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Encouraging TAs to Embrace Communicative Language Teaching: An Investigation of Pre-service Training Practices

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Abstract

This article begins by synthesizing research findings concerning the increasingly important role graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) play in fostering undergraduate learners' oral proficiency. Despite this important role, our review of TA training practices in the literature found a lack of research on the preparation TAs receive prior to beginning their foreign language instruction. Accordingly, the present study examines incoming TAs' perceptions of their command of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques presented at an interdepartmental, pre-service orientation at a large Midwestern research university. Using a qualitative approach, we investigated the unique ways in which this orientation influenced novice and experienced TAs differently in the analysis of thirteen focus participants' semi-structured interviews. The discussion speaks to the critical elements of the pre-service orientation that appeared to promote TAs' appropriation of various aspects of CLT as well as the tenets of CLT that remained neglected by the majority of the focus participants. The pedagogical implications address ways to maximize CLT training and extend beyond pre-service TA orientations to K-12 teacher training programs and workshops.

Recent studies on the reasons why students pursue world language study repeatedly report learners' desire to gain proficiency in the language in order to communicate with members of the target culture (Hoyt-Oukada, 2003; Husseinali, 2006; Murphy, Magnan, Back, & Garrett-Rucks, 2009; Ossipov, 2000; Yang, 2003). Communicative language teaching (CLT) meets the proficiency desires expressed by learners by preparing students for target language (TL) use in real-world situations. However, foreign language (FL) educators who have not been trained in the communicative approach risk using outdated methodologies, reducing the likelihood that their learners will gain a strong sense of oral proficiency. Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of their early FL learning experiences—due to their lack of ability to communicate in the target language—are less likely to continue their FL studies (Murphy et al., 2009). This is of particular concern given the 2009 Modern Language Association Enrollment Survey that reports that only about 20% of FL

students in commonly taught languages—Spanish, French, and German—are enrolled in advanced courses at higher education institutions, leaving the vast majority of students enrolled in first- and second- year classes (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010). Graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) play a critical role in encouraging university students to continue their FL studies because universities with graduate degree programs increasingly rely on TAs to teach their introductory FL classes (Kost, 2008).

Despite the important role FL TAs serve as advocates for world language programs, many TAs begin their FL instruction with limited training. With an emphasis on commonly taught languages, TA training reported in the literature typically consists of a brief pre-service orientation, followed by a semester-long teaching methods course during the TAs' first-semester of teaching (Kost, 2008). In a study of FL TAs' perceptions of their training, Brandl (2000) found that many novice TAs considered fall orientation training programs more beneficial than their methods classes, which he speculated may be due to "the immediate necessity to learn whatever it takes to get ready for their teaching assignments" (p. 366). Due to scheduling, many TAs start teaching prior to the start of their Methods course, subsequently relying solely on the information provided in the pre-service orientation for their first few days of instruction. Regardless of the importance of the pre-service orientation, there exists a lacuna in the literature of studies investigating TA pre-service training, particularly with attention to the aspects of the orientation that appear to encourage TAs to embrace CLT practices. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to contribute to the understanding of how to maximize FL teacher training methods, especially pre-service TA training practices, by investigating the ways in which TAs believed they would incorporate CLT practices into their own teaching after attending a pre-service orientation.

Using a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003) to derive meaning from 13 TA participants' experiences, represented in semi-structured interviews with the first author following the pre-service orientation, we identified the unique ways in which novice and experienced TAs appropriated aspects of CLT practices from the orientation. Despite the emphasis on pre-service TA training in this paper, the pedagogical implications extend to K-12 FL teacher training programs and district coordinator workshops, as well as to novice and experienced FL educators who are interested in brushing up their understanding of CLT practices.

Review of the Literature

In a communicative curriculum, classes center on meaningful experiences *in* the language through contextualized TL use rather than learning *about* the language through lengthy grammar explanations. The communicative approach to FL instruction emphasizes the communication of meaning in believable interactions in a variety of communicative settings, essentially preparing learners for real-life situations with speakers of the target language. Informed by research in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, the communicative approach emphasizes TL instruction, ideally contextualized through the use of authentic texts, role-play, or audiovisuals such as props, drawings, or movement (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Expanding Krashen's (1982) notion that oral proficiency is primarily acquired

by exposure to comprehensible input, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) greatly influenced the communicative approach to FL instruction by emphasizing the importance of learner language production in addition to comprehensible TL exposure. To encourage learner output, supporters of CLT believe error correction should be limited in the earliest stages of second language learning to avoid stifling learners' motivation to communicate "by an insistence on correctness" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 140). Rather, learners' errors are considered "a natural and valuable part of the language learning process" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p.140). Widely promoted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, CLT is the most prevalent FL teaching method found today. Nonetheless, TAs not been trained in CLT prior to their instruction risk perpetuating outmoded styles of teaching and limiting their students' sense of oral proficiency. This is of particular concern due to the aforementioned role of TAs as gatekeepers for advanced studies in world language programs.

In recent times, preparing TAs to teach the language they are studying at the graduate level has become valued by many as a crucial component of their professional development in addition to improving their effectiveness as a TA (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Byrnes, 2001; Schulz, 2000). According to Schulz (2000), research on FL graduate student training heightened in the early 1990s with the appearance of the American Association of University Supervisors and Coordinators annual volumes on research in language program direction and TA professional development. In the last 20 years, at least four of the volumes dealt specifically with matters of TA training, providing research findings and suggestions to conceptualize the development of graduate students in FL departments. Kost (2008) claims that the most prevalent model of FL TA training typically consists of a pre-service orientation workshop—just before the first semester of graduate school begins—followed by a methodology course during TAs' first semester of graduate school.

Although the literature suggests that FL TA training is common at research universities, little is known about the training practices that occur. For example, the 2007 Modern Language Association report urged departments to "Enhance and reward graduate student training in languages and in language teaching" (Modern Language Association, 2007, p. 8), but it lacked direction on how to instruct graduate students beyond suggestions to "teach graduate students to use technology in language instruction and learning" (p. 8). Moreover, there is even less specific guidance in the literature in the pre-service TA training component, which essentially introduces FL TAs to CLT as the exemplar instructional approach prior to their Methods course. In the following section, we provide an overview of four types of TA training practices described in the literature: (1) a descriptive study (Amores, 1999) of Spanish graduate student TA training at the University of West Virginia (UWV); (2) an empirical study (Brandl, 2000) investigating individual and group TA training practices across five departments at the University of Washington (UW); (3) an empirical study (Kost, 2008) investigating the general effectiveness of an apprenticeship program for all incoming graduate students into the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta (UA); (4) a position paper (Byrnes, 2001) making a case for a comprehensive model of TA preparation that emphasizes research-based understandings of pedagogy found at the German Department of

Georgetown University. Admittedly, TA training practices are varied and continually evolve. The information presented in the following review is intended to document a sampling of university FL training programs represented solely at the time of the publication date and only in the language departments specified.

Pre-service TA training is required at the UWV, UW, UA, and Georgetown. At UWV, Amores (1999) described the week-long pre-service workshop as "designed to provide new GTAs [graduate student TAs] with the theoretical bases and practical information they need in order to carry out their responsibilities in the classroom" (p. 443). The Spanish Department orientation workshop provides TAs with information about textbooks, course syllabi, lesson plans, ideas about how to motivate students, administer performance assessments, and administrative duties such as grade-keeping, as well as activities for the first few days of class. TAs also attend a session on maintaining TL use in the classroom and a first-day teaching demonstration of a French class, presumably a less-familiar language for many of the Spanish TAs. Brandl (2000) did not describe UW's pre-service orientations in his article, yet he did mention that the participants in his study who came from five language departments—Asian, Germanics, Romance (Spanish Division), Scandinavian, and Slavic—found their departmental fall orientations very useful. At the UA, Kost (2008) described the mandatory fall pre-service orientation for all incoming graduate students into the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies as consisting of two days of training for all languages in the department and one day of language-specific workshops. In addition to the pre-service workshop and fall semester Methods course, incoming graduate students with no previous teaching experience are funded as apprentices at the UA in order to "provide incoming graduate students with the opportunity to gain day-to-day teaching experience in the classroom under the guidance of a more experienced instructor" (p. 31). At Georgetown, TAs in the German Department take a FL Methods course during the first semester of graduate study prior to any instruction (Byrnes, 2001), thus a fall pre-service workshop is unnecessary. Interestingly, novice TAs at Georgetown take a second graduate-level class to further explore teaching and learning issues when they begin teaching during their second semester of graduate study. Both the UWV and the UW offer only one Methods course taken during TAs' first semester of instruction that is intended to train TAs further in CLT.

As noted by Amores (1999), delaying the teaching assignments of TAs until their second semester, after they have completed the Methods course, would be much more desirable, but the staffing needs that would result at most research universities would be "cost-prohibitive" (p. 444). As a result, few TAs receive training on FL instruction prior to their first day of class beyond what is provided in the pre-service orientation. Despite the importance of the pre-service orientation in preparing the majority of incoming TAs for their first-semester of instruction, few studies have investigated the aspects of such orientations that encourage TAs to embrace CLT. This is precisely the goal of the current study.

The Study

The aim of this research is to explore the influences of a CLT pre-service orientation workshop at a large Midwestern university on graduate student TAs' percep-

tions of their command of CLT techniques. Influenced by previous research (Brandl, 2000) that found differences between the training preferences of novice TAs and those with prior teaching experience, the researchers investigated the ways in which novice and experienced TAs differ in their perceptions of their command of CLT after a pre-service orientation workshop. The following questions are intended to inform this overarching question:

1. In what ways do novice and experienced TAs imagine themselves teaching differently prior to and then after the orientation?
2. In what ways do novice and experienced TAs accept or question the effectiveness of CLT after the workshop?
3. In what ways are novice and experienced TAs confident or not confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop?

Data used in the present study are taken from a larger study intended to understand TA perceptions of the influences on their instruction over the course of a semester including the pre-service TA orientation, Methods classes, workshops, observations, and student evaluations at the end of the semester. The present study focuses only on the influences of the pre-service orientation on TAs' perceptions of CLT immediately after the pre-service TA orientation.

Methods

Description of the Pre-service TA Orientation

In the fall of 2010, over 60 TAs who were beginning their graduate studies at a large Midwestern research university attended a mandatory interdepartmental pre-service TA orientation sponsored by seven departments and the university's Language Institute (see Appendix A[1] for the specific language departments in the informational letter sent to incoming TAs). The interdepartmental orientation lasted three days and consisted of lectures on SLA theory and research that inform CLT methods, professional CLT demonstrations, practice micro-teaching sessions, hereafter referred to as *micro-teaches*, and brief presentations by Study Abroad and TA Union representatives.

On the first day of orientation, TAs attended a brief lecture on CLT and a French teaching demonstration (demo) that modeled how to work with vocabulary within the context of short conversations by a FL teaching methods professor. For meta-instructional comments on the application of pedagogical theories and practices modeled in the demo, the professor switched from French instruction to English. Next, a Japanese professor modeled a vocabulary-focused lesson taught exclusively in the TL, scaffolding her instruction with drawings and realia. Prior to her instruction, the professor first contextualized the activity in English: The planning of an international student welcome party in Japan. She then asked the TA "students" to perform a communicative activity by asking food and drink preferences of their "classmates" to determine what to serve at the party using the Japanese equivalent of "Do you like ...?"

After the first lecture and teaching demos concluded, the TAs were assigned to pre-arranged small groups of six to seven people. The groupings deliberately includ-

ed TAs who would be teaching a variety of languages in order to afford the experience of teaching "students" who do not know the language, as well as the experience of being a novice learner again within the same session. TAs were provided micro-teach instructions and guidelines (see Appendix B[1]) to teach a 10-minute session about vocabulary in context the following day. TAs were informed that they would be provided feedback immediately after each micro-teach in the form of group discussions mediated by a faculty member and an experienced TA who had previously taught in a university FL program. In addition to public comments, TAs also received brief peer comments written down on index cards noting strong points of the lesson and suggestions for improvement after their lessons.

On the second day of the orientation, the TAs reconvened to attend a lecture on SLA theories and research influencing FL grammar instruction in CLT in order to prepare for their second micro-teach. A Japanese teaching demo followed. Expanding upon the international party context of the previous day, the Japanese instructor explained the communicative activity that the TAs were ultimately to perform: Introduce themselves, ask the food and drink preferences of their partner, and then offer him or her the desired food and drink. The interdepartmental TA training orientation ended on the third day, after the TA-led, grammar-focused micro-teaches. In addition to this interdepartmental orientation, many departments organized their own course section meetings with language-specific break-out sessions, library tours, and departmental social gatherings during this orientation week. However, for some of the smaller FL departments, this interdepartmental training may have been all that they provided their TAs.

Participants and Procedures

The 13 participants in this study—three males and 10 females between the ages of 21 and 30-years old volunteered to be interviewed immediately after the orientation and prior to their first day teaching. Of these 13 TAs, six were experienced — either having served as the primary teacher in a K-16 FL classroom or holding a degree to perform in this capacity, and seven were novice — having no prior FL teaching experience. There were six Spanish TAs (three novice and three experienced) and seven French TAs (four novice and three experienced). Five of the 13 TAs were international (two French, one Swiss, one Spanish, and one Peruvian) and eight TAs were from the U.S. The majority of the TAs were teaching introductory language courses (first- and second-semester), and only experienced TAs were teaching second year courses (third-semester). TA participant descriptions are found in Table 1 below.

Table 1

TA Participant Descriptions

Name	Course	FL Teaching Experience	Nationality	Degree Program
TA1	French	2 years high school	US	SLA/French-Ph.D.
TA2	French	none	US	French M.A.
TA3	French	none	US	French M.A.
TA4	French	none	US	French M.A
TA5	French	none	French	Public Policy M.A.
TA6	French	FL teacher training (France)	French	Exchange, non-degree
TA7	French	FL teacher training (Switzerland)	Swiss	Exchange, non-degree
TA8	Spanish	FL teacher training (U.S.) + 3 years university TA	US	Spanish Ph.D.
TA9	Spanish	1.5 years private high school	US	Spanish Ph.D.
TA10	Spanish	None	US	Spanish M.A.
TA11	Spanish	None	US	Spanish M.A.
TA12	Spanish	None	Peruvian	Spanish M.A.
TA13	Spanish	7 years, university TA	Spanish	SLA/ Spanish Ph.D.

The first author invited all incoming French- and Spanish-language TAs to participate in the study to discuss their teaching professional development in three 15-minute interviews over the course of the semester. Only French and Spanish TAs were invited to participate in the study due to their departmental mandatory FL Methods course requirements. All of the interviews were recorded by the first author and then transcribed by both authors. Because the present study solely investigates the pre-service orientation portion of the TA training, only the analysis of the first interviews is included. The first semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C[1] for interview protocol) centered on TAs' previous teaching experiences (question 1), the ways in which the TAs imagined the workshop had influenced their instruction (questions 2 and 3), and the elements of the workshop TAs' perceived as useful (questions 4 through 6). The transcript analysis of participant responses to these six questions is described in the following section.

Data Analysis

The first author started the content analysis of the interview transcripts using line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006) to identify TA comments about teaching, including self-images of their teaching and any comments pertaining to CLT (e.g., teaching in the TL, making their TL use comprehensible, contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios, avoiding lengthy grammatical explanations in English, emphasizing learner language production, and limiting learner error correction). Both authors independently analyzed the coded transcripts and compared their interpretations of TA comments into *YES* or *NO* categories needed

to respond to the three research questions; 1) TAs' initial self-image of their teaching matched CLT before compared to after the workshop, 2) TAs' acceptance of CLT and 3) TAs' confidence in their ability to use CLT in their instruction. For example, if a TA had expressed that he had not initially pictured himself teaching in the TL prior to the orientation, but that he now understands the importance of TL instruction, he would be categorized into a *NO* category for initial self-image of his teaching matching CLT and a *YES* category for his acceptance of CLT. Both authors met for peer checks to discuss their yes/no categorization of TAs for each of the three research questions based on the TAs' statements in the transcripts. No differences in interpretation occurred. The first author further analyzed the transcripts of the interviews, seeking novice and experienced TA statements that provided further insight to the influences from the workshop on TAs' perceptions of CLT.

Findings

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the participants' perceptions of CLT reported by the thirteen TAs interviewed after the pre-service workshop. Individual TA comments are indentified by the TA number referred to in Table A above. The majority of the participants (10 out of 13) reported a difference between how they had imagined themselves teaching prior to the workshop compared to after it. The three TAs (TA1, TA8, and TA13) who reported no difference in their imagined teaching style all had some prior CLT training and teaching experience. The majority of the participants (11 out of 13) appeared to accept the CLT practices promoted at the workshop; only two participants—one novice (TA6) and one experienced (TA9)—questioned the effectiveness of certain aspects of CLT during the interviews. The majority of the participants (nine out of 13) also appeared confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop, and only four participants—two novice (TA5 and TA12) and two experienced (TA6 and TA9)—expressed any type of concern with their ability to teach using this approach during the interviews.

The differences found between experienced and novice TAs' perceptions toward CLT after they attended the orientation are described in more detail in the following section.

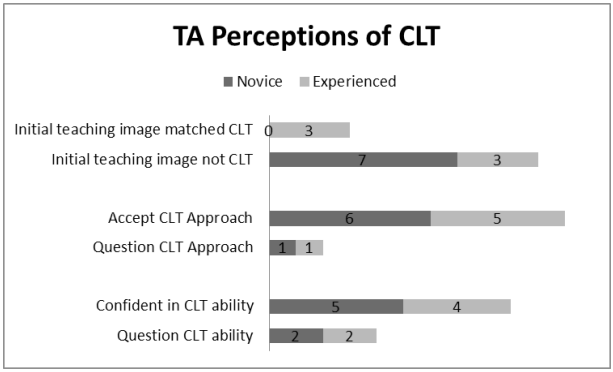

Figure 1: TA Perceptions of CLT applied to their own teaching practice.

Novice and Experienced TAs' Perceived Teaching Changes after the Orientation

In response to the first research question regarding the ways novice and experienced TAs imagine themselves teaching differently prior to and then after the orientation, only the experienced TAs with prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA12) imagined themselves teaching using the techniques taught in the workshop prior to the orientation. The most salient feature related to CLT found in the transcripts was that the majority of the novice TAs did not imagine themselves teaching in the TL prior to the workshops. For example, one novice TA (TA4) reported that she had imagined herself teaching in English prior to the workshop because of her own experiences taking an introductory Spanish class at the university level, which was mostly taught in English. After the workshop, she was eager to teach her introductory French class in the TL from the first class in order to "get the students to have an idea of how class is going to be" (TA4). On the contrary, another novice TA (TA11) who did have exposure to TL instruction in her own beginning studies of Spanish had also imagined herself teaching in English prior to the workshop. She explained that despite her early exposure to TL instruction in high school, "for some reason it seemed overwhelming to teach that way" (TA11). She described how the micro-teaches in the workshop encouraged her to teach in the TL as follows:

> After physically doing it [TL teaching] two days in a row [during the micro-teaches at the workshop], I found that it is definitely not that hard. You can make yourself clear through body language, through certain signals you give them—it [TL instruction] is attainable and should be done (TA11).

In addition to holding a changed impression of her own teaching after the workshop, it also appears that this TA has accepted TL instruction by her statement that it "should be done."

It is interesting to note that the three experienced TAs with no prior CLT training (TA6, TA7, TA9) also portrayed their lack of TL use as well as an emphasis on grammar explanations in their instruction in the same way as the novice TAs had depicted their imagined self-image of their teaching prior to the orientation. For example, an experienced TA described his realization that he had previously emphasized grammar and not TL communication in his teaching as follows:

> I felt pretty good about my teaching experiences until I took the orientation […].I thought [before the orientation] that we could not teach students to be fluent in the classroom…I was very effective at teaching my students to be masters of understanding the mechanics of language…but they were not great communicators (TA9).

However, he explained that the professional teaching demos and micro-teaches were helpful in making him believe that the students can understand TL instruction when given the appropriate support, and that he now understands the importance of fostering student language production.

The experienced TAs who had prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA13) had not only imagined themselves teaching in the same way as the methods modeled in the orientation—contextualized TL instruction and student-centered language production activities—but they appeared to notice detailed aspects of CLT promoted in the

workshop. For example, one experienced TA (TA1) noticed how to deal with student grammar questions in a better way than she had previously by responding briefly in English then offering multiple contextualized TL examples. The three experienced TAs with no prior CLT training, as well as all seven novice TAs, appeared to notice general CLT tenets such as teaching in the TL (all 10 TAs), avoiding lengthy grammatical explanations in English (all 10 TAs), placing the emphasis of their instruction on the learner's language production (TA2, TA3, TA4, TA6, TA7, TA9, TA10, TA12), making the TL comprehensible (TA6, TA7, TA9, TA10, TA11, TA12), and contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios (TA5, TA7,TA9). It is interesting to note that none of the TAs, neither novice nor experienced, mentioned error correction in their descriptions of how they would teach after attending the workshop.

Novice and Experienced TAs' Acceptance of CLT

In response to the second research question, *the ways novice and experienced TAs accept or question CLT after the workshop,* the majority of the novice and experienced TAs alike (11 out of 13) appeared to accept CLT practices stating their readiness to emulate CLT in their own instruction or explicitly stating their understanding of why immersion in the TL seemed beneficial. Only two participants, one international novice TA (TA5) and one U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training, explicitly questioned one aspect of CLT—the use of TL instruction. The U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training questioned the feasibility of creating positive student-teacher relationships with TL instruction. He further expressed his personal belief that college-aged students would benefit from explicit grammar instruction more than young learners. However, he explained that the professional teaching demos and micro-teaches were "super effective" in making him believe that the students can understand TL instruction when given the appropriate support, and that he thinks it is important to provide students "the opportunity to express themselves" (TA9).

The other TA who questioned the merits of CLT, an international novice TA (TA5), simply believed that explicit grammar instruction made FL learning easier for students. She explained that this is how she learned English, and that it made sense to her to perpetuate this style. The rest of the participants, both novice and experienced TAs without CLT training, either seemed to relate TL instruction to immersion experiences where they improved their own language skills or they were impressed with their own recall of an unfamiliar language, per the Japanese instruction on the second day teaching demo. No concerns about other aspects of CLT—contextualized grammar and vocabulary lessons in real-life scenarios or limited error correction—were expressed.

Novice and Experienced TAs' Confidence in their Ability to Use CLT

In response to the third research question, the ways novice and experienced TAs are confident or not confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop, previous CLT training and TAs' nationality were the influential factors detected. The three experienced TAs with prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA13) all expressed confidence in their ability to teach with the communicative approach. The four participants who did not feel completely confident in their abil-

ity to use CLT in their instruction were three international TAs—two novices (TA5, TA12) and one experienced (TA6)—and a U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training. The U.S. experienced TA (TA9) felt confident in his ability to foster student language production, but was concerned that making the TL comprehensible for his students would take a lot more energy than focusing on explicit grammar explanations. All three international TAs seemed primarily concerned about their teacher identity—as appearing overly energetic or not serious—and also sounding repetitive in their native language instruction. For one of the novice international TAs (TA12), having a second opportunity to do a micro-teach helped reduce his anxiety about sounding too repetitive in his native language instruction. He described his first micro-teach as "very bad" because "no one knew what to do and I did not know what to do about it" (TA12). He described his preoccupation with sounding repetitive in the first micro-teach and the influence of the second teaching demo on a change in his own second micro-teach as follows:

> The first one [micro-teach], I was more concerned about myself, and …I didn't want to repeat that much, I felt like a clown. But the second day, because of this second Japanese class impacted me […] I was repeating and repeating. It was very great (TA12).

For this TA, it was important to have exposure to two days of teaching demos and two micro-teaching experiences to overcome his preconceptions of what FL instruction should look like and to learn how to make the TL more comprehensible for his students.

Contrary to the four aforementioned TAs, the majority of the TAs appeared confident in their ability to use the CLT methods demonstrated in the orientation stating that they felt, "very supported, like my hands are being held a little bit before you take the training wheels off" (TA3), or "I am not concerned about finding ways to teach because there are mentors and resources" (TA11), or "I feel spoon-fed" (TA7) or "I now feel I know how to prepare a class" (TA4).

Overall, the analysis of the interview transcripts suggests that all of the TA participants in this study, both novice and experienced, were persuaded to use at least some aspects of CLT in their own classrooms after attending the orientation. Prior CLT training appeared to separate the views of the TAs in this study more than prior teaching experience. The three TAs with prior CLT training did not express great changes in the self-image they held about their teaching after the workshop; however, after the orientation, the ten other TAs had gained a greater sense of the communicative approach to teaching. It is interesting to note that all ten of the TAs without prior CLT training had imagined themselves teaching *about* the language in English, rather than emphasizing TL use in the classroom. In addition, the majority of these TAs (eight out of ten) also described the importance of emphasizing learners' language production in their instruction and making the TL comprehensible (six out of ten). However, only three of the ten TAs who were not previously trained in CLT noted contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios, and none of the TAs mentioned error correction in their descriptions of how they would teach after attending the workshop.

Discussion

Identifying Critical Elements to Promote CLT in TA Pre-Service Training

The pre-service orientation is considered a common component of TA training (Kost, 2008), but as summarized in the review of the literature, considerable differences exist among universities regarding their pre-service training practices. The current investigation of an interdepartmental TA pre-service orientation found the professional CLT demos followed by TA-led micro-teaches valuable for the majority of the TAs, novice and experienced alike. Recall that the first professional teaching demos in this study were of both French and Japanese lessons. The French teaching demo provided TAs meta-instructional comments in English to explain CLT techniques such as contextualizing lessons in real-life scenarios, encouraging learner language production, making TL instruction comprehensible, and avoiding learner error correction when the meaning of their message was comprehensible. The Japanese teaching demo provided TAs with a first-hand opportunity to experience the ways in which an instructor can make the TL comprehensible. Furthermore, having a second day of instruction in Japanese, with the focus on grammar since the necessary vocabulary had been presented during the first session, seemed crucial in promoting these TAs' acceptance of CLT techniques. Several of the TAs expressed surprise at how much Japanese they had not only retained, but could also produce in the subsequent contextualized grammar lesson demo. Most importantly, the majority of the TAs in this study stated that the teaching demos provided invaluable modeling to inform their understanding of the expectations of their own micro-teaches. The most salient feature from the teaching demos reported by TAs was how to make the TL comprehensible to their students through body language, signals, cognates, and the use of images. These strategies were further modeled in the micro-teaching sessions where TAs were intentionally grouped so as to have multiple languages represented thereby deepening the understanding of how to contextualize and visually support unfamiliar languages by trial and error.

In this study, the two TA-led micro-teaches further fostered the TAs' appropriation of CLT techniques. It is noteworthy that having two micro-teach opportunities seemed essential to several of the TAs, particularly to the novice TAs who felt their first lessons were not successful. Recall the description of TA12's heightened attention to details in the second Japanese teaching demo after his self-perceived failed first micro-teach. Similar to Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis that describes the way in which L2 learners notice gaps during their language production that subsequently heighten their attention to input, the micro-teaches in this pre-service orientation afforded the TAs an opportunity to notice a gap between their perceptions of CLT from the professional demos and their own teaching performances. After noticing gaps in the first micro-teach, the TAs had the opportunity to apply strategies they had noticed in the second Japanese teaching demo in their own second micro-teach with reported success.

The majority of the TAs in this study stated that the pre-service orientation was influential on their command of certain aspects of CLT. Admittedly, the influence of the orientation on the TAs' self-reports described in this study may be unique to these participants. It is possible that the participants may have been more willing or

motivated to express their acceptance of CLT techniques because they volunteered to participate in this study, or because they knew they were being interviewed by a researcher who was a French course lecturer, and consequently affiliated with the university language coordinators at the time of the study. In addition, this study only reports TAs' anticipated vision of their teaching prior to entering the classroom as an instructor. Future research with a semester-long follow-up, including classroom observations of TAs' instruction would help elucidate the findings in this study. Yet, despite these limitations, this study corroborates previous research (Brandl, 2000) suggesting that TAs not trained in CLT would most likely continue to teach with methods that do not emphasize the communicative approach, such as explicit grammar instruction with a lack of TL use. Moreover, findings from this study uphold the results of a comparative TA training study (Chambers & Pearson, 2004) where TAs with supported access to modern FL lessons reported more self-confidence in their teaching than those without such training.

Although this study contributes to filling the gap in the literature concerning pre-service TA training by investigating TAs' impressions of their global command of CLT after the pre-service training, it is important to note that the majority of TAs spoke primarily about TL use in their instruction. It is alarming to note that several of the TAs' descriptions of their imagined teaching styles after the orientation lacked primary principles of CLT—emphasizing learner language production in student-centered classroom activities, contextualizing grammatical features in real-life scenarios, and minimizing learner error correction. There is a need for future research to explicitly address these important aspects of CLT and to further elucidate the effectiveness of additional pre-service TA training practices. It is possible that CLT review seminars over the course of the semester are needed to expand TAs understanding of additional dimensions of CLT. As noted by Brandl (2000), it takes time and experience for TAs to "process, apply, and synthesize" (p. 366) pedagogical theory and methods. Furthermore, ongoing interdepartmental CLT seminars would provide TAs from language groups who do not have the benefit of a Methods course with a review of what they had been taught during the three-day workshop. TAs from language groups with Methods classes, such as the French and Spanish groups in this study, would also benefit from a CLT refresher seminar to reinforce the information studied in their Methods classes in a continued mixed venue of multiple languages and cultures as deemed valuable by TAs in this study. Similarly, in the K-12 setting, district-wide CLT-focused professional development workshops among mixed FL group instructors could be beneficial, and provide fodder for additional research into CLT training techniques.

In conclusion, there is a tremendous need to understand best-practice pre-service TA training as TAs are becoming increasingly responsible for undergraduate FL instruction. With only 20 percent of students continuing to advanced levels of FL instruction in major research universities, we cannot deny the important role TAs play in world language programs in attracting FL learners to continue their study. Research findings continually report FL learners' desire to gain proficiency in the language in order to communicate with target culture members (Husseinali, 2006; Murphy et al. 2009; Ossipov, 2000; Yang, 2003). TAs play a key role in influencing language learners' affective experience with language learning and sustaining learn-

ers' motivation for further language study. Therefore, this study maintains that the extent to which TAs are able to address learners' needs and interests related to real-life communicative skills depends largely upon the their effective implementation of CLT, an instructional approach that addresses learners' interests. Accordingly, the importance of equipping TAs with CLT-training prior to the very first day of instruction, as well as with ongoing support in the use of CLT, cannot be understated.

The implications of these findings can be extended beyond TA training programs to K-12 FL teacher preparation programs as well as FL teacher continuing education. The findings show that novice and experienced FL instructors alike can benefit from workshops revisiting the tenets of CLT. In addition to encouraging FL instructors to embrace CLT techniques, well-designed training can boost an instructor's self-confidence and self-efficacy as a teacher, and as noted by Chambers and Pearson (2004), "an effective TA is a confident TA and confidence has much to do with competence" (p. 32).

Endnotes

1 See http://prucks.edublogs.org/ for Appendices

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