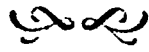


Mentoring Foreign Language Teaching Assistants, Lecturers, and Adjunct Faculty



Benjamin Rifkin, Editor

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Introduction



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The notion of mentoring is as old a concept as parenthood. Indeed, in the academy today, one often hears references to younger scholars as the “children” of an older scholar. While this metaphor is an old and established one in the academy, the notion of consciously preparing to take on a mentoring role and, more importantly, the concept of conducting research on mentoring roles are more recent. As more and more institutions look to teaching assistants, lecturers, and part-time or adjunct faculty to teach language courses, the language program director’s (LPD’s) role as a mentor grows in importance. While many of us take on such responsibilities enthusiastically and with the best of intentions, not all of us have been prepared to do so. Many language program directors rely on the model of their own mentoring relationship with a professor in their graduate institutions, a professor who may or may not have been a language program director. While these models may be good ones, they cannot provide the full range of experience upon which we must draw as we mentor our own teaching assistants, lecturers, and part-time and adjunct faculty. This volume, the eleventh in the AAUSC Series in Language Program Direction, is designed to help fill that gap. Its focus grows out of essays previously published in this very series: Cynthia A. Fox, “Toward a Revised Model of TA Training,” Julie Herschensohn, “TA Development: A Case Study,” and Benjamin Rifkin, “Breaking Out of the Vicious Circle,” all in the 1992 AAUSC volume edited by Joel C. Walz; Katherine Arens, “Applied Scholarship in Foreign Languages: A Program of Study in Professional Development,” Lynn Carbon Gorrell and Jorge Cubillos, “TA Programs: The Fit between Foreign Language Teacher Preparation and Institutional Needs,” and Cathy Pons, “TA Supervision: Are We Preparing a Future Professoriate,” all in the 1993 volume edited by David P. Benseler; and Linda M. von Hoene, “Subjects-in-Process: Revisioning TA Development through Psychoanalytic, Feminist, and Postcolonial Theory,” Celeste Kinginger, “Toward a Reflective Practice of TA Education,” and Peter C. Patrikis, “The Foreign Language Problem: The Governance of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning,” all in the

1995 volume edited by Claire Kramersch. Clearly, the issues of teaching our graduate students to teach and promoting their professional development in ways and manners beyond the confines and constraints of a single methods course or teaching practicum are of central importance to the membership of the AAUSC, as reflected in these and other essays of our series in language program direction. These questions are a topic of discussion not only on these pages, but also on the pages of journals and annual volumes of other organizations dedicated to foreign language teaching, including those produced by the MLA (e.g., Michaels 1999) and in general academic publications, such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (e.g., Kaye 2000). The current volume is designed to focus closely on a subset of these issues—the history of mentoring, the process of mentoring, and the ways of mentoring—and addresses them in the context of foreign language programs with language program directors charged with the task of mentoring graduate students, lecturers, part-time, and adjunct faculty who teach under their supervision.

First, we must consider the goals for mentoring teaching assistants, lecturers, and part-time or adjunct faculty. Certainly, facilitating the teachers' development as teachers will always remain a top priority. Coupled with this, however, is the goal of helping instructors teaching in our programs find tenure-track employment since, in many cases, this is the top priority for the instructors with whom we are working. This second goal, second for the language program directors but primary for many of the instructors with whom we work, involves a much broader range of issues for the LPD mentor. In the context of these two goals, it is possible to identify three major areas in which the mentoring process can unfold: mentoring instructors to conduct research in foreign language education and related disciplines (including investigations in applied linguistics and second language acquisition) as well as in the disciplines of literary and cultural studies and theoretical or historical linguistics; mentoring instructors in their classroom teaching and curricular development; mentoring instructors to take on more and more varied service roles in the academic community and beyond. It is, of course, no surprise that these mentoring areas correspond rather neatly to the three pillars on which tenure cases rest: research, teaching, and service.

Schoenfeld and Magnan (1992) describe approximately 40 different faculty duties or responsibilities, including activities related to literary and/or linguistic research and teaching and curricular development. More importantly for this essay, Schoenfeld and Magnan also emphasize the importance of service in the academic's career. They discuss several different kinds of activities which successful academics

undertake, including staying on top of study abroad programs, employment trends, and career opportunities; advising students; learning to work with a diverse range of learners (including learners of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and learners of different sexual orientations); referring students for counselling; supervising dissertations; writing recommendations; performing departmental, institutional, professional, and community service; and participating in outreach programs to high schools and other community groups. Some of the instructors mentored by LPDs may not need or want mentoring for some of these activities, or they may not need or want mentoring from LPDs in some of these areas since other professors in the language department may be able to provide this mentoring; other instructors may need our help in many of the areas identified by Schoenfeld and Magnan.

Mentoring teaching assistants, lecturers, and part-time and adjunct faculty in some contexts may mean helping them conduct research and publish in the area of foreign language education. In a survey of four journals in the foreign language field (*Foreign Language Annals*, *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, *Die Unterrichtspraxis*), 7–10% of the articles published in the last ten years were authored or co-authored by individuals identified as graduate students (data for other prominent foreign language journals, such as *French Review*, *Hispania*, or *The Modern Language Journal*, were not available because the journals do not record the status of their contributing authors). LPDs who take on a mentoring role must ask themselves if promoting their protégés' research and publication record, at least in the area of foreign language pedagogy, is one of their goals, and if so, how best to go about helping them make their debut on the pages of professional journals. Brandt (1989), Kagan (1989) Sharan and Sharan (1989), Slavin (1989/1990), and Gebhard (1999) all describe frameworks for cooperative investigations that could serve as a means for LPDs to work together with instructors teaching in their programs to identify areas of mutual interest and concern, design research proposals, and implement an "action research plan" that could lead not only to solutions for genuine teaching problems, but also to a publishable paper in the discipline of foreign language education.

The question of mentoring teaching, rather than mentoring research or service, is the focus of this volume. Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) have written at great length about various approaches to teacher supervision, identifying a "developmental approach" in which mentors, assumed to be master teachers, guide their apprentices along a known path to a desired goal, i.e., the solutions to classroom problems that

correspond to the mentors' sense of what is desirable in the context of their institution, language program, or beliefs about language learning. Gebhard and Opprandy contrast "developmental" mentoring with "exploratory" mentoring, in which mentors help apprentices identify problems and investigate solutions without any preconceived notions regarding the best or most desirable outcomes.

The authors of this volume take up the question of mentoring in many different contexts. First, H. Jay Siskin, with Jim Davis, examines mentoring, especially in the foreign languages, from historical, theoretical, and pragmatic perspectives. The authors explore different definitions of the mentor-mentee relationship in a broad range of contexts and different roles and functions taken on by each partner in the relationship. Next, Siskin and Davis examine the history of the mentor-mentee relationship in the context of foreign language teacher training, education, and supervision, considering the various pleas, complaints, and laments by various parties over the course of the last 45 years concerning the state of graduate student teacher preparation in the foreign languages. They then consider obstacles to mentoring in the context of foreign language programs and propose suggestions for future research on mentoring in the foreign languages.

In the next chapter, Elizabeth Guthrie considers disciplinary tensions in the mentoring of foreign language teaching assistants. She considers the perception by some that the focus on "drills and skills" in TA training detracts from "content" (literature or linguistics) training. Guthrie suggests ways that TAs can be mentored to bridge the gap between language and literature in the language classroom. She examines the nature of the multi-section foreign language course, a structure which meets the institution's needs for cost-efficient teaching, but one that may be at the root of disciplinary tensions in the mentoring of graduate student teaching assistants.

Elizabeth Bernhardt looks at the question of mentoring experienced or "veteran" instructors in a program also staffed with younger teachers who have had substantial training in applied linguistics or second language acquisition. She explores the "potentially explosive and divisive teaching staff configuration" of the two groups on either side of a generational divide, one with significant teaching experience (and good rapport with students), the other with more contemporary research preparation. Bernhardt also examines differences in these two groups' views of language study: the older teachers, she argues, often believe that language study is the way to gain access to the canonical literary texts and therefore focus on reading skills, while the younger teachers see formal language instruction as the beginning of

a life-long learning process for students who have a variety of purposes for language use, not just the reading of literature.

Betty Lou Leaver and Rebecca Oxford discuss style as a critical variable in the mentoring process, considering personality characteristics of mentor and mentee and steps the mentor can take to accommodate the individual mentee's style. They begin by defining the mentoring relationship and then propose that one of the most important issues in mentoring is the mentor's need to provide equal, not identical, treatment to each of the instructors whom she or he mentors. This point is critical for the rest of the argument these authors make, as they discuss a variety of personality and character trait inventories (e.g., Myers-Briggs or Keirsey's Temperament Sorter). Next, Leaver and Oxford consider the possibility of different combinations of personality traits in each partner of the mentor-mentee relationship and identify potential problems that could arise in each context, as well as possible solutions. For instance, they note that extroverted mentors can exhaust introverted mentees by overstimulating them with personal interaction. The large matrix of personality variables makes the potential relationship between mentor and mentee quite complex, but Leaver and Oxford provide a road map to help mentors identify which strategy to take with which kind of mentee.

Sangeeta Dhawan takes up the question of reflective practice in the following chapter. She uses the metaphor of a series of mirrors in which teachers can consider their own practice and brings to our attention a case study of a graduate student teaching assistant who took on an action research project exploring the use of realia. In the examination of this case study, Dhawan considers the different roles of the TA supervisor: the methods professor, the teaching mentor, and the research partner. In many instances, the conflation of these roles is the source of significant problems the language program director must solve in his or her day-to-day interactions with graduate student teaching assistants.

Cynthia Chalupa and Anne Lair consider how best to mentor international teaching assistants, exploring three fundamental problems: language, acculturation, and university policies. They discuss issues related to language in the context of foreign-born teaching assistants who teach their native language to anglophones in an American university and their use of English in the classroom. Next, they examine the question of acculturation and the problems which arise in the disjuncture between the realities of American university life and student behavior patterns and the realities and patterns typical of the international teaching assistants' native cultures. Third, Chalupa and Lair consider

problems which may arise in the area of university policies, such as those on sexual harrassment or academic misconduct, which may be different from those in the international teaching assistants' native culture. Finally, the authors propose a workshop in which these problem areas can be addressed so that international foreign language teaching assistants can be best prepared to take on the responsibilities of language teaching in an American university.

In the next chapter, John Klapper discusses an exciting new mentoring program in the United Kingdom. After discussing the history of reflective practice in mentoring teachers, Klapper considers action research and top-down approaches to teacher training and compares the different concerns held by experienced and novice teachers. He then describes a program designed to accommodate teachers and their concerns in different stages of their careers.

Next, Richard Robin examines the question of part-time employment, an issue of increasing urgency in the foreign language field, with a case study of Russian in the Washington, DC area. He provides professional profiles and charts comparing compensation and training for part-time instructors of Russian in the Washington, DC area before considering student perceptions and performance outcomes as part of the larger picture of staffing problems. Ultimately, he proposes some solutions to the "staffing crisis," one that plagues small- and mid-sized universities without graduate programs in the foreign languages.

In the volume's final chapter, Patricia R. Chaput considers the question of the successful job candidate's profile and how we, as language program directors, can mentor our instructors so that they can be identified as the ideal candidate for an appropriate position. Chaput notes that "efforts to think more seriously about the preparation of Ph.D.s who will teach language often collide with the survival interests of a department's literature faculty." She goes on to argue that the question "what should we be looking for" when hiring a language instructor should be construed to mean "what should we be asking for," not "what should we settle for." Chaput suggests that the field should raise expectations and provide opportunities for graduate student teaching assistants to acquire a knowledge base and skill base comparable to those they acquire in the area of literary scholarship.

All the chapters of this volume contribute to the on-going discussion of what we, as language program directors, should do to mentor the instructors who work under our supervision. Whether we take developmental or exploratory approaches (as described by Gebhard and Oprandy [1999]) or a combination of these and other approaches, we must recognize that we hold the immediate future of the foreign lan-

guage field in our hands. Therefore, we must do the best we can to provide for the field's long-term needs while also meeting the short-term needs of our institutions' own policies and constraints. The puzzle is even more complicated, of course, as we try to accommodate the short-term and long-term needs and interests of the undergraduate students in our language programs and the interests of our colleagues in literature or linguistics, as well as our own short-term and long-term needs for professional development and advancement. It is, however, in the accommodation of the competing interests of all these constituents that we find the most exciting challenges of language program direction. For all these reasons, it is no surprise that the AAUSC has begun a mentoring program, matching beginning language program directors with more experienced veterans in the field. If you are interested in joining this program, either as a mentor or as a mentee, please contact one of the officers or language section heads of the AAUSC.

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