The Professional Development of Foreign Language Teacher Educators: Another Challenge for Professional Communities* 1

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The professional development of Colombian foreign language teacher educators faces many challenges that require individual and institutional actions as well as the participation of a community of teacher educators. This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study in which eighteen Colombian teacher educators describe their professional alternatives to achieve higher standards in their jobs. Data collection includes focus groups, in-depth interviews, a questionnaire, and e-mail correspondence. The analysis showed that teaching advanced courses, doing research, attending and presenting in international conferences, being involved in reflective practice, developing autonomous agendas, and networking represent the best means to accomplish their professional growth.

Keywords: professional development, networking, teacher research, growth, foreign language teacher education.

El desarrollo profesional de los formadores de docentes de lenguas extranjeras en Colombia enfrenta muchos retos que requieren acciones tanto a nivel individual como institucional, de igual manera también la participación de una comunidad de formadores de docentes. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio cualitativo en el cual dieciocho formadores de docentes de lenguas extranjeras describen sus alternativas de desarrollo profesional para alcanzar mayores niveles de desempeño en su labor educativa. La recolección de información incluyó grupos focales, entrevistas a profundidad, un cuestionario y correspondencia vía electrónica. El análisis de la información mostró que enseñar cursos avanzados, investigar, asistir y presentar trabajos en conferencias internacionales, involucrarse en práctica reflexiva, desarrollar agendas de trabajo autónomo y conformar redes de trabajo representan los mejores medios para alcanzar su desarrollo profesional.

Palabras claves: desarrollo profesional, redes de trabajo, investigación de docentes, crecimiento, formación de docentes de lenguas extranjeras.

Le développement professionnel de formateurs d'enseignants de langues étrangères en Colombie fait face à de nouveaux défis qui requièrent des actions aussi bien sur un plan individuel qu'institutionnel, ainsi que la participation de toute une communauté de formateurs d'enseignants. Dans cet article, on

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présente les résultats d'une étude qualitative où ont participé dix huit formateurs d'enseignants de langues étrangères. On décrit les possibilités de développement professionnel qui permettent d'atteindre de meilleurs niveaux de rendement dans leur travail éducatif. La collecte d'information a inclus des groupes focaux, des entrevues approfondies, un questionnaire et une correspondance électronique. L'analyse de l'information a permis de montrer que le fait d'enseigner des cours avancés, de faire de la recherche, d'assister ou de présenter des travaux à des conférences internationales, de s'engager dans des pratiques de réflexion, de développer des agendas de travail autonome et de conformer des réseaux de travail représentent les meilleurs moyens d'atteindre leur épanouissement professionnel.

Mots clés: développement professionnel, réseaux de travail, recherche, formation d'enseignant de langues étrangères.

INTRODUCTION

We became interested in understanding how Colombian language teacher educators achieve the professional standards to carry out their job after we got engaged in some critical reflection on the current professional challenges in our country. Most language teacher educators do not have doctoral studies or participate in research. They do not have an adequate economic compensation for their job. They do not have access to a great variety of teaching or technological resources, nor do they get exposed to a sufficient number of academic events. Nevertheless, they must perform the same tasks as professors in developed countries. In this article, we will report the findings of a study in which we describe the different resources used by language teacher educators to enhance their professional practice. We present some of the existing literature, present the data collection and data analysis processes, discuss the findings and suggest some actions to contribute to the growth of reflection on Colombian foreign language teacher education.

The professional development of foreign language teachers is a constant issue in the research agenda of the profession. Diaz-Maggioli (2003,a) defines professional development as "an ongoing learning process in which teachers engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students." Professional development is not a one-shot or one-size-fits-all event, but rather "an evolving process of professional self-disclosure, reflection, and growth that yields the best results when sustained over time in communities of practice and when focused on job-embedded responsibilities." Besides an adequate definition of professional development, researchers have come up with an inventory of challenges, effective practices, objectives, contents, skills and resources that may represent the basis for the design of professional development programs for foreign language teachers (Peyton, 1997). Diaz-Maggioli (op.cit.) and other researchers describe the following strategies as used by school districts and teachers to address the teachers' needs: Peer coaching (Rogers and Threatt, 2000), study groups (Murphy, 1999), dialogue journals (Peyton 1993; Bean, 1989), professional development portfolios (Barret, 2003; St Maurice and Shaw, 2004), mentoring (Huling, 2001; Joyce and Showers, 1982), and participatory practitioner research (Calhoun, 1993; Cohen and Manion, 2000; Altrichter et al., 1993).

Although the professional development of second and foreign language teachers is well documented in the literature (Freeman, 1989), there is a great gap in research regarding the education and the professional growth of language teacher educators, in other words, how they acquire and maintain the professional skills required to educate language teachers. The strategies used by language teacher educators to develop the competencies required in their work may be similar to those needed by language teachers, as both groups teach. Nevertheless, teacher educators may face greater challenges and must fulfill more demanding requirements than regular language teachers.

THE SEARCH FOR BETTER STANDARDS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The education of language teachers is becoming better defined and shaped in our profession. We have come to an agreement on how to educate language teachers, regardless of the setting in which they work. At the same time, we understand the need to focus on the particularity of the teaching activity as there is no set of procedures that work for all kinds of scenarios (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Teacher education is a combination of theoretical and practical approaches to define core knowledge and to understand the particularities of the teachers' job. Johnson (2000, 1996) argues that the foundations of any teacher education program should be "a collaborative effort, a reflective process, a situated experience and, a theorizing opportunity." The process of being recognized as a language teacher is constantly revised and improved through the contribution of research and interdisciplinary dialog.

Although we have a clear picture of what is needed to have better language teaching programs in pre-service and in-service, we have not achieved an active of discussion of the ways language teacher educators improve the quality of their own teaching through their professional development as "teachers of language teachers." Teacher educators may be called staff developers, mentors, coaches, advisors, tutors or facilitators. Killion and Harrison (1997) see the following roles of teacher educators: trainer/designer, coach, resource provider, program manager, consultant, task facilitator, process facilitator, and the most important role, catalyst for change.

The absence of research on the processes of becoming a language teacher educator and on the challenges of the profession is more evident in foreign language settings

than in second language settings. Although we are aware of the fact that Colombia shares many similarities with other developing countries regarding this issue, we did not find references of studies conducted in countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America addressing this issue. [2]

In addition to the definition of better ways to prepare teachers for the challenges of the profession, there is also the explicit agreement that college preparation is not enough. The search for professional development is a constant endeavor, as there is always room for improving classroom instruction and student achievement. This professional development is the task of individual teachers, as well as the responsibility of administrators (Sokolik, 2005). Being part of a community of teachers, as a way to bring teachers together socially and professionally, may be one of the most productive ways to contribute to the teachers' growth. This development approach removes the teachers' isolation and motivates them to share resources, successful strategies, and to find new ways to address the needs of their job. The support from administrators is an extra element that may include funding, time allowance, and resources required in the formation teachers' networks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON COLOMBIAN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

In many settings, especially in developed countries, becoming a teacher educator at the university level requires from the candidate the fulfillment of very high standards. Some of the basic requirements are to hold a doctoral degree[3] , research and school teaching experience, and publications. In addition to the above, it may be a requirement to speak at least one language in addition to the one used as a means of instruction. Once hired, professors get involved in a never-ending practice of academic production through participation in conferences, article and text writing, and involvement in grant searches. These activities make them active participants in the

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2   When this topic was presented at an international conference on language teacher education, it was the only paper concentrating on the education of foreign language teacher educators. The audience encouraged us to publish it as we seemed to be pioneers in this field of research.

3   Some universities may accept candidates who are ABD (All but Dissertation).

field of teacher education as they "publish or perish." For example of the requirements see Appendix 1.

The situation in Colombia regarding the process of hiring foreign language teacher educators, as in many developing countries, may have some differences. Some job descriptions require candidates almost as well-prepared as the ones in the United States. Three main requirements may be demanded of candidates: an academic degree, research experience, and academic production. Nevertheless, there is not a national consensus on the specificity of each requirement. Some universities seek for any graduate degree, even accepting an *Especialización*[4]. Others demand a Master's degree as the minimum qualification. Certified research experience is demanded in some universities, but it is optional in others. Publications and presentations in conferences seem to be a plus for all universities. Universities require the candidates to have certified proficiency in English or another foreign language, usually French. In the last ten years, universities have shown tendencies to prefer candidates that hold a Doctoral degree. This aims at acquiring new professors who can bring to the programs the research and publications components developed in their doctoral training. The toughness of the criteria seems to be related to factors such as the academic prestige of the university, its state of accreditation, and the role of research in its institutional mission. Standards tend to be higher in public research universities. They are using international criteria in adopting the standards of their programs. (See Appendix 2.)

Although the interest in improving the standards for foreign language teacher education is increasing, Colombian universities face some difficulties in filling the positions available. The situation is quite complex, as universities are currently experiencing a great number of teachers retiring. The qualifications they had when they were hired, the majority in the 1970's, are not the same as those currently demanded. At that time, many professionals with only an undergraduate degree were hired as professors. Research and publications were nonexistent or scarce. An academic growth of universities has occurred since then as the result of individual initiatives to raise

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4 *Especialización* is a graduate degree that may last two or three semesters. It may not include a scholarly paper for completion of its academic requirements.

standards, and through the implementation of institutional and national policies. Commenting on the new profile required of professors in the 21st century, Hernández (2004), a professor at La Universidad del Valle, says,

"La Universidad del Valle has been one of the best in Colombia, but the new circumstances require it to overcome its own past. This means that new professors must be better than those of us who were hired some time ago. They should be young, hold a doctoral degree, be proficient in a second language and display high academic productivity."

The shortage of language teacher educators may be explained by of some of the following issues:

The lack of sufficient graduate programs to prepare candidates at the Master's level: As of 2005, there are only five Master's degree programs available to foreign language teachers in the country. Universities that offer the Master's programs have better chances to prepare their alumni to assume the positions in teacher education programs. They may start as lecturers while completing their course load and thesis, and after graduation, may be hired as teacher educators. However, they may take some time to fulfill the requirements, as they might not be prepared in terms of research experience and publications.

Lack of research experience: The majority of candidates for positions in foreign language teacher education do not possess the adequate research experience. This derives from the still limited presence of research training in the available undergraduate and graduate education. Even for some candidates who have studied abroad to obtain a Masters' degree, the research component is not mandatory. Many programs do not require a thesis or classroom-based research project. They award the diplomas after the course work is done and some exams are taken.

Lack of publications: Publishing is still an activity restricted to a few university researchers. We have only three professional journals in which teachers and students may publish their work in the field of foreign language teaching and learning: ÍKALA, from La Universidad de Antioquia, CALJ (Colombian Applied Linguistics

Journal) from La Universidad Distrital, and PROFILE from La Universidad Nacional. Only ÍKALA is a refereed journal. As a consequence of its high standards it has become the preferred journal for publications from language teacher educators.

Few incentives to be a professor in public universities: Public universities experience serious budgetary cuts that affect the resources assigned to faculty salaries. It seems to be even more evident for research universities, in which the standards are very high and do not correspond to the uninviting salaries.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In order to understand the processes in the professional growth of Colombian foreign language teacher educators, we started by defining the kind of language teacher educators we would consider for our study. We agreed to invite educators who were actively involved in the profession through teaching professional courses in teacher preparation programs such as Methods, Second Language Acquisition, Curriculum Development, or Practicum, had published in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, or were involved in research.

After reviewing the faculty lists of the universities that have foreign language teacher preparation programs, we made an inventory of the possible participants. Using the academic space of two congresses held in Medellín, we sent e-mail messages inviting them to meet with us at the events. Taking advantage of their attendance was a way to get to know outstanding professionals from different cities throughout the country. Eighteen teacher educators from different regions participated in the study, fifteen majoring in English and three in French. Sixteen of them were involved in teacher education programs in public and private universities as professors or as program coordinators. The other two were retired professors working as part-time instructors in teacher education programs.

Table 1 summarizes the main demographic information about the participants.

TABLE 1. Participants' demographic information

Name[5]	Last degree	Current Position	Years of teaching experience
Melisa	M.A.	Professor	19
Dalia	M.A.	Assistant professor	13
Laura	M.A.	Program Coordinator	28
Evaristo	ABD	Spanish teaching assistant	11
Julio	Honorific doctorate	Retired professor	40
Emilio	PhD	Professor, Doctoral Program Coordinator	33
Juan	M.A.	Assistant professor, Language Department Coordinator	13
Ana	PhD	Associate professor, M.A. Program Coordinator	18
Pedro	M.A.	Associate professor, Foreign Language Department Coordinator	18
Marcela	M.A.	Assistant professor, Practicum Advisor	11
Zulma	M.A.	Assistant professor, Practicum Advisor	
Verónica	PhD	Assistant professor, Director of School of Languages	12
Ernesto	*Especialización*	Retired professor, Program director	30
Teresa	M.A.	Practicum Advisor	33
Sara	M.A.	Program Coordinator	20
Eloisa	M.A.	Full-time Professor	34
Vilma	PhD	Practicum Advisor, Research Coordinator	22
Victoria	M.A.	Full-time Professor	24

5   We use fictitious names to protect the participants' identities.

DATA COLLECTION

Participants signed a consent form in which we stated that their participation was voluntary, privacy of their identities would be preserved, confidentiality of the information gathered would be guaranteed, and data would be used and kept only for archival purposes. Data were collected through the use of two focus group sessions (Debus, 1988; Dendinger, 2000), teachers' narratives (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995; Whiterrell & Noddings, 1991, some in-depth interviews (Kvale 1996; Berry 1999), and a questionnaire on demographic and job related information. As the majority of them work in different cities, we also maintained e-mail correspondence to confirm or expand information, as the personal contact with them was limited in time. To clarify and expand some ideas, we had in-depth interviews with some of the participants. Eight key respondents' answers were printed and analyzed using the same routine we used for the focus groups' transcriptions in order to perform the category construction process.

DATA ANALYSIS

The focus groups sessions were audio taped and then transcribed using standard orthography. Researchers had an individual reading to do a first level of coding in which themes and units of meaning were identified. Then, the group of researchers[6] got together to share this individual analysis and perform a second level of coding in which we assigned some labels to the units identified. In the third level of coding, we constructed the categories of professional needs and mechanisms to meet them proposed by the teacher educators. The transcripts were analyzed based on qualitative methods of constant comparison (Straus, 1987). The researchers' interpretations were constantly compared to verbatim (Dendinger, 2000; Debus, 1988). To expand some of the issues addressed in the focus groups, we contacted the participants to explore their testimonies through a semi-structured in-depth interview. The interviews were also transcribed and followed the routine analysis we had for the focus group sessions.

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6   We belong to a research group involved in the study of foreign language and teaching. The group is composed of nine professors (six full-time and three adjuncts) and three undergraduate students.

For validation we used data triangulation as we looked at three different sources of information. Investigator triangulation was also considered, as we included the perspectives of the researchers and two teacher educators who had the double role of being researchers and participants (Freeman, 1998).

FINDINGS

Sokolik (2005) claims that "teachers often use development opportunities as ways merely to increase their salaries or achieve promotions," but this is not exactly the case with teacher educators.

Colombian foreign language teacher educators experience a constant struggle to construct their professional identities through some professional strategies. To enhance their growth, they benefit from the following alternatives:

1. **Teaching Advanced Courses**: Very few participants really mentioned their graduate work as an academic space in which they explicitly acquired certain knowledge or gained experience to work with teachers. Teacher educators said that their search for the quality of the content of the courses they teach may be the main way to keep up-to-date. In undergraduate programs, they usually teach Practicum Seminars or Methods in Foreign Language Teaching. These courses are placed in the professional cycle of the teacher preparation program. Therefore, students tend to be better trained academically, more willing to reflect on their own learning and teaching, and have better language performance. Nevertheless, there seems to be a clear difference between teaching teachers in undergraduate and graduate programs. The majority of teacher educators see graduate courses as the main challenge. In the group of teacher educators, nine have taught and/or are teaching in graduate programs, mainly courses on Research, Second Language Acquisition, or Linguistics (see Table 2). These courses are demanding, as they require greater knowledge, more thorough preparation, as well as the search for better techniques to deliver the content. The courses are seen as "an academic reward," as the teacher educators feel they become professional and even personal role models for the graduate students. They initiate students in research, and may be their mentors or co-authors of papers.

TABLE 2. Type of institution and courses taught

Name	Type of University	Courses Taught in Teacher Preparation Programs
Melisa	State university	Research and Autonomy in undergraduate program
Dalia	State university	Didactics and syllabus design in undergraduate program
Laura	Private religious-oriented university	Pedagogy, Learning in In-service program
Evaristo	State university in the United States	Pedagogy, currently a Spanish TA[7] in the United States
Julio	Private religious-oriented university	Didactics and Literature in undergraduate program
Emilio	State university	EFL Pedagogy, Linguistics
Juan	State university	Reading, Writing, and New Technologies in undergraduate program
Ana	Public city university	Literacy Development in graduate program
Pedro	State university	Didactics, Teacher Professional Development in undergraduate program
Marcela	State university	Methodology, Research, practicum Supervisor in undergraduate program
Zulma	State university	Linguistics, Research, Practicum Supervisor in undergraduate program
Verónica	State university	SLA, Qualitative Research in undergraduate program
Ernesto	Language center in a state university	In-service training
Teresa	State university	Reading and Writing in undergraduate program

7 TA Teaching Assistant

Name	Type of University	Courses Taught in Teacher Preparation Programs
Sara	State university	Learning Styles, Autonomy, and Cooperative Learning in undergraduate program
Eloisa	State university	Pedagogy in FL, New Technologies in undergraduate program
Vilma	State university	Action research, Practicum supervisor in graduate and undergraduate program
Victoria	State university	Didactics and Pedagogy in undergraduate program

When comparing her performance and practice as a teacher educator in a private language center in which she taught English, and in a graduate program in Foreign Language Teaching in a public university, Verónica says,

> *"The planning was different when I taught English and when I taught teachers… I realized it when I started to teach at the state university because… There we had real teachers… My commitment had to be stronger because I realized I had to read more and widen my academic horizons. It was not only teaching English, I had to know about politics, geography, history, literature, music, and fashion. I had to understand the world in a wider perspective."*

Dalia also agrees on the fact that teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in teacher preparation programs are different processes from teaching English for general purposes. Teacher education programs entail not only more demanding content, but also new ways to convey that knowledge as it requires us to become models for teachers. Moreover, she believes that in these programs theory and practice must go together. She states it as,

> *"I have to teach things such as time management in the classroom. I have everything to do with being the role model… The way I get to class, distribute time, and the knowledge I have about time distribution are closely related… When I taught English, my students were not interested in learning how I distributed class time. My students, future teachers or teachers, are really interested in having a model of*

> *how to distribute class time… Definitely, theory and practice are one. I have never believed in any separation between the two. Theory and practice are there. One needs to be aware of that and implement it."*

She also comments that she has "acquired and created knowledge" mainly through her graduate school work and her experience as a teacher supervisor in a private university. Currently, she sees her role as a Practicum Supervisor in a state university as particularly enriching. She says,

> *"My knowledge comes from listening to teachers, observing them directly, promoting reflective practices in institutions such as A, B, C, D, and E, as well as in the undergraduate program at the state university where I currently work. In these institutions, I have taught pre-service courses, supported teachers through clinical observation, and taught graduate courses."*

Freeman (1982) acknowledges the gains of observation routines for the development of language teachers. In the same way, language teacher educators value the contribution of observing peers. Verónica is currently an administrator whose tasks do not allow her the time to teach in the undergraduate teacher preparation program at her university. She claims that she really misses her role as a teacher saying,

> *"The greatest need I have right now is the contact with teaching, because the harder demands from the course content make it possible for me to study new topics and learn something new."*

2. International Conferences: Sokolik (2005) says that teachers may attend only one or two conferences annually because they cannot afford the fees. However, teacher educators see attending or being a presenter in professional conferences in the field of foreign language teaching as a valuable means to learn how to be a better teacher educator. Melisa stresses the importance that events such as the TESOL[8] Convention, the Qualitative Research Conference at the University of Georgia, and the AERA[9] Conference have had in her professional development. She names the following professional meetings as particularly enriching,

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8   Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
9   American Educational Research Association

"Introduction to Teacher Training Seminar," lead by Keith Morrow at Cambridge University in England.

"Research in Education: Methods, Aims and Application" Seminar lead by Wynne Harlen, in Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

Course on "Methods of Qualitative Research" taught by Ruby Vizcarra in the M.A. program at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in Santiago, Chile .

Attendance of lectures given by Carlos Marcelo, from the Universidad de Sevilla, entitled "The Cooperating Teacher as Collaborator in the Preparation of Teachers," at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in Santiago, Chile .

Attendance of a lecture by Prof. Ken Zeichner, from the University of Wisconsin, entitled "Teacher Preparation and the Social Context of Schooling: Main Challenges." Attendance in the workshops "Which One is Our Model of Teacher Education and Professionalization?" and "Our Beliefs and Social and Cultural Representations of Teacher Professionalization and Schooling" at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in Santiago, Chile.

Attendance of the lecture given by Charlotte Danielson, President of the Education Associates in Princeton, Princeton, N.J., entitled "Improving the Professional Practicum: A Framework for Teaching," Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in Santiago, Chile.

Verónica emphasizes that her participation as a presenter at the International Conference on Foreign Language Teacher Education, a biannual event held at the University of Minnesota, provides a very special motivation to learn and to share her experience as a teacher educator and researcher in Colombia. She describes the importance of the conference as,

> "This conference is a wonderful academic space. I have had the opportunity to be in the four sessions since 1997. During this time, the conference themes and the contact with authorities in the field have definitely shaped not only my learning about teacher education, but also my research projects."

Ana expresses her opinion about conferences in terms of the great possibility to socialize knowledge constructed through individual and group research. She states that,

> "In my opinion conferences are a means to share and make visible our research work and the innovations that we have in higher education at an individual or group level. Moreover, conferences are an ideal space for communicating with

peers and establishing strategic networking for strengthening and developing knowledge nationwide."

Laura sees international professional conferences as a way to get to know different views of foreign language teaching and learning. She highlights the benefits of international academic events stating,

"For more than three decades, conferences have allowed me to learn about different trends in foreign language teaching and learning, to have access to a [new] bibliography, to become familiarized with some authors' works, compare approaches, strategies, and techniques. Over all, they have allowed me to take all this information to the classroom, share it with my students and promote among them the desire to study other views and apply them in their professional activity."

3. DOING RESEARCH

Doing research is a vital task in foreign language teacher education programs around the world. However, it is a quite recent endeavor in the academic work of Colombian teacher educators. According to the participants in this study, it is the most important academic activity in order to maintain the standards set by the profession. All of them highlighted it as the bridge between reality and change. Closely related to the research activity we find publications. Until quite recently, universities did not have many research lines in teacher education. The work of the COFE Project in the 1990's, sponsored and led by the British Council and several Colombian universities, set the foundations for subsequent research initiatives and the first publications in the field (Bonilla et al., 1993).

After some time, the project was over and the initial support was gone. It was only through the individuals' actions that research kept going. In the last fifteen years we have seen the growth of research groups interested in the study of the processes of teacher education. Some institutions are involved in joint projects to receive state or institutional funding through COLCIENCIAS.[10]

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10 COLCIENCIAS is the national research foundation for the development of science and technology in Colombia. In the COLCIENCIAS index of research groups, we find seven groups coordinated by Colombian teacher educators. Among them, we have two classified in Category A, two classified as Category C, and three not classified, but yet recognized as meeting the standards of the institution. The groups classified as Category A represent the highest standards and lead the academic production in the field of foreign language teaching.

From the group of participants, the sixteen teacher educators who are still working as full-time professionals are involved in research as part of their academic duties. The two retired professors are not. Out of the sixteen, fourteen are academically active through presentations in conferences and publications. Five of them have written books on foreign language teaching and teacher education (See Table 3).

TABLE 3. Participants' involvement in research groups and publications

Name	Research Group Member	Area of Research	Publications
Melisa	X	Teachers' Autonomy and Assessment	Articles
Dalia	X	Teachers' Autonomy and Assessment	Article
Laura	X	Teacher Education	Articles
Evaristo	-	-	Articles
Julio	-	-	Book
Emilio	X	Literacy and Sociolinguistics	Articles, Books
Juan	X	New Technologies in EFL	Articles
Ana	X	Bilingual Literacy and Teacher Education	Articles, Books
Pedro	-	-	-
Marcela	X	Teacher Education and Action Research	Articles
Zulma	X	Teacher Education and Action Research	Articles
Verónica	X	Teacher Education	Articles
Ernesto	-	-	Articles, Book
Teresa	X	French Teacher Training	Articles
Sara	X	French Teacher Training	Articles
Eloisa	X	French Teacher Training, Action Research	Articles
Vilma	X	Action Research, Teacher Education	Articles, Books
Victoria	X	Action Research and Teaching Children	Articles, Book

Regarding the importance of research in his professional development, Ernesto comments, "One concentrates more on science, on research, rather than on the art of teaching because the focus is not on English. It is on the methodology and the teaching itself."

Verónica states that doing research is a *sine qua non* requirement of teacher education. Through this activity teacher educators renew their learning processes and can debate the popular idea that there might be a unique method to teach or learn a foreign language. Moreover, she acknowledges the common lack of information about research in foreign language teaching. She says,

> *"[Through research] we can persuade language teachers and common people that "the method" does not exist… that there is not a panacea or recipe. One has to convince oneself, the teachers, and the others of the possibility of doing research in the English class… People often do not know that research is possible in language classes, that there is something else beyond teaching some content."*

Teresa and Pedro share a common view of doing research as one way to understand and get to know the social context in which the teacher educators work and may contribute to the improvement of the Colombian educational reality. This understanding of the setting is acquired necessarily by experiential participation in research.

In addition to the need for doing research, Eloisa stresses the importance of not only promoting research among teachers, but also helping them to understand the research process itself. She describes the task of the researcher-teacher educator as,

> *"…Sharing not only his/her knowledge but the experiences he/she has had as researcher or thesis advisor. This helps the future teacher to not only reflect on what he/she may be doing but also to gain awareness of what his/her role model has done and may be useful for him/her."*

Doing research has started to have a stronger and clearer relationship to teaching for these teacher educators. Vilma highlights the influence that teaching the Practicum Seminar had on her initiation in doing research because her limitations and needs

moved her to be involved in classroom action research. She describes the relationship between teaching and doing research as,

> *"I identify and solve practical problems and also, under the logic of the reflective spiral, I can derive principles and construct theory to reinitiate new cycles related to knowledge, science, and the formative processes of my students and myself as a teacher. I understand, change, and create theory, starting and restarting again and again. I make my teaching action a permanent process, different each time. The scientific outlook allows me to make sense of daily experiences, transcend the routines, and make education a project in permanent construction."*

Doing research has an extra reward for Melisa as she sees herself as someone who excels among foreign language teachers. She says she realized that "teachers treat me with respect. Therefore, my self-esteem has improved."

Diaz-Maggioli (2003) expresses the value of action research as it represents an "opportunity for teachers to examine their teaching situations in order to better understand and improve them." We believe this is particularly valuable for teacher educators, as they have to train teachers to develop research practices.

4. Systematic Reflection on Practice: Thinking over their experiences as teachers and learners allows the teacher educators to review critically their roles, challenges, and responsibilities. Their academic preparation contributes to strengthen their professional growth through this systematic exercise. They report learning from their own successes and failures in both roles and becoming better teachers of teachers after confronting their ideal views of teacher education and their experiences.

Reflecting on the way she taught a graduate course on Second Language Acquisition for the first time, Verónica realized that the methodology she used at the time would no longer be suitable these days. She expresses her concern saying,

> *"I remember the first graduate course I taught… I would be very embarrassed if I taught it the same way nowadays. At that time I practically repeated everything I had studied in my doctoral program. I felt my students had to learn it in the same*

exact way I did it… Right now, I see teaching a graduate course as a huge responsibility. Everything I do in class requires deeper thinking… I cannot simply copy something from another context."

Verónica also acknowledges that in her search for better standards in her performance as a teacher educator, she reflects on the good and the bad experiences she has had as a learner. She says that she tries to imitate what her good professors did.

Melisa comments on her graduate school experience as a process in which she did not have any training focused on helping her become a teacher educator. She says, *"I had no special preparation. I just observed what my professors did." Her reflection process began when she started teaching in a foreign language teacher preparation program. She says that in the Practicum Seminar she could really put into practice what she had learned in her graduate program and in different seminars. She engaged in a constant reflection cycle with a colleague who became her critical friend. Together they developed a way of teaching that motivated other teachers, "…reflecting on our daily practice and learning from each other."*

Vilma reports that her schooling experience had an influence on the way she teaches teachers. Her reflections have played an important role in her growth. She says,

"Since I was a little girl, I was training myself in the work of directing and advising teachers. My school teachers' attitudes influenced my desire to educate teachers one day. This chain continued up to my doctoral studies."

Juan also stresses the fact that his professional development and the creation of knowledge in the work with EFL teachers comes mainly from his personal reflections. He states it as follows: "I have done this work empirically, only taking into account my experience as a teacher and as a foreign language learner."

5. Independent Study: As a consequence of the teacher educators' limited training in research, many decide to work independently in order to fulfill these professional needs. One of the main ways to attain the skills required to contribute to the professional development of teachers in pre-service, in-service, and graduate studies

is to seek independent study opportunities for individual or small groups. Most of the themes, designs, and methodologies in research, as well as some of the knowledge acquired, come from their own independent inquiries and studies. Diaz-Maggioli (2003, a) presents some benefits of study groups for foreign language teachers. The same applies to teacher educators. He says,

> "*These meetings provide opportunities for them to interact in the language they are teaching. Study groups are suitable for teachers who need a better understanding of research and knowledge in the field or of ways to analyze their students' work and for those who need to develop a more reflective stance toward their teaching or students' learning.*"

Melisa says that her process has occurred through,

> "*...Reading articles related to teacher education and Practicum supervision, especially doing research on my own practice; facilitating action research with other teachers…. And advising the research group that studies the development of autonomy among Practicum cooperating teachers.*"

Verónica has also developed some individual strategies to compensate for the knowledge she feels that she did not attain in her doctoral training. She states her learning experience as follows:

> "*I have tried to educate myself by reading books about group dynamics for working with teachers; I have read about and put into practice some techniques for interviews and information management in the research projects… I have learned how to publish in a very slow way, going from the least demanding to the most demanding journals. I have put some effort into analyzing various journals to decide to which one I could submit an article for publication, mainly at an international level, where we haven't published anything yet.*"

6. Networking: Although this resource is the most sought for by teacher educators in Colombia, it seems to be the most underdeveloped strategy. Networking requires the cooperation of groups of teacher educators and groups of institutions to succeed. This collective endeavour demands much more effort than the previous alternatives which may be developed individually. It is only very recently that some networking has begun to take place in our country. The efforts are still incipient and are more

centered on individual proposals rather than on interinstitutional plans. González (2005) states that Colombian language teacher educators have experienced a tremendous growth in networking in the last ten years. This growth has occurred in research, teaching, and publishing. There is an emerging community of academic peers that are reviewers and co-researchers in studies carried out interinstitutionally. More and more Colombian teacher educators participate as instructors in graduate programs across the country, many as visiting professors. We found that three Colombian teacher educators belong to the editorial committees of the Colombian professional journals specialized in foreign language teaching and applied linguistics. Nevertheless, there is a great need to strengthen the network in areas such as curriculum design for teacher education, practicum supervision, and accreditation.

In addition to these needs, a Colombian network for foreign language teacher educators would be an excellent way to change our traditional viewpoints of teacher education. Our cooperative work requires concentrating on changing the gears towards the new perspectives proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2005). He claims that teacher education agendas should transform the following issues:

a. Post-transmission perspective
b. Post-method perspective
c. Post-colonial perspective
d. Post-national perspective

A second benefit of having foreign language teacher educators working together in Colombia would be an opportunity to reflect on and take a stand to face the challenging priorities for teacher education programs. Kumaravadivelu (op. cit.) proposes to design teacher education programs in which student teachers focus:

"More on personal knowledge than on received wisdom.
More on production of knowledge than on application of knowledge.
More on acceleration of agency than on acceptance of authority.
More on teacher research with local touch than on expert research with global reach.
More on becoming transformative intellectuals than on being passive technicians.
More on mastering the teaching model than on modeling the master teacher."

Verónica highlights the importance of having international networking as a way to find a balance between the Colombian local reality and the international standards in the profession. The contact with peers from other countries also means learning to obtain academic space in conferences and publications within the international professional community. She says that the Conference on Foreign Language Teacher Education serves this purpose for her. She verbalizes this opportunity stating,

> *"I must confess that I have developed better research skills and gained more confidence through these years. The quality of my research has changed as a result of the contact with people in the conference. Some international figures in the field have taken the time to help me through e-mail. I really take advantage of their input."*

Ana reports her need to have more and better networking to carry out her teacher education job in a more efficient and professional way. She sees networking as the main weakness in her current job. She says,

> *"Networking in our field is extremely important for me as a researcher, because it is a way to show the outcomes of studies in publications, to get more ideas for research, and to create alliances to write proposals for grants."*

Victoria considers also that one of the greatest professional needs in her job as a teacher educator is "to belong to networks in which teachers work on the same areas to share difficulties and achievements."

Juan, a teacher educator with almost no experience of research in the field, considers that a national conference on foreign language teacher education must generate the construction of networks. He says,

> *"A strong network [must be built] that gathers together both the experts in the field, and those, included myself, who are willing to improve and widen their research and scientific experience. In other words, we need to make our everyday job a space for scientific reflection."*

CONCLUSIONS

After finishing their professional preparation in graduate school, Colombian foreign language teacher educators rely on teaching, doing research, reflecting on their practice, and attending national and international conferences in order to face the challenges of the education of teachers. Most of these actions come from the teachers' individual efforts, and sometimes, from personal financial investment. A new paradigm requires from them the capacity and commitment to be involved in networks of professional growth.

This aim is a constant struggle, as we have more and more financial restrictions in education that relegate the development of foreign language teachers to a lesser level. There is a strong need to have clear national policies to promote better standards for the profession, as well as some initiatives to support the growth of teacher educators through the creation of a professional community of language teacher educators in Colombia. Moreover, teacher educators should have more time and resources allocated to work collaboratively and collegially in projects that involve more than one institution.

Finally, teacher educators need to take a stand in national political actions to be part of the decision-making process in the defense of their right to participate in the construction of in-service agendas sponsored by the Colombian educational system. We are still exposed to models of training and education in which our local reality and knowledge is displaced by a colonial academic perspective imposed by the view of native speakers as the source of knowledge and expertise. More research on how this takes place and how we can overcome this conception is required from Colombian foreign language teacher educators themselves.

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Appendix 1

Job opening at the University of Alabama, published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on 5/5/2004:

RESPONSIBILITIES: Teach graduate courses in English as a Second Language and undergraduate and graduate courses in a related Secondary or Elementary subject; supervise interns and practica; advise graduate and undergraduate students; conduct and publish independent research; develop proposals for extramural funding; develop and coordinate an ESL program to certify teachers. The Department of Curriculum and Teaching is a supportive and collaborative academic environment. QUALIFICATIONS: REQUIRED-Earned doctorate in ESL or a strong ESL background with a doctorate in a related field; at least three years of successful teaching experience in U.S. schools; potential to conduct research and publish, and to direct graduate research. PREFERRED-Successful experience working with linguistically heterogeneous K-12 students; computer and technology skills; success in procuring contracts and grants. RANK AND SALARY: Assistant Professor (tenure track) at a salary commensurate with experience and other qualifications. Nine-month contract. APPLICATION PROCESS: Send letter of application, resume, official undergraduate and graduate transcripts, and three letters of recommendation to address below. Screening will begin on June 1, 2005 and will continue until the position is filled.

Dr. Edna Brabham,
Chair, English as a Second Language Search Committee
Curriculum and Teaching
Auburn University, AL 36849-5040 Haley Center.

Appendix 2

Job description for a teaching position at la Universidad del Valle in Colombia:

Number of positions available: 1 full-time professor
Academic Unit: School of Literary Studies
Area of Classical Literatures
Academic Profile: Undergraduate and M.A. degree in Literature, doctoral degree preferred.
Professional Profile: Two years of full-time teaching experience at the university level, research experience, publications in the field.
Job description: Research, teaching, and extension activities in the field.
Further information: Tel (57) (2) 321-21 90 – 333-4909