 to 1998 (Lardner 2000, 42). Health and retirement benefits are generally strong. Teachers can improve their salaries with additional training, degrees, seniority, and national professional board certification.<sup>8</sup>
3. Many foreign language teachers have the option of working with K–12 learners of a variety of ages and levels.
4. Many foreign language teachers are active and interactive. In an up-to-date K-12 foreign language classroom, grammar teaching does not dominate instructional time.
5. Many foreign language teachers develop sought-after skills, such as clear communication, strong interpersonal skills, and foreign language proficiencies.
6. Many foreign language teachers frequently have on-the-job technological access and training.
7. Many foreign language teachers enjoy a career that is family friendly (due to reduced summer obligations) and sometimes family enriching.
8. Many foreign language teachers generally contract for nine months, so there is time to pursue varied opportunities, such as summer travel/work abroad, summer schools, language camps, community service, or personal interests.
9. Many foreign language teachers engage in language-related travel, for example, leading student and community groups on study programs or tours abroad.
10. Many foreign language teachers are invited to host foreign dignitaries, sports figures, and students visiting their local communities.
11. Many foreign language teachers have unique access to foreign/second cultures and are able to consult on a variety of community projects like translating and interpreting, media, health, and legal issues.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Intangible Benefits**

12. Many foreign language teachers contribute to the internationalization of their communities.
13. Many foreign language teachers contribute to their students' intellectual development.
14. Many foreign language teachers encourage respect for other people(s).
15. Many foreign language teachers contribute to cultural literacy.
16. Many foreign language teachers contribute to economic development.
17. Many foreign language teachers contribute to national security.
18. Many foreign language teachers contribute to their country's image as a cultured nation.
19. Many foreign language teachers contribute to modes of thought outside their native language.
20. Many foreign language teachers contribute to knowledge of the students' native language.
21. Many foreign language teachers contribute to enhanced communication between diverse people in their communities.
22. Many foreign language teachers contribute to broadening their students' world views.

### **Conclusion**

Enlisting future foreign language teachers is yet another facet of collegiate interaction with students. Members of the professoriate should recruit future foreign language teachers by sharing information about the profession and encouraging their students to continue foreign language studies and consider foreign language teaching. Professors should provide students with detailed information regarding foreign language certification programs and the foreign language profession. Encouraging the brightest foreign language students to consider foreign language teaching as a career is key for the survival and improvement of the collective foreign language profession. Individual encouragement from the professor to the student will always be the most potent recruiting tool. Besides one-to-one recruiting, there are successful institutional approaches for foreign language teacher education recruitment and retention that can be used as models. The California Foreign Language Project's model offers a well-documented approach to recruiting that identifies and fosters the interest of successful language learners early and tracks their subsequent foreign language teaching careers.<sup>10</sup> Clearly foreign language professionals will need to join with emerging recruitment efforts for future teachers for all disciplines.

Recruiting college students (high school students or language-oriented community members) to enter the foreign language teaching field involves both simple and complex strategies. Foreign language teacher recruitment does not have to be a solitary task for foreign language professionals of any level. National efforts, such as the recent Modern Language Association brochure on foreign languages, have highlighted foreign language teaching as a career option. Another initiative is the sponsorship by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the National Foreign Language Resource Center (K–12) of "New Visions in Foreign Language Education." This series of events is focusing professional discussion on teacher recruitment and retention among other topics. The foreign language professoriate should support all national, regional, state, and local campaigns to recruit K–12 foreign language teachers. Participation from college and university level foreign language faculty in foreign language teacher recruitment efforts will ensure the future quality of instruction in U.S. language classrooms and is an obligatory investment.

#### **Notes**

1. Wilkerson addressed the attrition factor in her presentation, "Retaining New Teachers: Critical Shortages and Critical Needs," at the 2000 Southern Conference on Language Teaching, Birmingham, Alabama. Using Georgia as an example, she reported attrition rates among foreign language teachers higher than the national average. Nationally, the general attrition rate of new teachers leaving the field in the first five years is 40% (González 1999). Wilkerson stated that the problem is not only how to certify in-service teachers but also how to retain foreign language teachers. Although her sample population was small, her survey of teachers revealed that foreign language teachers were entering the field aware of current salary levels, but respondents stated that they have considered or are considering leaving the foreign language teaching field for the following perceptions: (1) lack of training in delivering language courses to special education students and to students with special needs; (2) lack of preparation to teach culture; (3) lack of knowledge about school politics and factors related to the teacher's role and the role of the administration/bureaucracy.

2. Foreign language teacher recruitment was targeted for discussion at the 'think tank' sponsored by the National Foreign Language Resource Center K–12 (NFLRC) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Additionally, an issue paper titled "Teacher Recruitment" was prepared by Paul García and myself for the working committee consisting of Nancy Gadbois, Gordan Hale, Nancy Hernández, and June Phillips. The draft document has been a discussion paper for the profession and is available through ACTFL and NFLRC.

3. Haley (1999) makes the case that we must reach out to teacher candidates of all races and ethnic origins, encouraging them to become teachers who will reflect the current demographics of our nation.

4. This point can also be argued as a potentially positive by-product of the shortage due to the exploitation of part-time and adjunct foreign language teachers in higher education. Few foreign language teachers or faculty of any rank would disagree that part-time and adjunct colleagues deserve better status, job security, and wages.

5. I could locate no quantitative study responding to the question, "Do you recommend foreign language teaching to your students as a career path?" However, having taught for 20 years in four traditional departments of foreign languages and literatures in various regions of the country, I have noticed that encouraging foreign language students to enter the foreign language teaching field is frequently neglected. In collecting anecdotal data from postsecondary foreign language colleagues (who are not affiliated with Colleges or Schools of Education) at various foreign language professional meetings over the last few years, many colleagues report similar observations, or they explained to me why they do not encourage foreign language teaching (K–12) as a career path.

6. A study published in *Future Teacher* (1999) listed "keeping schools safe from violence" as one of the top issues that needs to be addressed to raise student achievement.

7. The last 12 of the "Twenty-Two Reasons to Be a K–12 Foreign Language Teacher" were inspired by Alan Frantz's (1996) seminal article, "Seventeen Values of Foreign Language Study."

8. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is developing 14 high standards for

accomplished K-12 foreign language teachers; for additional information see their homepage at <http://www.nbpts.org>.

9. In standards-based teaching, the community involvement described in reasons 8 and 9 links to foreign language classroom activities for one's students and achieves the "Communities" standard.

10. See Michele Bousquet's (1999) detailed study, "Professional Associations as Recruiters: California's Innovative Approach to Remediating the Foreign Language Teacher Shortage." In her study, she documents factors that can complicate recruiting, such as the fact that 39% of current foreign language teachers teach more than one target language. The most popular language teaching combinations: Spanish/ESL, Spanish/French, French/Italian, and Spanish/Italian.

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