

AAUSC Issues in Language Program Direction 2011

Educating the Future Foreign Language Professoriate for the 21st Century

Heather Willis Allen
Hiram H. Maxim
Editors



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Chapter 7

The *Acceso* Project and Foreign Language Graduate Student Professional Development

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Introduction

The 2007 MLA Report “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” is an ambitious call for foreign language (FL) departments to embrace innovation and change to secure their central role in promoting humanistic learning in the twenty-first century. The report recommends promoting the development of translingual and transcultural competence by undergraduates through situating language study “in cultural, historical, geographical, and cross-cultural frames within the context of humanistic learning” across the curriculum (2007, p. 3). With respect to graduate-level FL education, the report proposes the need for “substantive training in language teaching and in the use of new technologies” as well as opportunities to collaborate with lecturers, faculty, and each other. While these recommendations may seem unconnected, reported success stories of graduate student involvement in undergraduate curricular reform (Arens, 1991; Byrnes, 2001, 2005; Maxim, 2006) suggest opportunities for convergence. This chapter takes as its point of departure the notion that both goals may be approached in tandem: Enhancing undergraduate student learning at the first- and second-year levels offer an opportunity for graduate student instructors (GSIs), through guided collaboration with peers and faculty mentors, to develop knowledge and skills (both pedagogic and technological) necessary for effective teaching at the foundational level and beyond.

The literature exploring graduate-level pedagogy training identifies several areas as ripe for improvement, such as increasing opportunities to explore curricular design and materials development (Allen, 2010; Pons, 1993; VanValkenburg & Arnett, 2000), facilitating more occasions to prepare for teaching upper-division classes (Berman, 1996; Byrnes, 2001; Pfeifer, 2002), providing experience with the application of existing and emerging technologies in the classroom (Brantmeier, 2003; Lord & Lomika, 2006; Rava & Rossbacher, 1999), and encouraging formal and informal pedagogic collaboration with colleagues and faculty (Allen, 2010; Brandl, 2000; Brantmeier, 2008; Byrnes, 2001; Gonglewski & Penningworth, 1998; Pfeiffer, 2002; Schechtner & Koser, 2008).¹ The present chapter describes the University of Kansas Spanish Basic Language Program’s efforts to address these needs, reports and analyzes the participating GSIs’ reactions to their experiences with the initial phase of the project (in terms of its perceived impact on

their professional development), and finally concludes with a discussion of the future direction of the project.

The Genesis of the *Acceso* Project

While the 2007 MLA Report proposes integrated curricula across all levels of collegiate FL instruction, it is only at the beginning levels that the language program director (LPD) generally makes curricular decisions, despite often being charged with guiding graduate students' pedagogic development as well (Byrnes, 2005, 2008; Maxim, 2005). This practice, combined with the fact that GSIs gain the vast majority of their pedagogic experience in lower division classrooms (Allen, 2010; Maxim, 2005), presents obvious challenges for LPDs who wish to provide principled training and experience for GSIs facing the changing landscape of collegiate FL instruction.

One possible route within the purview of the LPD is to lead collaboration between GSIs, lecturers, and faculty members to develop the curricular content and scope of the basic language sequence, to enhance both the impact of the FL requirement and its articulation as the foundation for language, literature, and culture study beyond the intermediate level. To this end, our department recently launched *Acceso*, an open access, Web-based platform for intermediate-level Spanish study that structures critical exploration of the culturally diverse Spanish-speaking world to promote FL development and awareness, critical cultural literacy, and opportunities to relate to and reflect on differing cultural perspectives.²

Repeated calls for integrating meaningful content at the earliest levels of collegiate FL instruction (e.g., Byrnes 1998, 2001; Kern, 2000; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) and the 2007 MLA Report in particular informed the department's vision of a transformed basic language curriculum. The departmental faculty read and discussed the report, and we agreed that redesigning the basic language curriculum³ would serve to both better prepare undergraduate students for later coursework (focusing primarily on critical analysis of literary and other authentic texts and the development of analytical writing capacities) and to enhance its contribution to the university's general education mission.

These decisions did not originally consider the role of graduate students beyond that of teaching the courses in the new curriculum. The co-LPD, in consultation with other colleagues, began exploring strategies to shift from a communicative framework privileging oral peer-to-peer interaction to one that would promote the development of *translingual* and *transcultural competence* as proposed by the MLA Report. While the report focuses primarily on reconsidering the aims of the FL major, its description of the fundamental goals of "deep translingual and transcultural competence" (p. 3) is holistic, leaving specific learning expectations at discrete levels unarticulated. In the specific context of a Spanish language program (the "lower tier" to which the report refers) at a large public institution such as the University of Kansas, the majority of students have no plans to continue FL studies beyond the institutionally mandated requirements, which minimally include successful completion of the fourth semester, or the last course in the basic language sequence; most students choose Spanish because they have

studied it previously in high school and/or they believe that speaking it will be useful to them in the future. This presents remarkable challenges when establishing learning outcomes that serve both this “terminal” majority and the smaller but no less important group of students who either already planned to study Spanish in greater depth after the basic language sequence or become motivated to do so in foundational classes.

This dilemma was confounded by the dearth of commercial materials for intermediate-level Spanish that integrate research-informed approaches to focus-on-form and meaningful content exploration, which the MLA report addresses in its call to “situate language study in cultural, historical, geographical, and cross-cultural frames” (p. 5). What would a curriculum that attempted to accomplish this goal look like in a relatively large basic language program that serves students with manifestly disparate reasons for enrolling in its courses? How would its content be chosen, structured, and delivered? Given the unique position of Spanish in the United States and students’ own motivations for studying it, which modalities would be emphasized and why? How would successful learning be defined and assessed?

At the outset, the only clear answer to these questions was that such a project could only be successfully realized through sustained collaboration of the entire teaching cadre. This realization provided an additional incentive beyond enhancing undergraduate education: It could be structured to provide unique opportunities for GSI professional development in areas identified as traditionally difficult to target, as discussed in the previous section. As a result of prior Web-based projects realized in the department (Rossomondo & Alonso, 2009) and opportunities for critical cultural inquiry that would be enabled, the idea of developing an open access, Web-based program emerged as a solution for delivery and structuring of curricular content. In other words, authentic texts in a variety of modalities would be a click away; sequencing and content could be easily updated and modified; and, through emerging technologies, learners’ interactions with content and the language used to encode it could be structured to promote effective and engaged learning (Blake, 2008; Brantmeier, 2003; Cubillos, 1997; Lomicka, 1998). As a result, the goals of the *Acceso* project crystallized: to create an evolving and collaboratively created Web-based platform that 1) structured a curriculum for foundational Spanish language and critical cultural studies courses and 2) fostered GSI professional development.

The decision to focus first on reimagining the third and fourth semester Spanish courses was made for several reasons, including the fact that there was no articulation between the final course in the basic language sequence and the first courses in the major. Integration of texts to promote transcultural competence, metalinguistic analysis, and reading development would be necessary to address the breach.⁴ The major curriculum’s focus on literary studies made it paramount to promote the development of reading and writing competencies, which corresponds to a growing body of literature on curricular reform to promote the development of multiple literacies (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, 2001; Byrnes, Maxim & Norris, 2010; Kern, 2000). At the same time, the development of the capacity to negotiate meaning in oral communication was deemed of

commensurate importance given the fact that by 2050, just under a third of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). This recognition of the role of Spanish in the United States is not intended to argue for an “instrumentalist” rather than a “constitutive” approach to FL study as is discussed in the 2007 MLA Report and elsewhere, but it does inform the learning outcomes and selection and sequencing of content discussed in the next section.

The Acceso Project and Graduate Student Professionalization

With respect to its goals for GSI professionalization, *Acceso* provides opportunities for pedagogic development through supervised experience with curricular design, which Allen (2010) identified as a skill that new Ph.D.’s are expected to demonstrate and often lack. As Arens (1993) recommended, the GSIs develop content-based learning units stemming from their areas of academic interest that systematically integrate principled focus-on-form and foster metalinguistic awareness, thus promoting a connection between research and teaching that can be applied when designing more advanced courses. This point is key when training a future professoriate capable of integrating linguistic and content learning at *all* curricular levels. The project also promotes the use of existing and emerging technologies together with a research-informed understanding of how these tools can foster FL learning. Finally, the *Acceso* project seeks to foster pedagogic collaboration amongst GSIs and other colleagues, modeled to the extent possible on the Georgetown University German Department’s Curricular Renewal Project (Byrnes, 2001); such exchanges have been demonstrated empirically as highly influential and nonthreatening for GSIs (Brandl, 2000).

GSIs have participated actively in the *Acceso* project from its inception in 2008 to the full-scale implementation of its first phase in spring 2010. Beginning in fall 2008, the focus of the required graduate seminar on approaches to teaching collegiate Spanish was entirely redesigned to include topics and research relevant to the curricular redesign project.⁵ Given this redesign, many experienced GSIs and lecturers who had previously taken the course participated in class discussions. Additionally, over the semester, several discussions took place between the Spanish co-LPDs, departmental administration, faculty members who teach major-level coursework, and the director of the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to establish a roadmap for implementing the first phase of the project. In December 2008, all Spanish Basic Language program instructional staff, interested faculty members, and key ARC staff (who would provide technological support and training) met to discuss the *Acceso* project. The meeting began with a presentation of the theoretical underpinnings that informed the project’s approach to intermediate-level Spanish study. Subsequently, a working draft of student learning outcomes for the basic language sequence were presented, discussed, and refined. Finally, the vision for how the group would collaborate to develop the content of a curriculum to promote these learning outcomes and foster professional development among GSIs was put forth, beginning with a request for proposals about what content should be included and how this content should be sequenced.

More than 20 content proposals by GSIs were submitted, the majority of which suggested an exploration of contemporary cultural issues with limited

historical orientation and organization by geographical regions. Several proposals suggested a thematic organization centered on social issues from the perspective of students from the United States and a variety of Spanish-speaking regions, and still others proposed a genre-based organization. The co-LPDs and a course coordinator weighed the merits of all proposals to arrive at a structure that would incorporate elements of each: Eight major content units would be organized first geographically and then structured within each unit by activity type (content and genre) to explore one overarching theme each semester. Two months later, a preliminary draft of the first unit (“The United States: A Spanish-Speaking Country?”) was developed by the project leader to be critiqued and refined by the project participants before serving as a model for the development of subsequent units.⁶ By taking advantage of a variable credit course (Colloquium on Teaching Spanish), the GSIs had the option of earning credit as they contributed to this curricular content. Teams of two to three GSIs and lecturers worked in consultation with the project leader to develop and structure “*Acceso* activities” informed by their own areas of interest and expertise.⁷ Each team was guided through the process of brainstorming topics and identifying information sources for activities, establishing content and language learning goals for each activity, developing activities to facilitate meaningful student interactions with the various texts and planning how they should be implemented, and finally, developing formative assessments to serve as indicators of student learning for each unit. Through the support of the ARC, the GSIs participated in technology workshops and one-on-one tutoring to facilitate the use of Web 2.0 technologies, video editing software (iMovie), and other digital tools in materials creation and implementation. Four GSIs and one lecturer also collaborated with graduate students from Film and Media Studies to learn how to conduct video interviews with native speakers. Though not every GSI opted to participate in this stage of the project, more than 22 GSIs did collaborate on the first phase of content development, which took place over a year and a half.

The final step of this first phase of the *Acceso* project was the implementation of the curriculum in 18 sections of third-semester Spanish in fall 2009 and in 18 sections each of third- and fourth-semester Spanish in spring 2010. The GSIs were responsible for classroom instruction for most of these classes, creating shared lesson plans to promote collaboration and efficiency. Each instructor signed up to develop a detailed plan for three class days that was then reviewed by the course coordinator and shared with other instructors via a shared computer network.

Throughout the first phase of the *Acceso* project, numerous GSIs communicated their excitement about it and the pedagogic opportunities that it provided; however, to investigate how well the project was facilitating GSI professional development, a formal inquiry was undertaken, guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways was participation in *Acceso* perceived by the GSIs to influence their pedagogic development?
2. Do the GSIs believe that participation in *Acceso* has affected their relationship with technology for pedagogic purposes?

3. How do the GSIs believe that participation in *Acceso* will affect their future professional endeavors?
4. What impact do the GSIs believe participation in *Acceso* has had on their collaboration with colleagues?

Methodology

A survey study was conducted to explore the four research questions in depth. Because the researcher was also the co-LPD and creator of the *Acceso* project, the anonymity of participants was deemed imperative for the ethical elicitation of honest responses.⁸ Therefore, data were collected via an anonymous 12-item questionnaire (Appendix A). The researcher consulted two LPDs regarding the wording of the questionnaire to promote informative responses and to reduce the possibility of researcher bias.⁹ Items 1–3, 7, 8, and 10 probed research question one (pedagogic development). Items 4 and 5 related to the second research question (technology use), while items 6 and 12 targeted research question three (future teaching/professional endeavors). Finally, item 9 probed the fourth research question (collaboration).

Participants

Participants were GSIs from the graduate program in Spanish at the University of Kansas. Of 24 GSIs invited to participate (all of whom were teaching third- or fourth-semester Spanish and 12 of whom contributed to the project's initial content development), 17 submitted complete questionnaires. Their Spanish-language teaching experience ranged from two to five years, and only eight had taught beyond the fourth-semester level. Ten of the original 24 (42 percent) had one semester of experience teaching with *Acceso*, while the remaining 14 were completing their first semester using it. Of the 24 invited participants only 9 participated in the required seminar on FL pedagogy described in the previous section. Six of the invited participants had taken the redesigned seminar and four more had opted to read the new material and participate in class discussions relevant to the *Acceso* project. Of the 24 invited participants, 10 were native speakers of Spanish (41 percent, with the remaining 14 participants native speakers of English), 70 percent were females, and 30 percent were males. All remaining non-native participants had near-native competency in Spanish.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was deployed via a course management system, enabling anonymous submissions of questionnaires. After reading the informed consent statement, invited participants were asked either to complete the questionnaire or to submit a questionnaire stating that they were opting out, so as to preserve the anonymity of their fellow instructors by providing submissions from all invited participants (see note 8). The participants had 14 days to complete the questionnaire. All 24 invited participants submitted either a completed questionnaire or one that followed the instructions for opting out.

At the end of the 14-day period the completed questionnaires were exported into an Excel spreadsheet and randomly assigned a participant number (1–17), allowing the data to be analyzed both by participant and by item. After reading all responses, the researcher grouped them according to the four research questions. An extrainstitutional LPD was consulted to verify the researcher's initial categorization of responses. Once the responses were grouped into overarching themes, the researcher used inductive coding techniques to generate subcategories (e.g., within the category of "pedagogic development," many responses made reference to actual classroom practices, while others spoke to beliefs about teaching). Responses revealing discernable patterns with respect to the impact of participation in the project were also identified and tallied. Additionally, upon further analysis, new themes that linked existing categories emerged.

Reliability and Validity

Among the multiple strategies used to enhance the study's reliability and validity was consultation with other LPDs, one of whom was involved with the project, during development of the questionnaire and again during data coding, to address possible bias and/or misunderstandings of responses. In addition, a consistent and effective system for tagging and organizing data was employed. Finally, findings are reported with respect to frequency in an effort to convey general trends and are exemplified by verbatim questionnaire responses.¹⁰

Results

The results of data analysis reported below relate to the four research questions guiding the investigation.

Research Question One: GSI Perceptions of Pedagogic Development

Of the 17 participants, 16 indicated directly the belief that participation in *Acceso* had played a role in their pedagogic development, whereas one participant answered question eight with a simple "no." Among those GSIs who felt *Acceso* was helpful for their pedagogic development, four areas emerged as impacted by their participation in the project: classroom practices and interactions with students, attitudes and beliefs about teaching, preparation for class, and curricular design and materials development.

Regarding the first area, data revealed that 76 percent of participants felt that *Acceso* had positively impacted their teaching practices, though little consensus existed regarding the specific nature of this impact. One theme that did emerge was the role of the instructor in the classroom: Nine participants underlined that using *Acceso* had changed their perceived role in the classroom from that of the central figure and sole information source to that of a coparticipant or facilitator. For example, one GSI stated, "Since I am no longer relied on as the only source of information, I can feel more relaxed." Another GSI described this changed classroom dynamic as "more egalitarian":

With this kind of content, although I may be part of creating activities that work with the *Acceso* material, when it comes to daily

interaction with the class material, it feels more egalitarian between the students and myself. I'm not an expert in all aspects of Hispanic cultures. We are both approaching the material in a similar way. I still direct class activities (and facilitate small groups in which they do the leading), but there are also times in which the teacher participates as a member of the class in the discussion, not necessarily as the authority.

However, two GSIs expressed the opposite reaction to not having control of all of the material or answers to all of the questions in class, exemplified in the following response:

When students have other questions, many times I'm embarrassed because I don't know the answers to them. I think they expect me to be the expert on every aspect of what we teach from *Acceso*, and the fact is, I am not. A lot of what I am teaching from *Acceso*, I am learning the same as they are.

Three GSIs expressed the belief that their classroom practices and interactions with students were not meaningfully affected by the project, or in one GSI's words, "I don't really think my teaching has changed since we are using *Acceso*. Not having the chance to rely on a book was a bit challenging at first but it didn't affect the way I teach."

A second aspect of perceived pedagogic development revealed in the data related to GSIs' attitudes toward teaching. Twelve participants (70 percent) reported more positive feelings toward teaching for a variety of reasons, the most prevalent of which related to the belief that the content of the new curriculum was inventive and allowed them to teach material and skills significant to their students' learning, as expressed by a GSI who wrote, "I feel like I'm doing important innovative work because of preparing and teaching with *Acceso*," and by another who explained, "I am excited about the opportunity to search out 'realia' on the Web and using it to make communication meaningful for my students. I'm encouraged to find good material and to educate my students about finding good source material as well." Two GSIs stated explicitly that participation in the project did not affect their feelings or their beliefs about teaching. However, one GSI expressed very negative feelings about teaching as a result of the project:

They constantly remind me of their need to have a book in their hands, as well as many tell me that they have a VERY hard time concentrating while working online, or don't have adequate technology for everything to work properly for them. This leads to frustration, which in turn, is taken out on me in the classroom and through e-mail.

A third aspect of perceived pedagogic development related to GSIs' experience with *Acceso* and its impact on their strategies for class preparation. All but three of the participants (82 percent) reported spending more time preparing for class with the new curriculum, though most acknowledged that the novelty of the *Acceso* curriculum contributed to this increase and that they anticipated having to spend less time in subsequent semesters. Another theme that emerged from

the data involved GSIs rethinking class preparation as a result of teaching the *Acceso* curriculum. Six mentioned adopting the approach of preparing as if they were students in order to anticipate areas of confusion or possible avenues for discussion. As one GSI explained,

To prepare for my class meetings, I first put myself in the place of the students and “do” their assignment (readings, videos, additional investigation, quizzes, etc.), which I never did in the past. I think about possible questions, misunderstandings, doubts, etc., that they might have. I then review my lesson plan and think about the things I want to emphasize and additional questions I want to ask my students.

Half of the participants mentioned the available lesson plans developed by their fellow instructors. Despite the fact that the practice was put in place to protect their time and to promote collaboration, five GSIs stated that their colleagues’ lesson plans were not adequate and added to their workload. Conversely, four GSIs reported the group lesson plans to be an asset, as exemplified in this response: “The shared lesson plans are a great starting point as I prepare my classes...I really learn a lot of from the other ideas that I would not think of on my own.”

Regarding the fourth area of perceived pedagogic development, 12 participants (70 percent) reported that creating materials for *Acceso* had a positive impact on their development as teachers. The most commonly cited reason related to the perceived opportunity to link their research and teaching interests and with learning how to make this material accessible to others. One GSI explained, “I had the chance to teach information that I found relevant and interesting... it was very helpful to think about how to select, organize, and present material in a way that would be clear and helpful for other instructors and students,” while another stated, “It was a lot of work, but I enjoyed being able to connect my scholarship with my teaching in a more tangible way.” Another theme that emerged related to how the process of developing content led them to recognize gaps in their own understanding. In the words of one GSI, “I had the opportunity to review topics that I thought that I knew quite well, only to find that communicating the core elements of the history/culture required significant organization and structure that I had not yet placed on my knowledge.” Additionally, one GSI identified that contributing to *Acceso* facilitated the ability to explain *why* a given activity was included: “I often say to the students ‘we thought that this would be important for you to know because...’ and ‘when we wrote this we felt that this would help you understand...’ ” Finally, six GSIs mentioned that the process of developing materials was more complex than they had previously imagined.

The theme of limited time reemerged in a variety of contexts that related to contributing to the content of the curriculum. All 12 GSIs who had contributed materials highlighted that the process was extremely time-consuming. Two stated directly that they would not contribute more due to limitations on their time, one of whom explained the decision in this way: “Developing *Acceso* materials was much more time-intensive than I anticipated, and for this reason I would not volunteer to develop materials in the future while also teaching courses and pursuing graduate studies.” The remaining contributors stated their intentions to

develop more materials for *Acceso*, though half qualified this intent as contingent on time availability. Finally, three of the five GSIs that had not contributed to the curriculum stated that they lacked available time to participate. All of these expressed a desire to develop materials in future.

Research Question Two: GSI Perceptions of Technology

Use for Pedagogic Purposes

All of the participants expressed the belief that *Acceso* had informed their views on technology use in the FL classroom, with 15 (88 percent) indicating greater confidence in employing technology in the classroom. Several GSIs explained this increased assurance in detail. For instance, one wrote:

I am much more at ease with incorporating technology in my everyday teaching. Now I do not hesitate to utilize the computer as a tool to show students how to access information. Also, whenever side discussions take place, I can easily research information, videos, music, etc., to show my students and to enrich our discussions and their learning.

Another responded as follows:

My attitude toward the use of technology has changed due to my participation in the *Acceso* project. I now understand its usefulness and no longer have the fear of it not working or taking too long. Also, my comfort level and preparedness with regards to the navigation of multiple programs and documents on the computer at once has increased, which has drastically affected my attitude.

However, a third of GSIs who discussed their more positive relationship with technology use also expressed apprehension about possible technology failure, as in the following explanation: “I have adapted to not having anything besides the computer as a reference, but I still get nervous at times that if the internet or computer happened to be not working during classtime [sic], it would be VERY difficult to teach without it.”

Another theme that emerged related to the perceived benefit of using structured interaction with content in a Web-based environment. Ten GSIs detailed the ways in which Web-based content and tools enhanced student learning and class interactions. Several participants cited the immediacy that employing technology allows, with one stating, “The content available through technology is more relevant and current. Also with discussions in the classroom, and interacting with Internet sites in real time—like with the cell phone polls—we can handle information and communication with new media.” Most of these responses also asserted that technology integration heightened student engagement in class, as is exemplified in this response:

Before using *Acceso*, I thought good class discussion and communication did not necessarily need technology for improvement. Now I know that technology can increase students’ engagement and help the content be more relevant, as well as being a great starting point for discussions or debates.

Another GSI expressed the belief that incorporating technology in teaching facilitates the class's exposure to and interaction with authentic and meaningful input: "*Acceso* inspires me to find relevant Web sites and videos that I can show students to peak their interest, to communicate content, and to demonstrate the communicative properties of structures and forms." Three others underscored that technology allowed them to access relevant information in the classroom as the opportunity presents itself: "While in class I can also research other viewpoints that arise which enriches our conversations. I have embraced technology as an important part of my teaching."

However, data also revealed that these positive experiences with technology were not shared by all participants. Two GSIs expressed negative feelings about how technology had taken a central role in instruction. Each specifically highlighted that they missed having a paper textbook to refer to in class.

The GSIs also commented on the extent to which they felt supported with respect to technology use in the new curriculum. Two reported that they did not feel sufficiently supported, whereas the other 15 reported feeling both supported and comfortable seeking support regarding classroom equipment, the Web-based tools used in the *Acceso* project, and the employment of such technology in their own contributions to content development.

Research Question Three: GSI Perceptions of *Acceso*'s Role in Their Future Professional Endeavors

Because one goal of the *Acceso* project was to prepare GSIs for teaching courses beyond the intermediate level, participants were asked directly if they believed themselves to be better prepared for teaching advanced courses as a result of participating in the project. Additionally, they were asked to comment on how this participation might impact their future professional endeavors. Fourteen participants (82 percent) expressed that they felt better prepared to teach at advanced levels as a result of participating in *Acceso*, citing enhanced classroom management skills, experience teaching process-based writing, experience integrating authentic content into language study, and lesson planning. Four GSIs revealed that they whereas they had prior experience teaching beyond the fourth-semester level, the project had enhanced that experience, with one stating:

As a result of *Acceso*, I have already taught lessons with cultural and literary content. I have also led discussion groups and debates with real-world contents and consequences. I have guided my students through the various revision and editing processes in preparing three- to four-page compositions. These activities are perfect preparation for anyone teaching 300 level courses, in my experience.

The other 10 responses indicated the conviction that *Acceso* had provided opportunities for skills development and/or general knowledge enhancement that would prove beneficial when teaching upper-level courses, as illustrated in the following response:

While I am not aware of the specific demands of more advanced courses, I imagine that course design and instruction will require me to create lessons that are interesting, profound, and meaningful [sic]. The few lessons that I've developed for *Acceso* required significant reflection on the kinds of content to include and the method for their communication and relationship to form. I expect that this experience of lesson design is an appropriate introduction to my future teaching.

Three participants reported that they were either unsure or that they did not believe that participation in the project contributed to their preparation for teaching more advanced classes. Among those, one whose response suggested past experience with teaching upper-division courses cited student attitudes and the lack of a textbook as sources of ambivalence:

I don't feel any more or less prepared to teach a 300-level class than I did before my involvement in *Acceso*. The 300-level students WANT to be there, and have a much better attitude towards the class. The use of technology or *Acceso* wouldn't be as much of an issue with these students, but I would still like a book, especially if literature is to be implemented into the lessons.

In addition to opinions expressed about preparation for teaching more advanced courses, most GSIs (76 percent) expressed the belief that participating in *Acceso* would enhance their curricula vitae or benefit them during the job search. As one GSI explained, "I think it has really helped me develop curriculum content in a useful manner, and to understand my own way of teaching and instruction, which will be helpful in an interview situation and definitely help my CV." Several stated that experience with integrating technology into teaching would prove to be attractive to future employers: "I'm glad to have had experience incorporating online content into teaching. This will be good when searching for a job."

Finally, other less instrumental reasons were cited by five participants to support the belief that *Acceso* would have a positive impact on future professional endeavors. Two GSIs pointed to advancing Open Educational Resources and reaching out to other institutions:

I am very interested in making similar programs available to students in Latin America who do not have textbooks or library systems. There is tremendous potential for *Acceso* to be an intercultural project by asking our students of Spanish to be interviewed, for example, so that students of U.S. English and culture can experience a similar program.

Two other GSIs indicated that they planned to incorporate approaches to teaching that they learned through the project on other courses. One explained, "I know I'll apply to future teaching the kinds of online resources that I learned about through *Acceso*," and another stated, "This experience will inform all the courses that I design in the future." A third GSI highlighted how the project has informed his or her understanding of undergraduate students: "As a result of the

expanded responsibility and more diffused content structure, I am significantly more sensitive to the needs of my students as well as what they are capable of even in fourth semester.”

Research Question Four: Perceived Impact of GSI Participation in *Acceso* on Collaboration

The final goal that *Acceso* related to professional development was to promote collaboration amongst faculty, lecturers, and GSIs. In fact, this area elicited the least consensus among respondents: Nine (53 percent) indicated that the project encouraged more intradepartmental collaboration while the other eight (47 percent) indicated that the project did not, or that more formal collaboration was necessary to achieve successful outcomes. Of participants who reported experiencing more opportunities for collaboration, most cited examples related to implementation of the new curriculum. For example, one GSI stated, “Because *Acceso* was new, I feel that we collaborated more closely than normal. We had to be aware about what elements of a lesson were functioning properly, and consult with each other regularly.” Four GSIs reported that contributing content to the curriculum led to more opportunities to collaborate with peers, as exemplified in following response: “While creating content, I collaborated with two other graduate students. Together we brainstormed potential projects, gave each other deadlines for completing them, and edited and revised both the content and activities.” Two GSIs’ responses indicated that the project motivated a more profound sense of teamwork, with one stating,

The collaborative nature of *Acceso* has most definitely encouraged me to reach out more and feel more a member of a team. In addition, the rich, current material *Acceso* presents has prompted my own research and discussion of current events with my fellow instructors and mentors.”

Of the eight GSIs reporting that participation in *Acceso* did not impact collaboration, one responded, “No. I felt I collaborated well before.” The other six GSIs indicated that the amount of collaboration was insufficient or limited their responses to suggesting future improvements. As one GSI explained, “When we did collaborate, it was effective. We shared ideas and doubts. However, I feel that MUCH MORE collaboration (besides e-mail) is necessary for this program to work.”

Discussion

Considering the fact that 94 percent of participants reported a positive impact on their pedagogic development, overall, the first phase of *Acceso* has proven fruitful from the GSIs’ perspective. In general terms, the rich variety of learning experiences described in participants’ responses (both positive and negative) are encouraging indicators of the project’s potential as a vehicle for professional development.

Notably, the GSIs' responses concentrated on different aspects of their perceived pedagogic development, which suggests the broad range of learning opportunities offered by a project like *Acceso*. With respect to classroom teaching, the results exposed their perceptions of progress and challenges related to structuring classroom interactions and preparation for class meetings. The majority welcomed a perceived shift in classroom roles from that of the central figure to that of a guide or coparticipant in the learning process. The instructors who responded more positively to this approach learned that using their research skills to guide the discovery of relevant information sources relieves the instructor of a commonly perceived pressure to be the "expert" on content, wherein they may instead learn with their students as they structure opportunities for linguistic and critical cultural development. In fact, this is a hallmark of critical pedagogy in which "educators themselves attempt to disrupt the classroom's traditional power relationships in search of a more equalitarian environment" (Elola & Oskoz, 2010, p. 184). Additionally, the notion of experiencing the course from the students' perspective surfaced in several descriptions of how GSIs' approach to class preparation had changed, with more than a third stating that they began the process by imagining how the students would experience the content to better anticipate their needs, moving closer to a classroom that is understood as "a site where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of learners and teacher alike, is produced through meaningful interactions" (Elola & Oskoz, p.184).

The data also provided information about how GSIs' beliefs about teaching were impacted by the project, with the majority (70 percent) reporting enthusiasm for the opportunity to explore meaningful content with the broad range of students enrolled at the intermediate level. Those who participated in materials development specifically underlined the occasion that the project provided to make a connection between their research interests and their classroom teaching, a point explored in Aren's (1993) discussion of professionalization, which emphasized that future faculty must be prepared to creatively merge their roles as scholars and teachers to meet the demands of the varied types of institutions of higher learning in which they may find themselves. Additionally, many GSIs expressed the belief that creating materials and teaching with a critical cultural inquiry-based curriculum provided impetus to gain broader knowledge in areas of the Spanish-speaking world, which they recognized as crucial to their professional formation. Further, the GSIs appreciated the opportunity to broaden their cultural knowledge base while gaining experience with making this type of information accessible and relevant to their students. They also perceived the experience gained to be relevant to future professional endeavors, including teaching courses beyond the fourth-semester level.

The greatest consensus among GSIs related to the impact of *Acceso* on their technology use for pedagogic purposes, with all but two expressing the belief that they were more comfortable employing technology in FL teaching and possessed a better understanding of its application to developing course content. Even so, several GSIs mentioned their fear that the technology would fail during class. Meskill, Mossop, DiAngelo, and Pasquale (2007) reported similar apprehensions about the failure of technology among novice FL instructors, regardless of

their level of training, suggesting that this anxiety may stem from less classroom management experience in general. Moreover, GSIs that referred to technology as a tool to access content rather than the locus of learning itself reported more positive feelings toward its use, which demonstrates a more developed understanding of technology use in the classroom.

A well-informed GSI today is aware of job descriptions calling for familiarity and experience with technology in the classroom, so it was especially encouraging that participants recognized the stimulating learning opportunities occasioned by the integration of technology in the *Acceso* project. Even the two participants who expressed more negative attitudes toward technology pointed to its overuse as problematic rather than focusing on the idea that technology had no place in the FL classroom. Additionally, when explaining how the *Acceso* project would impact their future teaching, an overwhelming majority expected to make use of their hands-on experience with technology when designing courses in the future. These findings are in line with those in Brantmeier's (2003) study of FL doctoral students who developed more positive attitudes toward technology use to facilitate L2 reading development as a result of training through theoretically informed rationales and hands-on experience.

Conversely, there was less agreement about the level of collaboration fostered by the project. The goal of promoting more active, ongoing collaboration among department members was not *perceived* to have been achieved at this point in the project's development by all GSIs in this study, which suggests that *Acceso* may be improved by better articulating its inherently collaborative nature and by facilitating more collaboration with respect to its classroom implementation through regular instructional staff meetings and/or a course wiki to facilitate discussion at a distance.

While the primary purpose of this study was to explore how the *Acceso* project was perceived to contribute to GSI professionalization, an added benefit was the feedback provided by study participants to inform future directions for the project. First, GSI feedback revealed the need to more explicitly communicate the goals of the project as related to graduate education. A more formal and transparent description of these intended outcomes should clarify that *Acceso* intends to be a vehicle for multiple facets of graduate professional development. Such discussions could also reframe what some GSIs perceived as negative aspects of the project (e.g., its time-consuming nature, perceived inadequacies of the collaborative lesson plans), so that these may be recognized as contributing to professional growth. Understanding the time pressures involved in curricular design and materials development, for example, is excellent preparation for a professional future that will likely feature less support and greater demands on one's time. Similarly, overt discussion of the benefits and challenges of collaboration with colleagues will better prepare GSIs for the realities of the FL profession. In sum, findings of this study uncovered the need for reflection on GSIs' experiences with the project to tap its potential as a means for professional development in the future.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study has several limitations. First, the dilemma of how to ethically elicit opinions from participants when the researcher is their professor, supervisor, and project leader informed the methodological approach to this preliminary

study. Only anonymous data was collected, with no background information about individual participants. Unfortunately, this precluded triangulation with other information sources that would have added depth to the interpretation of the results. Follow-up interviews would go far in shedding light on the reasons behind questionnaire responses and revealing insights about the perceived impact of the project on GSIs to date.

Examining participant responses in relationship to their own student evaluations and LPD classroom observations would provide additional understanding with respect to classroom teaching and learning. Additionally, more specific participant background information would serve to illuminate possible reasons for responses (e.g., Did the participant contribute to the content development, and was he able to implement his own work? Did the participant take part in the version of the graduate seminar designed to support the *Acceso* project? Was this the first time that she had taught one of the courses in sequence?). The fact that 30 percent of those invited to participate in the study chose not to do so should not go unmentioned. While any number of factors may have contributed to the decision to opt out, it is possible that the nonsubmitting GSIs did not share their colleagues' positive views of the project.

The final methodological drawback relates to the cross-sectional nature of the study and the participant pool itself, which did not represent all of project collaborators. Many GSIs who were heavily involved in initial content development were not among the study's participants because they were not teaching at the time of data collection. Future studies will be expanded to include all GSIs participating in the project, along with detailed description of the nature of their participation. Lastly, the questionnaire captured GSIs' perceptions at the moment when it was filled out—with two weeks remaining in the semester in which a new approach to teaching intermediate Spanish was implemented. Several participants subsequently commented that the project has had a more profound and evident effect on their understanding of teaching now than at the time of data collection. Future investigations will push beyond anonymous and cross-sectional data to include more contextual information and provide more insight into GSI's perceptions of their professional development as they participate in the ongoing project.

With respect to future directions for the *Acceso* project itself as it relates to GSI professional development, in the near future, collaboration among project participants continues as we work together to improve the intermediate-level sequence through continued expansion of its content, refining implementation based on structured reflection and formative assessments of student learning, and exploring avenues for developing summative assessments that are cost-effective and can be externally validated. Many GSIs are gratified that their work is benefitting students and instructors at institutions beyond the University of Kansas that have adopted *Acceso* in their intermediate-level sequences. While not all GSIs opt to be heavily involved in the ever-evolving project, through the mandatory first-semester graduate seminar, each new GSI comes to understand its goals and theoretical underpinnings to realize a final project in which they create a series of *Acceso* activities. As a result, GSIs are prepared to be as engaged as they choose

in a collaborative project that affords them the opportunities for professional development that was not previously available.

While there remains notable resistance to change among FL departments despite almost two decades of compelling research and scholarship recommending curricular innovation, perhaps the 2007 MLA Report, which has synthesized many recommendations and circulated them to a more diverse readership, will catalyze more widespread efforts for progress in collegiate and graduate FL education. It certainly served that within the context of the Spanish basic language sequence at the University of Kansas, which in turn has occasioned a new direction for facilitating pedagogic development amongst our GSIs. It is for this precise reason that dialogue among LPDs, other faculty, and our graduate students themselves about reconceptualizing their professional formation is so critical: As future professors of language, literature, and culture, they will be called upon both to effect change in the profession and to negotiate the changes that they are sure to encounter in their new roles.

Notes

1. Allen and Negueruela-Azarola (2010) review research related to graduate student professional development from 1987 to 2008.
2. For a description of the project's goals and content of the intermediate-level curriculum, see <http://www2.ku.edu/~spanish/acceso/>. The supporting pedagogic and assessment materials are available in the password-protected area for instructors. *Acceso* is currently being used at a small number of secondary and postsecondary institutions beyond the University of Kansas.
3. While recognizing that the term "curriculum" is often used to refer to the courses that comprise a four-year language major or liberal arts program of study, the term is used here to describe a specific learning program with articulated learning outcomes that include their teaching, learning, and assessment.
4. For informative discussions related to engaging authentic texts to promote transcultural competence and FL reading development in the context of the 2007 MLA Report, see Brantmeier & Pulido (2010).
5. The following topics were explored in the redesigned graduate seminar: The nature of translanguaging and transcultural competence as contrasted with proficiency-based models of communicative competence (ACTFL, 2006; Byrnes, 2006; MLA, 2007; Byrnes, 2008); models of how the development of these competencies might be achieved (Kern, 2000; Maxim, 2006; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) and what successful learning outcomes would be realistic within the context of the basic language sequence; recommendations for integrating Content Based Instruction and effective focus-on-form to promote L2 development (Lyser, 2007; Rodgers, 2006); the role of Open Educational Resources (OER) (Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative; French *Interactif*; Iiyoshi & Kumar, 2008; Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative; McElroy, 2008) and backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) in curriculum planning and implementation, and successful applications of technology to instructed L2 teaching and learning (Blake, 2007, 2008; Furstenberg, Levet, English, Maillet, 2001; Lomika & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2003).

6. A complete description of the *Acceso* curriculum is beyond the scope of this chapter. The following is a succinct overview: Each unit contains six activity types: (1) *Aperturas* is a unit opener that contains an authentic text foreshadowing and problematizing the themes explored in the unit or a demographic and geographic introduction to the countries in the region; (2) *Voces* consists of a series of interviews with native speakers and a description of the Spanish spoken in the region; (3) *Almanaques* explore a wide range of present-day cultural phenomena via online newspapers, magazines, videos, etc.; (4) *Sucesos* structures key historical information for understanding the present realities of the region via interactive timelines; (5) *Un paso más* explores more formal cultural production (e.g., literature, film, music); (6) *Perspectivas* are experiential activities regarding social issues that invite multiple perspectives and prompt students to clarify and articulate their own beliefs. The number and content of activities within each type is expandable so as to offer the utmost flexibility for structuring thematic modules for a given semester. Additionally, the platform offers a functional description of grammatical structures in focus and a glossary with definitions and sound files for the content-driven active vocabulary.
7. The term “*Acceso* activities” is used to avoid confusion with term “unit,” which describes the eight geographical regions around which the content is organized. An “*Acceso* activity” is made up of an articulated learning goal with respect to content and form, a prereading or prelistening activity, a text and the means by which it should be engaged both outside of class as preparation and in class to promote interaction, deeper critical understanding and focus on form, identification of critical vocabulary that is added to the unit’s active vocabulary list, and a synthesis writing activity or collaborative project.
8. The challenge of negotiating multiple and often conflicting roles experienced by all LPDs and course supervisors becomes especially acute for those conducting research related to programmatic goals. For example, for the present study it would have been informative if the gender and first language of participants were reported. However, with such a small group of participants, the anonymity necessary for eliciting honest perceptions could easily have been compromised or at least perceived to be compromised. The survey function in the Blackboard course management system allows an instructor to see which students have submitted a survey (and which have not); however, when the data is exported there is no way to match a respondent to his or her responses. Therefore all participants were asked to submit a questionnaire—be it blank or completed—to protect the anonymity of the actual participants and to eliminate any pressure to participate.
9. The two LPDs consulted in an effort to enhance the validity and reliability of the current study included the researcher’s co-LPD and a colleague from another institution with a background in applied linguistics who directs a Spanish language program and supervises GSIs.
10. An anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out that the study employed a convenience sample and did not attempt to triangulate questionnaire data with other information sources, the limitations of which are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

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Appendix A

1. Has your teaching changed as a result of participating in the *Acceso* project? If so, how?
2. Have your feelings toward teaching changed as a result of participating in the *Acceso* project? If so, how?
3. Describe how you go about preparing for class meetings. Do you believe that there is a relationship between the effort you make in preparation and the effectiveness of the lesson? Please explain.
4. Do you feel sufficiently supported with respect to a) using technology and b) implementing the content of the curriculum? Please explain.
5. Describe your attitude toward the use of technology in the foreign language classroom. To what extent has your attitude been influenced by the *Acceso* project? Please explain.
6. Do you feel better prepared to teach at the 300 level and beyond as a result of the *Acceso* project? Why or why not?
7. Have you developed materials for the *Acceso* curriculum? If so, briefly describe your experience. Would you like to develop materials in the future?
8. If you believe that the *Acceso* project has impacted your pedagogic development, please offer insight into how and why.
9. Has the *Acceso* project affected the extent to which you collaborate with your fellow instructors and your faculty mentors? If so, how?
10. How do you think the *Acceso* project can be improved to have a more positive impact on your pedagogic development?
11. Are your students engaged by the *Acceso* curriculum? Please provide any examples that you can think of to support your answer. How do you think that we can enhance student learning as we move forward with *Acceso*?
12. What impact (if any) do you believe participating in the *Acceso* project will have on your future professional endeavors?