When Theory Meets Practice: Applying Cambourne's Conditions for Learning to Professional Development for Elementary School EFL Teachers*

Cuando la teoría y la práctica se encuentran: implementación de las condiciones de aprendizaje de Cambourne en el desarrollo profesional de docentes de inglés de la básica primaria

Isabel Cristina Cadavid Múnera[**]
Claudia Patricia Díaz Mosquera[***]
Diana Isabel Quinchía Ortiz[****]
Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia

This article presents a reflection on an action research project carried out by a group of teachers and students at Universidad de Antioquia. The action research project aimed at determining the impact of a professional development proposal for elementary school English teachers in Medellin, Colombia. In the first section, the article describes the previous study that supported this project as well as its design and implementation. In the second part, Cambourne's conditions for learning are discussed from a theoretical and practical perspective. Researchers found that participant teachers improved both their use of the foreign language and their pedagogical practices as a result of having the opportunity to take risks and reflect as learners and teachers on holistic strategies for teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

Key words: Cambourne's conditions for learning, teachers' professional development.

Este artículo presenta una reflexión acerca de un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo por un grupo de profesoras y estudiantes de la Universidad de Antioquia. Este proyecto de investigación acción tuvo como objetivo principal determinar el impacto de una propuesta holística de desarrollo profesional para maestros de inglés de la básica primaria, en Medellín, Colombia. En la primera sección del artículo se describen el diseño y la implementación del proyecto así como el estudio anterior que dio origen al presente proyecto. En la segunda parte se discuten las condiciones para el aprendizaje y propuestas por Cambourne, desde una mirada teórica y práctica. Se encontró que los profesores participantes mejoraron en su uso de la lengua extranjera, así como en sus prácticas pedagógicas, como resultado de la toma de riesgos y la reflexión como aprendices y docentes acerca de estrategias holísticas para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: condiciones para el aprendizaje de Cambourne, desarrollo profesional docente.

Introduction

Like the students they teach, it seems that teachers also benefit from being in learning settings that go beyond mere transmission of how-to-knowledge.
(Cambourne, 2000-2001, p. 417)

Elementary school EFL teachers in Medellín, Colombia (South America), are in the midst of a complex situation concerning their teaching practices and their professional development processes. Since 1994, official policies require them to include a foreign language in the regular school curriculum at the primary level, but factors such as their personal stories as FL learners and teachers, their students' needs, the lack of resources at schools, as well as their teaching conditions in general hinder the fulfilment of those demands posed by the government.

Recently, the Ministry of Education has started the implementation of the national program "Bilingual Colombia 2010-2019" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN), 2005) which implies, among other things, the definition of standards and standardized tests for all levels of education, and the definition of guidelines for teacher training in order to attain the expectations concerning the English level students should have at the end of their high school studies, grade 11, namely level B2, according to the Common European Framework for language learning, teaching and evaluating.

Given this situation, and in response to it, university professors in different regions of the country have started to undertake research projects to better understand the reality of teachers at schools in order to suggest possible courses of action. This article reports on one of such efforts carried out by a group of researchers at Universidad de Antioquia in Medellin, Colombia. The first part will describe a previous study that explored the reality of English teachers in public elementary schools in Medellin; the second part will focus on a professional development experience implemented by these researchers with some elementary school teachers; and finally, the analysis of the project based on Cambourne's conditions for learning.

Using an Earlier Project as a Planning Guide

Cadavid, McNulty, and Quinchía (2004) explored the reality of EFL elementary instruction in Medellín in a previous research project that was the springboard for the one presented in this article. It is therefore worth mentioning here that this preceding study allowed us to read the reality of teachers before embarking on the task of proposing a professional development course for those teachers. The previous study was a small scale ethnographic investigation with 12 EFL teachers in grades 1, 3, and 5 in seven public elementary schools in the metropolitan area of Medellín. After observing classes and interviewing the teachers, we analyzed the information gathered which gave us a picture of the situation in public schools. Results derived from this experience included a profile of the participant teachers and a description of the methodology they used to teach English in their classrooms while following the beliefs they held.

Concerning the most salient features of the teachers, we can state that they

- Were mainly homeroom teachers in charge of teaching all subjects in their groups
- Had brief English teaching experiences
- Held undergraduate and graduate degrees in areas different from foreign languages. (Only three had a BEd in foreign languages)
- Had little preparation in English and methodology. Some of them had taken professional development courses related to learning the English language, but not to the methodology of teaching it.

- Worked with around 50 students in English classes that were offered once a week and were 45 minutes long.
- Were free to teach English the way they considered best because principals allowed teachers the autonomy to make decisions about how English was taught, but they were also alone doing their job without any support.

The same researchers highlight the importance of a careful identification of a teacher's profile related to their educational and target language preparation in order to analyze critically governmental policies and the feasibility of their implementation.

Figure 1 outlines the teachers' classroom methods. It presents a general overview of the method used by them. The first column refers to the approach, which consists of the theory of language and language learning that support the classroom practice. In our case, we included the beliefs of these teachers. The second column is related to the design, which includes objectives, types of activities and the roles of the teacher, the students and the materials. Finally, in the third column, there is a description of procedures that depict what actually takes place in the classrooms and the taxonomy of the activities undertaken.
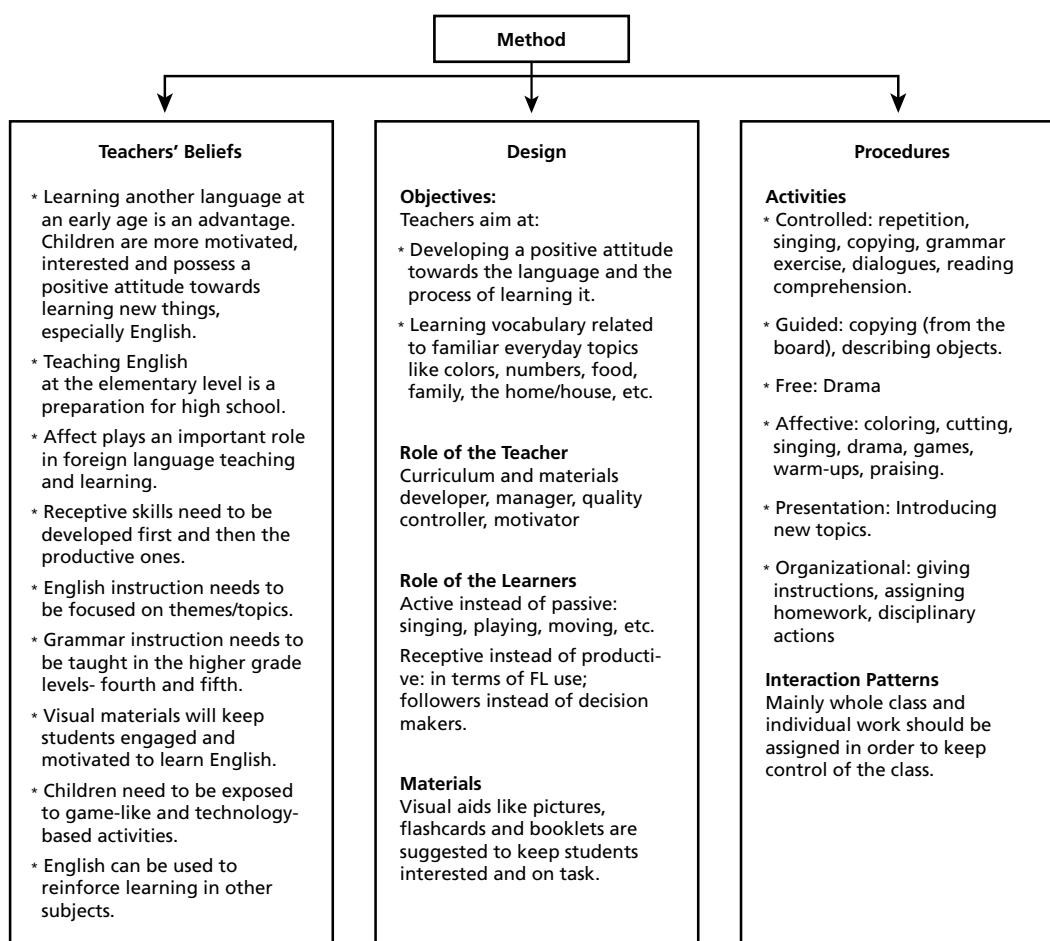
Method

Teachers' Beliefs

* Learning another language at an early age is an advantage. Children are more motivated, interested and possess a positive attitude towards learning new things, especially English.

* Teaching English at the elementary level is a preparation for high school.

* Affect plays an important role in foreign language teaching and learning.

* Receptive skills need to be developed first and then the productive ones.

* English instruction needs to be focused on themes/topics.

* Grammar instruction needs to be taught in the higher grade levels- fourth and fifth.

* Visual materials will keep students engaged and motivated to learn English.

* Children need to be exposed to game-like and technology-based activities.

* English can be used to reinforce learning in other subjects.

Design

Objectives:
Teachers aim at:

* Developing a positive attitude towards the language and the process of learning it.

* Learning vocabulary related to familiar everyday topics like colors, numbers, food, family, the home/house, etc.

Role of the Teacher
Curriculum and materials developer, manager, quality controller, motivator

Role of the Learners
Active instead of passive: singing, playing, moving, etc.

Receptive instead of productive: in terms of FL use; followers instead of decision makers.

Materials
Visual aids like pictures, flashcards and booklets are suggested to keep students interested and on task.

Procedures

Activities
* Controlled: repetition, singing, copying, grammar exercise, dialogues, reading comprehension.

* Guided: copying (from the board), describing objects.

* Free: Drama

* Affective: coloring, cutting, singing, drama, games, warm-ups, praising.

* Presentation: Introducing new topics.

* Organizational: giving instructions, assigning homework, disciplinary actions

Interaction Patterns
Mainly whole class and individual work should be assigned in order to keep control of the class.

Figure 1. Elementary school teachers' method (Adapted from Richards & Rodgers, 1984).

The conditions of these teachers, as well as those of many others around the country, can be described as a *cart-before-the-horse situation* (Murphey, 2003) because elementary school teachers are asked to teach English having had little or no preparation for this task. As a result, they end up learning the language at the same time that they are teaching it. The results of this study became a point for reflection about the needs of these teachers and about the role of administrators and policymakers concerning the teaching of English in elementary schools. This study was also an invitation to teachers and teacher educators to be critical towards this reality and to attempt to become agents of change. But, as Cadavid, McNulty, and Quinchía (2004) point out, "teachers cannot become reflective if they are not given the chance to participate in decision making; they cannot be agents of change if their voices are not heard. A process of critical reflection leading to principled actions is required in our schools" (p. 45).

In order to promote such processes of reflection and principled actions, a group of teacher-researchers of Universidad de Antioquia proposed the project that is described below.

The Focus of the Study

The project presented here focused on a holistic approach to professional development of EFL elementary school teachers. It was an action research study that, as described by Burns (1999), is "a systematic process of investigating practical issues or concerns which arise within a particular social context" (p. 31). In this case, the particular social context was a professional development course for elementary school English teachers. We, as the teacher-researchers, and three student-teachers of Universidad de Antioquia, designed, implemented and analyzed this study. The course for professional development was fashioned with

the participation of 14 schoolteachers working at different schools in Itagüí (a town near Medellin) and was led by the student-teachers and us.

The questions that guided this action research project were as follows:

1. How can a professional development course, designed from a holistic perspective, favour language development in a foreign language as well as the development of strategies for the EFL class?

2. How do teachers' reflections on their processes as language learners and teachers promote a process of empowerment that will allow teachers to be critical of their practices and search for strategies to improve them?

Throughout the course, we wanted to follow up on teachers' development concerning the identification and reflection about their teaching practices and how they became more confident and competent at using the language. So, the content of the course had two main components: a language development component in which teachers were learners of English, and a pedagogical one in which they reflected on their role as teachers of English as shown in Figure 2.
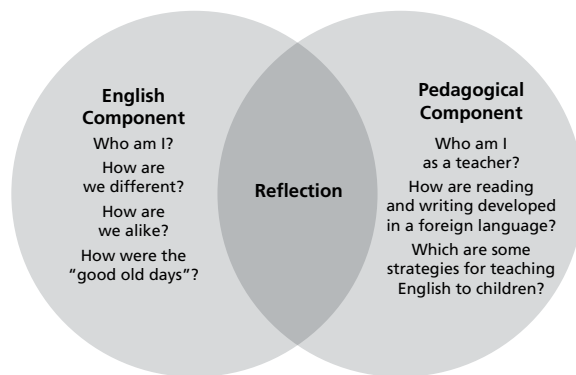

Figure 2. Content of the course.

It was holistic in the sense that the teachers involved were participating both as learners and teachers; they explored the learning of the foreign language and some possibilities for teaching it. The sessions were divided into two sections: one around learning the language, and the other was a reflection about its teaching. It was also holistic because the language they were exposed to or produced was not fragmented since the emphasis was on meaning–making processes. Reflection was a central element throughout the process. Their experiences as learners and teachers nourished the discussions and helped them to build the syllabus that was presented as a general framework to be reformed and adapted based on teachers' needs as the course developed.

To answer the questions posed, data were collected through the observations of the sessions with the schoolteachers, a group interview with them and a questionnaire. In order to find information about their foreign language development, a pre- and a post-test were used. These tests aimed at assessing the teachers' comprehension of oral and written texts and their capacity to use the language to describe and provide personal information. The analysis of data followed the steps proposed in Grounded Theory. These were open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 2007). We now present the analysis of this process in light of the theory that supported it.

When Theory Meets Practice

This part will focus on three central aspects that theoretically supported our professional development course: first, the difference between training and professional development, the latter being our option; second, the concept of Knowledge Building Community (KBC); and finally, Cambourne's conditions for learning. The discussion in this part will deal with these three concepts from a theoretical and a practical perspective. So, a brief explanation will be followed by the way each concept was evidenced in the course.

From Training to Professional Development

After we examined the reality of EFL primary schoolteachers we found that teachers needed to improve as language learners and teachers. Hence, we decided to implement this proposal that was conceived as a professional development course in which elementary schoolteachers and university teacher researchers worked collaboratively to learn from each other. Woodward (1997) presents the main differences between training and professional development as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Main differences between training and professional development (Woodward, 1997)

Training	Professional Development
Mandatory	Voluntary
Competencies	Holistic
Short-term	Long-term
Temporary	Continuous
Product-oriented, certificate, final work	Process-oriented
Skills, techniques	Reflection, personal growth
External agenda	Internal agenda
Guided by experts	Guided by *advisors*

In our case, the course was a voluntary process led by the Secretary of Education of the municipality where the project was carried out (Itagüí). Elementary schoolteachers were invited to join this project, and 20 that were interested registered. Some of them had either personal or professional problems and, thus, 14 teachers finished the whole process. So, we started working with the 20 teachers within the framework of a holistic approach defined above. There was also a journal in which teachers wrote about different issues connected to them as persons and as teachers on the basis of specific prompts. It is important to highlight that the reflection, as an essential component of the course, was an important way to include university teachers' expertise and knowledge as well as that of schoolteachers and student teachers.

All participants had a voice and it was exactly this polyphony that made this experience a very enriching one. The next part will describe more in depth how this community of learners was set and how we worked.

Knowledge Building Community (KBC)

KBC is defined in Kiggin's words as "a community of individuals… dedicated to sharing and advancing the knowledge of the collective" (as cited in Cambourne, Ferri, & Kiggins, 2003). At the University of Wollongong, a group of professors implemented a model of KBC for the education of pre-service teachers as an alternative to the more traditional lecturing-tutoring-exam model. In this experience three modes of learning were fostered: Community learning, School-based learning and Problem-based learning. In our context, these three modes of learning were also essential.

In the first place, as in the Wollongong experience, the community was made up of pre-service teacher education students (from the Foreign Language Teaching Program at Universidad de Antioquia), school-based teachers (from different public schools in Itagüí) and faculty lecturers (from Universidad de Antioquia). In this community, a sense of belonging was fostered through the discussions where the expertise and knowledge of all participants were shared and valued.

It is essential to emphasize that these teachers were also co-learners with their students as both parties were involved in the process of learning the language: the children in the classroom with the teachers, and the teachers with us in the course. This gave them the chance to analyze the process of their students in a different way because they were experiencing it as well.

Concerning school-based learning, this course was a clear example of it. Even though we had a general framework to organize content, it was modified as the course developed. The reflection on these teachers' contexts was a starting point that allowed us to see some of their needs in order to plan actions. However, they were asking for specific topics they needed to explore and discuss like literacy development in the foreign language or the use of technology in their classes. So, sessions were based on their schools and on their needs and interests.

The third element, problem-based learning, was evident in this project since it stemmed from a clear problem we have in our city with teachers of English in public elementary schools, as the previous study revealed. It was a diagnosis that allowed us to see the reality of teachers and the need they had (and still have) for support as regards both language learning and its teaching. This project was presented as a way to respond to this problematic situation.

With all these elements being present –community-based, school-based and problem-based learning– we can say that this proposal for professional development constitutes an experience of KBC on a small

scale. It is through these communities that we believe processes of true professional development can take place.

Cambourne's Conditions for Learning

Within the framework of these conditions we made informed decisions concerning the type of literacy events that encouraged this group of teachers to understand the development of the foreign language through experiences in which language had realistic and meaningful functions for their lives.

According to Cambourne's theory for learning (1988), *immersion* refers to the meaningful and contextualized examples experienced language users expose the new members of the society to so as to show what they will use and ultimately learn. The actions that show what language is used for and how it functions for language users are known as *demonstration* and how they are coupled to actions and artefacts such as books show learners what print is and how all of them allow connections with life experiences and other sign systems.

Learners will only *engage* in demonstrations when they see them as purposeful for their lives, "do-able" or "owner-able", and that they will support them in becoming potential talkers, readers, or writers since failure in emulating them will not lead to harmful outcomes. All through these processes, *expectations* are two-fold: those the learners hold about their possibilities to learn, and the ones "significant others" communicate to learners offering opportunities to exploit their capabilities, and challenging them without being overwhelming.

Once learners are *immersed* in variegated examples articulated with *demonstrations* that enhance the array of possibilities to *use* the language, they will learn to become proficient in the events that they form part of, and will learn to make

decisions about how to engage in those aspects that become relevant for their own learning experience. On the other hand, the significant others must make sure that the *immersion* and the *demonstrations* are meaningful and create the climate of *expectations* to take advantage of the learners' capabilities. The process may become complicated if the significant others strip away the *responsibility* from the learner by predetermining everything he or she is going to learn, thus turning the process into a trivial and fragmented act.

Learners do not go through the learning process error-free; they try to imitate what has been *demonstrated* to them and, in so doing, set in motion the "hypothesis, test, modify hypothesis, test again" cycle. Significant others are not *expecting* learners to have control over all the language systems at the same time; instead, they treat the *approximations* as legitimate, relevant, meaningful and useful evidence of natural learning. Time and opportunities should be provided to use the language in real literacy events that allow learners to interact with others, as well as work on their own and to develop their awareness and skills about how language functions in an anxiety-free context.

Significant others scaffold learners' attempts by going beyond a mechanistic feedback, therefore providing complete examples of the language they are trying to use. The *response* is not restricted: it is frequent and the learner is allowed to continue trying with no threat when not getting it the first time.

The Linguistic Component

In the linguistic component, there were many events in which some of the conditions for learning were easily observed. The three linguistic cycles proposed in the course included activities that were addressed to promote the development of the four linguistic modes; however, reading and writing were given special treatment during the course.

We are going to explain how we articulated these learning conditions in the linguistic cycle *How are we alike? How are we different?* focusing on *How are our families alike?* To begin this cycle we carried out activities related to the family; for instance, poems, riddles, songs and communication games. Then, we did shared reading with the book *Families are different* by Pellegrini (1991). As the book was quite small, we created a big book in order to provide a demonstration for the schoolteachers to perform the shared reading with students. We prepared previewing, viewing and reviewing activities for this event.

The first stage consisted of asking schoolteachers to predict the content of the book based on the illustrations of the cover and on the title. Their predictions were written on the board for further use. The second stage consisted of the actual reading. First, we read the book, constantly making the connections between the print and the illustrations evident, and then we invited schoolteachers to read the book with us. Some teachers were immediately eager to participate in the reading; others were encouraged by their partners and later accepted doing it. During reading, some schoolteachers used unconventional pronunciation of some words, and their partners corrected them right away; however, we did not use that strategy; instead, we waited for schoolteachers to finish and then repeated the word or sentence they had had problems with.

The third stage consisted of writing a text about the teachers' own families. They could use the book they had just read as a reference as well as use the expressions and words that were written on the board and the guiding questions that we had prepared to facilitate their writing. During this activity schoolteachers worked in groups while we monitored their work and helped them when they needed it. They were asked to bring a photo of the families for this last stage.

The fourth and final stage was to create a page of a book. Each schoolteacher was given a large colored sheet of paper with which to write the text about their family on and paste the photo on it. Each schoolteacher ended up with a page of the book. Afterwards, we collected the different pages and bound them to create a big book. In groups schoolteachers discussed the title of the book; nonetheless, they ended up with the same title of the book they read because they said it really portrayed the content of their book. They said that their families were also different and unique.

Throughout the course *immersion* was seen in all the activities which were carried out in the foreign language; we, as the most experienced foreign language users, spoke English all the time. Spanish was used when schoolteachers needed clarification. Moreover, the materials used during the course were generally authentic. Language was presented to schoolteachers for real- life situations and students were surrounded by this language while they were in the sessions.

At the moment of reading the book and when schoolteachers were encouraged to participate in the reading (shared reading), what Brian Cambourne calls *Demonstration* was evidenced. The teachers also discovered that reading in English was not something artificial or too different from reading in Spanish. Throughout the course, schoolteachers observed models of how to use reading strategies that would later facilitate the association of print and sound, how to organize conventional sentences to describe, and how to take advantage of their background knowledge and previous experiences with the language to understand print or aural texts. *Engagement* occurred when the teachers felt confident to write their own texts about their families because they had demonstrations and immersion that helped them to view this event as do-able and purposeful for their lives as teachers. *Expectation*

was a critical factor in the course. Although it was not observable, we were constantly generating a safe and trusting environment in which schoolteachers were encouraged to learn. In the event described above, schoolteachers *approximated* conventional writing when they created the texts about their own families; as a consequence, they were *using* the foreign language in class. We supported teachers' attempts at using the language without judgement and showed the conventional way of saying or writing something in English. During the course, mistakes were opportunities to learn as evidenced by one schoolteacher who stated, "*el error no es un acto de desacierto, sino una aproximación a la verdad*" [An error is not an act of ignorance but an approximation to the truth].

As can be seen, in the process of acquiring the foreign language, schoolteachers were experiencing the conditions for learning and this had an impact on their process as learners, but also on their reflection about teaching. This is the issue we now address.

The Teaching Component

The discussions about the implications of oral and written language development in EFL were encouraged through reflections in Spanish around teaching experiences that were reported by scholars in some articles. In several sessions, teachers discussed the perceptions they had constructed concerning the characteristics of learners across different age levels, some stages of their students' language development processes, their own histories as teachers and learners and on the impact of their reflections on the design and implementation of the syllabus for English. After reading "La Escritura en primera y segunda lengua: Un proceso, dos idiomas" (Clavijo & Torres, 1999), they came to the conclusion that reading and writing are very complex processes that imply the understanding of language learning stages.

Therefore, it is convenient to validate children's initial attempts and not to rush students. Teachers also realized that reading and writing processes do not differ from one language to the other; rather, that the changes lie in the conditions that foster or hinder the access to resources or the strategies that significant others around the students use to support them. Being immersed in these experiences as learners and having demonstrations of different literacy events helped the schoolteachers clarify that writing is not copying, but a process that involves thinking and needs to be experienced by children from the early stages of their schooling. Finally, they pointed out that it is very unfortunate that at their schools the strategies to promote literacy development change as students move up through the elementary grades because teachers have to prepare students for high school and, in the process, the enjoyment disappears.

In order to understand these processes in a wider perspective within the school curriculum, we discussed with teachers the article "Ciclos temáticos: una alternativa para lecto-escritura bilingüe" (Salmon, 1998). The schoolteachers brought up questions about how to work individually and to negotiate themes with groups of 50 students, a common situation in the EFL context. This proposal helped them realize that as life-long learners, teachers are constantly constructing knowledge in the company of their students through processes that validate previous knowledge and life experiences as primary sources to organize their lessons. They highlighted the need to find strategies to make connections between English and other subject areas as they negotiate and pose questions, promote extensive reading and learn to write through multiple opportunities to interact with print.

In order to create conscious links in the company of teachers, we explored which of

Cambourne's conditions were evident in this context. They stated that the exposure to the foreign language is very limited, first, because students have scarce opportunities to be surrounded by English outside school and teachers considered that their English proficiency was very limited. The access to resources was another difficulty because they could only count on what they call a bilingual room, which is a computer lab without software to work there. Teachers considered that they had to be more creative at designing materials and activities that favored the use of the foreign language, so that students feel they are able to participate as language users in different events and that their knowledge and abilities to learn more are not underestimated. Again, their need to be more experienced as language users became an issue here because they had to show students how to use the language without fear of making mistakes, and with purposes different from "practice English". Students should be invited to create materials so they can use them in class or for students in other grades.

The conclusions they derived from being immersed in the readings and the discussions evidenced that they were not the only models students may have in their classes and that they did not have to control everything in the class. The other point was that they had not participated in events of that kind as English language learners. They knew about holistic strategies for Spanish and other subject areas but they had never thought about transferring those to the English class because for them the foreign language to date has basically been a matter of learning vocabulary and grammar rules.

Schoolteachers also had an opportunity in their classes to *use* one of the events they experienced in the course. In the implementations the teachers shared, we identified evidence of how at the moment in which each teacher planned their version of one of the activities, they were *responsible* for the decisions they made concerning the risks they were able to take; they set a purpose for the event, selected the strategies that favored their students' learning, as well as the resources required, all this in light of the learning experiences. Their *expectations* allowed them to identify their possibilities to learn and they had the opportunity to reflect on the implications of implementing the experiences we shared with them, and analyze how far they could go without feeling pressed to do it. When they learned to give more value to their situation as education professionals, they realized that as life-long learners they needed to be informed not only about the policies mandated by the district or the Ministry of Education, but about the sound selection of practices supported by the professional literature; they confirmed that they had the expertise to understand their students and their institutions; therefore, they were responsible for the decisions they made and would take risks to implement what they were ready for. We encouraged them to try without predetermining what exactly they had to do or the specific strategies to use.

The confidence and knowledge gained through the sessions became evident when all the teachers shared the events they implemented. Even though they still needed more opportunities to use the language, their versions of events such as drawing your name, the family album or reading aloud adapted versions of fairy tales confirmed that they wanted to try what they considered meaningful, interesting and relevant for both them and their students *(engagement)*. As they were on their own, in their own places without us to provide immediate response, they felt they had the authority to control the situation *(responsibility)*. The *responses* they received from their colleagues and the university teachers during the sharing sessions opened more spaces for discussions that articulated the

experience in their classes and the support they had found in the professional literature.

To finish this component, schoolteachers analyzed how the syllabus they had at their schools might be organized in order to create meaningful connections and transitions among the topics in order to move to theme cycles. In their programs they had a list of contents, vocabulary, and topics as well as references to competences, goals, progress indicators, evaluation, strategies and procedures.

In order to articulate this information, the university teachers suggested taking into account a name for the unit that introduced the theme, goals for the unit, contents, materials and evaluation procedures and instruments. They had the chance to respond to their colleagues' proposals on posters they put up on the wall.

As Cambourne explains, when learners have time and opportunities to participate in events that allow interaction with others and to develop their awareness and skills about how they are learning functions, all the conditions come together. As such, they indicate how the quality of the immersion and the relevance of the demonstrations put into motion a need to engage in events they want to be responsible for, to make their expectations explicit, to try their hypothesis and to receive a response to keep on trying.

Conclusions

The professional development course presented here was an enriching experience for all the participants, but it was by no means the answer to the teachers' complex situation. It was an opportunity to inquire about the impact of implementing a professional development proposal within a holistic framework. It was the possibility of exploring Cambourne's conditions for learning in a new context. It was a chance for university and schoolteachers to share and create knowledge together with a common purpose. This inquiry yielded some interesting results and points for reflection.

First, it was interesting to see how at the end of the sessions, teachers were gradually accepting their role as English teachers. At the beginning of the course they were reluctant to see themselves as English teachers, but throughout the development of the sessions this image changed as they felt that they were empowered to explore different possibilities in their classes even though their English proficiency was not as they wished. Second, as a result of the application of Brian Cambourne's conditions: immersion, demonstrations, approximations, and use, these teachers felt engaged and felt they were experiencing something they were willing and able to use in their own classes. They felt responsible for the changes they wanted to implement in their classes because it was their own choice.

As the course developed, the teachers' conceptions of the foreign language and its teaching began to become modified, and so did their practices. For instance, the concept of planning changed from a very linear perspective around topics and vocabulary to one that could explore connections with other subjects. Class activities aimed at repetition and copying began to change to other activities that promoted construction of meaning involving the comprehension and creation of texts.

Finally, we can state that one of the most important gains was the linguistic and pedagogical growth of teachers. Figure 3 below condenses the complexity of this learning process.

Learning in this case went beyond the mere understanding and application of concepts and/ or strategies since reflection on the teachers' own processes as teachers and learners was fomented within an atmosphere in which relevant exposure to and use of the foreign language, as well as discussions about the process of teaching it, took place. Through

reflection, teachers developed an ability to critically *transfer* to their own environments what they were learning and experiencing in the course. They felt empowered to make decisions and to try to transform their practices. The concept of *Transferability* involves being able to make conscious links between theory and practice and to understand principles underlying practices in order to make informed decisions.
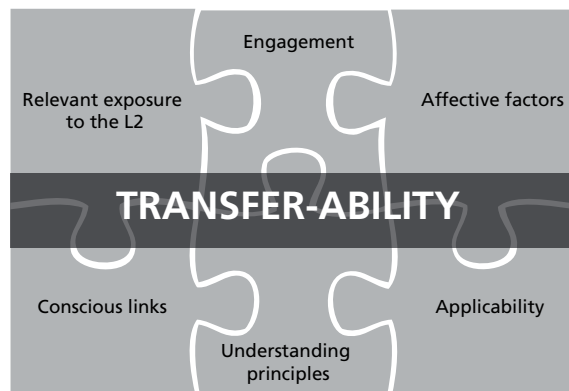

Figure 3. Process of transfer-ability[1] in professional development (Cadavid, Díaz & Quinchía, 2009).

After finishing the project, some questions for further research arose e.g. How has the practice of these teachers changed over time? Are they exploring new alternatives? How can this professional development proposal be implemented on a larger scale? How can these teachers be helped to establish and consolidate a community of learners?

To conclude, we would like to emphasize the importance of proposals for professional development for teachers that respond to their realities. University teachers and schoolteachers should work together to construct communities of knowledge aimed at the improvement of foreign language teaching and learning in our context through processes of transfer-ability that will help teachers become reflective and empowered to be

agents of change (Price & Valli, 2005). More and deeper reflection is needed in order to illuminate decision making concerning foreign language policies; imposed agendas can no longer be the answer to local needs.

References

Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cadavid, I. C., Díaz, C.P. , & Quinchía, D. I. (2009). Una propuesta holística de desarrollo profesional para maestros de inglés de la básica primaria. *Ikala, Revista de lenguaje y cultura, 14,* 135-158.

Cadavid, I. C., McNulty, M. M., & Quinchía, D. I. (2004). Elementary English language instruction: Colombian teachers classroom practices. PROFILE *Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 5,* 37-55.

Cambourne, B. (1988). *The whole story: Natural learning and the acquisition of literacy in the classroom.* Auckland, New Zealand: Ashton Scholastic.

Cambourne, B. (December 2000/January 2001). Conditions for literacy learning: Turning learning theory into classroom instruction: A minicase study. *The Reading Teacher , 54,* 414-417.

Cambourne, B., Ferri, G., & Kiggins, J. (2003). *The knowledge building community odyssey: Reflections on the journey.* Retrieved from http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/2003v23art1.pdf

Clavijo, A., & Torres, E. (1999). La escritura en primera y segunda lengua: Un proceso, dos idiomas. *Lectura y Vida , 20,* 33-41.

Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (2005). *Al tablero, 37,* octubre- Diciembre. Retrieved from http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/propertyvalue-32266.html

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

---

1   Term coined and spelling used by Cambourne (1998).

Murphey, T. (2003, September/October/November). NNS primary school teachers learning English with their students. *TESOL Matters, 13*(4), 1-6.

Pellegrini, N. (1991). *Families are different.* Markham, Ontario: Holliday House.

Price, J., & Valli, L. (2005). Preservice teachers becoming agents of change: pedagogical implications for Action Research. *Journal of Teacher Education, 56*, 57-72. Retrieved on March 19, 2007 from http://jte.sagepub.com

Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (1984). *Approaches and methods in language teaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Salmon, K. (1998). Ciclos temáticos: Una alternativa para el desarrollo de la lecto-escritura bilingüe. *Lectura y Vida, 19*(3), 26-34.

Woodward, T. (1997). *Models and metaphors in language teacher training.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

About the Authors

Isabel Cristina Cadavid Múnera is a full time teacher educator at the School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia. A member of the research group Pedagogy and Foreign Language Teaching at the same university, she holds a BA in foreign languages, a Diploma in Translation from Universidad de Antioquia, and an MA in TESOL from West Virginia University.

Claudia Díaz Mosquera is a full time teacher educator at the School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia. A member of the research group Pedagogy and Foreign Language Teaching at the same university, she holds a BA in foreign languages, a Diploma in Translation from Universidad de Antioquia, and an MA in TESOL from Fresno Pacific University.

Diana Isabel Quinchía Ortiz is a full time teacher educator at the School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia. A member of the research groups EALE (Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras) and Pedagogy and Foreign Language Teaching at the same university, she holds a BEd in Foreign Language Teaching, Universidad Antioquia, and an MA in English Teaching, Universidad de Caldas.