Teachers' Attitudes towards Reflective Teaching: Evidences in a Professional Development Program (PDP)

Actitudes de los profesores hacia la enseñanza reflexiva: evidencias en un programa de desarrollo profesional (PDP)

Sonia Jerez Rodríguez[*]

Universidad de Córdoba, Montería - Colombia

Reflective teaching is a paradigm that dominates teacher education around the world and most professional development programs include it as a way to improve teachers' practice. As a teacher educator I am aware of the importance reflective teaching (RT) has on teachers' professional development. This article reports a research experience with two in-service teachers of English enrolled in a professional development program at a public university in Bogotá who initiated a reflective teaching process through the development of reflective thinking skills. Data were gathered through interviews, observation, videotaping, questionnaires and a diary. Findings showed some teachers' attitudes towards RT, the possible factors that might have stimulated and lessened reflection, and some of the changes observed in their teaching practice.

Key words: Reflective teaching, reflective thinking skills, professional development program, teaching practice

La enseñanza reflexiva es un paradigma que domina la educación de docentes en el mundo y la mayoría de programas de desarrollo profesional (PDP) la incluyen como una manera de mejorar la práctica de los docentes. Como docente educadora, soy consciente de su importancia en el desarrollo profesional. Este artículo describe una experiencia investigativa con dos profesores de inglés participantes en un PDP en una universidad pública en Bogotá, quienes iniciaron un proceso de reflexión sobre su práctica docente mediante el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento reflexivo. Los datos se recolectaron mediante entrevistas, observación, video grabación, cuestionarios y un diario. Los resultados mostraron algunas actitudes de los docentes hacia la enseñanza reflexiva, los posibles factores que pudieron estimular e inhibir la reflexión y algunos cambios en su práctica docente.

Palabras claves: Enseñanza reflexiva, habilidades de pensamiento reflexivo, programa de desarrollo profesional, práctica docente

[*] E-mail: sonijerez@yahoo.com

Address: Universidad de Córdoba. Facultad de Educación. Departamento Idiomas Extranjeros. Montería, Colombia.

Introduction

A significant element of improving teaching in our country is being a reflective practitioner of one's own teaching. This implies, as Wallace (1991) states, that reflection upon teaching practice will probably lead teachers to understand the pragmatics of classroom instruction and this will promote teachers' self-reflexive awareness of their assumptions about language instruction and willingness to explore how their implicit theories match or do not match their teaching.

Although the idea of being reflective might sound appealing to many, specially for the benefits that this might promote in one's teaching, this is a process that has to be guided and designed rather than be left at random. In other words, to succeed one needs to be committed and have a systematic account of it, and it is up to us to improve our teaching or leave it as it is. Marylyn Ferguson (cited in Covey 1989, p. 24) said: "No one can persuade another to change. Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another, either by argument or emotional appeal".

This study aimed at engaging two in-service teachers from a public school in Bogotá while they were participating in a professional development program to initiate a reflective thinking process that could allow them to question their beliefs and actions as a way to improve their practice. So, in the lines below the reader will find some theoretical underpinnings that highlighted this study, a description of this study, its outcomes –which are presented in terms of gains as well the

difficulties encountered by the teachers to understand what it means to be a reflective practioner– and finally, the conclusions and the implications of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Education is a fundamental factor in the development of the human being. Through it, every country enlarges its cultural base and satisfies the needs of professional development. Since education is a necessary factor for the survival and a key aspect for the development of the coming years, it is evident that educational service needs to be offered with quality according to the social needs of the community. In this regard, our role as professionals in education is to participate in the development and improvement of the country by offering our students qualified teaching.

Insofar as assessing the quality of teaching, however, it is the state who is in charge of constantly overlooking the different factors that promote the quality and betterment of education and the participation of the community. In Colombia, the General Law of Education – 115, (1994) in its article 4 (p. 1) says that

> "the state will be particularly watchful of the qualification and formation of educators, their promotion, and the resources and educational methods as well as other factors such as professional orientation, inspection and evaluation of the educational process. The law leaves the initiative for development primarily in the hands of teachers themselves: Art 110 states that "the betterment of teachers will be the responsibility of teachers, the Nation, the local states and the educational institutions"

> (p. 23) (Translation from Spanish).

However, one of the characteristics as regards the qualification and training of teachers is the expectations teachers have to be economically recognized on "Teachers' National Rank" which entails economic recognition and personal growth. This can sound like a perfect logical relation since every academic effort can also deserve an improvement in salaries but improvement and changing should not only be looked at in those terms but as a response to some external motivating factor as well.

It follows from the above that if the betterment of teaching is principally in the hands of teachers, it must then be the duty of universities and tertiary institutions with a school of Education (or any other academic entity dedicated to education or professional preparation) to offer professional development programs to promote professional growth. Important attempts to contribute to in-service programs have been made in Colombia. Studies conducted by Clavijo et al. (2004), Cárdenas (2004), and McNulty & Quinchía (2007) show the relevance of giving teachers the opportunity to pursue further professional development so that their practice can be enhanced.

Along these lines it is clear that there are regulations that express the importance of keeping a permanent process of professional development and maintaining an investigative attitude. It is my belief that these days most teachers are aware of the changes society is going through but the real understanding does not depend on the laws dictated to rule education. It is up to teachers themselves to update their teaching, to innovate, to do research in their classroom and to identify the real learning

needs of their students. Teacher education depends to a large extent on teachers' own decisions to change and improve.

But how willing are teachers to question their practice and improve it? This was one of the questions I initially asked myself at the beginning of this study and the same question led me to think that perhaps we as teachers are not very frequently aware of how to improve and that our participation in a professional development program can be a waste of time if the same program does not promote in us reflective teaching skills to continue on our own after the program finishes.

What is Reflective Teaching?

It seems difficult to agree on a specific definition for teachers' reflective teaching practice. Schön (1987) presented a view of reflection by proposing the concept of "reflection in action", arguing against the view of professional action as a series of steps in a decision-making process. He suggested that such a view undervalues the artistry of the professional. He goes on to say that professionals can reframe a problem as they work on it, testing our interpretations and solutions, combining both reflection and action. On the contrary, reflection in action is a kind of reflection through which practitioners sometimes make new sense of uncertain, unique or conflicting situations of practice.

Additionally, Schön suggests that reflection involves the relationship between an individual's thought and action, and the relationship between an individual teacher and his or membership in a society. The first relationship involves the subjective

perceptions in teachers' heads, whereas the second explores consciously the relationship between individual teaching actions and purposes of education in society.

Another view of reflective teaching (RT) is the one presented by Cruickshank (1981) and Zeichner (1981) (cited in Zeichner, 1981, p. 5), who defined it differently but the logic behind each definition is the same. Cruickshank defines RT as the teacher's thinking about what happens in classroom lessons, and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals or aims. According to this definition, reflective teaching is "an opportunity to consider the teaching event thoughtfully, analytically and objectively. The purpose of RT is to engender good thought habits".

Furthermore, Zeichner (1981, p. 20) demonstrates a robust interpretation of and practical approach towards Dewey's work. He draws on Dewey's definition of reflection as "an integration of attitudes and skills in the methods of inquiry". The attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and whole-heartedness are prerequisite to reflective action.

It is therefore evident that there are a number of principles that guide a process by which teachers can become reflective. Dewey (1933) considered the following principles as the starting point of the process of reflection:

1. The issue upon which the teacher reflects must occur in the social context where teaching occurs.
2. The teacher must be interested in the problem to be resolved.
3. The issue must be "owned" by the teacher; that is, derived from his/her own practice.
4. Reflection on the issue involves problem solving from the teaching situation in which the teacher is located.
5. Ownership of the identified issue and its solution is vested in the teacher.
6. The teachers' ideas need to be tested through the practice of teaching.
7. Ideas about teaching, once tested through practice, must lead to some course of action.
8. Hence, reflective actions may be transformed into new understanding and redefined practice in teaching.
9. Tested practice must lead to some kind of action resulting in change.
10. Reflective actions should cause new understanding and changes in teaching.

The theories presented see teachers' knowledge as increasingly interconnected and integrated with past experiences, and reflective teaching serves as a mechanism to allow teachers to modify their knowledge and expertise. Reflection is in fact a cyclical or spiraling process in which teachers continually monitor, evaluate, and revise their own practice.

The Professional Development Program (PDP)

In 2000 a group of 110 teachers from different schools in Bogotá participated in a PDP offered by University Distrital. It gave teachers opportunities for

professional development. Teachers were situated at the center of the process for innovation, investigation, and knowledge construction. They were the protagonists whose experiences as persons, as teachers, and particularly as readers and writers, were important instruments to reflect upon. They were also considered as creative individuals, capable of introducing innovation and making multiple decisions responsibly about teaching and learning in their classrooms.

The general objective of the PDP was to form teachers and children as readers and writers within the educational context, and outside of it, with the aim of connecting reading and writing practices present at home and at school. During the development of the PDP, teachers identified turning points in their experiences with literacy as learners and then as teachers through their literacy histories. They also designed a literacy project which served as another step towards their development as teachers. This permitted them to implement innovations through research in their own classroom over a period of one year. As teachers, they put into practice what they knew as well as what they had learned from the course; they also built their own theory for teaching literacy according to what they had found in their own classroom. Theory building was done not only through their own experiences and the theory they were assigned to read, but through the opportunity to pick up and include other people's experiences and knowledge as well.

As a student in a master's program at University Distrital, I was allowed to participate in the PDP as an observer on Saturday sessions. During these I worked with some of the teachers interested in reflecting and improving their teaching practice further and I could see how the PDP gave teachers opportunities to reflect upon their previous experiences as well as on the new ones.

Wallace (1991, p. 52) objects that not every course has space for practice sessions. In other words, he implies that they might operate entirely in the area of what he has called "the received knowledge". The effectiveness of such courses will obviously depend on how well they relate to the trainees' own reflection and practice. Wallace refers to the kind of input a teacher can receive in a professional development program which the teacher believes can be used or incorporated in his teaching and if the results are fine, include it in his repertoire for teaching.

In Wallace's model, the reflective process a practitioner can follow takes place outside the professional development program in which he/she participated. The drawback aspect of all this, as discussed by Wallace, is that the experience becomes private, not shared. In this regard during the Distrital PDP, teachers' experience was shared and social construction was highlighted. It allowed teachers to participate actively in the development of projects and allowed them to share with others colleagues from the PDP or in their schools the experience so that it was not kept by the participants. The fact that in-service teachers could carry out some research in their schools undermined the dichotomy between theory and practice. In this respect, teachers had the opportunity to do action research since what they faced every day were practical problems for which

PROFILE 10, 2008. ISSN 1657-0790. Bogotá, Colombia. Pages 91-111

95

they needed practical outcomes related to practice in the teachers' own context.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

– How are teachers' attitudes toward reflective teaching manifested in a professional development program?
– What are the factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards reflective teaching in a PDP?
– What kind of changes took place as a result of reflection and action on the teachers' part?

Methodology

This research study was conducted in a public school in Bogotá and counted on the participation of two case studies that were part of a group of 110 teachers participating in the PDP on Literacy Development at Distrital University. The selection of the two cases was based on the fact that they were both school English teachers, they had a B.A in Language Education, worked as public school teachers and were interested in changing their current professional practice.

Both participants could be described as teachers who had taught for several years and who were also interested in participating and changing their teaching practice. They saw their participation in the PDP as an opportunity to do so since at school they were not very much supported by the principal to continue studying and developing professionally.

This study followed a qualitative case research design since it was primarily descriptive and valued the perspectives and experiences of two teachers as case studies. As defined by Stake (1995) (cited in Clavijo, 1998, p. 10), a case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.

The fact that this study intended to describe the attitudes of two in-service teachers towards reflective thinking and the factors that might have influenced those attitudes made it entirely descriptive and particularistic. The results of this study can not be applied to the whole population of the teachers that participated in the PDP.

The following are several data collection procedures used to collect the information:

Observation

Through participant observation done during a three-month period, several observations were conducted in order to gain a general overview of the context in which teachers worked, their interaction at school and participation in the PDP. Richards (1999) states that in many language programs teachers are often reluctant to take part in observation or related activities since it is associated with evaluation. In this particular case, it served to gain entry into the group and develop rapport and trust with the participants.

During my participant observation I tried to overcome the differences between the teachers' agenda and my agenda. This stage permitted observance of their school, teachers' practice, their relation with students and learning about their concerns

in regard to teaching and learning. To encourage a rapport I visited the school during the break time, had a cup of coffee with teachers and listened to them talk about different issues. Doing participant observation was time-consuming and made me act as an open-minded person in order to understand teachers' thoughts and experiences. These were registered in my diary in order to follow the two case studies' reflective process as well as to register my own reflections.

Interviewing

The purpose of interviews was to allow teachers to discuss what they thought about their teaching actions and to guide them to reflect upon their actions so that they could try to understand and question their teaching practice. All this served as a starting point in the process of reflective teaching.

Interviewing was one of the main sources of information. It was from this practice that teachers commented on their teaching and narrated experiences, which permitted exploring teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. It also offered the opportunity to register teachers' attitudes toward RT as well as question their practice and think about possible changes.

Questionnaires

These were used at the beginning of the study as a preliminary source of information to stimulate responses about teachers' belief system. However, due to the lack of time, teachers claimed to have other data collection techniques turn out more

helpful. Thus, the information collected through them was expanded through interviews.

Videotaping

Using video recording provided reliable and complete information of the teachers' classes, and allowed for contrasting the teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching with their answers. In addition, changes in the teaching practice were registered through it. Unfortunately, teachers were unable to watch their classes and reflect upon them.

Diaries

These served to register and reflect upon all the events that occurred during the development of the study.

The data collected though the above data collection procedures plus other sources of information such as teachers' life histories provided information on how the participants had learnt English, how they perceived themselves as language teachers and users. In addition, the literacy project work requested by the PDP as a requirement to show teachers' innovation in their practice offered information on some of the changes teachers tried to implement in their teaching. These data were then triangulated and analyzed.

The data collection was a very difficult stage which taught me, above all as a teacher educator, that being reflective is not easy. Several skills are necessary to do it and it does not happen from one day to the other. However, it was very interesting to see how

the participant teachers made an effort and offered the best of themselves to this study.

Findings and Discussion

As the data gathered were analyzed and triangulated, two main categories arose. The first one makes reference to teachers' reflective thinking. This presents a description of the teachers' statements about how they see themselves as language users and teachers, their beliefs in terms of learning and teaching, their own definition as teachers, their classes' characteristics, their role as language teachers and the factors that might influence the organization of the teaching practice. The second category refers to teachers' reactions towards reflective teaching.

Teachers' Reflective Thinking

One of the aims of the PDP at Universidad Distrital was to promote reflection upon teachers' professional performance and therefore promote changes in their teaching practice. Nonetheless, teachers do not reflect as easy as one would think; on the contrary, there is resistance to being reflective. Boud et al (1985) (cited in Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 3) suggest that knowing our practice is central to learning to reflect upon it and that this process of reflection involves both looking back and looking forward. This means using our new understanding and appreciation to improve our future teaching. Reflection of the kind described before emphasizes the centrality of professional experience in the process of "understanding the self". It was by understanding the sense of self

that the participants in this study initiated a process of consciousness; they reflected on their practice, so that they were required to remember things and to question themselves in order to find explanations for their activities.

In trying to understand how teachers dealt with the dimensions of teaching, it was necessary to examine the beliefs and thinking processes which underlay teachers' classroom actions. Teachers' beliefs about the kind of teachers they believed themselves to be served to open a path to start exploring their teaching practice. It was from this initial questioning that they allowed themselves to dig to their inner thoughts about learning and teaching. These initial reflections were followed by the teachers' description of their practice; that is, what they did in the classroom as far as teaching the language was concerned and this included their preferences, interests and what they expected their students could achieve.

Teachers were led to initiate an inquiry about their teaching to find out the kind of teachers they believed themselves to be. This was done to start uncovering teachers' self-image as language teachers and users. In order to provoke teachers' reflection on this matter, the following initial question was asked: What kind of teacher are you? The purpose of this question was to have the participants describe their teaching practice. This was a good starting point because they needed to move on trying to explain and justify their teaching. This initial process seemed to allow the two subjects to start giving their teaching its shape, direction, and purpose in a more conscious, informed way and, therefore, becoming more open to inspection and critique. The teachers were

asked to think about the type of teacher they believed themselves to be as well as of the characteristics of their classes through a questionnaire. Their answers were later discussed and expanded on though a structured interview.

The following are the two teachers' answers reflecting upon the kind of teacher think they are[1]:

R: What kind of teacher are you?

Maria: I'm a good teacher. (Raising her voice) I'm the type of teacher that worries about doing my things well, I would like to know more to improve but... we don't have many opportunities to do so; therefore, I have to do it on my own. I have told you that I usually take other courses; of course I pay for them. Here at school, that's a problem. I think my students can learn some English but I still don't know what for because most of them have to work with their parents and I don't think they are going to university anyway.

Teresa: I'm concerned about my students. It's important to teach them values, you are constantly teaching them through your own actions (smiles). I don't know what use it would be to know a lot if they are unable to be life together... I usually worry about my teaching but I'm also concerned about being a good person as well. Here you have to work a lot on respect and tolerance, for example.

The two teachers' answers denoted different professional values as regards the kind of job they do and how it seems to provide them different reasons to teach in a particular way. Maria was emphatic and her tone of voice was high when trying to answer the question. Apart from the fact that the subject could have felt initially

judged, she seemed to be aware of the importance of being up-to-date. This awareness revealed the teacher's ideological complexity about what she is and does, so she uncovered something about her belief system. She apparently considered it necessary to receive further training but at the same time she did not seem to see the usefulness of her efforts on students who might not continue studying. This attitude apparently reveals some kind of frustration on behalf of the teacher.

On the other hand, Teresa seemed to value her students as human beings who needed to be offered affective support and who did not only need to be given academic work alone. This evidence portrayed a teacher who seemed to be responsible for her students and someone who was willing to be there for them.

The previous descriptions of what the participants considered to be a teacher might be compatible with how the teachers see themselves as "a person". This idea allowed the researcher to question the participants on the role they believed to play as language teachers.

To this end, the participants answered as follows:

Maria: The role of the teacher's to be the right and left hand of the students if I can say so. Because the teacher's the only source they have close to them. As a teacher you have the resources, you teach what you have learnt, you do your best.

Teresa: I'm a guide, organizer, and provider, I give them everything. They don't do anything on their own. I explain everything; I haven't let them being autonomous.

According to Richards (1987), many teachers create their own roles within

---

1   Participants' names were changed and their testimonies, gathered in Spanish, were translated.

the classroom based on their theories of teaching. Both cases seem to have a philosophy of teaching that might come from a specific method of teaching in which the teacher is the center of the learning process. The sociologist Meighan (1990) (cited in Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 25) suggests that there are different ways in which teachers construct learners and that such constructions reflect individual teachers' views of the world and also have a profound influence on their classroom practices. He adds that learners can be constructed as registers, receptacles, and raw material. These three constructs are heavily teacher dominated. In both cases teachers seem to perceive teaching as a teacher-controlled and direct process, and their assumptions make them feel responsible for their students' learning and feel as if they are the only source available for them.

Regarding how they described their classes, the following were the teachers' answers to the questions:

> Maria: My classes are similar to anyone's classes in any public school in Colombia. You have to work without a textbook, materials or resources and the only thing you do is to teach grammar, translation, reading and sometimes try to get them to say something in English.

> Teresa: My class is usually focused on the teaching of grammar and I work on writing and speaking.

The two participants agreed on the emphasis grammar had on their teaching and this was apparently evidence of the teachers' traditional view of what learning a language should be; therefore, they were asked to think about the reasons learners should be taught grammar and they replied as follows:

> Maria: Grammar is the most important thing otherwise how students are going to do the rest

> Teresa: It is from learning the grammar that students can construct their own sentences, or texts and make up things. I generally given them an example and then I ask them to go to the board so that they can write a sentence. I also ask about the previous class, then some students come to the board select a verb, for example if we are working verb to be I ask them to write sentences and they invent sentences.

The analysis of the teachers' assertions on the importance they assigned to grammar learning might reveal the emphasis on the development of this aspect of the language as a prerequisite to developing the other language skills necessary to be competent in the foreign language.

At this point, teachers apparently perceived learning a foreign language as the gradual development of grammar and vocabulary as separated by the language skills; therefore, it was relevant to find out the possible sources of these beliefs and to guide the teachers to reflect upon them.

Richards & Lockhart (1996) state that "teachers' belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it" (p. 30). These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision making and action; hence, constitute what has been termed the "culture of teaching". Richards summarizes that teachers' belief systems are derived from a number of different sources. These

are (a) their own experience as language learners; (b) their experience of what works best; (c) established practice; (d) personality factors; (e) educational based or research based principles; and (f) principles derived from an approach or method (pp. 30-31).

In an attempt to guide teachers toward identifying which could be some of the possible sources of their beliefs, they were asked to recall in a semi-structured interview the way they had learnt English and they reported as follows:

> Maria: When I remember what I wanted to do, I recall l wanted to study English, not because I liked it but because it was a challenge. My teacher was very bad tempered, I hardly ever understood what she explained, she used to write exercises on the board, and we repeated them, everything was about grammar. At university we did translations, dialogs and grammar exercises with games. I think I usually repeat what my teachers taught me. Sometimes I wonder if my English teacher still influences my teaching after all these years. (Long silence).

> Teresa: Well, I was taught pretty much the same way I teach. After learning grammar comes the rest; however, with these students one has to translate everything because they do not know much, and in this way they seem to learn better, that is how I have always taught, it does not mean that I am not willing to change… (Pause)

At this point teachers were uncovering their belief system and starting to reflect upon their actions. In both cases the participants were apparently aware that most of their teaching came from their experience as language learners; however, there were some factors that seemed to influence the participants' practice and development of reflective skills as will be described in the following paragraphs.

In an attempt to identify the possible reasons for which the two participant teachers in this study presented difficulties engaging in reflective teaching, I sought to identify factors that could have inhibited the teachers' reflective practice. This search permitted identifying possible factors that might have prompted the two participants to continue their routinised actions as a way to handle the complexity of their classroom and provided them a sense of security because they knew what to expect. Dewey (1933) stated that routine action is guided by factors such as tradition, habit and authority, and by the institutional definitions and expectations.

Thus, this study found that there were organizational factors that made teachers keep their teaching routine while the intervention of others served at some time to promote reflection upon actions and change their teaching practice. Regarding the organizational factors, these were related to the organization of the school and how this affected the teachers' reflective process; specifically, they referred to the principal and the school organization and the lack of space and time to work with the researcher.

The principal was identified in this study as a non-supportive person who usually relied on the coordinators and these, on the other hand, were not concerned about their co-workers' professional development either. Price (1992) comments that the organizational environment usually plays an extremely important role in teachers' attitudes towards teaching. It also seems to be critical in its implications for teachers' opinions about their professional development needs.

Maria was the first one to discuss with the researcher her disappointment regarding the school organization and principal. She reported the following:

> Maria: I hardly ever see her, she comes and goes. She talks to the coordinators and then leaves. Once in a while you see her talking to some teachers. She does not check if the projects teachers are carrying out are doing well. We have a meeting every week, one of us leads it but we make decisions and sometimes we only talk about discipline.

> Teresa: I wish she would come more often. I would like we could have more opportunities here in the school and that she could bring workshops for us. She doesn't know what we are doing. She will find out because the coordinator might tell her but not because she talks to me, for example. I feel disappointed, because no one from the administrative staff is concerned about us, they only worry about keeping discipline.

Both teachers reported the lack of support and encouragement teachers had at school. They reported the lack of communication with the principal, the discipline and academic coordinators who were regarded as non- supportive. These findings indicate that the principal's actions are critical in determining outcomes in the school and in the teachers. In general, the participants would have liked to count on a leader who could support them.

Evidence about the lack of group work and organization within the English department was also gathered. This also seemed to affect teachers' reflective teaching since it was difficult to have teachers talk about what they were doing and comment on their actions; in general, each one did things on their own most of the time. In this regard, the lack of space and time was

apparently another constraint for teachers who could not talk to the researcher at will. Usually both teachers had to work at different times so that we could not discuss what they were doing in the PDP or in their English classes for more than twenty minutes without being interrupted by students or other teachers.

Regarding this, one of the participants reported:

> Maria: I would like to be able to do some research in the classroom and be able to share with my coworkers about what we are doing, but we do not have the space and time to do so. In the teachers lounge there is no privacy, every one is talking, laughing, that is not the correct place to do so.

As teachers were part of the PDP they had to submit a research project, and they complained of the lack of time to do it since no one liked to stay after work to do it. However, as this was a task they had to fulfill for the PDP they finally seemed to sort out their agendas and found time to do it. Thus, the influence of others served to organize a project that could bring changes in their teaching and set up long term objectives; however, their reflective skills were not developed given the constraints reported before. Still, I thought that this represented a positive achievement since their participation in the PDP made them work as a group and share with others what they were doing. This usually permitted receiving feedback and to be critical in ones' actions.

Teachers' Reactions toward Reflective Teaching

The initial purpose of this study was to accompany the two participant teachers in

their process of reflective thinking during their participation in a PDP which promoted reflection as one of its components. During the study I observed a process that eventually led to the identification of the two participants' concepts about learning and teaching a language and some changes in practice. As the study advanced, the two participant teachers demonstrated certain attitudes of resistance towards reflection which could have also prevented them from reflecting systematically.

Teachers' attitudes towards reflective teaching were identified at the beginning of the study, during and at the end of it. They were observed, registered in the researcher's diary and discussed and verified by the teachers in the interviews. Thus, this category intends to describe how these attitudes were observed and the extent to which they might have inhibited reflective action. The following are the observed attitudes of the two teachers: Tension, anxiety and defensiveness, and recognition of a need for change and innovation.

Tension, Anxiety and Defensiveness

Accepting that we teachers are human beings who are constantly learning and who also need to continue pursuing different goals in teaching in order to innovate and change does not seem to be a very easy matter. There is resistance to change which, according to Eichholz (1996) (Cited in Covey, 1989, p. 16), exists as an integral and necessary part of the acceptance process. Eichholz states that since any change will initially cause inefficiency, partial rejection is essential.

At the beginning of this study, the two in-service teachers agreed to participate in this study, to be observed during their participation, to register in their diary how they would reflect upon their teaching, how they would innovate their teaching actions and find in their own classroom what was necessary to improve and change their teaching. As I started to visit the teachers at school, I noticed that the participants were tense and anxious. These were understood in this analysis as related to an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future. Usually, when a person is nervous, it is because there is some tension which makes the person feel anxious about the unknown situation.

In an attempt to have an organization of the activities that could serve to record data for this study, I designed three initial questionnaires, programmed classroom observations and interviews to collect data. However, filling out the questionnaires was difficult not only because of the time teachers claimed not to have to do it but because the answers were rather short and sometimes the teachers did not answer at all. They seemed to show discomfort whenever they were asked to write their answers and avoided doing so. After several attempts to collect the information through questionnaires, it seemed as if they did not feel secure about what they were going to answer.

As a researcher, I also had to reflect upon what I was doing and I realized that the participants were feeling intimidated by my presence and, in spite of their willingness to participate, it was normal that they saw me as an "outsider". Thus, I devoted more

time to visiting the teachers at school, to listening to them and reducing the tension that my presence and the questionnaires had produced on them. I soon realized that for them it was difficult enough to accept a person who did not belong to their community and, even more, to report to me what they believed about teaching, the profession and the PDP. This led me to build up rapport and trust before asking for further data during the first months of the study. By the end of the first school period, I asked the teachers if I could videotape and observe some of their classes and, later on, watch the video with them. Both teachers agreed and selected two groups to be observed in class.

María was the first one to be videotaped and she showed evidence of her anxiety and defensiveness when she approached me and said:

> This is not a normal class... The one you are going to see today because students are going to do much of the talking.

As the teacher tried to prevent what I was going to find, I noticed her anxiety in the excuses she gave me despite that I had told her the objective of the observation was not to give her feedback on her actions but to have her watch and reflect upon her practice.

As soon as the class finished, María asked me in front of the students how I liked the class and what I thought of the students. This allowed me to confirm once more María's anxiety towards the observation and me. After the class María continued apologizing for the class organization and this led me to conclude that the Maria saw me as a supervisor and

perhaps was not going to give herself the opportunity to question her actions as I expected.

The second participant was also videotaped the same week. She expressed to the researcher that she was nervous and aware she needed ideas to improve and change her classes. During the videotaping she avoided the camera, lowered the tone of her voice so that the researcher had to take notes to support the transcription and she used Spanish in her class most of the time.

I had planned to watch the video and talk about the classes with each of the subjects but both subjects avoided watching it even though they were given the tape to watch it individually at home first. They had several excuses such as they did not have means to watch it either at school or at home or that there was no time. The teachers' concurrent excuses regarding filling out questionnaires, watching the video and even following a diary or their activities were interpreted as a negative response to the study. During the first months I tried to establish a relationship with the teachers and this allowed them to talk about their classes, what they believed of the school, their students, the program, but all this in informal conversations. However, whenever I mentioned that I needed them to answer some questions in a questionnaire, for example, the teachers changed their attitude. It was evident that the teachers preferred to share orally what they were doing or what they wanted to do rather than following diaries, answering questionnaires or watching the video to formally reflect on it.

As I could conclude they saw me as a supervisor or as someone who represented

the PDP tutors. For them I was acting like a supervisor who could judge their performance and observe their actions to give them feedback. There was no evidence that they wanted to hand in any written proof since I could possibly give it to the tutors in the PDP. In addition, the teachers' questions on how to do things better in their classrooms and their concern for finding what I interpreted as "key formulas to teach" served as evidence that the teachers perceived me as a supervisor and a provider of knowledge.

Reducing teachers' tension, anxiety and defensiveness became an objective during the second stage of the study. If teachers felt nervous it was necessary to converse with them and help them overcome their initial responses to the study. It was through questioning that I found that both teachers felt anxious whenever I arrived to the school. They reported seeing me as someone from the PDP.

Teresa reported:

I was tense at the beginning. It was like being afraid to the unknown, to the new. I was usually afraid that you could tell me that my teaching was wrong just like I was told at university when the supervisor visited me during my teaching practice.

María also said,

…well, you are doing a Mater and you know more than we do. You are also observing us in the PDP so you know what we are doing there.

Both teachers reported their anxiety and defensiveness whenever they were requested for information. In their view, I was someone who was maybe checking their teaching practice. At the same time,

my affiliation with the University permitted me to be accepted in the community but it also seemed to prevent teachers' reflective thinking. As soon as the two subjects held a conversation with me and understood that my role was not to supervise but to accompany them in their participation in the PDP,
the teachers started to be more open and relaxed. Teachers' apparent awareness permitted the researcher to start interviewing the subjects, to talk to them more often and to observe them at school and in the PDP.

Recognition of a Need for Change or Innovation

The two participants in this study were apparently aware that their participation in the PDP did not only involve both the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills but the need to examine their beliefs about teaching and learning, their own theories and principles when teaching. This process of awareness involved thought and action, and the interaction between the two forms initially caused stress. It was crucial for this study to observe to what extent teachers could develop a sense of awareness about their actions. In an attempt to lead teachers to be more acquainted with reflective teaching, I looked for questions that could develop the teachers' understanding of their beliefs, theories and their recognition for innovation.

The participants' recognition of a virtual need for improvement and innovation seemed to be present. Teachers were apparently conscious about it and their participation in the PDP was not only for

the credits this would give them but also for their desire to change their practice at school. María was usually enthusiastic about her teaching actions. She also seemed to be updated as well as interested in the latest trends in education. The image that she projected was that of a teacher ready to learn as she reported as follows in an interview:

> I like to learn from many things, I take courses to improve my English...whatever to improve because I know that my English is... I have difficulties... Right now I am taking some courses at university... I do every course I can and I read on my own, now I am reading about the CLT to see how to improve and see if it works in my classes because there are things that might work but there are that not much.

Regarding the reasons she had to register in the PDP she commented,

> I registered in this course to see what I can learn; we hardly ever have the change to take an English course so that we have to do whatever we are offered. This has to be good to change to improve because after so many years one becomes used to do everything the same and at the end one is also tired of doing it.

The previous evidence might suggest that María was willing to try new practices and seemed to be more positive in her approaches. Her individual desire for change can be more directly related to personal teaching efficacy in the absence of an organizational pressure to do it.

Teresa also proved to be interested in understanding her teaching practice more and to discover how to improve it. She reported in an interview,

> I don't know, there are so many things I would like to learn, improve and change, like to find methodological strategies that… but you know

to sit down and think seriously what is best for the students , what they want, what they like… They usually forget what they have been taught. I don't know (raises tone of voice). I don't know…… I would like to find out what is best for them.

Teresa was questioned on what she meant when she said "seriously" and she expressed,

> I mean with everyone, we don't do it here and you have noticed it. Right now we are working on things that can be good for students but hardly ever compare them with the other teachers and share the results. That could be a good way to see if things have been done properly or to see if one has to change the next time.

For Teresa the desire for change was not enough unless there existed responsibility and whole-heartedness, which are presented by Dewey as pre-requisite attitudes to become reflective and to think and understand our own actions. Teresa does not seem to be motivated to do it on her own but she would like to be able to do it as a team with the other teachers. Working as a team might help her to defeat and contain her anxiety towards everything that is new.

While teachers claimed to be interested in the PDP as an opportunity for their professional development, the researcher tried to identify to what extent the two participants perceived innovation and change as necessary in their teaching practice and how they implemented actions and followed them. The two subjects were observed as different in regards to their awareness for a need for change and innovation. In order to see to what extent the teachers could follow what they did in

their classes and if they did notice changes in their practice they were closely observed.

María was observed to be a rather organized teacher who seemed to have clear what she was doing. She seemed to know which her teaching objectives were and how to evaluate them. When asked if she ever registered the changes she had to include in her classes, she reported that since she had different groups and all of them reacted differently, some activities could work with one group but not the others and she had to register them in her agenda.

On the other hand, Teresa was also asked about the same issue and she reported that she did not register changes anywhere because she was able to remember them. It could be said that given the interest María had as regards her own development, she was motivated to use different kinds of activities and register the outcomes in her classes. Teresa's strategy to record information did not seem to help her and seemed to cause her to continue with her routine actions and not to include activities that could make her observe changes in the teaching practice.

As the teachers' participation in the PDP advanced, they were asked to design a literacy project. While María seemed to have a better idea of what the objectives should be and what could be achieved with her students, Teresa did not. The teachers demonstrated continual difficulties meeting at school and discussing the project; therefore, María, who seemed to be the leader of the group, designed it. The project was later discussed and complemented by Teresa and another teacher who was also participating in the PDP but not in this study. However, as soon this was done, the teachers started to work on

the project individually again once they had discussed it.

María's understanding apparently permitted her to organize the activities to be developed in the PDP project. She expressed that the project should allow students to express themselves and talk about things they enjoyed and liked. In her view, this was a good opportunity to do different things in class such as look for information on the Internet, draw, read stories about kites, and finally have students talk about their own experience of the design of the kite and how they had enjoyed the trip they made to the park. Her understanding of what innovating in her practice meant seemed to be motivating to her.

Teresa also showed interest in the activities and as soon as she saw the outcomes of the first activity, she seemed to realize the importance of innovating and how it could promote changes in the students' attitudes toward the class.

By the end of August, the first activity had been done and María left the program because she was ill and Teresa was in charge of the project. Teresa had already seen that the activity excited and motivated her students and she reported the following:

The students are participating more in class, the activities I'm doing allot them to write and read more in class.

Lastly, acknowledging a need for change and innovation was apparent at the beginning of the study and the two participant teachers, each to a different extent, seemed to have a positive attitude towards the PDP as a possible way to do things. In María's case, she seemed to perceive the program as an opportunity to teach herself and inquire after her

own teaching. She was apparently more concerned to include what was discussed in the sessions she attended in the PDP and observed the outcomes of actions in the classroom. Her dynamic personality permitted her to conceive the literacy project as an opportunity to implement new actions with the students and observe possible changes in their outcomes. However, due to her obligatory leave from school for some days, she could not continue a process that could have been rewarding and innovative for her. Notwithstanding, her return to school was marked by her desire to continue developing the activities she had initially planned to do until the end of the year in the literacy project she designed on her own before she left. Also, her departure from the program did not restrain her search for opportunities to innovate. The fact that she had the opportunity to participate during the first semester in the PDP and in this study seemed to have impacted and driven her to continue searching in her classroom, questioning her actions and looking for other activities that could improve her students' outcomes. The absence of communication with colleagues kept her isolated and the researcher did not observe that both she and the other teachers participating in the PDP wanted to share their actions and outcomes as she was no longer a member of the program.

In Teresa's case, she might initially have viewed the program as a particular set of teaching techniques or strategies to teach that could offer her the possibility to make her teaching less complicated but not as an opportunity to inquire about her actions. Although, she apparently saw

the program as an opportunity to alter her actions, she showed motivation and agreed to participate in the study. This study permitted her to be more interested in her actions and to question them. It was from the outcomes of the first activity implemented with the students that she realized that they were actually communicating through their writing. This motivated her to express and question her beliefs about language teaching. At the same time her new actions allowed her to reflect and change some of her beliefs about teaching and to develop essential abilities required to be reflective. This is supported by Guskey (1986) (cited in Richardson, 1994) who suggests that changes in teachers' beliefs follow changes in practices. As Guskey explains, only when teachers see positive results of different behaviors in terms of student learning do they begin to change their beliefs. This could be the Teresa's case since it was only when she observed positive outcomes that she showed enthusiasm for the project, and at the same time, the results seemed to influence her new actions.

In general, both teachers identified professional development as a way to innovate, update their pedagogy and change their actions. Each one was committed in her own way and their observed actions reflected that. María did not have to wait to see positive results to try new actions and question them and her process was rather interactive. Her participation in the PDP and in this study served as an opportunity to try and see how things worked in the classroom and to implement changes according to what she had noticed and considered best for her students. Teresa, like María, showed

interest but in her particular case, the process was at her own pace and it was not until she saw changes from her own actions that she realized the fact that she was changing her beliefs as well.

To conclude the analysis of this category, it could be said that teachers responded to reflective teaching with different attitudes. The teachers' responses to the process influenced their professional development. It took time and effort for the participants to realize that they could not develop a project in their institution as part of the PDP if they were not aware of their own needs, actions, strengths, weaknesses and difficulties. The teachers' awareness of the need to appropriate and solve issues concerning their institution seemed to make them think and speak about it to colleagues which lessened their anxiety toward reflection.

Conclusions

Fostering teachers' reflective process is a difficult process since, as Chant, Heafner & Bennett (2004, p. 25) state, it "requires critical thought, self-direction, and problem solving coupled with personal knowledge and self-awareness". Teachers do not usually change from one day to the other just because they are participating in a PDP. When teachers enroll in a PDP, we usually expect that their classes change from one day to the other and that they become the teachers we expect them to be since they had been attending our lectures, discussing with us different issues and apparently agreeing on them. However, in our case, teachers held different attitudes toward reflective thinking. These attitudes might have inhibited teachers' participation

in more overt ways. The following lines present the answers to the research questions set up in this study:

– How are teachers' attitudes toward reflective teaching manifested in a professional development program?
– What are the factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards reflective teaching in a PDP?
– What kind of changes took place as a result of reflection and action on the teachers' part?

Questioning teachers' beliefs and practical theories was stressful for them and it required time to start a process of inquiry of their actions and reasons. The participants initially avoided and seemed to reject reflecting systematically. They were not ready to do so explicitly since it implied monitoring their classes and reporting the outcomes. Teachers were not willing to do so since this represented commitment and teachers did not have enough motivation, given the different factors which apparently affected their teaching practice.

The teachers' response to systematic reflection could have meant, as Favell (1981) (cited in Smith, 1998, p. 25) said, to be flexible, to do a rigorous analysis of one's actions and have social awareness on the part of the teacher. The teachers reacted by trying to understand the pragmatics of their classroom instruction because it was apparently the first time they had tried to do it systematically. The teachers were used to thinking about their actions as most teachers are, but when asked to think about the reasons their assumptions about language instruction enabled them to see

if their implicit theories matched or did not match their teaching, they reacted to it defensively. This allowed them to protect themselves and their practical theory about teaching. These attitudes were also part of their process toward change.

Not surprisingly, there were several factors that seemed to influence teachers' attitudes toward reflective teaching in the PDP. For example, their participation in the program served to allow teachers to raise awareness and question the need to reflect. It meant more thinking and observing their acting and making changes in their practice. It also allowed them to develop certain skills to become reflective such as to start working with colleagues, communicate ideas, look critically at their actions and evaluate the process they were following. The fact that the PDP placed emphasis on teachers' previous knowledge and experiences about teaching was the best incentive they had since they felt they were always at the center of the program. This acknowledgement made teachers aware of the importance of their participation.

Finally, I would like to point out that there are no "born teachers". There are some people whose personalities, life experience, and natural ways of interacting are conducive to classroom teaching. But even so, without the knowledge of how EFL/ESL teaching is accomplished, even the most talented person can lose teaching opportunities. Teachers' participation in the PDP was only one step toward change and they took advantage of this opportunity as much as they could. As a researcher, I expected to see teachers' reflections from the start; however, I found that this was

rather difficult for them and that, above all, it demanded commitment.

In spite of the many difficulties encountered along the way, teachers demonstrated to themselves that improving the teaching practice was possible as long as they wanted to do it. They also seemed to be pleased with the final outcomes of the project and, to them, this was their best achievement. At the end, several changes regarding their attitude toward reflection were observed. The participants were more open-minded and shared their experiences more overtly with others. They also included different activities in the language class that aimed at enhancing their students' learning even if these were difficult to be carried out.

References

Cárdenas, M. L. (2004). Las investigaciones de los docentes de inglés en un programa de formación permanente. *Íkala, Revista de lenguaje y cultura, 9*(15), 11-41.

Chant, R.H., Heafner, T.L., & Bennett, K.R. (2004). Connecting personal theorizing and action research in pre-service teacher development. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 31*(3), 25-42.

Clavijo, A. (1998). Teachers' life histories: An important input in the formation of teachers' beliefs. *Colombian Applied Linguistics journal, 1*(1), 3-20.

Clavijo, A., Guerrero, C. H., Torres, C, Ramírez, M, & Torres, E. (2004). Teachers acting critically upon the curriculum: Innovations that transform teaching. *Íkala, Revista de lenguaje y cultura, 9*(15), 11-41.

Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (1994). *Ley General de Educación 115.* Bogota: Author.

Covey, S. (1989). *Seven habits of highly effective people.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Dewey, J. (1933). How we think. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co.

Ghaye, A. & Ghaye, K. (1998). *Teaching and learning through critical reflective practice.* London: Cassell.

McNulty, F. & Quinchia. D. (2007). Designing a holistic professional development program for elementary school English teachers in Colombia. *PROFILE, 8,* 131-143.

Price, J. R. (1992). The teacher career cycle: Development and validation of research instruments. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Richards, J.C. (1987). The dilemma of teacher education in TESOL. *TESOL QUATERLY, 21*(2), 209-226.

Richards, J.C. (1999). *Language teaching awareness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richardson, V. (1994). *Teacher change and the staff development process.* New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, M. (1998). Learning to reflect a classroom experiment. *The Clearing House magazine, 72*(1), 24-28.

Wallace, M.J. (1991). Training foreign language teachers: A reflective approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zeichner, K.M. (1981). Reflective teaching and field-based experience in teacher education. *Interchange, 12*, 1-22.

About the Author

Sonia Jerez Rodríguez holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from Universidad Distrital. She is a full-time teacher at Universidad de Córdoba, Montería. She is the director of the research group ESCU and the academic coordinator of the English Language Teaching course diploma at UNICOR.