

Designing a Holistic Professional Development Program for Elementary School English Teachers in Colombia*

Diseño de un programa holístico de desarrollo profesional para docentes de inglés de primaria en Colombia

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The design and implementation of a holistic professional development program for elementary school English teachers in Colombia concerns target language improvement and pedagogical reflection. School-based and learner-centered, the program is characteristic of a synthetic, progressive, process-oriented curriculum as teachers' language and pedagogical needs determined the learning and pedagogical activities for the program. The teachers improved their use of conventional English and became aware of an alternative approach for early foreign language instruction. They reported increased confidence using English and implementing new methodological strategies by getting positive feedback from their learners. Positive changes in teachers' and students' attitudes towards English suggest that this holistic approach be used as a viable professional development program for elementary school teachers in Colombia.

Key words: EFL teacher professional development, elementary school EFL teachers, program design, target language development, pedagogical reflection

El diseño y la implementación de un programa holístico de desarrollo profesional para profesores de inglés de la básica primaria en Colombia está dirigido hacia el mejoramiento de la lengua extranjera y la reflexión pedagógica. El programa, situado en el contexto escolar y centrado en el docente como aprendiz, se caracteriza por ser sintético, progresivo y orientado hacia procesos debido a que las necesidades lingüísticas y pedagógicas de los profesores determinaron las actividades pedagógicas y de aprendizaje del programa. Los profesores mejoraron el uso del inglés convencional y adquirieron conciencia de un enfoque alternativo para la instrucción temprana en lengua extranjera. Informaron un aumento en su confianza para utilizar el inglés y para implementar nuevas estrategias metodológicas al recibir realimentación positiva de sus estudiantes. Los cambios positivos observados en las actitudes

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de los profesores y estudiantes hacia el inglés indican que este enfoque holístico puede constituirse en un programa de desarrollo profesional para profesores de básica primaria en Colombia.

Palabras Clave: Desarrollo profesional de profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, profesores de inglés de la básica primaria, diseño de programas, desarrollo de la lengua extranjera, reflexión pedagógica

Introduction

More than ten years ago, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) started to be introduced in the curriculum of public elementary schools in Colombia resulting from the Ley General de Educación, (General Education Act), 1994. To date, the Colombian government has undertaken numerous initiatives to support these teachers such as designing and promoting curricular guidelines for foreign language instruction at the secondary school level, providing teacher education programs and professional development courses focused on early foreign language instruction, and giving computer-based resources to schools, among others. Despite these governmental initiatives directed towards helping primary schools and teachers, local research studies have shown that primary school English teachers and their learners continue to face difficulties with this educational endeavour.

Cárdenas (2001) reports a lack of planning and standards in the implementation of EFL programs at the regional and national level. In a study to determine the needs of EFL teachers in Medellín, González, Montoya & Sierra (2001) cite teachers' needs related to inadequate levels of proficiency in English and knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogical strategies. These issues were also highlighted in a study (Cadavid, McNulty & Quinchia, 2004) that explored the methodological strategies used

by public elementary school teachers in Medellín. Teachers had limited or unrelated educational preparation, insufficient training and target language preparation. A major finding of this study was the need for the teachers' target language development and pedagogical enhancement related to theme-based instruction. Berry (1990) points out that effective in-service programs for teachers can integrate language improvement with a methodological component.

Vélez-White (2005), the Colombian Minister of Education, presents findings of a diagnostic study to determine the level of communicative competence of English school teachers in six regions of Colombia. Results indicate that a high percentage of teachers are at a basic level of proficiency in English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This led Vélez-White to conclude that both primary and secondary school teachers are in need of programs to improve their proficiency in English and their methodology. The fact that teachers may be required to teach a foreign language before they have acquired the language skills to do so has also been recognized by Murphey (2003, p. 1) in the Asian context. This author believes that "we need to develop methods and materials to acknowledge the situation of these teachers and to support and encourage them to grow more professionally through their own learning and teaching of English".

Taking into consideration the reality of EFL teachers in our context, our curriculum development effort focused on the implementation of a holistic professional development program with a group of public elementary English teachers in Medellín. This initiative explored the possibility of integrating strategies directed towards improving the teachers' target language and reflective practice based on principles of theme-based instruction as part of an action research study. Curriculum development would be contextualized, progressive, and process-oriented in nature while focusing on learning and pedagogical activities (Nunan, 1994; Rabbini, 2002) to support the integration of the target language component with the pedagogical. We aimed towards a shift in program delivery from a "campus-based-lecture-tutorial mode to a problem-based-learning-within-a-school-site" mode of program delivery (Cambourne, Kiggins & Ferry, 2003, p. 35). We believed that this program model would enable university researchers to respond to the needs of the elementary school teachers and adopt the role of co-learners who facilitate and participate in the shared learning and construction of knowledge for that community.

Our paper is organized as follows: first, the background of the professional development program, and a description of the teachers; second, a description of the methodology of the program and its implementation; third, reflections on teachers' language and pedagogical development; fourth, theoretical considerations from the perspective of curriculum design; and fifth, our final reflections.

1. Background of Our Professional Development Program

Our program has been part of an on-going larger professional developmental effort directed towards giving public elementary and secondary school English teachers courses focused on target language development, methodology, and evaluation, in Medellín. The proposal for our program was initially written by us and two colleagues. It was included in a participatory action research project that was submitted to the University of Antioquia funding board –CODI– and the School of Languages for funding in 2005. Our director of the School of Languages presented the professional development proposal to the Secretary of Education, Itagui, a locality of Medellín, for additional financial support. As a condition of approval, the Secretary of Education requested that we submit an outline of our course with general objectives, content, methodology, and evaluation which was prior to meeting our teachers. To guide this draft of our program design, we relied on findings from our previous study in which we compiled a profile of public elementary school English teachers and determined the methodological strategies they used in their classes and the principles that guided their actions. Our program duration was ninety hours: eighty hours of face-to-face work and ten hours of independent work. We considered that we could meet with the teachers twice a week for three-hour sessions over a five-month period at a school in Itagui. Based on our work schedules at university, we contemplated holding the sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 3:00 to 6:00

p.m. We also knew that most of the teachers worked in the morning timetable at their schools. Each session was facilitated by one of us, along with one of two other colleagues and the support of our student researchers.

The first presentation of our professional development program to teachers from many public elementary schools was held at the Educational Institution Pedro Estrada in Itagui, in February of 2006. At that meeting, teachers were informed of the general objectives of this initiative, and that their participation in our program would give them a number of credits which they could use to increase their salary scale. We invited interested teachers to volunteer and sign a research consent form which would allow us to collect data from them and the classes.

1.1 Background of Our Elementary School Teachers

The teachers who participated in this program are all elementary teachers. Although twenty-one teachers registered for the program, sixteen from 9 schools began (two men and fourteen women), but due to personal reasons, only thirteen finished the course. At the beginning of our course, we asked participants to complete a questionnaire that explored their personal and educational information, and some aspects related to their experiences teaching English as well as the resources available at their institutions. Their ages range from thirty to fifty years. Most of them are full-time teachers; just one holds a part-time job. Two of them have been teaching for thirty years while the others have between 10 to 14 years of teaching experience. Most teachers have been teaching English from 1 to 4 years

at their schools. The majority of the teachers are “normalistas” as they completed their secondary education in “Escuelas normales”¹. They also hold a Bachelor of Education degree in different fields such as Spanish and literature, pedagogy, psychology, history and geography, preschool and elementary education, social sciences and ethics. Many of the teachers have undertaken postgraduate programs in different areas. Most teachers have taken English courses and just two of them completed methodology courses to teach English. At their schools, they teach English in preschool and grades 2, 3, 4, and 5, for 1 to 2 hours a week. Their average class size is 30 to 49 students. The teachers primarily use English to teach greetings and vocabulary, and do activities such as games, singing songs, repetition exercises, and reading and copying words and phrases. Their personal interests include syllabus and materials design and EFL methodology, specifically reading and writing.

2. Description of Course Methodology and Its Implementation

In our first class with the teachers, we, the university researchers and research students, shared professional information about ourselves, findings from our previous research, our vision of this professional development program, and general logistics. Teachers shared personal and professional information about themselves as well. This was very important for us to get to know each other and understand that this project

¹ Secondary high school training for teachers in Colombia.

would begin with a mutual understanding of their teaching and learning contexts and perceived needs as primary school English teachers. Once the teachers heard about other EFL teachers' needs, all of them identified themselves with the teachers in our previous study and expressed their enthusiasm to continue with this professional development program. They believed that our in-service development program could help them to improve their English and widen their methodological strategies. Teachers were advised that they would receive a certificate from the Secretary of Education and two credits upon completion of this program. Teachers agreed to meet as a group in two weekly sessions for five months. We told them that each three-hour session, divided into two equal parts, would be focused on language development through themes and then on their pedagogical practice and theory, but that these two aspects would be inevitably connected. We also informed them that during the sessions we would write some reflections and that the student researchers would mainly observe and take notes. The teachers also agreed to write a weekly journal in Spanish and/or English based on their experience in our sessions and subsequent work in their classes at school. Teachers were informed that their journal entries would be guided by questions at times, and that they would share what they wrote with us and their peers. During the five months, we, university researchers, met with our student researchers at the university after each session to evaluate our experience with the teachers, plan upcoming sessions, design materials, and discuss theory.

It was clear to us that we would have to adapt our original proposal once we had a

better understanding of the teachers' ability to use English and information about their teaching and learning contexts. In the first session, we designed and administered a diagnostic language instrument that consisted of the following four components: listening to a fable under the format of Reader's Theater and completing two charts – one about general and specific information and the other about what the characters said; reading a short text of a teacher's description about her experience with her first graders and answering comprehension questions; writing a short description about a poster of people at a picnic based on prompts; and speaking about personal information based on prompts in a handout. Their speech production was recorded. This diagnostic tool enabled us to check the teachers' skills in English, and to determine that most teachers appeared to be at a low- to-middle-beginner level of proficiency. We found that most of the teachers were able to communicate their ideas at a word and phrase level, while only a few could communicate using short, simple sentences. From our discussion with the teachers and with this information, we began to revise our proposal and plan our first sessions.

Concerning English, we thought of topics which could be introduced at a beginner-level. The topics were usually formulated in personal questions such as What's my name?, What's my nickname?, How old am I?, What are important numbers in my life?, Who is my family?, Are our families different? How?, What do I look like?, What am I like?, Who am I like in my family? How?, What are my daily routines?, What is my favourite day of the week?, What do I do every day?, What are some daily routines around the world?, What

are my likes and dislikes? What food do I like? Dislike?, What are my abilities?, etc. In addition, we had teachers explore different story genres such as fantasy and science fiction. A few topics related to the vocabulary that teachers presented to their learners in their schools.

A variety of activities were carried out with the teachers to develop their four language skills further and explore these topics. The following activities were identified as appropriate for young learners: drawing pictures to describe one's names; reading and writing rhymes and poetry; describing family pictures; singing songs, making big books; engaging in reader's theater, doing information-gap activities; doing role-plays; reading and writing stories of different genres such as science fiction, fantasy and horror; playing game-like activities, puzzles, and board games, etc. The materials we used were authentic; for example, children's literature books, and big books, board games, labeled pictures, and props for role- playing fables, made by us and the teachers. During these sessions, the teachers had an opportunity to interact with their peers and us, and actively use English to communicate meaningful information. We adopted seven conditions of learning that emphasize language immersion, real language use, demonstration, and language approximation, among others, as guiding principles for our implementation of the activities with the teachers (in Cambourne et al., 2002).

As we started developing the teachers' language skills, we began to look more closely at who they were as teachers and their social contexts of teaching. We focused on their pedagogical practice and encouraged

the teachers to reflect on the experiences they were having as English learners in our sessions. Teachers first wrote entries in their journals describing themselves as people and professionals. After that, we asked them to complete charts with information about their English curriculum at the school, grade syllabus including content, activities, evaluation, resources, and learners. Teachers usually shared this information in small groups according to their grades as a preparation for plenary session discussions. With this work, teachers were able to identify why and how English was being taught to young learners in their contexts, describe their young learners, and see samples of syllabi with different aims, etc. In another activity, we asked teachers to think of one of their learners and reflect on his/her characteristics and necessary conditions for learning English. With this activity, teachers were introduced to the concept of learner needs analysis as a strategy for planning, implementing, and evaluating their instruction. Over numerous sessions, we continued exploring similarities and differences as to how they were teaching English as a foreign language in their classrooms. Once teachers had discussed and reflected on their own social contexts of teaching and on their learners, we linked this information to the curricular guidelines proposed by the Colombian Ministry of Education, and theory. At this point, the theory considered what influences what and how foreign language teachers teach, and children's reading and writing processes across different ages and grade levels as well as possible teacher actions in the classroom. To introduce theory and key concepts, we used practical, exploratory activities with the teachers.

After teachers had participated in a variety of activities as learners of English, we usually asked them to reflect on their language development in their journals. We also encouraged teachers to tell us whether they had used any of the activities in their classrooms. It was important for all of us to share these experiences. This was motivating for the group as teachers could evidence their colleagues' work. In fact, we believed that the teachers' voices and direct teaching practice should be taken as the starting point for reflection on methodological change. After this, we directed them to reflect on the possibilities of adapting and implementing some of the activities with their learners. This generated a lot of enthusiasm, group discussion, and questions as to how the activities could be implemented in their classrooms. Teachers started to implement a number of the activities such as the alphabet picture name game, reading and writing poetry, the reader's theater, etc., and discussed how their learners reacted to these. It seemed that the teachers felt encouraged to take risks with the new methodological strategies and enjoyed learning from each other's experience.

After a period of time, we thought that we could begin to introduce some theory about reading and writing in children, and link the development of these skills to the concept of thematic cycles as an alternative methodology for them. In fact, the teachers had raised various questions over a number of sessions related to this. One of the researchers shared her past experience with practicum students who had taught English in a primary school through a spiral thematic curriculum in a session. This gave our teachers a practical, realistic example of a curriculum

which integrated themes and language over different grade levels in our context. During our sessions, we brought more activities to develop the teachers' reading and writing connected to themes and this gave them ideas as to how to develop these skills with their learners. After this, we gave the teachers some theory. For example, teachers read a few short articles in Spanish to illustrate reading and writing processes. Two of the articles were the following: *La escritura en primera y segunda lengua: un proceso, dos idiomas* (Clavijo & Torres, 1999) and *Ciclos temáticos: una alternativa para el desarrollo de la lecto-escritura bilingüe* (Salmon, 1999). Teachers began to have a deeper understanding of key concepts related to student-centered learning, thematic cycles, cooperative learning, real language use in reading and writing, and pedagogical implications, and reflected on these in their practice.

Teachers requested additional material which they could use with their learners in their schools. They were specially interested in how they explore English with the computer and develop reading and writing skills. Therefore, a few sessions were organized with them in the language lab at the school. There they explored reading and writing, for example, with short stories having a language model through an interesting ESL/EFL children's web site. Teachers were also provided with a list of other sites they could use, given information about them, and had the opportunity to browse through them.

Towards the end of the program, we began to look again at the teachers' syllabuses and have them work in groups according to their grade levels and adapt these based on their practical experience in our program and their pedagogical knowledge. Teachers

were able to draw diagrams with a few topics they could include in their courses, activities with which to explore the topics and develop language skills, and a few strategies for evaluation. These teachers began to reflect on how to reshape their syllabuses and future teaching and learning practices. In order to reflect on the teachers' progress in language and change in their practice, we gathered teachers' work from the language activities, their journal reflections and ours, their answers to a self-assessment questionnaire, and a group conference that was held at the end of the program. In addition, teachers were given the same diagnostic test as an additional measure of their language improvement.

3. Reflections on Teachers' Language and Pedagogical Development

We are currently in the process of reading through the data from their final diagnostic test in order to compare the results of the initial and final tests. In addition, we are reviewing the teachers' class work, journal entries, and responses to the self-assessment questionnaire. The final group conference with the teachers to evaluate the program has been transcribed and a preliminary analysis has been done.

It seems that most teachers showed improvement in speaking and writing on the final test and during the activities in the sessions. Teachers were able to use the language in a more conventional way to give personal information and express their ideas. While in the initial diagnostic test they were using words and short phrases to

communicate, at the end of the program they were able to use sentences and longer pieces of discourse. We also noticed that many teachers used more vocabulary and accurate structures.

The teachers' responses to the self-assessment questionnaire show that they have reflected on their processes as language learners and teachers. As language learners, teachers began to reflect on their language proficiency level and recognized that they need to continue with their language development so that they will be able to go beyond the word level and use the language to express their ideas in their classrooms. They believe that they need to be exposed to English more often and to be able to use and monitor the language previously learned. Throughout the course, teachers reported that despite their level of proficiency with English, they felt confident taking risks, making mistakes, and correcting themselves. They understood that they were in a process of improving their English by using it creatively and making approximations towards more conventional language (Cambourne et al., 2002).

As language teachers, they also took risks to implement the methodological strategies they had experienced in this program in order to improve their learners' use of English. A number of teachers reported that their learners liked the activities and materials they had brought to class and that their learners were more motivated to study English. Also, the teachers pointed out that they are more tolerant and understanding of their learners' mistakes when trying to use English in class activities. The impact of this program was not only seen in their classrooms. One teacher reported that she

had shared her experience and materials in our program with another teacher at her school, and that this teacher also reported positive changes in her students' attitudes and work in the English class.

All teachers shared an interest in continuing to work with this type of professional development program because it enabled them to improve their English and apply new methodological strategies in their teaching and learning contexts. Teachers believed that this holistic approach was quite different from the traditional training experiences as their individual differences and interests were acknowledged. All of us believed that the group was very cohesive and that we were able to learn from each other in a supportive environment. We considered that these teachers had taken responsibility for their own learning in this knowledge-building community model of professional development (Cambourne et al., 2002).

Also, teachers reported that they valued the practical nature of this course from two perspectives: First, they were able to experience the activities and see their own language improvement; and second, they could apply what they learned in these sessions and see their learners respond positively to learning English. Teachers recognized that they could integrate English with other areas. Overall, this professional development experience enhanced teachers' confidence to continue developing their language and exploring how they can move towards a more theme-based approach.

4. Theoretical Considerations

In this section, we related our experience by designing a holistic program to the

theoretical concepts of learner-centered curriculum, negotiation in curriculum development, and synthetic curriculum design, in order to connect practice and theory.

4.1 Learner-Centered Curriculum

Designing this professional development program based on our educational reality supports (Nunan et al. 1994, p. 1) conceptualization of curriculum as that of "what teachers actually do" related to planning, implementing and evaluating. Our curriculum development was a localized or 'school-based' plan of study for a group of teachers. Although our initial proposal could be associated with that of the traditional model (Taba, 1962, cited in Nunan, 1994), as our general objectives and methodology were predetermined before having contact with the teachers, we believe that it was much more learner-centered as our prior decision-making was not binding in terms of content selection, grading, specific activities, and materials (Nunan, 1994). In fact, our program was reshaped from the initial stage to its end based on information from the teachers' language development, subjective needs, and pedagogical needs as they experienced the learning activities and pedagogical reflection tasks. We consider that our program was an example of a progressive, process-oriented curriculum having a focus on the learning and pedagogical activities and not a product (Nunan, 1994; Rabbini, 2002). In addition, the evaluation of our program was carried out parallel to other curriculum activities in an ongoing process, whereas traditionally, it occurs at the end of a course (Shaw & Dowsett 1986, cited in Nunan, 1994). Throughout our

teaching and learning processes, we and the teachers informally monitored our process in journal reflections and shared this in class discussions and research meetings.

4.2 Negotiation in Curriculum Development

At the beginning of our program, having the teachers complete the questionnaire enabled us to get some biographical data and subjective information related to their proficiency level and interests, etc. as EFL teachers. Richards (1984, p. 5, cited in Nunan, 1994) suggests that “needs analysis is a means of obtaining wider input into the content, design and implementation of a language program”. At that point, we realized that a few of these interests related to EFL methodology were part of our course proposal and, later on, we understood that these had contributed towards teachers’ personal investment throughout the learning process. Through group discussions, we also negotiated a few general parameters for this course related to the number of contact hours per week and the duration (concerning school holidays), homework, and whether the language component or the pedagogical component should be presented first in the sessions (Nunan, 1994). During the course, teachers’ needs related to how to teach English in the language lab, how to find computer materials to teach reading and writing, and how to modify their syllabuses to become more theme-based, were taken into account and a number of sessions focused on these aspects. This negotiation enabled us to attend to the teachers’ needs and build an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, sharing and co-operation (Linder,

2000, cited in Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Another factor related to negotiation and autonomy for making decisions was having the teachers group themselves during the language development activities, although we encouraged them to change partners as much as possible.

4.3 Synthetic Curriculum Design

This professional development program is more characteristic of the synthetic approach to curriculum design process than the analytic one. We did not begin designing our course with specific language performance objectives (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, cited in Nunan, 1994). Our program was not based on a subject-centered approach to language course design where a linguistic content analysis (Nunan, 1994) leads to specific stated objectives concerning the teachers’ language development or skills to be developed. Rather, we worked within a broad competency view of language proficiency which Stern (1992) recommends for beginners in the early stages of learning languages. We viewed the teachers’ language proficiency in terms of a progression of stages on a continuum from beginners to intermediate to advanced (Stern, 1992).

To derive content (selecting and grading) for the language development component, we included two perspectives. Initially, we relied on the teacher profile from our previous research, which we considered as a realistic recurring teacher-type (Nunan, 1994); but also, we viewed teacher data to be important from this group as these teachers are unique, having varied interests and needs. With this in mind, we considered why the teachers were attending our program and

their teachers' goals were checked against the general objectives in our proposal. The goals identified for our program were the following: cognitive goals -relating to explicit pedagogical and conceptual knowledge; communicative competence- development of the skills and linguistic knowledge; affective goals- related to how the teachers feel about their foreign language learning experience; and transfer goals- where the teachers could implement some activities they had experienced as language learners with us and in their classrooms with their learners (Stern, 1992).

Whereas Nunan (1994) proposes that specifying the communicative tasks and language skills comes before contextualizing them in topics, our process was slightly different. We seemed to reflect on the teachers' goals, topics that are common for beginners and those which could relate to their English course syllabi in their schools, and our knowledge of and experience with EFL methodology for young learners. Considering their goals, we were able to design a more integrated framework with appropriate topics, materials and activities (Nunan, 1994).

The organization of the topics followed a cyclical format rather than a linear one (Nunan, 1994), and that gave us the opportunity to integrate topics and recycle language and content. In a cyclical syllabus, topics can be reintroduced at different times, in progressive levels of difficulty (Dubin & Olshtain, 1996). In our program, teachers had multiple opportunities to experience the topics during the following three thematic cycles which were developed: Thematic cycle 1: 'Who I am', which included basic personal information related to the teachers

and their families; Thematic cycle 2: 'We are alike, we are different', which recycled topics in the previous cycle and introduced differences among the teachers related to physical descriptions, personality, daily life, personal interests, etc.; and, Thematic cycle 3: 'The good old days', which reintroduced topics and included childhood memories, etc. In terms of grading the content, while we planned and implemented our sessions, we asked ourselves questions which reshaped our original proposal, to wit, What motivates our teachers? How confident are they with their English? How do they feel about themselves as language teachers? Do they have familiarity with our activities? Do they have the necessary skills for the activities? What linguistic knowledge do they need? Are we moving too quickly or too slowly? Are they finding the language tasks too easy or difficult? Are these activities relevant for their learners? Are they able to process language for the tasks? How much time will it take them to work on these activities? How much help will they need?, etc. (Nunan, 1994). These questions guided our actions and shaped the direction of our program. We extended some topics and gave teachers more experience with some activities and the chance to work with different materials.

As evaluation is part of progressive curriculum development, we have begun to evaluate this program by gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. With respect to the qualitative data, we are using the thematic or conceptual framework proposed by Lynch (1992). As we read through the data, for example, from the teachers' journal entries and their responses to the self-assessment form, we are identifying recurring themes and concepts.

Concerning the quantitative data from a few sections of the diagnostic tool, we are reporting performance from a before and after perspective. Having these two types of data will hopefully enrich our final reflections on the effectiveness of this program.

5. Final Reflection

We believe that we have begun a journey developing ourselves as teacher curriculum developers. Having designed and implemented this course was an enriching and rewarding experience. This course was first based on the specific needs of some teachers who had participated in our previous research, and became relevant for other teachers having the same or similar needs. According to Dubin & Olshtain (1996), the beliefs of all those involved and concerned with a program need to be addressed.

Narrating our process of planning, developing and evaluating this course has given us not only a sense of accomplishment, but also the idea that there is still a lot to be done. Sharing this work with others has helped us to believe in the work we are doing. We are grateful for the ongoing insights of the participant teachers and their constant feedback in this process. In our experience, collaborating with the teachers required not only curriculum, language and pedagogical considerations, but also administrative, organizational, and curriculum-support (Nunan, 1994). As the teachers showed their satisfaction, they also expressed that there was an urgent need of continuing with this course. We believe that these teachers are willing, enthusiastic, and committed to continue working against all odds to improve EFL teaching and learning

in their contexts. We think that professional development is an ongoing and lifelong process, and that it goes hand-in-hand with personal growth. Educational policies and administrative support sensitive to EFL teachers' realities and needs can help create the conditions for future professional development efforts and research inquiry in this field.

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