The Shortage of America's Foreign Language Teachers

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The number of students enrolled in US K-12 public education has been steadily increasing while the number of teachers in US classrooms has been decreasing. While the literature is clear that there is a teacher shortage (American Association for Employment in Education, AAEE, 2009; Draper & Hicks, 2002; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Johnson et al., 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002), researchers cannot agree upon the causes of the teacher shortage. On one side, some feel that the issue is one of distribution. Shortages are reported in hard-to-staff schools in highly urban and rural areas of the country, certain geographical areas nationwide, and in certain content areas (AAEE, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2001; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1998; Olson, 2000; Voke, 2002; Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2001). However, others believe that there is a surplus of certified teachers who actively choose not to teach and that the revolving door of teacher attrition and turnover explain the shortage (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001a, 2001b, 2003). Nevertheless, the shortage of teachers in many parts of the country exists regardless of the available teaching pool.

1.0 Current Situation

Almost thirty years ago a severe shortage of teachers in America was reported (Boe & Gilford, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1984; Haggstrom, Darling-Hammond, & Grissmer, 1988; National Academy of Sciences, 1987; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). These researchers foresaw that both increases in student enrollment in FL classes and in teacher attrition from classrooms would bring about a lowering of professional standards for teachers by offering alternative routes to certification. These individuals were correct; there is a lack of teachers in America's classrooms as well as reports of lowered standards for teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Rado, 2004).

A review of the literature indicates that the shortage is not uniform across content areas. Severe shortages are reported in mathematics, science, special education, bilingual education, English as a Second Language, and foreign language (FL) (AAEE, 2006, 2009; Bradley, 1999). FL teaching positions appear to be the most difficult to fill, well above special education, math, and science (Murphy, DeArmand, & Guin, 2003). By and large, FL is an area currently facing a national shortage of teachers (AAEE, 2009) and research on the shortage of FL teachers points to at least seven factors that explain the shortage: retirement, attrition, increased enrollments, legislation, perceptions of teaching, teacher efficacy, and one's personality and vocational interests (Swanson, 2008a).

2.0 Known factors contributing to a shortage

A review of the literature indentified areas of substantial research and areas where more research is needed. The scope of the findings reported here concentrates on FL teaching specifically. However, while researching the seven factors, there were limited findings for FL teachers exclusively concerning some of the factors so the review also contains information relevant to the general teaching population.

2.1 Retirement. The number of teachers near the age of retirement or beyond is a cause for alarm. Eleven years ago, Radner (1998) found that 29% of the US population were Baby Boomers (age 50 and older) who would be eligible to retire by 2008. In order to fill these teaching positions, an estimated 2.2 million teachers would be needed by 2010 to fill the vacancies created by both retirement and attrition (Howard, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). A few years later, researchers continued to gather data regarding the Baby Boomer generation and reported that 24% of elementary and 26% of secondary teachers in the US were at least 55 years of age in the late 1990s and that the same percentage of elementary and

secondary teachers could be expected to retire between 2005 and 2010 (AAEE, 2006). The authors predicted that if student enrollments remain constant, more than 24% of the teachers at each level would need to be replaced in the next ten years. Now, it appears that America is on the verge of a retirement tsunami. According to the president of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, more than half of America's teachers are Baby Boomers and these individuals will be eligible for retirement soon (Der Bedrosian, 2009). If all content areas are equally distributed in these projects, school districts will be challenged to find a large number of FL educators to fill these vacancies.

2.2 Attrition. While retirement certainly is a cause for concern, attrition from the teaching profession is equally serious. Research on teaching in general shows that "almost a third of America's teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave after five years" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2002, p. 4). For individuals who enter the profession through an alternative route such as emergency certification, researchers find that the attrition rate can be as high as 60% (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001) within the first two years of teaching (Lauer, 2001). New teachers appear more vulnerable to leaving teaching while approximately half of new teachers leave within five years and 22% leave within the first two years (Johnson et al., 2001).

For language teachers, Zoroya and Hartzell (1999) found that K-12 FL teachers left public school positions at an annual rate of 7% between 1993 and 1995 and Long (2000) estimated that "this percentage will grow with anticipated foreign language teacher retirements" (p. 1). The literature on the attrition rates of FL teachers is scarce but a few reports paint a disturbing picture. In the Midwest, Kleinsasser (1992) studied FL teacher attrition in Illinois from 1985 to 1990. He reported that most of the FL teachers who left the profession were women

and that the maximum stability among FL teachers occurred between ages 51-55 and 56-60. For teachers as a whole, the maximum stability was found to take place between the ages of 45 to 50 (Boe et al. 1997). In the southeastern US, two separate studies indicate that FL teacher attrition rates are high than for teachers in other content areas.

In the first study, Konanc (1996) studied surveys of FL teachers hired in North Carolina's public schools from 1979 to 1996 and reported that after two years these individuals left the profession at a slightly higher rate (22%) than teachers in other content areas (15-18%). Of the more than 81,000 new teachers hired, she reported that males were more likely to leave the profession and high school teachers left the profession at a rate of 35% after five years in the classroom (females 15%). In terms of content area, FL teachers had the highest rate of attrition after the second year (21%), the fifth year (38%), the tenth year (49%), and the fifteenth year (57%).

The second study conducted in Georgia revealed that the attrition rate is lower (11%) than the rate reported by Konanc but is still higher than other content areas in Georgia (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006). Investigating the notion that attrition may have less to do with teaching and more to do with a general adjustment to workplace realities (Huling-Austin 1992; Schaffer et al. 1992), Wilkerson (2000a) studied former FL education students at a university in northern Georgia. She focused her efforts on students' academic preparation, employment status, and job satisfaction from a qualitative perspective. She found that dissatisfied FL teachers who left teaching "did not have the same insight into schools as workplaces as teachers who chose to remain" (p. 33). Further, she found that attrition is often caused by one's failure to reconcile personal expectations with the realities of the workplace.

2.3 Increased enrollments. The review of the literature found that the total number of enrollments in FL classes in public secondary schools is increasing. In the only study focused on an individual state, Montana, one of the many states experiencing a shortage of Spanish educators (AAEE, 2006), Nielson (2001) reported that the causes for the shortage there were increased enrollments combined with a high number of teacher retirements and FL teacher attrition. From a national perspective, Draper and Hicks (2002) studied enrollments in modern FL courses (Spanish, French, and German) over a one hundred ten year period (from 1890 to 2000) and reported that student enrollment in these courses has increased nationally from 16.3% to 42.5%, with enrollments in Spanish courses steadily climbing since 1964. Regrettably, an increase in the number of FL teachers to meet this demand has not reported.

Research suggests that part of the increased enrollment in public schools can be explained by recent illegal immigration to the US. Passel (2005) finds that undocumented immigrants account for approximately 11 million people in the US, of which about 1.7 million are children under 18 years of age. Nearly one third of undocumented immigrants arrived since 2000 and approximately 57% came from Mexico and another 24% are from other Latin American countries. Well over half of these individuals reside in non-traditional immigrant states, particularly in the southeast. In Georgia for example, enrollments of Mexican students swelled from 4% in 1990 to a 61% in 2005 in the Dalton district alone (Associated Content, 2007). Georgia has an estimated 300,000 undocumented immigrants, or 3.4% of the state's population. Projections suggest that the number of school-age children is expected to increase steadily for the foreseeable future (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

Institutions of higher education in America are also seeing tremendous growth in student enrollment in language courses. According to data taken from the Modern Language Association

survey, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006* (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007), that included data from 2,795 American colleges and universities measuring student enrollment in 219 languages other than English during 2002-2006, interest in studying languages has increased consistently since 1998. In fact, FL enrollments on US campuses are at their highest since the 1960 MLA survey. The latest figures show that enrollments between 2002 and 2006 grew almost 13% over the four years, which continues a growth trend beginning in 1998. Spanish enrollments increased the most (10.3%), four times higher than the second most preferred class, French (2.2%). Other languages such as German, American Sign Language, and Italian grew too but at slower rates.

Student enrollment in the classics (Greek and Latin) increased almost three fold since 1960. For less commonly taught languages, Arabic offerings were reported to be the fastest growing language, enrollments increasing by 126%. Japanese and Chinese saw stronger growth rates but could not match the current number of students enrolled in Spanish classes, 822,985. In fact, college Spanish courses account for 52% of all FL enrollments! However, students, regardless of language, are not typically taking advanced-level coursework in languages. Data from the survey indicates that students are nearly five times more likely to enroll in first-year courses than in higher-level courses. Regardless of the level, the number of FL teachers is not increasing rapidly enough to accommodate such growth.

2.4 Legislation. Adding to the aforementioned factors, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative appears to contribute to the shortage of FL educators. NCLB requires all educators in federal core academic areas, which includes FL, to meet the "highly qualified" criteria[i]. This requirement is complex because FL teachers who were once licensed to teach in their respective states may discover they are not "highly qualified" under the NCLB act at a critical time of a

national FL teacher shortage (Swanson & Moore, 2006). Additionally, NCLB has prioritized instruction in the core areas of science, mathematics, and reading as well as the allocation of resources to these specific content areas (Rosenbusch, 2005; Rosenbusch & Jensen, 2004). Such a focus not only narrows the curriculum in terms of decreasing the number of elective courses students can take (Glisan, 2005), but also increases instructional time in the tested areas (reading and mathematics) and subsequently decreases precious teaching time the non-tested areas, such as FLs (Rosenbusch, 2005). Consequently, such preference can lead to FL program reduction or program elimination.

Further, state legislatures and policymakers have contributed to the lack of certified teachers (Garcia, 1999; Heining-Boynton, 1991). In 1999, the Wyoming Legislature passed the Wyoming School Improvement law that states: "Not later than the 2002-3 school year, all school districts shall provide instruction in foreign language to all students in kindergarten through grade two in accordance with standards promulgated by the state board of education" [*sic*] (School Improvement Act, 1999, p. 3). Later, Wyoming House Bill 0170 extended the 1999 legislation to include grades 3-6. This new legislation requires elementary educators to teach an additional subject in an area for which many (11%) are not certified (Stowers, 2004; Swanson & Moore, 2006).

2.5 Perceptions of Teaching. For years teaching has been described as being a dead-end job with a perceived low status, low salaries, a lack of control over how schools are run, many classroom discipline issues, and ineffective administrative support leading to a lack of induction and mentoring (Boles, 2000; Boser, 2000; Brunetti, 2001; Stanford, 2001; Weld, 1998). This undignified description has the potential to discourage future educators from investigating and pursuing a career in teaching any subject area as well as to dishearten in-service educators to

consider leaving the profession. Research indicates that new teachers regardless of content area are often assigned the most challenging duties with little to no professional support and that these individuals tend to have few successes and a sense of failure drives them out of the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Researchers note that perceptions of the profession play a significant role in ones' decision to enter or to leave the profession.

In a study focused on novice FL teacher perception as it relates to the realities in the workplace environment, Wilkerson (2000a) used a qualitative approach to study 14 language teachers' perceptions about their academic preparation, employment status, and job satisfaction. This study revealed that FL teachers tend to leave the classroom if they have an unrealistic view of the profession. She found that teachers are unable to cope with unexpected workplace realities because they have not spent much time in the field prior to full-time teaching. Additionally, she reported that one of the realities affecting FL attrition was that these individuals felt that FL instruction is not highly esteemed.

Using a quasi-experimental research design to study secondary FL students' perceptions about becoming a language teacher, Swanson and Moore (2006) conducted research in five rural schools. The researchers were interested to learn more about student perception of teaching languages and how that information affected their vocational aspirations. Students were given a pre-test survey to get a baseline perceptual understanding about teaching. Afterwards, only students in the experimental group participated in lectures and independent research to dispel incorrect information some may have believed about the profession. After several weeks of presentations and discussions about the profession, a post-test survey was administered to see if student perceptions had changed. The researchers concluded that many times students indeed had

inaccurate perceptions about the teaching profession and that those perceptions tended to dissuade them from considering becoming a FL teacher.

2.6 Teaching Efficacy. Efficacy beliefs ― "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391) ― provide a base of human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. It is hypothesized that an individual with a higher sense of efficacy tends to set higher goals, fear failure less, and persevere longer in the face of obstacles. Conversely, if an individual has a low sense of efficacy, he or she may avoid the task altogether or give up easily when difficulties arise. Additionally, the person may be more likely to perceive potential problems to be much bigger than what they actually may be (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000) and have a lesser commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992).

A review of the literature revealed that studies relating efficacy to FL teacher attrition were scare. However, in a recent study to understand the relationship between one's sense of efficacy as it relates to teacher attrition, Swanson (under review) studied Georgia's FL teachers' sense of efficacy teaching languages. He developed and validated an instrument to measure in-service FL teachers' sense of efficacy in the classroom ($N = 463$). Swanson found that the teachers were more confident in their instructional strategy and classroom management skills than they were for student engagement (motivation). Additionally, he identified the importance of FL teachers being able to help students learn at the introductory level of language learning. The results indicated that individuals who expressed less efficacy working with students at the introductory levels also stated that they were going to leave the profession at the end of the 2008-2009 academic year. While exact difficulties associated with teaching the first levels of language learning were not clear, it appeared that Spanish teachers more than other language teachers were

in need of improved skills working with these learners because Spanish teachers were much more likely to quit teaching than individuals teaching other FLs.

2.6 Personality and Vocational Interests.

The final factor presented here deals with one's personality and vocational identity as it relates to teacher attrition. Holland (1997) posited in the 1950s that an individual's choice of profession is a complicated process, an expressive act that reflects a person's motivation, knowledge, personality, and ability. To Holland, an occupation represents a way of life, an environment rather than a set of isolated work functions or skills. He suggests that people seek out environments that provide them with the opportunities to use their talents and share their values and attitudes with others who are similar to them in the ideal. Holland's theory is situated on several key theoretical assumptions.

First, people can be characterized by their resemblance to each of the six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Second, environments in which people live and work resemble six model environments carrying the same name typology. Third, people search for environments to exercise their talents, express their attitudes, and take on agreeable roles. Last, the pairing of people and environments leads to outcomes such as "vocational choice, vocational stability and achievement, educational choice and achievement, personal competence, social behavior, and susceptibility to influence" (p. 2). The six personality types and environments are placed into a hexagonal model (Figure 1) to show the relationship among the six domains.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

To determine one's personality type, Holland designed and empirically tested the Self-Directed Search personality inventory. If an individual's two highest scale scores on the Self-

Directed Search are located on adjacent points (any adjacent two-point combination) on the hexagon, the person's vocational profile is consistent, leading toward stability of one's vocational interests. For example, a person with the two highest scale scores as Social and Enterprising has a consistent vocational profile because the two domains are located next to one another. Contrarily, profile patterns composed of elements from opposite sides of the hexagon are least consistent, such as Realistic and Social. Patterns following other types are said to have an intermediate level of consistency. The more closely related the two highest scale scores are, the stronger the individual's vocational profile becomes. Holland theorizes that people's interests should be congruent with their workplace environment. For example, a Social person would be best fitted for a Social work environment. However, if a Social person were residing in Realistic workplace, the person would find less vocational satisfaction and be more likely to leave the job.

Swanson (2008a) used the Holland's Self-Directed Search inventory (Holland, 1994) and the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, formerly known as The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) to measure FL teachers' vocational preference and perception of teaching efficacy. Data analysis revealed that the FL teachers in the sample had a stable and consistent vocational profile, Social, Artistic, and Enterprising. Correlation analysis of the two instruments indicated strong positive correlations between people with the Social, Artistic, and Enterprising Holland code and individuals' sense of efficacy, indicating that individuals pertaining to this personality profile have an increased sense of efficacy teaching languages compared with people who have this profile. As discussed earlier, those with a higher sense of efficacy are more likely to fear failure less and persevere longer in the face of obstacles, and research indicates that those with higher efficacy are more likely to remain in teaching (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991) whereas teachers with significantly lower scores on

measures of self-efficacy are more inclined to leave the profession (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982). However, while this finding is intriguing, more research is warranted in this area.

The seven factors identified here begin to explain the shortage of FL educators. In the following section, FL teacher recruitment and retention efforts are presented.

3 Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

Research into the active recruitment practices for FL educators revealed that while a few educator recruitment programs such as Recruiting National Teachers, Inc., Teach for America, Troops to Teachers, and Teacher Cadets presently exist, recruitment programs focused specifically on increasing the number of FL teachers are rare. At the turn of the century, Long (2000) called the profession to recruit members by stating that post-secondary faculty must be proactive in K-12 recruitment. She suggested an alliance among FL faculty members to help remedy the FL teacher shortage. The Alabama Association for Foreign Language Teachers Association recognized the need for more FL educators and took the bold step of encouraging French teachers to invite their best students to the association's annual meetings in hopes of recruiting prospective French teachers (Spencer, 2003). During the meetings, high school students had the opportunity to meet with other students and teachers from around the state to find out more about the teaching field. The success of this novel program remains unreported at this time.

However, success from a different research project focused on secondary students in the Rocky Mountain region was reported. Mentioned earlier, Swanson and Moore (2006) conducted research on high school students' perceptions about teaching ($N = 97$) and found that perceptions about teaching influenced vocational aspirations and decisions. Additionally, this research found that by correcting students' misperceptions about teaching, students became more likely to

consider a career as a FL teacher. In fact, at the onset of the research, only three students indicated an interest in becoming a FL educator. However, at the end, 15 students expressed interest and later an additional four students requested more information about teaching languages. While the number of interested students was not found to be extremely large, it was an initial increase of 500%.

Building upon the knowledge that secondary student perceptions are susceptible to change, Swanson (2008b) conducted similar research with undergraduate language students. Working with the Conceptual Change model as a theoretical lens (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982; Strike & Posner, 1982), he worked with faculty at the University of Wyoming's College of Arts and Sciences to contact students in second- and third-semester language courses. Students were invited to an evening event to learn more about teaching as a career. The researcher found that undergraduate perception could be influenced by correcting misconceptions about FL teaching, thus stimulating possible previous interest in teaching with students who have language ability. The project was deemed a success because the numbers in the FL teacher education program quadrupled the following semester. The event became an annual event and appears to be functioning as a quality recruitment initiative.

Another innovative collegiate initiative that focuses on both secondary and adult students, the "Double the Double" initiative, has the goal of doubling the number and diversity of teacher education graduates, in particular FL teachers (Georgia State University, 2005). Working from the theoretical underpinnings of the perceptual research discussed earlier (Swanson, 2008b; Swanson & Moore, 2006), recruiting efforts focus on identifying students with FL ability and presenting factual information about teaching. While official data have not been released, the program director for the FL Teacher Preparation Program noted that enrollments and the

diversity of the students in the program have nearly doubled since its inception (personal communication, Carol Semonsky, August 28, 2009). Research stemming from the Double the Double initiative indicates that teacher recruitment at the secondary level continues to hold promise.

Combining the knowledge of vocational profiles and perceptions of teaching while working from the theoretical perspective that individuals begin to crystallize a vocational preference between the ages of 14 and 18 (Super, 1990), Swanson (in press) found that individuals participating in Future Educators of America programs vocational interests began to surge between the ages of 15 and 16. Additionally, many of these individuals have the same vocational profile as in-service FL teachers. While a national curriculum for this organization does not currently exist, Swanson notes that collaboration between Future Educator advisors, school counselors, and college faculty is needed to induct these individuals into the profession through events such as pre-service teacher induction conferences and campus visits. Furthermore, Swanson states that the Holland's Self-Directed Search vocational preference inventory can be used more widely in schools and FL classes to identify students outside of such programs and those individuals should be encouraged to join future educator groups and investigate a career in teaching.

Noting earlier the relatively low number of FL teacher recruitment programs in the literature, it can be assumed that FL teacher recruiting initiatives continue to consist of attending career fairs, posting job vacancies on the Internet, and identifying qualities of the best, brightest, and most talented new staff by reviewing grade transcripts, meeting with college faculty, evaluation of references, and talking with student teaching supervisors and other employers (Scheetz, 1995).

Much like the recruitment programs focused on increasing the number of FL teachers, the number of active FL teacher retention programs is limited. One of the boldest initiatives at the national level was New Visions in Action (NVA). This project included PreK-16 FL educators from every state in a collaborative effort to improve the profession. Four task forces with different goals were developed, and one was designed to examine Teacher Recruitment and Retention. Members of the task force focused on three main areas:

1. Identifying and disseminating effective recruitment and retention models;

2. Developing a public relations promotional campaign for foreign languages in general and for recruiting new and diverse members into the profession; and

3. Establishing a variety of products and resources for teachers currently in the profession.

Unfortunately, the project was discontinued due to funding issues (New Visions in Action, 2004).

Clearly, the number of teachers leaving the profession is a cause for concern. Research indicates that retention is more of a problem than recruitment (Greiner & Smith, 2006) because of occupational stress and burnout (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) reported that one third of new teachers leave the profession in their first three years with only about 40% to 50% remaining in the classroom at the end of five years. This constant turnover is found to redirect funding that could otherwise be used for classroom resources, primarily salaries and facilities (Minarik, Thornton, & Perreault, 2003).

Over the years, investigators have delved into teacher retention issues and the research suggests that three major factors influence teacher retention: personal factors, external factors, and employment factors. Personal factors include the demographic, family, affective portions of a teacher's career decision, and the external factors include societal, economic, and institutional

variables. Employment factors are professional qualifications, work conditions, and commitment (Billingsley, 1993). While there has been substantial research, various models of teacher retention exist (Boe & Gilford, 1992; Lauritzen, 1990; Macisaac & Brookhart, 1994; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009). However, none of the models were found to be directly related exclusively to language teachers.

4 Conclusions

The present article discusses the shortage of America's Foreign Language Teachers. Seven reasons were advanced that explain the shortage and current initiatives focused on recruitment and retention of FL educators were presented. While there is some research specific to the shortage of language educators, more research is warranted. If America is to remain as a world leader in a variety of areas, it is crucial that FL instruction be put at the forefront of a national agenda. The days of simply having the doors open at colleges and waiting for students to enroll in critical needs areas must end. Active initiatives focused on the profession is required if FL study and teaching are going to remain as an integral part of the US curriculum. Students, teachers, and faculty members in institutions of higher learning need to become proactive agents and make sure that not only is no child left behind but also that no FL teachers or programs are left behind.

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[i] To be considered highly qualified, teachers must have: (1) a bachelor's degree, (2) full state certification or licensure, and (3) prove that they know each subject they teach (US Department of Education, 2004).