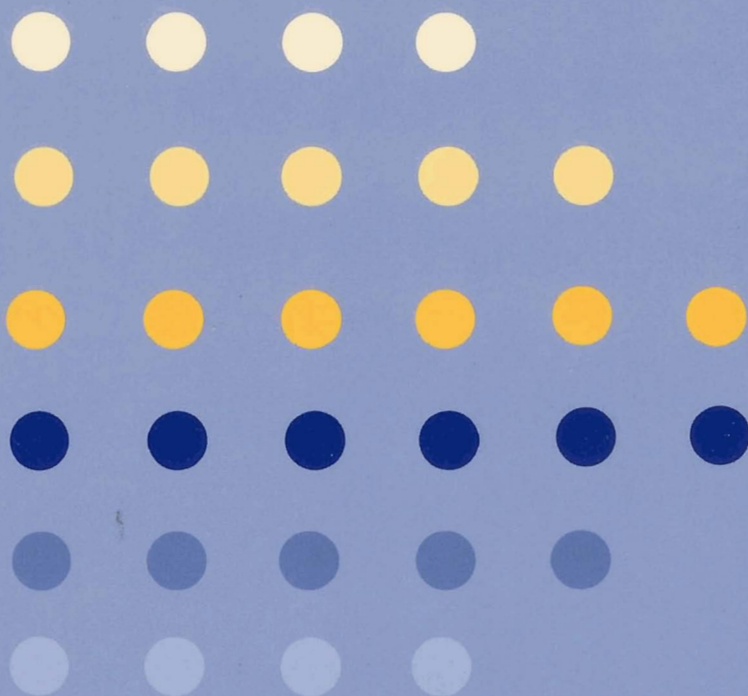


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# The Heinle Professional Series in Language Instruction

ROBERT TERRY, Series Editor



## Teaching with Technology

Lara Lomicka • Jessamine Cooke-Plagwitz  
editors

# **The Heinle Professional Series in Language Instruction**

## **Volume 1: Teaching with Technology**

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**Robert Terry, Series Editor**

Lara Lomicka  
Jessamine Cooke-Plagwitz  
**Editors**

**THOMSON**  
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**HEINLE**

# FLTEACH: On-line Professional Development for Preservice and Inservice Foreign Language Teachers

Jean LeLoup

*SUNY Cortland*

Robert Ponterio

*SUNY Cortland*

## Points to Ponder

- What are some of the roles you play as a foreign language teacher?
- What technical skills should today's language teacher possess?
- What are some of the resources available to language teachers to assist in their professional development?

## Keywords

Listserv

FLTEACH

URL

FAQ

Posting

Subscribing

Database

## ***Abstract***

*The job description of today's FL teacher requires that we limn the profile of the inservice and preservice foreign language (FL) teacher in an entirely different manner than even a decade ago. Teachers in the 21st century need to have a diverse background and wield an extensive range of competencies hitherto unprecedented in the educational arena. This suggests the need for a strong preservice preparation and an inculcation of the necessity for ongoing professional development for inservice teachers. Given the diverse teaching situations of FL educators, the challenge is to achieve strong professional articulation, dialog, and collaboration that facilitates this professional development. One vehicle that enables FL teachers to engage in this dialog on a regular basis is FLTEACH, the Foreign Language Teaching Forum, an on-line discussion list for FL professionals. The extremely active environment in this forum, including the list and ancillaries on the Web, provides numerous opportunities for professional growth to FL educators. This chapter will discuss the history of, rationale for, and goals of FLTEACH, as well as describe its many uses as a professional development tool for preservice and inservice FL teachers.*

*Use of FLTEACH is the embodiment of implementation of technology by FL teachers to improve their instruction and their students' learning. A survey conducted by the authors will be used to delineate the varied ways that FL teachers use the list for their own professional development. Survey results show that subscribers use FLTEACH in a myriad of educational and informational ways, for example: new methodologies, materials recommendations, as a conference alternative, linguistic and cultural information, professional reading, colleague networking, lesson plan resource, and self-reflection to name a few. Examples from several users will be highlighted.*

*"There has been no better source of professional development for me and my Department."*

*Linda Gump, Foreign Language Department Chair  
Trinity Christian Academy, Addison, TX*

## Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker

These are about the only job descriptions that are not currently included in the myriad of competencies required of today's foreign language (FL) teacher. What *does* the job description of today's FL teacher entail? Educational reforms, coupled with dramatic technological and societal phenomena, have radically altered the list of responsibilities the present-day FL classroom teacher must accept. Sweeping changes such as the opening of the FL curriculum to all students (K–12), the educational movement toward inclusion, dynamic student demographics, and the explosion of communications technologies with its concomitant emphasis on the global nature of society—to name just a few—require that we limn the profile of the inservice and preservice FL teacher in an entirely different manner than even a decade ago. Teachers in the twenty-first century need to have a diverse background and wield an extensive range of competencies hitherto unprecedented in the educational arena (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Peyton, 1998; Shrum & Glisan, 1999; Wing, 1992). In sum, from day one in the classroom, the FL teacher must possess:

- considerable depth and breadth of content knowledge (language and culture);
- a thorough base of pedagogical knowledge and competence in implementing current teaching methodologies and instructional paradigms;
- technological know-how;
- preparation for addressing the various needs of students with disabilities;
- management and organizational skills;
- training in teaching students from diverse backgrounds;
- motivational skills;
- a firm grounding in second language acquisition (SLA) research and theory—with an ability to translate same to the practicalities of the classroom and FL instruction and learning.

## Foreign Language Teacher Education

How can FL teachers possibly acquire all of the above competencies? The logical place to start FL teacher education is the college-level FL methods course. Unfortunately, many preservice FL teachers do not have a methods course specifically for FL teachers. They are lumped in with other preservice teachers of all disciplines for general teacher preparation. Something is better than nothing, and a general course can certainly address

generic topics common to all classroom teachers. Nevertheless, FL teachers are a special breed, for they are in the unique position of having their content area be simultaneously the medium of instruction (Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987). Most of the techniques a preservice FL teacher needs to know are definitely content-area specific and should be dealt with in a FL methods course where they can be introduced, practiced, and reflected upon by the student. In addition, FL teacher educators can and must serve as good role models in these methods classes as well as in coursework in the discipline, because research shows that we tend to teach as we were taught (Cruickshank, 1990; Wing, 1992).

Nevertheless, it is folly to believe that everything a preservice teacher needs to learn and know can be covered in a one-shot, one-time FL methods course. First, a one-semester course simply does not provide enough time to inculcate students with the requisite knowledge and skills to ensure success in the classroom (Guntermann, 1992; Jarvis, 1983; Wing, 1992). Second, methods courses cannot usually provide the practicum environment, complete with live K-12 students, that so richly enhances preservice teacher learning. Even paired with the laboratory experience of student teaching, the combination of methods and practicum cannot expose preservice FL teachers to all the circumstances and situations that they will most likely confront in the future. Indeed, FL teachers often lament that their methods course did not adequately prepare them for the real world experience of the classroom. Third, research suggests that teachers operate from an evolving rather than a fixed knowledge base (Shulman, 1986). The presumption here is that teachers continue to learn throughout their teaching careers and that no FL methods course can possibly dispense all knowledge. For teachers to evolve, mature, improve, and expand their knowledge base, they must engage in continuous professional development. The challenge, then, is to start preservice FL teachers on the road to ongoing professional development even before they become full-fledged, certified or licensed colleagues, to instill in them the desire to include professional development as a regular emphasis in their career.

## Professional Development as a National Goal

At the beginning of the 1990s, *America 2000: An Educational Strategy* was published. This booklet was a delineation of the long-term national strategy proposed by President George H. W. Bush and state governors at their Educational Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1989. The strategy was designed to accomplish six national educational goals, and the entire thrust of this meeting and resultant document has been since referred to as either "America 2000" or "Goals 2000." The goals have far-reaching consequences for all schools at all levels and for all subject areas. In particular, Goal 4 mandated the following: "By the Year 2000, the Nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the twenty-first century" (Goals 2000, 1994). In a subsequent government document, the parameters of professional development for teachers were demarcated.

### Professional Development:

- focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community;
- focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement;
- respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community;

- reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership;
- enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards;
- promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools;
- is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development;
- requires substantial time and other resources;
- is driven by a coherent long-term plan;
- is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts. (Achieving the goals, 1996<sup>1</sup>)

These parameters aver that professional development concerns improvement and change, is effective only if it is embedded in the reality of schools and teachers' daily work, is collaborative in nature, and is sustained over a long period of time (Clair & Adger, 1999; Peyton, 1998). This outline of professional development characteristics is clearly an admirable goal. When educational administrators try to provide appropriate professional development opportunities to teachers in their districts, these are, of necessity, generic in nature and meant to suit a broad scope of disciplines. As a consequence, FL teachers are seldom offered content-specific professional development possibilities that truly meet their needs. What opportunities exist for preservice and inservice FL teachers that meet all of the above criteria?

## FLTEACH<sup>2</sup>

One opportunity that is available to FL teachers at all stages of their career is easy Internet access to FLTEACH, the Foreign Language Teaching Forum. FLTEACH is an outgrowth of activity of FL educators investigating the possible professional and pedagogical uses of electronic communication on the Internet. The use of electronic communications technologies is a phenomenon that left an indelible mark on the close of the 90s and will certainly shape much of the beginning of the twenty-first century. New communication technologies are of prime interest to FL professionals because communication is the primary thrust and emphasis in FL teaching, and these technologies have far-reaching potential for FL educators. The remainder of this article will give the rationale for and goals of FLTEACH, as well as enumerate many of its uses vis-à-vis professional development for preservice and inservice FL teachers, as reported by FLTEACH participants responding to a survey (see below). It is hoped that readers will realize the benefits of participating in online professional discussion and will add to the shared dialogue about mutual interests and concerns in the FL field.

## Origin of FLTEACH

The Goals 2000 document generated much discussion throughout the educational community, and the impact of this conversation was also felt in the FL arena. Several educators bemoaned the sad state of affairs within FL education and called for intensive collaboration among all FL professionals to effect curricular change that would result in improved FL instruction and learning (Benitez, et al., 1993; Bridging the gap, 1993; Jeffries, 1993; SUNY 2000, 1991). Claire Jackson (1994), at the annual Spring Colloquium



of the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers (NYS AFLT), drove home the point of articulation and collaboration between and among FL educators. As director of the Articulation and Achievement Project out of Framingham, Massachusetts, she spoke of the work toward developing common frameworks for the FL profession that need to unify and assist us in our shared and concerted effort toward improved FL instruction, articulation, assessment, and overall student learning. These goals of articulation and collaboration, continually mandated by these documents and leaders in the FL profession, had and continue to have ramifications for every school district, college, and university nationwide that offers a FL curriculum. The implied number of FL practitioners involved is vast. A priority became initiation of a dialogue among these educators in order to foster communication that would lead to the desired articulation.

The impetus for FLTEACH, thus, came from a real necessity to unite as a profession and engage in productive discussions about common issues. The initial purpose of FLTEACH was to provide a forum for language teaching issues in New York State, but it quickly developed a much broader base (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1994a; LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995a). Over 4,000 teachers (as of January, 2003) are subscribed from all over the United States and from more than fifty foreign countries. From its inception, FLTEACH has been a vehicle for discussing issues, raising concerns, and solving common problems that are germane to the FL community at regional, national, and international levels.

## Description of FLTEACH

FLTEACH is a LISTSERV list that was founded February 1, 1994, and is running on a computer at SUNY Buffalo. A LISTSERV list is an ongoing electronic discussion between and among people with similar interests. In this case, FLTEACH is intended to serve as a grass roots forum for communication among FL teachers at all levels. Its members and targeted audience are any and all FL professionals and educators in general including methodologists, university supervisors, cooperating teachers in K-12 schools, and student teachers. Anyone who is concerned with the improvement of the teaching and learning of FLs, all teachers involved in developing or implementing a FL curriculum or engaged in the FL teacher certification process, and all professionals who have any tangential interest in FL educational matters, have a vested interest in the dialogue on this list. Such a list represents a model of support among classroom practitioners as equals rather than a top down model of practices emanating from experts in the field.

FLTEACH fills a void, as no prior list expressly addressed the FL educator community across such a broad spectrum. It also provides a useful service to the FL profession for many reasons. First, because it disseminates messages so quickly, a "list" is a most expedient way to initiate contact and spur discussion among FL professionals that can eventually lead to more communication at all levels and, hence, better articulation of FL curricula and goals. Next, the technology for such a list already exists, and access to electronic mail is now nearly as essential for many people as is access to postal mail and telephone service. Also, FL educators are a ready-made clientele with their common interests and aims. In addition, it makes good sense to pool and share resources instead of constantly "re-inventing the wheel." Another benefit that can result from the list is coordination of preservice FL teacher education, leading to more consistent expectations vis-à-vis the professional knowledge base and skills. Finally, the list can provide a network of moral and professional support and stimulation such as that obtained by conference attendance or a faculty mentoring program, but on a much more frequent basis. For these major reasons and many more, FLTEACH began as a fledgling in February 1994 and has grown steadily ever since.

## Subscribing to FLTEACH

To subscribe to FLTEACH, a teacher needs an Internet connection and access to e-mail in some form. Subscription to FLTEACH is relatively simple, free of charge, and follows the same protocol used to subscribe to most electronic lists. Send the following message:

**Subscribe flteach firstname lastname (putting in here YOUR name, of course!)**

to this address:

[listserv@listserv.buffalo.edu](mailto:listserv@listserv.buffalo.edu)

## Managing Subscriptions and Reading Messages

Once successfully subscribed, the initial mailing is a “welcome message,” containing useful information for participating on the list, as well as various subscription options that members may choose:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/flteach-welcome.html>

Subscribers may elect to receive individual messages on a daily basis (the default setting), to receive all postings in a few large messages daily (DIGEST), or just receive the author and subject information so that only individual messages of personal interest to the subscriber may be fetched (INDEX). When making decisions about subscription settings, subscribers should keep in mind that FLTEACH is a very active list, generating 50-60 messages daily on the average. If regular and easy access to e-mail is not possible, DIGEST or INDEX might be preferred settings. In addition, FLTEACH also has a newsgroup feature, available from the FLTEACH home page:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/>

Newsgroup readers enable people to read FLTEACH postings on-line without directly filling their e-mail account. Posting from this newsgroup, however, is not enabled. An additional feature for those with limited e-mail account space or time is to use the Web-based Index feature, also located on the FLTEACH home page. Here, messages are listed in index form, and readers may choose subject headers of interest and obtain only those messages. All FLTEACH messages are also available in the FLTEACH archives, which are open and available to all (on the home page) whether or not one is a subscriber.

The welcome message also includes information on how to change subscription options. One may wish to try different settings or need to suspend the FLTEACH subscription for a time (e.g., during vacation). Instructions for making these changes, as well as other useful settings, are contained in the welcome message and can also be found on the FLTEACH Subscriber Option page:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/Flt-opt.html>

## Posting Guidelines

A professional forum such as FLTEACH must tread a thin line between encouraging free and open discussion of issues that are important to teachers and focusing this discussion in a professionally useful and appropriate direction. To this end, each new subscriber receives clear posting guidelines in the welcome message. Messages of a commercial nature, attachments, and spam are not allowed. Most important, the guidelines state the requirement for “all postings to reflect the open, friendly, collegial, and professional atmosphere that has always existed on FLTEACH.” Reminders of these guidelines are sent to the list periodically, and the moderators examine each message before it is posted to verify



that the guidelines are being followed. The moderators also encourage discussion of professionally significant topics, redirect other mail as appropriate, and are available to help subscribers resolve issues related to FLTEACH participation.

## FLTEACH Biographical Database

The second mailing subscribers receive is a request to fill in a brief template for biographical information that is made available in an online database, searchable by keyword:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/flteach-bio.html>

The aim here is to facilitate the ability of members to pinpoint others with similar interests, projects, and languages, as well as geographic proximity. Submission of this information is completely voluntary.

## Goals of FLTEACH

The goals of FLTEACH are as numerous as the reasons for its existence. They have also evolved and expanded since its inception. The FLTEACH home page states that "Our topic is foreign language teaching methods including school/college articulation, training of student teachers, classroom activities, curriculum, and syllabus design." Below is a summary of the principal goals of the FLTEACH list.

*Professional Communication:* Primary is the emphasis on overall increased communication among FL educators. The importance of this contact is underscored by the comments of subscribers who see the list as a daily "must" in their professional lives. The benefits of frequent interaction in a productive forum with one's colleagues are endless and only limited by one's own imagination and participation.

*Improved Technology Access and Awareness:* Parallel, of necessity, to the goal of expanded communication among professionals is easy access to electronic media by all teachers at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Obviously, if any articulation and coordination are to take place, all levels must be significantly represented. In addition, the increase of technological awareness on the part of FL practitioners can improve their teaching and effectiveness as educators (cf. Knight, 1994; LeLoup & Ponterio, 1994b). FL teachers who use technology to enhance their teaching are serving as role models for their students, all of whom will need to develop technology competencies for their own future. For those students who will go on to become FL teachers themselves, an excellent example is being set by the teachers who open their eyes to the advantages and possibilities of the use and integration of technology in the FL classroom.

*Preservice Teacher Education and FL Methods Syllabi:* Coordination, convergence, and perhaps consensus in preservice FL education are certainly major goals of FLTEACH. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has indicated teacher education as a priority for the profession (Knop, 1991; Sandstedt, 1991; Strasheim, 1991; Guntermann, 1992; Wing, 1992). In general, instructors of FL methods courses appear to consider much of the same knowledge base as important; i.e., a common pool of elements features prominently in the majority of FL methods syllabi (Grosse, 1993). How much better would preservice training be if it were coordinated and improved by collegial sharing of resources and materials? On FLTEACH, FL methodologists share ideas and exchange points of view on many curricular issues. One service of FLTEACH is to archive FL methods course syllabi, resulting in a true pooling of talents and perspectives to the end of unifying the knowledge base that guides FL practitioners. This collection of syllabi is continually updated as new course outlines are submitted. The FL Methods Syllabi collection can be found at:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/syllabi/>

*Articulation:* The articulation so necessary to a smooth transition for FL learners between educational levels can only be improved by knowing how other colleagues are implementing FL curricula across the nation and even around the world. FL educators participating on FLTEACH discover on a daily basis what their counterparts are doing in many different areas, and all can capitalize on shared information and ideas.

*Professional Development:* Harkening back to the Goals 2000 document, professional development is participation in any activity that provides continued improvement of professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare children for life in the twenty-first century. FLTEACH definitely serves this purpose, as delineated in the following section.

## FLTEACH Professional Development Uses

In the fall of 1999 and again early in 2003, the FLTEACH moderators conducted a survey to identify FLTEACH professional development uses by sending the following message to the FLTEACH list:

Dear FLTEACHERs,

Jean and Bob are trying to identify the various ways that FL teachers may use FLTEACH for professional development. If you consider FLTEACH as a professional development tool, we would appreciate it if you would please send us a personal note at FLTEACH@cortland.edu identifying yourself and letting us know briefly how FLTEACH is being used. This is for any use of FLTEACH and its ancillaries (Web page, archives, etc.). This request applies to inservice and preservice FL teachers.

We need to collect this information as part of our NEH project for FLTEACH and also for presentations that we plan for the future.

Thank you all.

Jean & Bob

The responses by FLTEACHERs, giving their perspective on the professional development aspect of the list, were sorted into categories reflecting a variety of professional development uses. Their contributions to this survey are summarized below. In several entries, quotes from the e-mail responses are included.<sup>3</sup> The categories are not in any particular hierarchical order. Rather, they represent the culling of numerous “testimonials” to the professional development benefits of FLTEACH in the lives of many FL teachers.

1. *Useful ideas for lessons:* Teachers, new and veteran alike, often are at a loss as to the best way to present a grammar or cultural point in class. Sometimes it is not just a question of the “best” way but of a “different” way, new or more effective or better able to reach a particular type of learner. Teachers can request assistance with this dilemma and can expect to receive many responses with varied suggestions in the following hours or days. Teachers have shared information on and learned how to use rubrics for evaluation in the classroom. Some have received assistance adapting learning strategies for students and teaching strategies for themselves (S. Neese, personal communication, October 29, 1999). A major plus of FLTEACH is that the information is specifically for FL teachers, for their classrooms and students. “. . . the great thing about FLTEACH is that in all of these areas I am mentioning, the help, advice, or information I receive is completely, totally, 100% relevant to foreign language. That has only happened once or twice with regard to district-sanctioned professional development activities in my entire teaching career (of 8 years)!” (C. Montgomery, personal communication, December 5, 1999). “It is the best source

- of FL ideas I have ever encountered in my 27 years of high school teaching” (C. Baker, personal communication, October 29, 1999).
2. *Consultant resource:* Several subscribers to FLTEACH are FL consultants providing professional development services. They rely on list colleagues to provide professional guidance that they, in turn, use in all facets of their work to benefit their clients. For example, one consultant was working with a school district to establish an elementary FL program. The consultant queried the list for information on a variety of issues connected with this endeavor and was then better able to serve the school district’s particular needs.
  3. *Language resource:* The list acts as a resource for language questions for the teacher and students alike. It is quite common for a post to request help with a translation, vocabulary, or grammar question, sometimes for the teacher and sometimes for the students. “How do you say . . . ?” is a frequent query, motivated by students wishing to describe their lives in the target language (TL). “I use the list for ideas on teaching techniques, for information on research related to my field and as a resource when I need a question answered” (N. Wheatley, personal communication, January 16, 2003). In addition, several subscribers have extensive backgrounds in linguistics and have been able to elucidate many complicated linguistic puzzles.
  4. *FL methods students:* Numerous FL methods instructors require subscription to FLTEACH as part of their course. They wish to introduce preservice teachers to the FL professional community early and get them started with participation in professional dialogue. FLTEACH provides a window to the real world of teaching for these preservice teachers, and many are surprised and amazed at all the different facets of teaching that are discussed in a collegial manner on the list. One methods instructor stated: “It provides a realistic introduction to the professional world and an excellent resource for them. In addition, I send them to the archives for projects and to search for materials they may use to include in their resource portfolios” (C. Vogel, personal communication, October 29, 1999). Preservice teachers seem to appreciate this introduction to the professional world of their future FL colleagues. “My professor for my methods course last semester required us to sign on to this site as a resource for our class. This has been one of the most useful ideas I have picked up in class” (L. Davis, personal communication, January 20, 2003). Some remain on the list long after the end of the FL methods course. “During the Fall Semester of 1999, my FL methods instructor required her students to subscribe to FLTEACH and to write about threads we read about during one week. I found many of the posts interesting and full of wonderful tidbits to tuck away for future reference. I still feel that way. I have no desire to unsubscribe” (N. Holmes, personal communication, January 17, 2003).
  5. *Self-reflection:* Several FLTEACHers use the list postings as professional development for themselves, engaging in reflection on their own teaching. “All good teachers should reflect constantly on their own teaching methods, and therefore be in a constant state of ‘professional development’ and it is good to read colleagues’ thoughts about classroom-related issues and broad discussion topics as well as the nitty-gritty ‘ideas for teaching numbers’ type postings” (N. Brunger, personal communication, October 28, 1999). “My time spent with FLTEACH has done a lot to refine my thinking and performance as a teacher” (M. Young, personal communication, October 29, 1999). “Reflecting on my own practice is valuable. Being able to bounce those reflections off of other professionals on FLTEACH adds a new dimension to their value” (B. Heller, personal communication, January 20, 2003).

6. *Source for other professional development opportunities:* Teachers rely on FLTEACH to inform them of other opportunities to improve their teaching and increase their knowledge base. Local, regional, national, and even international FL conference announcements are frequent. Teachers also share their impressions of different workshops and inservice experiences that they have found useful (e.g., TPR-Storytelling workshops and Verb Wall presentations).
7. *New methodologies:* Veteran teachers become aware of new teaching methodologies that they may wish to try. One salient example is that of TPR-Storytelling, which has garnered quite a following. "FLTEACH has been the basis of a complete change in teaching methods now used by our entire foreign language department of 8 teachers. We are all using TPRS which was introduced to us by means of FLTEACH" (C. Baker, personal communication, October 29, 1999). A spin-off TPRS list has even formed as a result of meetings on FLTEACH. A respondent from the UK underscored this use: "FLTEACH has also made me aware of such things as TPRS, which—as far as I am aware—has not yet reached this side of the pond" (N. Brunger, personal communication, October 28, 1999). An effective method for content-based grammar instruction was mentioned on the list and prompted action by a subscriber. "In the past five years I have used FLTEACH many times to locate materials, to get opinions on materials, to learn about professional conferences, to learn about teaching methods, new and old. After reading about the Pace method of grammar instruction on the list in December, I ordered a copy of the Van Patten et al. book in Jan. and look forward to using it to the benefit of my students" (M. Albers, personal communication, January 16, 2003).
8. *Professional "reading":* On FLTEACH, there are frequent and often impassioned debates by notables (and not-so-notables) in the FL/SLA field. All FLTEACHERs—lurkers and posters alike—are important and valued members of the profession. Some are simply better known than others. For instance, Dr. Stephen Krashen was engaged in a series of debates about SLA issues. Several subscribers noted that reading these posts was wonderful professional development in that it was much like reading a professional journal. Still others benefit from the discussion of current language theories and research, something some admit they would not have the time to devote to were it not appearing in an electronic medium. "From FLTEACH, I get . . . discussions on the theory of teaching FL (including valuable summaries of things I don't have time to read) . . ." (D. Blaz, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
9. *Extended educational coursework:* Some members indicated that they had become aware of issues in education not covered in their education classes. As stated earlier, it is impossible to cover everything necessary in the FL methods course. It is also equally impossible to expect that all education courses can encompass all the requisite knowledge a preservice teacher needs. For many, FLTEACH is an extension of college coursework in that several educational topics are discussed on the list that received either no mention or short shrift in regular preservice teacher education.
10. *Singleton FL teacher:* This person is truly served well by the FLTEACH community. Being the only FL professional in a building or a district can be very lonely. Discipline-specific professional development offered on-site is out of the question. FLTEACH can be a departmental office or teacher's lounge for these singletons—a ready-made support system of colleagues meeting virtually. Some teachers get new ideas just sharing with their next door neighbor in the school. These teachers need to share with their electronic neighbors, a greatly extended boundary. "I'm the only

Spanish teacher in our district right now . . . I like being able to ask questions and get the many varied opinions and answers. It's great to be able to 'speak' with those in a situation similar to me" (D. Roberts, personal communication, October 28, 1999). "Because I am the sole elementary foreign language teacher in my small district, and one of the few ones in this area, I consider FLTEACH to be a professional development tool for me...I would be lost without FLTEACH, as there is no one to turn to here for help" (J. Pacheco, personal communication, January 15, 2003). "Last semester I was the only Spanish language teacher at my high school of 1200 students. Sometimes I really need to know there are others out there thinking about the same things" (D. Kline, personal communication, January 15, 2003). "I consider FLTeach my most consistent source of ideas and enthusiasm for my language classes. I am the only world language teacher at my school, so, although I have wonderful colleagues elsewhere in this district, I don't get together with them often" (J. Bodle, personal communication, January 22, 2003).

11. *Personal FL methods course*: Numerous FL teachers never had a FL methods course. They view participation on FLTEACH as their personal FL methods class and believe it is never too late to learn. "I have a BA in journalism with a Spanish minor and am NJ certified K-8 elementary education teacher and K-12 Spanish teacher. I have spent the last 16 years in the regular classroom, mostly in second grade. This means I've not had much of the methods training that those who become language teachers get. So . . . FLTEACH has been a tremendous help for me and I can tell from the messages for many others" (D. Roberts, personal communication, October 28, 1999). "I consider it the best methods class I've ever had" (M. Young, personal communication, October 29, 1999). "I still say that this listserv is the best foreign language methods 'course' around! And I have never encountered elsewhere a more friendly, helpful group of people" (S. Shackelford, personal communication, January 16, 2003).
12. *Ongoing source of inspiration and ideas*: Many responses indicated that FLTEACH topics are discussed at lunch and departmental meetings, and the creative ideas generated on the list are much appreciated. "Your site has been one of the best sources of inspiration, ideas, and good common sense I have found in thirty years of teaching. *Mil gracias*" (S. Neese, personal communication, October 29, 1999). "I have 10 3-inch spirals FILLED with ideas and resources from FL teachers who have contributed to this list over the years. Of the many conferences that I've attended, I can't say that I've ever come home with more than one or two useful ideas. However, on any given day, I have found at LEAST that many useful ideas on this list—and it only takes 10–15 minutes to read the mail" (B. Damascus, personal communication, October 29, 1999). "As far as I am concerned, I have received more benefit from this listserv than from all my other professional development sessions put together! Not even close. I have been a member for several years. Before I joined I was a pretty unimaginative teacher...mostly sticking with the book/exercises/tests. This listserv opened the world of possibilities to me. I began to see the benefit of teaching through many different modalities. I have used reams of paper printing ideas to use in class. Thanks to this list, I have activities that actively involve the student in his learning. I will be forever grateful to this listserv for helping me grow as a teacher" (P. Casler, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
13. *Conference Alternative*: Sometimes teachers simply cannot attend conferences or workshops or none of interest is offered within a reachable distance. "My personal circumstances preclude much conference participation right now (2 small children



at home), so FLTEACH IS my conference" (B. Techman, personal communication, October 29, 1999).

Still others feel that being on FLTEACH is akin to attending a FL conference or workshop, and they do not need to search further. They aver that they receive more professional development from FLTEACH than from most conferences or courses. "FLTEACH is like having a workshop in your classroom" (L. Gump, personal communication, October 28, 1999). "While I enjoy attending conferences, I find this format more helpful throughout the year" (J. Glandt, personal communication, January 15, 2003). "When going to a conference, I may learn miniscule compared to what I daily learn from this site" (P. Salsedo, personal communication, January 15, 2003).

14. *Rejuvenation for veterans:* Teachers who have been in the profession for years claim that "FLTEACH has been a life saver" by infusing new life into their teaching. They see the benefits for themselves and for their students. "I am sure my students would want to thank you, too" (P. Casler, personal communication, October 28, 1999). One FLTEACHER summarized her professional renewal as having been energized by the ideas, encouraged by the wisdom of veteran teachers, validated by fellow FL teachers for her own contributions, and motivated and empowered by professionals to create her own Web sites. "Not a week goes by that I don't use an idea that I found on FLTEACH!" (B. Larson, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Several respondents cited using the list for staying up-to-date with trends in the profession, indicating that they "...also like to read messages just to get a "pulse" of what is going on in the FL teaching profession" (J. May, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
15. *Reentry into the profession:* For those who have been away from teaching or have been involved in other branches of education, FLTEACH has proved to be a jumpstart to a return to teaching. From one librarian who returned to the classroom as a French teacher: "The listserv is, in my opinion, as valuable as a college methods course—all the more so because it offers a continuing network of support for its members.... At this point in time I am only teaching elementary French in a PTA sponsored, after school program. But thanks to FLTEACH I will soon have the courage to apply for a 'real' job!" (S. Shackelford, personal communication, October 28, 1999). One German/Latin certified teacher, currently not teaching in her fields, still subscribes to FLTEACH to garner ideas for future reference. "I became acquainted with FLTEACH when I went back to college to earn teacher certification .... Each time I come across something that I feel can benefit me later, I copy and paste the selection into my FLTEACH folder on my computer" (N. Holmes, personal communication, January 17, 2003).
16. *Inservice:* One teacher stated that she had given inservice workshops to ESL and FL teachers in the district completely with information from the list. Another states that she and her colleagues present ideas gleaned from FLTEACH at every department meeting (J. Miyata, personal communication, October 30, 1999). One FL District Supervisor says she encourages all her FL teachers to subscribe and participate in FLTEACH. (G. L. Arrington, personal communication, October 31, 1999). Other FL resource specialists and department chairs forward postings of interest to FL department members frequently (L. Clarkson, personal communication, January 15, 2003; H. Hall, personal communication, January 21, 2003). FLTEACH postings have often been the basis for department meetings and discussion. "As department chair I often brought in discussions from the list for my department to discuss, everything from



teaching multi-level classrooms to block scheduling" (C. Hargesheimer, personal communication, January 15, 2003).

17. *Systematic Professional Development and Evaluation:* Happily, several FLTEACHERs say that they include FLTEACH in their Annual Professional Development Plan for their school district. One teacher indicated that he used FLTEACH for district evaluation/supervision in the following way: he prints out 10 strategies, prepares them, and incorporates them into his curriculum. He then documents this process and discusses all with his district supervisor (D. Shenk, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Another FLTEACHER reports that her department has T.E.A.M.<sup>4</sup> meetings once a month that count in their professional development time. They discuss ideas from FLTEACH, share and teach each other (B. Damascus, personal communication, October 28, 1999). A third FLTEACHER credits what she has gained from the list for a positive classroom evaluation by her principal. "Earlier this week I got an outstanding evaluation from my principal. Many of the things he pointed out that he was particularly impressed with were ideas and procedures that I've gleaned from FLTeach. (I was using Pam Kaatz's present tense verb lesson) I am certain that I am a much better teacher than I would be without this listserv. I also think I'll get to be a better teacher faster because this listserv helps me to evaluate myself and my own practices" (R. Grawey, personal communication, October 29, 1999). Updated survey results indicate that subscribers are continuing to incorporate FLTEACH participation as part of their professional development in a systematic way. "I teach French (levels I,III, IV,V) to students from 8th to 12th grade and consider FLTEACH to be one of my most valuable professional development tools, second only to travel in francophone countries. I have included subscription to this listserv in my Professional Development Plan [the vehicle through which we renew our licenses now in Ohio]" (M. Kitsinis, personal communication, January 15, 2003). "I'm a fifth year teacher at Mahomet-Seymour High School, (although this is year 30 for me professionally) and I am using FL teach as one of my goals for my semi-annual staff self-evaluation. My first goal is to improve teaching materials and methods, but my third goal directly relates to FLTEACH, as it is to participate in FLTEACH listserv and share information with colleagues. . . . I have used FLTEACH to document professional growth and development for the past five years" (C. Brown, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
18. *Support and encouragement:* Not only for singleton teachers but also for beginning teachers, a support system is vital. The first year is often quite difficult, and several FLTEACHERs attribute their "survival" to the encouragement and advice received from other FLTEACHERs. "My first year was quite difficult for me, and many teachers offered advice and encouragement" (S. A. Shay, personal communication, October 28, 1999). "I don't know how I'd be surviving my first year without the guidance of everybody involved" (R. Graves, personal communication, October 29, 1999). "I sure wish I had had such a support system when I was a beginning teacher" (M. Burr, personal communication, October 29, 1999).

A teacher wrote to say she was so encouraged and motivated by her participation on FLTEACH and collegial support that she decided to present a session at a state conference. "My purpose for writing is to let you know that my session was full, teachers were standing around the room and in the hall. The excitement that was generated in the session was heartwarming" (G. L. Arrington, personal communication, October 31, 1999). Sometimes FLTEACH is just there, like an old friend. "In

short, FLTEACH has been like a teacher's lounge and workroom that is there whenever I need it" (C. Hargesheimer, personal communication, January 15, 2003).

19. *Global perspective:* List membership represents, at present, more than 50 countries. Though the overwhelming majority resides in the U.S., many feel they are enriched by the comments from their colleagues at all educational levels and from around the country and the world who have a different perspective. Pam Casler (personal communication, October 28, 1999) appreciates the worldwide contact and says, "we are like French *Médecins sans frontières*: teachers without borders." This enrichment can work both ways, as methodologies and materials are shared around the world. "I use FLTeach to get the experience and ideas of language teachers on what works in the US classroom. I share this information with either teachers from China or Chinese teachers locally... some who have never taught before" (J. Gulizia, personal communication, January 15, 2003). The broad range of feedback—across educational levels and geographic locations—is appreciated by many.
20. *Archives:* This open and accessible repository of all messages posted from the beginning of the list discussion in 1994 to the present is a very popular feature of FLTEACH. Many FL teachers—preservice, inservice, and even non-subscribers included—know that a wealth of FL instructional knowledge and expertise resides in the archives, and this is often the first place they look for ideas and information. "Anytime I need an idea or a resource, I check the archives. If nothing turns up, I post my question, and invariably I receive several answers within hours" (B. Larson, personal communication, January 15, 2003). Frequently, FL methods instructors have their students mine the archives for a variety of items. "I assigned the list to my student teachers, and directed them to the archives for help with lesson planning. They always loved it, even though they were often too busy to read the daily digests" (C. Hargesheimer, personal communication, January 15, 2003). "As a methods instructor I have students subscribe to FLTEACH and report on one thread. I also send them to the archives to find "bell ringers" and "sponge activities" (B. Heller, personal communication, January 21, 2003). One FL teacher badly needed assistance in preparing lessons for a new FLEX course she had begun to teach. "I was desperate for a variety of activities to differentiate the languages from one another. For example, I needed different ways to deal with numbers and counting. The archives saved me" (A. Richardson, personal communication, January 18, 2003).
21. *FAQs:* Another service of FLTEACH is the FAQ section of the home page. Here teachers can find consolidated ideas on frequently discussed topics. This information is readily and easily accessible by going to the FAQ page: <http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/flteach-FAQ.html>  
The FAQs have proven quite popular, and many subscribers use them on a regular basis. Some members have even suggested other topics whose responses could be culled from the archives and entered into new FAQs.
22. *Foreign travel:* Teachers sometimes want ideas for foreign travel and suggestions of good travel companies to use with their students. So many people have posted on this topic that a FAQ was created to encapsulate the general information. Teachers are also able to find information on planning such trips, pitfalls to watch out for, suggestions on where to go, what to see, where to stay, and teachers' personal opinions about what companies do a good job providing their clients with the best possible trip.
23. *Contests and clubs:* Information about student FL contests can be obtained by asking on the list (D. Doloff, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Also, teachers

- wishing to form FL clubs or honor societies can find support from their colleagues in the archives and in current postings.
24. *Textbooks*: When teachers are planning to select a new textbook series, they often seek advice from veteran users of several published texts. "I just searched the archives for pros and cons of *Ven Conmigo* and *En Español* and printed up an 18 page list of messages that we can use as we weigh the pros and cons during our textbook selection meeting" (C. Brown, personal communication, January 15, 2003). This use of FLTEACH has a dual benefit. First, comparative textbook opinions are always forthcoming, thus facilitating the final decision. Second, several textbook companies monitor FLTEACH to keep tabs on FL teacher kudos and dislikes vis-à-vis current publications and preferences for future endeavors.
  25. *Connections*: FLTEACHERs have made connections on the list for many different things. Some of the more common uses for these connections are research and language projects, e-mail/penpal exchanges, field trips, roommates at conferences, to name a few. FLTEACHERs have met new colleagues, made friends, and established lasting relationships via the list (S. Barkhurst, personal communication, January 15, 2003; B. Heller, personal communication, January 20, 2003). Some have found former colleagues and students (B. Larson, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Due to her association with FLTEACH, one teacher was chosen to serve on the ACTFL Pimsleur Award committee for 1999, something she credits with re-igniting her interest in reading published research (D. Doloff, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Another FLTEACHER linked with a colleague on a project, developed a conference proposal and presented it, all without having met face-to-face until the conference (P. Salsedo, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
  26. *Graduate School*: A few FLTEACHERs reported using FLTEACH in graduate classes (other than FL methods). "I do use FLTEACH as professional development. I have used it in grad school, research-wise, especially to explain the Krashen acquisition theory.... My graduate advisor accepts the opinions expressed by FLTEACH members as action research findings" (B. Rubenstein, personal communication, October 28, 1999). Still others have received e-mail mentoring on advanced degree work and projects.
  27. *Newsletter information*: Several regional and state FL officers indicated that they include ideas from FLTEACH in their FL newsletter, "thus extending the electronic reach of FLT to those not yet connected" (personal communication, M. V. Barrueta, October 29, 1999; A. Olafson, November 1, 1999). "... a colleague of mine in the state often prints useful ideas in our state newsletter, and now others are doing the same" (S. Callahan, personal communication, January 18, 2003).
  28. *Materials recommendations*: FLTEACHERs offer suggestions and tips about purchasing materials such as books, CDs, cassettes, videos, and DVDs (D. Blaz, personal communication, January 15, 2003). This can save time as well as help in the financial arena. "The forum gives me access to publishers and reviews of materials—software, methods texts, supplemental resources, etc.—and has thus saved me (and the school district) a LOT of money" (C. Montgomery, personal communication, December 5, 1999).
  29. *Cultural information*: One difficulty that most FL teachers share is access to sufficient and accurate cultural information. Even native speakers do not have all the answers to cultural questions as these may vary depending on the target language country. It is a rare FL teacher who has traveled, studied, or lived in enough TL

environments to possess the wealth of cultural knowledge that teaching demands. FLTEACH is an invaluable resource precisely due to the communal expertise of members and the representation of so many TL cultures. Teachers can, with confidence, ask and expect to receive helpful and solid information in response to their cultural queries. “Definitive and well-researched information on any number of cultural topics—such as the rationale behind a specific choice of words, the details of and “perspectives” that underlie certain cultural celebrations, or the history of a particular piece of art, music, literature, or event, etc.—is provided by scholars or by native speakers” (C. Montgomery, personal communication, December 5, 1999). Staying current with cultural trends is another challenge that FLTEACH can make a bit easier by “. . . making me aware of recent events in the Spanish Speaking World that I can bring into the classroom to show students that Spanish is the living language of a lively people. A recent example was the whole “*Las Tomates*” craze that I first heard about on FLTEACH” (B. Heller, personal communication, January 15, 2003).

30. *Technical assistance*: Though not intended as a list for questions of purely a technology nature, FLTEACH has a number of subscribers who are quite knowledgeable in the area of communications technologies and can offer suggestions in emergency situations. In addition, several FLTEACHERs have successfully integrated the use of technology into their FL curriculum. They are generally quite willing to share their lessons, complete with a post-evaluation including successes and pitfalls. “Technological expertise is also present here. I am a mere keystroke away from someone who can solve a technical problem for me or who can walk me through the use of some technological tool that I wish to use with my students. In fact, I am now considered quite ‘computer literate’ in my building and am even beginning to train others in basic ways. I credit a majority of what I know to the little technological tidbits and the patient explanations (both on and off-list) provided by list members over the last 3 years” (C. Montgomery, personal communication, December 5, 1999).
31. *Internet URL database*: Over the years, thousands of Internet URLs for many different languages and cultures have been mentioned on FLTEACH. They include such items as free clip-art, grammar presentations, resources for authentic materials, music, lyrics, sites for puzzle, quiz, and activity preparation, and so forth. This sharing is appreciated as a real time-saver for many subscribers. “What I especially enjoy is offers of sharing materials and recommendations on Web sites. My life is harried enough that I don’t spend much time surfing, but it’s nice to have someone send a clickable URL that I can check and bookmark for future reference if I like” (E. Chapman, personal communication, January 15, 2003). Several members indicated they pass these URLs along to their colleagues on a regular basis (D. Doloff & L. Gump, personal communication, October 28, 1999; J. Frost, personal communication, October 30, 1999). These sites can all be found by searching the FLTEACH archives using keywords. In addition, the FLTEACH home page has a collection of several useful FL sites that serve as a point of departure for the FL teacher just getting started. These resources can be found on the WWW Resources for Language Teachers page:  
<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/flteach-res.html>
32. *Conference presentations*: Material gleaned from FLTEACH postings has frequently become a substantial part of conference presentations to colleagues. “I recently researched the use of popular music in the language class in the FLTEACH archives. I compiled pages of suggestions and links, which will be the backbone for a presentation I’m giving at the OFLA conference in April” (B. Larson, personal communication, January 15, 2003). When this happens, the information often undergoes a

morphology that increases its benefits to a wider audience of FL teachers. “I teach in North Dakota. I can’t tell you how many times I have shared ideas from FLTEACH at our state conferences. Of course, credit is always given to whomever offered the idea in the first place, but many colleagues have then asked me how to get in touch with FLTEACH. As a result, others have taken ideas that were presented, changed them slightly to fit their classrooms and brought them back to the group for other angles that we might not have thought of. These same people have joined FLTEACH as well” (S. Callahan, personal communication, January 18, 2003).

33. *Non-profit educational support:* As mentioned above, FLTEACH is monitored by the commercial market to garner FL teacher opinions on materials. Other entities with an interest in FL matters also tap FLTEACH discussions in order to keep a finger on the pulse of FL educator dialog. SCOLA, a non-profit educational organization transmitting international television programs for educational use via satellite, is a good example of this. FLTEACH discussions are culled for “...ideas, applications and programs that can make SCOLA a better provider to the language community as a whole,” to address and correct any affiliate problems, and to spread the word about this FL resource (J. Gulizia, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
34. *LAC:* With a nod to Foreign Language Learning Standard 3.2,<sup>5</sup> some FLTEACHERs use the list to promote Languages Across the Curriculum ventures. “I currently teach only English [but] I am also a German teacher. This year my responsibilities include “Literacy Coach” and I have used numerous posts from FLTeach across the curriculum. When I read an idea or assignment that I particularly like, I print it. I have a file I keep at school that I pull out regularly for colleagues who come in search of ideas as well as departments with certain requests” (H. Hoffman, personal communication, January 15, 2003).
35. *Mentoring:* FLTEACH is recommended by some teacher/mentors as an additional and valuable resource during their first year of teaching. “As a trained mentor, I also recommend FLTEACH to all first-year FL teachers in my district. FLTEACH is also good therapy when you realize that others are in the same boat as you or even worse off, in many cases” (D. Way, personal communication, January 18, 2003).
36. *Certification resource:* FLTEACH has been used for preparation by some teachers seeking National Board Certification. “I use this listserv all the time. I used it a lot when I was working on my National Board Certification last year and I continue to lurk this year” (H. Hall, personal communication, January 21, 2003).

## Conclusion

Professional development comes in all shapes and sizes, forms and venues. Its essential characteristic, however, is a purpose of improvement—both professional and personal. FLTEACH provides the FL educational community with an opportunity to become a better integrated, more cohesive group in terms of professional goals, aims, and direction. These interactions represent the quintessential use of communication technology for the betterment of FL teaching. These reports by participants indicate that regular contact with colleagues on the list results in a better-informed and prepared cadre of FL practitioners that can further the objectives of FL education in local, regional, national, and international venues and at all educational levels. FLTEACH cannot do everything . . . but on an individual basis, it can do just about anything (Dire Straits, 1980).



## Notes

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1. All World Wide Web citations follow the style manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) for Internet citations.
2. For an extensive description of FLTEACH, see LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995b.
3. In keeping with the style manual of the APA, e-mail citations are treated as personal communications and as such are included in the body of the text only.
4. T.E.A.M. is the acronym for Teachers Educating and Mentoring in this particular school district.
5. *Standard 3.2*: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

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## Discussion Questions

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- Peruse the FLTEACH Web site: <http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/>  
Note your initial observations and reactions. Then, respond to the questions below.
  - Give a brief summary of what FLTEACH is.
  - What subscription options are available? Which one would you choose?
  - Note something you found out about each of the moderators.
  - Note the types of information that can be found in the archives and biographies link.
  - Click on the link: "A Few Things to Check Out." Read and be prepared to report on one of the articles by the moderators.
- Do you currently subscribe to a listserv? Think about both the benefits and challenges of being an active participant in a list.
- How would you define professional development? Why is professional development an important part of the life of an educator? What opportunities might you take advantage of in order to enhance your own professional development?
- According to the article, what factors have contributed to the success of FLTEACH?
- Which of the goals of FLTEACH mentioned in the article are most important to you as a language teacher or future language educator? Why?

For further information on FLTEACH, resources, and project ideas, visit <http://methods.heinle.com>.