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# Teacher Development for Bilingual Education in Colombia: Towards Teacher Empowerment

## *Desarrollo profesional para la educación bilingüe en Colombia: hacia el empoderamiento docente*

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**Abstract:** This article examines aspects of teacher education in Colombia with regard to demands posed by bilingual education and foreign language programmes. There is an initial overview of developments in the Americas, followed by a discussion of research conducted in Colombia in relation to the teaching of language and content area knowledge in a bilingual education context. The results of a recent study carried out on teacher empowerment are presented and there is a final discussion of how far teacher education programmes enable practitioners to cope with tensions in their classroom practice, both in bilingual education and in foreign language settings.

**Keywords:** teacher education and development; empowerment; content and language; bilingual education.

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina aspectos del desarrollo profesional en Colombia, con referencia a las exigencias de los programas de educación bilingüe y lenguas extranjeras. Inicialmente se da una visión general de desarrollos en las Américas, seguida de una discusión de investigaciones llevadas a cabo en Colombia sobre la enseñanza de lengua y contenidos en un contexto bilingüe. Se presentan los resultados de un estudio reciente sobre empoderamiento docente y una discusión final sobre el alcance de los programas de desarrollo profesional que ayuda a los profesores a lidiar con las tensiones diarias en su práctica docente, tanto en contextos de educación bilingüe como en contextos de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo profesional; empoderamiento; lengua y contenido; educación bilingüe.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2008 Ofelia Garcia noted that, “all teachers today need to have specialised knowledge about the social, political and economic struggles that surround language, about pedagogical practices surrounding bilingualism and about bilingualism itself” (p. 389). It follows that it is not sufficient for trainee teachers in bilingual education programmes only to aim at reaching a high level of proficiency in the target language. They also need to be conscious of how they can help their own students to develop bilingual or multilingual proficiency.

This article situates the discussion of teacher education for bilingualism and foreign language teaching and learning in relation to developments in different countries in the Americas. It then focuses particularly on two recent studies in Colombia, the first, examining how primary school teachers come to terms with the tensions of teaching language and content knowledge, and the second, focused on processes of teacher and student empowerment. It ends by discussing how both pre-service and in-service professional development programmes can help student teachers to become competent professionals, empowered to be able to take responsibility for helping to initiate informed processes of change in language and bilingual education programmes.

## A REVIEW OF BILINGUAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN THE AMERICAS

In order to situate the discussion of bilingual teacher education programmes in the Americas, I would first like to briefly outline the diverse nature of bilingual education programmes in this part of the world. As Ofelia Garcia (2009) notes, bilingual education in the U.S. has historically been linked to immigration, particularly Latinos, and students categorised as having “limited English proficiency (LEP)” (p. 171). Although in 1984, developmental bilingual education was officially authorised to allow bilingual and multilingual students to maintain their languages, giving rise later to dual language programmes, in reality, most bilingual education programmes in U.S.A are transitional in nature. Thus, “it is the teaching of English to emergent bilinguals... [Latino, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese students, among others] ...that remains the focus of attention” (García, 2009, p. 185), a compensatory rather than an enrichment perspective (Palmer et al., 2015).

However, there is a very different scenario in other parts of Latin America, such as Argentina, Brazil and Colombia. Here King (2005) has distinguished between

enrichment models (of bilingual education) which promote language development for the elite; and... transitional (or nominally maintenance) models for indigenous sectors, which, in the long term, promote subtractive bilingualism. (p. 2)

The enrichment models are associated with the promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism in international languages, such as English, French, Italian and German, particularly in private education, in so-called “global language schools” (Banfi and Day, 2005). However, recently there have been moves in countries such as Argentina and Colombia to establish bilingual programmes (usually in English and Spanish) for students in state or public schools (Banfi, 2006; Lopez et al., 2008).

In a discussion of the roles of bilingual teachers, Brutt-Griffler and Varghese (2004), criticized the static and prescriptive nature of the professional development programmes offered to bilingual teachers in the United States, where much of the knowledge presented is decontextualized and where, according to these researchers, “the knowledge base has failed to include many of the roles that bilingual teachers are involved in” (p. 99). However, they also acknowledge the importance of providing the “mainstream or content area teacher with techniques in language support” (Brutt-Griffler and Varghese, 2004, p. 98). In this way, the authors show a clear change of emphasis from the division between language and content area specialist teacher training and education towards the recognition that that it is necessary to formulate the knowledge basis of bilingual teaching and learning differently.

For their part, in the same volume, Benson, Morgan and Varghese also question the limitations of traditional programmes offered to teachers who work in bilingual settings. Benson (2004) considers that the major roles that these types of course should address for teachers in developing countries are: bilingual teachers as pedagogues (languages and content), as linguists (including literacy), as intercultural communicators, as community members and as advocates for bilingual programs. Morgan (2004) acknowledges a deep contradiction between “the ways that language teacher education programmes teach and the ways that teachers teach (and learn)” seeing these as “incompatible pedagogies” (p. 177). Based on her experience in the US context, Varghese (2004, p. 233), also shows how there has been “a lack of dialogue about the roles of bilingual teachers” and that their pedagogical roles go beyond a linguistic focus to include issues of advocacy for their students. Thus, the researcher argues that professional development programmes for bilingual teachers in the United States should be seen as situated practice, linked to actual classroom practice in local settings.

In contrast to the situation in the United States, in much of Latin America teacher training and teacher education specifically focused on bilingual education provision are in their infancy. While there is a wealth of pre- and in-service courses for teachers of foreign languages, bilingual education *per se* has been largely under-served in this respect.

In Argentina, Banfi and Rettaroli (2008) have discussed aspects of teacher training and development in a number of different bilingual education contexts, including state schools. These are a recent development, as formerly most bilingual education programmes were developed in private institutions catering for students from higher socio-economic strata.

In 2001, the City of Buenos Aires, which has a long tradition of foreign language teaching and learning (Banfi, 2013), set out to provide foreign language tuition (mainly in English) in the belief that the learning of a foreign language in the state-run schools, particularly those located in socially-disadvantaged areas, would raise educational standards. In these plurilingual schools, children are taught by two teachers. On the one hand, there is the class teacher who teaches all subjects (Spanish, Science, Social Science, and Mathematics) in Spanish. On the other, the foreign language teacher teaches the foreign language.

The foreign language teachers, who work in tandem with the qualified primary teachers, have to attend a one-month training course which introduces them to topics to do with bilingual education. They work with teacher trainers, tutors and carry out class observations. They also have to submit a formal written evaluation (Banfi and Rettaroli, 2008). The results of the study carried out by the two researchers show that while the content, languages and pedagogical knowledge are generally well covered in these programmes, cultural knowledge and knowledge about bilingualism and bilingual education are not.

In Brazil a research project conducted in São Paulo, in 2009, focused on teacher training programmes for novice teachers in bilingual education programmes for very young children. This was a new development in bilingual education studies in Brazil, as can be seen by the researcher's acknowledgement that she found no previous studies carried out on this topic (Wolffowitz-Sanchez, 2009). The participants in this collaborative research project were student teachers who were registered on a pre-service teacher training course in bilingual education, which included critical-reflexive sessions based on classroom videos, both face to face and through emails. The results of the analysis of these data indicate that the participants considered that the emails constituted an important space where they could express themselves, disagree, question and contribute with their own knowledge. There was also evidence that the participants gradually became conscious of them-

selves as teachers responsible for the different decisions and activities they were involved in. They were greatly helped in this process of consciousness-raising and understanding by the collaborative nature of the project and the co-authorship or co-production of knowledge. As the role of the trainees increased in importance, the role of the teacher trainer became more peripheral. There was thus an ongoing movement among all the participants “from the centre to the periphery and from the periphery to the centre” (Wolffowitz-Sanchez, 2009, p. 119) (*do centro para a periferia e da periferia para o centro, movimentos esses que todas as participantes realizaram*).

Fernanda Liberali (2013), also in São Paulo, documented a multicultural education research project carried out in Brazil with pre-service bilingual education teacher trainees in public (state) schools catering for underprivileged children, which involved planning, teaching and evaluating classes together with teacher educators, including the use of both English and Portuguese in the classroom. This was followed by group discussions on key aspects of the sessions. Liberali highlights the importance of the new roles assumed by both student teachers and by teacher educators. The students reported on their surprise at finding how much they could accomplish in the target language (English) while the project coordinator recognised her need to learn more about bilingual education as a result of the interaction during the study.

#### BILINGUAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN COLOMBIA

In a recent study (Truscott de Mejía et al., 2012) carried out at primary level in eight bilingual schools in Bogotá, one of the issues examined was the type of teachers hired to teach in these bilingual programmes and the previous training they had received. The research was designed according to the requirements of descriptive, collective case studies, followed by cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995), collecting data from interviews with teachers and administrative staff, class observations and document analysis.

According to the results of the data analysis, it was found that the main requirements had to do with aspects such as the level of English proficiency of the candidates, their knowledge of specific content areas, as well as their training and experience. There was also evidence of a difference in requirements according to the level the teacher taught at. As one of the participants noted, “For English teachers, it is mostly language proficiency in middle school. In high school, content knowledge becomes more important to the point that only native speakers with advanced degrees are able to teach the courses” (unpublished preliminary teacher

survey, 2008). However, there was a general consensus in the eight participating schools that teachers' knowledge of the content area was paramount. As one coordinator explained, "there must be a balance between what the teacher knows and understands about his discipline [...] and his knowledge of English in academic discourse, giving a percentage of 60% importance to knowledge of the discipline which is being taught and 40% to the use of the foreign language" (Truscott de Mejía et al. 2012, p. 105) (*debe haber un balance entre lo que el profesor conoce y comprende de su disciplina [...] y lo que maneja del inglés en el discurso académico, dando un porcentaje de 60% de importancia al conocimiento sobre la disciplina que se enseña y un 40% al manejo de la lengua extranjera*).

There is an indication of institutional concerns about the teachers' previous training in bilingualism and how in-service provision may help to remedy any deficiencies. Thus, teachers were required to take courses preparing them for international examinations, such as the Certificate of English Language teaching to Adults (CELTA), an introductory course in the Primary Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate or the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT). There was also evidence of attempts by schools to provide English classes for teachers of content areas and courses to help English language teachers cope with teaching content areas through English, a type of "counterbalanced approach" referred to by Lyster (2007). The findings of this study also show that the schools support the in-service training of their teachers, either by giving them time to take courses or workshops offered by outside organisations, or, in one case, encouraging them to participate in weekly pedagogical sessions in the institution itself.

The difficulties experienced by teachers in their classroom practice, according to the results of this study, have to do with factors such as the use of the imported textbooks, which have been designed mainly for native speakers of English and therefore do not often fit easily with national Colombian curriculum standards, as well as low levels of motivation on the part of students who have difficulty learning different subject matter through English. There is also an interesting tendency, noted in one of the schools, to question the nature of bilingualism, which previously had been equated with the teaching of English. The changing perceptions involved considerations of bi- or interculturality and how this should be included in the programmes.

However, the greatest challenge faced by all the schools in the study was how to help students understand different concepts in Mathematics, Natural Sciences or other areas of the curriculum taught through English. This was not helped by a tendency noted of rivalry between language and content teachers –the former finding it difficult to come to grips with the concepts and knowledge required to

be taught through English in the different content areas, while the latter wanted to ensure that the objectives of the particular subject area were covered. This is illustrated in the following testimony from a Science teacher in one of the participating schools. He said:

I teach Science in English and for me it is an advantage the children can answer clearly in English, but if I see that a child finds it difficult to answer in English, but understands the concept and shows this in Spanish, I say “this person is doing what I expect him to do”, because I am a Science teacher and what I have to evaluate is Science, not English. (Truscott de Mejía et al. 2012, p. 75) (*Yo enseño ciencias en inglés y para mí es un plus que los niños puedan responderme claramente en inglés, pero si veo que a un niño le cuesta trabajo responder en inglés pero entiende el concepto y me lo manifiesta en español, yo digo “esta persona está cumpliendo con lo que yo espero que haga”, porque yo soy profesor de ciencias y lo que tengo que evaluar es en ciencias y no en inglés.*)

One of the conclusions of this study, in relation to teacher education, was that a major challenge for bilingual schools was how to prepare English language teachers to teach content areas in English, observing that:

Most of the teachers interviewed are aware of the need to integrate the teaching and learning of the foreign language harmoniously with the teaching and learning of content areas in their pedagogical practice, although sometimes they are not very sure how to achieve this balance. (p. 269) (*La mayoría de los profesores entrevistados son conscientes de la necesidad de integrar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera armónicamente con la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de áreas de contenido en su labor pedagógica, aunque a veces no están muy seguros de cómo lograr dicho balance.*)

In this respect, one of the recommendations spoke to the need to:

Implement integrative proposals of language and content, such as teaching through projects, the experiential method and the support of initiatives such as team teaching between teachers of foreign languages and teachers responsible for different curricular areas. (p. 277) (*Implementar propuestas integradoras de lenguas y contenidos, tales como la enseñanza por proyectos, el método vivencial y el respaldo de iniciativas de enseñanza en equipo entre profesores de lenguas extranjeras y profesores a cargo de diferentes áreas curriculares.*)

While another referred to how important it was to:

Motivate teachers to look for professional development programmes in bilingual education which will give them theoretical guidelines and methodologies about how to manage the relationships between languages and academic contexts. (p. 278) (*Incentivar a los profesores a buscar programas de formación en educación bilingüe que les proporcionen orientaciones teóricas y metodológicas acerca de cómo manejar las relaciones entre lenguas y contenidos académicos.*)

#### TEACHER EDUCATION FOR REFLEXIVE, EMPOWERED PRACTITIONERS

So, what are some of the wider issues that need to be addressed in relation to effective teacher education for bilingual education and foreign language teaching and learning in Colombia? I think there are a number of questions that need to be raised in relation to the relevance of teacher education programmes to the development of reflexive practitioners, instead of the production of technical experts in teaching standardized methodologies and strategies (Zeichner and Ndimande, 2008). These concerns may be formulated by means of the following questions:

- How far is a concern with pedagogical issues sufficient to prepare teachers to be able cope with changing realities in Colombia in bilingual education and foreign language programmes?
- How far do pre-service or in-service teacher education courses have a positive effect on subsequent teacher empowerment?

Debate on these issues is ongoing among academics in Colombia (Cárdenas, 2006; González Moncada, 2008) and has led to calls to include counter-discourses in teaching and teacher education and development (González Moncada, 2008). Teacher education programmes for bilingualism and foreign language teaching and learning currently offered in Colombia evidence, as noted above, a tendency to privilege what may be considered technical expertise in the teaching of standardised methodologies and strategies, as exemplified in the widespread adoption of the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) designed by Cambridge University ESOL (UK) for teacher professional development. This has been criticised by González Moncada (2007) in that it “lacks the promotion of autonomous work and networking, and imposes a pre-established package of pedagogical knowledge” (p. 315).



## A CASE STUDY ON TEACHER EMPOWERMENT IN COLOMBIA

Recently, a study carried out by Guzmán Mejía et al. (2014) specifically focussed on ways in which language teachers who have recently studied on a postgraduate teacher education course can generate changes in their classroom practice, empowering themselves, their colleagues and their students, changing power structures and promoting collaborative working together in the interest of improving students' communicative competence in English. The research was carried out in two Colombian cities, Bogotá and Armenia, which at the time were both involved in pilot bilingual programmes. The four teachers who took part in the study had all recently finished or were in the process of studying at postgraduate level (either in M.Ed. programmes or in postgraduate diploma courses –*Especializaciones*–) and were selected specifically to see how far they considered that their studies had helped them to become more autonomous and more empowered.

*Considerations on empowerment and professional development*

According to León (1997, p. 5), this word “empowerment” signifies “to give power (*dar poder*) or “to concede to someone the exercise of power” (*conceder a alguien el ejercicio del poder*). The translation into Spanish “empoderamiento” has been included in a well-known dictionary (Moliner, 1986), even though many speakers of Spanish refuse to accept the term as correct. Other nouns which have been used are “potenciación” and “poderío”. León (1997) argues for the use of the term “empoderamiento”, rather than the other alternatives, as she maintains that this implies that the subject becomes an active agent as a result of the process.

The notion of empowerment in education owes a lot to the work of Paolo Freire (1970) on critical pedagogy and his insistence on the need to learn to read the world before learning to read the word (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Thus, his concept of a liberatory education, or a “pedagogy of the oppressed” (Freire, 1970), as opposed to a transmission or “banking” type of education, is inherently political, involving the “conscientisation” of “marginalised” students and teachers that their voices can and should be heard; in other words, that “the voicing of their lives may transform both their lives and the social system that excludes them” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 101).

In the field of bilingual education for minority students, Cummins (1989) notes that it is important for teachers to define their role in empowerment processes so that students may experience a sense of control over their lives and the skill, confidence and motivation to achieve academic success. However, in order to

do so, teachers need to have a personal conviction of the importance of empowering their students and sufficient institutional support, as well as adopting a critical stance towards society and towards the schools they work in.

With respect to the notion of cultural identity, a group of educational researchers in Colombia have recently questioned the common practice of adopting pedagogical systems which have been designed and implemented in very different contexts, observing, “Programmes are acquired and teachers are trained to apply theories or pedagogical approaches in their classroom processes, without having related the content to our cultures” (Samper Alum et al., 2008, p. 5). They advocate initiating a process of institutional empowerment “at the level of people, creating a sense of belonging and offering the possibility of participation... incorporating the knowledge and the competencies of those who are part of the institution at this time” (Samper Alum et al., 2008, p. 6).

Finally, with respect to teacher education, empowerment has been characterised as a process to help student teachers “value their meanings and their knowledge... [and] to hold on to their own voices rather than adopt the teacher’ voice” (Yonemura, 1986, cited in Gieve and Magalhães, 1994, p. 130). This is particularly important if we consider that many entrants to the teaching profession revert back to traditional beliefs and practices in the face of the opposition they often encounter to current ideas, approaches and methodologies espoused during teacher education programmes (Gimenez Nunes, 1994).

Gieve and Magalhães (1994), for their part, consider various possible formulations of the idea of empowerment before opting to foreground the importance of “voice” (see Freire, 1970) in considerations of processes of empowerment, maintaining:

Empowerment is about ‘voice’ and allowing the subjects’ own voice to emerge, indeed promoting it... Empowerment is the ability to value one’s knowledge and meanings through a process of critical reflection on the meanings and knowledge of others. (Gieve y Magalhães, 1994, pp. 131-133)

It is interesting to note here the balance achieved between a focus on the emergence of the voices of individual subjects and the influence of what others have said.

The importance of an enhanced understanding of participant autonomy resulting from processes of empowerment is exemplified in the following definition taken from a school bilingual project in Bogotá (Colombia):

We understand by empowerment when a person has developed autonomy, when they are free to carry out their work as they think fit, inspired by a clearly

defined horizon; they recognize that their work has real meaning for themselves, for their superiors and colleagues; this is what fosters their development as human beings... A being capable of assuming risks with initiative, creativity and who is responsible for his or her actions. (Samper Alum et al., 2008, p. 3)

As Adriana González Moncada (2007) has recognized, the professional development of teachers is a constant concern in both research on TESOL and on bilingual education. Johnson (2000) considers teachers' learning as a permanent process beginning when they are learners in classrooms and schools, and continuing when they participate in teacher development programmes and as they learn from their classroom experience. Diaz-Maggioli (2003), for his part, has defined professional development as a permanent development in which teachers take part voluntarily in order to learn how to adjust their classroom practice to student needs. Richards and Farrell (2011) specifically refer to teacher professional development in foreign languages as the sense of identity which represents being a language teacher and the ways in which this is structured.

### *Methodology*

The inter-institutional study in question (Guzmán Mejía et al., 2014) was carried out over a period of three years (2011-2014) from a qualitative research perspective. The data collected included class observations, reflexive diaries written by both the teacher researchers and the external researchers from the two universities involved in the project, semi-structured interviews with both teachers and academic coordinators, and a final reflection by the teacher researchers on the whole process. There was also a questionnaire designed to capture student perceptions.

### *Results and Discussion*

The results of the analysis are presented here in relation to two main categories which emerged from the data: evidence of empowering attitudes, and the incidence of pre-service and in-service professional development on helping teachers to become agents of change.

#### Empowering attitudes

With respect to the developing of empowering attitudes among the four participating teachers, there is evidence to show that one of them was very concerned

to involve other English teachers, sharing experiences, material and activities to ensure more coherence in classroom processes. She said,

... and we have tried to suggest that they share the activities that they do in class but they are not very receptive to this (...) (*... y hemos tratado de hacer intentos con ellas de que compartan las actividades que hacen en las clases pero ellas se muestran reacias frente a eso...*)

... We proposed this and we did so, but it did not come from the school, but it was an initiative of ours, the teachers... (Teacher interview, p. 74) (*... Nosotros lo propusimos y así lo hicimos, pero no fue iniciativa del colegio ya eso fue iniciativa de nosotros los profesores.*)

The same teacher went further in taking the initiative together with another colleague to revise the English curriculum in the light of perceived student needs in reading comprehension. As she notes:

... we structured the programmes in order to manage tenth and eleventh (grade) because the eleventh grade students are not very good at English, so what we did was to agree on working on the reading plan, the contents' to manage this process. (Teacher interview, p. 75) (*... hicimos como una estructura de programas para manejar el décimo y once por lo que los chicos de once también están muy regular en inglés entonces lo que hicimos fue ponernos de acuerdo para trabajar lo del plan lector, los contenidos para manejar como ese proceso.*)

Furthermore, after an initial period of adaptation using the previously established teaching methodology of grammar-translation, the same teacher decided to introduce a radically new direction to the English programme in which student interests and concerns formed the basis for the teaching and learning of the target language, as noted in the following interview extract:

... (during) the first period I taught translation and grammatical structures to test out the previous teacher's system but the next bimester I told the students that we would make a break in what we had been working on up to now and that we were going to have different English classes. (Teacher interview, p. 75) (*... el primer periodo si manejé traducción y estructuras gramaticales para probar el sistema de la profesora anterior pero al otro bimestre les dije muchachos hasta acá vamos a trabajar lo que veníamos trabajando vamos a hacer una ruptura en el proceso vamos a hacer las clases de inglés diferentes.*)

These actions can be seen in the light of what Ghay (2011), has referred to as ‘empowering attitudes’ relating to the stimulating of self-determination and student participation and demonstrating commitment, enthusiasm, reflection and respect both for students and colleagues.

### Pre-service and in-service teacher training and development

In a reflection on the process of teacher training one of the participating teachers observed:

In the University it was a challenge, all the contents were very difficult, demanding teachers, new learning, a new language. This required a great effort on my part to achieve this, to prepare myself to learn to speak, understand and to communicate with others. I knew that to be a teacher was another challenge, because it demanded a lot of preparation, both in disciplinary as well as pedagogical knowledge. (Teacher reflection, p. 75) *(En la Universidad fue un reto, todos los contenidos eran muy difíciles, profesores exigentes, aprendizajes nuevos, un idioma nuevo. Requirió de mi parte mucho esfuerzo para lograrlo, prepararme en aprender hablarlo, entenderlo y poder comunicarme con otros. Sabía que el ser docente era otro desafío, porque ser maestro exigía mucha preparación, tanto del saber disciplinar como pedagógico.)*

Realising that she felt unprepared to take on these challenges, she decided to study on a Master’s degree course in Education, particularly focusing on bilingual education. As she admitted:

Already in my classroom practice I had come up against a great challenge, both in a private or a public school, the demands on the teacher are very great and the knowledge developed in undergraduate courses is not enough, the experiences lived in each school contribute a lot, but in the same way, many worries and questionings arise, both professional and personal. For this reason, I decided that one way of coming to terms with these queries was to study a M.Ed course and this is why I began to study on the Master in Education programme at Universidad de los Andes. (Teacher reflection, p. 76) *(Ya en la práctica docente me enfrente a ese gran desafío, sea en colegio privado o público, las exigencias del profesor son muy grandes y el conocimiento construido en pregrado no es suficiente, las experiencias vividas en cada colegio aportaban mucho, pero de la misma manera surgían más inquietudes y cuestionamientos tanto profesionales, como*

*personales. Por eso, decidí que una manera de afrontar esas preguntas podía ser por medio del estudio de una maestría y así llegué a cursar la maestría en Educación en la Universidad de los Andes.)*

The importance of becoming a questioning practitioner, aware of changing classroom realities and challenges is reflected in the following comment: “As a teacher, one must constantly question oneself about one’s classroom practice and not think that one knows everything” (Teacher interview, p. 77). (*Uno como docente debe cuestionarse en todo momento sobre su práctica dentro del aula de clase y no pensar que uno se las sabe todas.*)

A second teacher in the study confirms this by referring to the effect of her professional development course in the following statement:

The fact of having completed a postgraduate course in Bilingual Education and the fact of studying a M.Ed programme focused on the didactics of English teaching for autonomous learning has awakened in me a more reflexive attitude, in which it is very important for me to identify my strengths and weaknesses, in order to be conscious of where I am and where I want to go to as a teacher, and what I have to do to achieve these aims. (Teacher interview, p. 95) (*El haber realizado una especialización en Educación Bilingüe y el hecho de estar cursando una maestría enfocada a la didáctica de la enseñanza del inglés para el aprendizaje autodirigido, han despertado en mí una actitud más reflexiva, donde es muy importante para mí identificar mis fortalezas y debilidades para ser consciente del lugar en el que estoy, a dónde deseo llegar cómo docente y qué acciones debo llevar a cabo para lograr dichos objetivos.*)

She goes on to emphasize her conviction about the importance of trying to ensure the collaboration and participation of her colleagues to work together for similar aims and to develop a reflexive, critical attitude to their teaching, saying: “To look for alternatives to objectively measure contents, achievements, learning and to evaluate. This is achieved through teacher research on his or her practice with the students” (Teacher interview, p. 77). (*Buscar alternativas para medir objetivamente contenidos, logros, aprendizajes y evaluar. Esto se logra por medio de la investigación del profesor en el hacer de su práctica con sus estudiantes.*)

According to another teacher participant, it is necessary to have the support of the administration, as well as the support of colleagues and rest of the educational

community (parents and students) in order to bring about successful innovation. However, the same teacher also emphasized the importance of professional development and the crucial role of theory in helping teachers to reflect and become aware of what is not working well and the way forward:

It is vital that teacher development helps (identify) what does not function on a daily basis in teaching... Theory helps us to reflect and improve what happens in practice. The reflection carried out allows us to see where we are going to. It's important to talk to others, to read and to be in contact with others. (Teacher interview, p. 34) (*Es vital la formación profesional, es lo que permiten el día a día en la enseñanza, lo que no funciona... La teoría le hace reflexionar y mejorar, lo que se hace en la práctica. La reflexión que hace es lo que permite mirar para dónde va. Hay que hablar con otros, hay que leer y estar en contacto con otros.*)

Another teacher in the study agreed with the importance of being able to count on the backing of the school authorities to be able to undertake postgraduate study and as a result:

This has been a fundamental aspect in my personal and professional development. Being able to rely on the support of the senior administration, which has been evidenced in such actions as being granted permission to carry out my postgraduate studies, the implementation of projects connected with these studies in which my students have been participants, the autonomy to carry out my classes in the way that I consider best, the provision of resources and spaces, among other things; (these) have been fundamental to my empowerment as a teacher and in the results obtained over the years. (Teacher interview, p. 95) (*Este ha sido un aspecto fundamental en mi desarrollo personal y profesional. El contar con el apoyo de las directivas, el cual se ha visto reflejado en acciones tales como la concesión de permisos para llevar a cabo mis estudios de posgrado, la implementación de proyectos relacionados con dichos estudios, donde mis estudiantes han sido los participantes de los mismos, la autonomía para desarrollar mis clases de la manera que considero adecuada, la provisión de recursos y espacios, entre otros; han sido aspectos fundamentales que han contribuido en mi empoderamiento como docente y en los resultados obtenidos a través de estos años.*)

### *Conclusions*

As noted above, the criterion of professional development was one of the characteristics used to select the teacher participants in this study, as we wanted to examine the incidence of recent postgraduate studies on the development of empowerment in the participants. It was found that these courses had a marked influence on the actions of the four participants. The two teachers from schools in Armenia had been active in continuing in English and ICT courses, while one of the teachers from Bogotá had also enrolled on refresher courses. In addition, three of the four teachers said that they had participated in congresses and in academic events. Another teacher, again from Bogotá, said that her Master's research project was a direct result of her endeavour to involve her students more directly in their English language learning and that she had been motivated to examine studies related to her work as a foreign language teacher. Furthermore, one of the teachers from Armenia confirmed that the process of pre-service and in-service teacher training and education had helped him widen his vision about the type of classroom climate appropriate to promoting, motivating and fulfilling the needs and interests of his students.

We may also conclude that the teachers' sense of empowerment, evidenced in the interviews and reflections, was stimulated by what they learned in their teacher education courses, and that this also reflects a dynamic two-way process between theory and practice, as Cummins notes, "I see the relationship between theory and practice as two way and ongoing: practice generates theory, which in turn, acts as a catalyst for new directions in practice, which then informs theory, and so on" (Cummins, 2000, p. 1). In this sense, it can be seen as a result of reflection on situated classroom practice in local contexts (Varghese, 2004).

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As noted in the Introduction, García (2008) has argued for a reconceptualisation of professional development programmes to enable teachers to become critical, committed and empowered practitioners. According to Gieve and Magalhães (1994, p. 133), the transformation of individuals into subjects capable of "speaking with their own voice" is intrinsically related to the way each person presents him or herself to others and how others recognise this, in other words, how each teacher may come to claim for him or herself a sense of identity which represents being a language teacher (Richards and Farrell, 2011).

Taylor (1994), for his part, maintains that "we always define our identity in dialogue with the things others wish to see in us, and sometimes in opposition to



them” (p. 53). The four teachers who took part in this study in their different contexts and in different ways demonstrate how they had been able to take on board change and develop processes of empowerment in the professional practice. In some cases, these processes were supported explicitly or implicitly by the educational authorities, thus recognising the value of the innovations implemented by these practitioners and reaffirming their role as valid agents of change. However, in others, the teachers encountered resistance on the part of the administration or from their own colleagues who were not inclined to take on the challenge of implementing new dynamics in the learning of English and were, thus, limited in the possibility of being able to respond to changing realities.

In the study carried out in Bogotá with the eight primary schools, while several of the participating institutions were concerned about how to help their teachers update their knowledge and skills in the area of bilingual education and foreign language teaching and learning, many of the teachers were unsure how to cope with the tensions and dilemmas involved in reconciling both language and content issues. As one teacher noted:

At our school, we frequently talk about the needs of our SLL students and how teachers can fulfill those needs. As teachers we should be exposed to the latest methods successful teachers are utilizing in their classrooms. Fortunately, this collaboration is discussed, but sadly, our training doesn't really include any methods. For example, we all know we should be teaching literacy across the content areas, but the specific methods to implement literacy are not taught to the teachers. Teach us the methods! (Truscott de Mejía et al., 2012, p. 3)

This notion of having recourse to the safety of a method, while understandable, goes against current emphasis on post-method pedagogies (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2003; 2006). It also works against Pennycook's (2001) recommendation about developing teachers' critical, reflective capacity to help conscientious and committed practitioners value their own constructed pedagogical knowledge and insights.

Thus, it may be argued that there is an urgent need for teacher education programmes aimed at developing competent professionals who have a high level of proficiency in the languages taught and appropriate content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as an understanding of the principles of foreign language and bilingual education. However, this is not sufficient in today's world where teachers are increasingly being challenged to take responsibility for helping to initiate informed processes of change, bearing in mind local realities and global concerns

which are shaping educational priorities in the Third Millennium. As noted in our study on teacher and student empowerment,

The current vision of ‘being’ a teacher needs to change to a vision of an empowered teacher, who has the opportunity of being the agent of his or her own practice, conscious of existing regulations, but also his or her own identity and the capacity to introduce changes in the system. (Guzmán Mejía et al., 2014, p. 111) (La visión actual de ‘ser’ maestro debe cambiar hacia una visión de un maestro empoderado, a quien se le brinde la oportunidad de ser agente de su propia práctica, consciente de la normatividad vigente, pero con identidad propia y capacidad de introducir cambios en el sistema.)

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