

# Who is Educating EFL Teachers: a Qualitative Study of in-service in Colombia\*

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This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study designed to explore the professional needs of EFL teachers. Data collection techniques included focus groups, a questionnaire, and in-depth interviews. The results suggest that many EFL teachers may not experience the benefits of the professional options provided by institutions of higher education; less formal and structured training opportunities, such as professional conferences and publishers' sessions, are considered by many of them as the real agents of their education. The implications of these beliefs for the professionalization of the teachers are discussed.

Key words: teacher education, professional development, in-service training, conferences, continuing education

Este artículo reporta los resultados de un estudio cualitativo diseñado para explorar las necesidades de capacitación de los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera. Las técnicas empleadas en la recolección de los datos incluyen grupos focales, un cuestionario y entrevistas a profundidad. Los resultados sugieren que muchos de estos docentes no pueden beneficiarse de las opciones profesionales propuestas por las instituciones de educación superior y que oportunidades de capacitación menos formales y estructuradas como los congresos del área y las charlas de las casas editoriales son vistas por muchos de ellos como los agentes reales a cargo de su educación. Se discuten las implicaciones de estas creencias para la profesionalización de los docentes.

Palabras claves: educación a profesores, desarrollo profesional, educación continua, conferencias, capacitación docente.

Cet article rend compte des découvertes d'une étude éducative destinée à évaluer les besoins des professeurs d'Anglais Langue Etrangère. Les techniques de collecte des données employées sont composées : de l'observation de groupes cibles, de l'analyse d'un questionnaire et d'entretiens détaillés. Les résultats montrèrent que de nombreux professeurs ne peuvent bénéficier des options professionnelles proposées par les institutions d'éducation supérieure. Les opportunités de formations moins formelles et structurées, comme les congrès professionnels et les présentations des maisons d'édition, sont vues par beaucoup d'enseignants d'Anglais Langue Etrangère comme les réels agents de leur formation. Les implications de ces croyances pour la professionnalisation des enseignants sont ici discutées.

Mots clés: formation des professeurs, développement professionnel, formation continue, conférences.

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## INTRODUCTION

The terms “teacher education”, “teacher preparation” or “pre-service training” have been applied to the formal academic training teachers have in their undergraduate programs (Ducharme, 1986; Richards, 1998; Johnson, 2000). The term “teacher training”, or more specifically “in-service training”, has been used to define the academic actions taken by the teachers in their search for their professional development. The expression “pre-service training” may mean “train the teachers to serve” while the “in-service” may mean “train the teachers during their service”. “Serve” will represent the concepts of “be of help to” and “assist” others in the process of learning. The meaning of the in-service training stage implies that the pre-service phase may not have been sufficient and that teachers themselves require some support and assistance while helping their students in the learning process. This view reflects the teachers’ opinion that their preparation stage is insufficient and that they require an extra learning phase to keep abreast with the tasks of their work. Some reasons such as,

- a. the division between theory and practice in the curricula,
- b. the stress being on theoretical issues while the practical problems are addressed only in the practicum stage,
- c. the need to raise their language proficiency,
- d. the necessity to design different materials and learning tasks,
- e. the urgency to obtain help managing the students’ personal and academic problems, and above all,
- f. the need to learn to learn by themselves get teachers to seek alternatives to fulfill their professional needs after they graduate from the universities or teacher colleges.

The National Center for Education Statistics NCES in the United States conducted a study in 1998 to explore the qualifications and preparation of American teachers in public schools. The report suggests that the majority of American teachers are underqualified to meet the expanding demands of the profession. As a consequence of this, there is a great need to analyze the standards in teacher preparation programs and to have teachers capable and



willing to engage in the learning and relearning of their profession. The first task will be the universities' responsibility while the second one is to be carried out by teachers and teacher educators through professional development programs.

In the field of language teaching, the term "teacher training" has been questioned because it may reflect the idea of techniques and practical issues without considering more profound reflection on teaching/learning issues in which the teacher is seen as a critical and reflective thinker (Richards, 1998). The term "teacher education" is preferred as it implies a more complex view of the job of teachers. Woodward (1991) compares the two approaches, as can be seen in Table 1. Under the two frameworks, the conception of the teacher's participation, decision making, background, expertise, and knowledge are seen in different perspectives. The author advocates for the use of the teacher education framework as it promotes continuous learning and the teachers' responsibility of their own development. This paper will follow the perspective of the professional development of teachers as "teacher education" and will use the term to refer to the way how teachers meet the challenges in their profession.

**Table 1.**  
**Teacher Training vs. Teacher Education (adapted from Woodward, 1991)**

<b>Teacher Training</b>	<b>Teacher Education</b>
Compulsory	Voluntary
Competency-based	Holistic
Short term	Long term
One-off	Ongoing
Temporary	Continual
External agenda	Internal agenda
Skill/technique/ knowledge-based	Awareness-based, angled towards personal growth

Johnson (2002) states that research in teacher education has demonstrated that teachers learn to teach through experiences in three different social settings: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in teacher development programs, and as teachers in their own schools.

Research in the field has gained understanding of the teachers' experiences as students as basis of their future work and has done extensive research on how the



preparation programs can educate more effective teachers (Richards, 1990; Freeman, 1996). However, there is little evidence on how Colombian EFL teachers engage in professional development programs, why they do it and the gains from those experiences. This paper reports the alternatives that EFL teachers have to pursue higher professional standards in Medellín once they are actively involved in teaching.

## THE PROFESSIONAL NEEDS OF EFL TEACHERS IN MEDELLÍN

In a study conducted at the Universidad de Antioquia designed to explore the professional needs of EFL teachers in the Metropolitan area of Medellín, González et al. (2001) had access to the testimonies of thirty-one teachers from public and private schools. Although the study may be considered as quite restricted, the presentation of the results in different professional conferences in Colombia has validated the findings. Several issues appeared in the aforementioned research as key elements to understand the professional development required by the Colombian teachers of English. One particular issue was brought to the authors' attention along the study: the teachers' self-categorization as public and private school teachers as two different groups. Their views about themselves as part of one group and the other group were full of stereotypes. Each group believes that they face very different professional challenges to the other group. However, the data analysis showed that their need to improve their language proficiency, their students' social and psychological problems, and the need to become reflective practitioners are common denominators for teachers from public and private schools. The researchers concluded that teacher education agendas for professional development should promote more instances of mutual recognition and sharing, include professionals from other areas to enrich the solution of school problems, and provide opportunities for language practice outside the classroom. The problems teachers from both groups face are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Problems reported by public and private school EFL teachers**

<b>Public school teachers</b>	<b>Private school teachers</b>
Students' social problems Low language proficiency Lack of motivation to teach Lack of preparation to teach English to children	Overloaded with school work Lacking autonomy Having highly motivated students Having low language proficiency Students' social problems



In the same study, the issue of the professional needs of the teachers was explored in more detail. Results suggested three different domains in which we could summarize what EFL teachers search for in any teacher education agenda: **as workers, as instructors, and as learners**. The study concluded that a major EFL teacher education challenge in Medellín, for this group of teachers, is to offer a holistic approach in which teachers can develop their potential in these three areas through the constant interrelation of the three domains.

### **a. EFL teachers as workers**

As workers, the first issue teachers would like to include in their professional development is the opportunity to improve their income as they become better qualified. As a second issue, they also would like to be able to have fewer class periods and not being involved in extracurricular activities that limit their capacity to learn by themselves. The third one is the desire to hold a stable job, especially for teachers that work in private schools and language centers. As they hardly get tenure, at the end of each term, they do not know if their contract will be renewed. A fourth issue is the teachers' desire to be active agents in the decisions made at schools. A fifth issue, is their need to learn how to prevent school violence as domestic and social conflicts are growing fast and affecting more and more schools. And finally, EFL teachers would like to count on some personnel and procedures to take care of some tasks such as making copies, buying school supplies, getting snack and refreshments for teacher meetings or assisting a student that hurt himself/herself in the playground. The concerns summarized in this domain are reported in table 3.

**Table 3. Issues included in the domain of teachers as workers.**

Better salary
Less work load
A stable job
Autonomy
Prevention of school violence
Logistic support from administrators

### **b. EFL teachers as instructors**

The need to improve their curricula and instructional practices are the main issues presented by the teachers motivating them to participate in professional



development programs. In this domain, EFL teachers would like to have better conditions to teach their English classes with the access to more intense programs, smaller classes, and the support of adequate materials. Teachers also require help in the integration of contents among different subjects to enrich their students' perspectives in the learning process. The most frequent demand to teacher education programs is the provision of new and effective teaching techniques that enable teachers to motivate their students to learn the language. The highlighted importance of meeting these needs reflects the traditional view of teachers as instructors that underestimates their interests as workers and as learners. The needs in this domain are presented in table 4.

**Table 4. Issues included in the domain of teachers as instructors**

Smaller classes More teaching aids More English class sessions per week Cross-curricular integration Teaching techniques
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### **c. EFL teachers as learners**

In this domain, one of the most frequent demands for universities and teacher educators is how to improve the EFL teachers' language proficiency. Most teachers feel that they lose a great amount of language knowledge as they go on the profession. A second issue in this domain is the teacher's need to learn to work collaboratively to construct networks. A third element is their necessity to be reflective practitioners. The fourth request made to teacher education programs is their training in humanistic approaches to solve school problems. They insist that their classrooms represent several challenges because they are located in complex sociocultural environments. In this domain they ask for the presence of more inter and trans- disciplinary work with professionals from other fields to solve problems and learn from other ways of thinking and constructing the classroom realities. These needs are presented in table 5.

**Table 5. Issues included in the domain of teachers as instructors**

Better language proficiency Networking Humanistic approaches Reflective teaching Graduate studies
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## METHODOLOGY

In the study that explored the professional needs of EFL teachers, my colleagues and I found an interesting issue that emerged along the data analysis: the agents that deliver on the professional development for EFL teachers. Although this aspect was not one of the original research questions that led that research, the discussion and further analysis in which we were involved motivated me to write this paper. In the data collection, the questions “What EFL teacher development programs do you know in the city?” and “If you have participated in any of them, could you describe your experience?” provoked various answers that reflect the circumstances of the in-service training available to EFL teachers in Medellín.

### a. Participants

Sixty (60) Colombian EFL teachers from public schools, private schools, and language centers were contacted to participate in the study and forty-four (44) agreed to participate. Six (6) of them were cooperating teachers in our Practicum in foreign language teacher education; twelve (12) are graduates from our teacher preparation program; ten (10) work in the Extension Department, and sixteen (16) were school teachers that heard about the study from their colleagues. The gender, average age and teaching experience of the participants are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Demographics of the group of participants**

Category of teachers	Gender		Average age	Average years of teaching experience
	Male	Female		
Public schools	7	11	38.6	15.3
Private schools	4	9	31.3	6.9
Language centers	5	8	28	6.3

### b. Data collection

Data were gathered through focus groups sessions, a structured written questionnaire, and in-depth open-ended interviews. Two focus groups sessions were held for each



category of teachers. The focus groups were chosen as they “elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context”, allow the participants to take the initiative to express their feelings, and promote interaction (Gibbs, 1997; Morgan, 1988). Although some researchers are cautious about the fact that the rapport among participants may affect the quality of the information in focus groups sessions (Debus, 1988), the technique offered us a convenient way to discuss the professional needs of EFL teachers as it allowed us to hear their voices directly.

To guarantee the quality of the data collected, the protocol of the session was discussed with some colleagues from the School of Nursing that have had extensive experience in the use of focus groups. To pilot the routines of this technique, a simulation was held with a group of students (McNamara, 1999; Debus, 1988). My colleagues and I had the opportunity to experience the roles of moderator and observers. Before the focus groups sessions started, we informed the participants about the objective of the study, their role, the use of the information collected, and the protection of their identities. We told them about the use of pseudonyms in case of reporting any part of their testimonies. This was expressed in a consent form that all signed. The sessions followed the focus groups routines with some open questions about the teachers’ needs, what they want out of in-service courses, and the experiences they had had attending professional development programs. I, as the moderator, took some notes that were used as a summary of the main issues addressed. To validate my interpretation of the data, I read it to the teachers and asked them to provide their insights.

Once the focus groups sessions ended, the participants received a semi structured written questionnaire in which we asked some open questions about the teachers’ experiences in in-service programs. The questionnaire also included multiple choice questions regarding issues such as their preferred intensity and length of the professional development programs, the presence of non-native speakers as educators, the places and times for training sessions, etc. This instrument had been previously piloted with twenty-six teachers in a regional ELT Conference. The in-depth interviews were conducted with three teachers whose answers were particularly interesting to the researchers in the data analysis phase and helped us in the clarification of some issues (Kvale, 1986). They were invited to discuss their views two weeks after the focus groups sessions. Through their voices we expanded concerns such as the role of native speakers in teacher





education and the teachers' proficiency in English as a limitation in their education options.

## Data analysis

The focus groups sessions and in-depth interviews were audio taped and then transcribed using regular orthography. The questionnaires were tallied and the answers were grouped according to the teachers' preferences and opinions. My colleagues and I had a first individual reading to highlight and mark interesting issues and look for emerging patterns in the transcriptions of recorded material. We shared our individual notes in the group meetings. Naming and coding was done using first the **grounded approach** (Freeman, 1998: 101). We constructed the categories through the group discussions and modified as we had deeper interaction with the data. Then, the data were analyzed according to the existing theory of agents of teacher education: classrooms and school experience as students, professional development programs, and experience as school teachers using the **a priori approach** (Freeman, 1998). Within the domain of professional development programs we included the graduate studies, the English teaching conferences, and the training sessions or workshops offered by the local or national secretary of education. Both approaches were compared to do a more adequate interpretation of the data. We validated the data using the investigators' triangulation and the data triangulation (Freeman, 1998).

## FINDINGS

At the time the data was collected, the year 2001, there were very few opportunities for EFL teachers to access professional development programs in Medellín. If these limitations are found in a big city, the situation for teachers that work in small towns and rural areas may be worse. In the data analysis, we identified three main agents in the education of EFL teachers in Medellín: universities, professional conferences, and publishers sessions to present materials. Universities, especially public universities, are seen by the teachers in Colombia as the natural agent in the professional development of teachers. These institutions can guarantee democratic access to knowledge, have the trained personnel, and relate theory and practice through research. Universities are the



responsible instances for undergraduate and graduate preparation of teachers. The other two agents do not intend to educate teachers, at least openly. The activities proposed by publishers and professional conferences are meant to provide teachers with an opportunity to exchange experiences and get to know new materials available in the market. However, the academic content addressed in these events is considered by many EFL teachers as very valuable, and as may be seen later, the only opportunity to be in touch with development alternatives.

### a. Universities as teacher education agents

Although higher education institutions are supposed to be the main agents in the proposal of professional growth, most EFL teachers in Medellín report feeling “abandoned” because they do not feel they are included in the development agendas of universities. Continuing education and extension departments from universities in Medellín barely include alternatives to assist teachers to serve or to be prepared in their service. There are few options in the country in which researchers and teacher educators propose learning clubs or gathering opportunities getting EFL teachers together to seek ways to grow as colleagues. Efforts have been made by independent research groups of some universities to transfer their new knowledge to the needs of the teachers. The majority of these actions take place in Bogotá, and are just beginning to grow in Medellín. In one of the focus groups sessions, David, a teacher that works in two language centers, directed the following question to me,<sup>1</sup>

*“Why don’t universities care, now that **you are here with the university authorities** (his emphasis), about opening these kind of courses if they know there is the demand? I believe that the majority of teachers that you have interviewed have the need and they want to, then why not?”*

He believes that I should have a more leading role because I hold multiple identities as EFL teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and now, program administrator at

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1. The testimonies were originally stated in Spanish . We translated them into English to write the paper. We chose to publish it in English as a way to provide EFL teachers in Colombia with an opportunity to socialize our findings and practice the language meaningfully.



the Universidad de Antioquia. He expects from me the assistance of someone that knows the teachers' needs and, according to him, may have some power to make decisions. Although the call was addressed to me, I think his claim goes beyond my temporary role as an administrator. It is the message to local universities to commit themselves to offer better alternatives for teachers.

In Colombia, the role of many universities in the education of teachers is limited to the proposal of graduate programs such as *Especializaciones* and Masters' degrees. The objectives of these programs are the professionalization of the teachers and their training to do research, but they do not represent an adequate alternative for all the Colombian teachers of English. Although many EFL teachers in our country see graduate studies one of the best options to grow professionally, several limitations hinder their choice. The participants of the study reported the following problems for graduate programs. These limitations are summarized in table 7.

Table 7. Limitations of graduate studies for EFL teachers

Theory-oriented Distant from the real classrooms Unaffordable for many teachers
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The first limitation is the programs' heavy theory component. EFL teachers often claim that graduate programs tend to be oriented towards the acquisition of theoretical elements and that they underestimate the practical training to solve precise problems from local contexts. Leon, a teacher from a public school, provided a typical response which supports this view saying,

*"We need that training because it can represent a light for us, but the programs are too theoretical and are full of how to teach English and how the kids learn English. I remember that in one of my courses was taught that students would learn this and that... We did not think about Colombian kids that were thirteen, fifteen years old... I realized that my theory is just a blackboard... I asked myself what I was doing, then I got home and felt frustrated trying to change everything. I looked at my notebooks and turned the pages... I thought "they are useless, the context changed" ...*



The second limitation is the distance between classroom realities and materials studied. Teachers say that most of the questions that come up in the classroom are unanswered by the modules in which ESL contexts are described and addressed. Martha, a teacher from a private school has been quite reluctant to register in a graduate program. Her testimony reflects the opinion of several EFL teachers. She states,

*“We need programs to be designed that take into account the needs of the Colombian teacher, of this context... They should be more practical because most of the time they are too theoretical. Theory is there, so beautiful, but very hard to apply... Topics such as resources, discipline management, teaching strategies, motivation...”*

The third limitation is the high cost of graduate tuition fees. Working conditions for teachers make them hold more than one job to complete a decent salary. Setting some time aside to attend the classes means quitting one job or limiting the amount of time in which they can work as lectures. Few teachers can afford a reduction of their income without affecting the quality of their lives. Four, the length of the academic program. Unlike graduate programs in the United States, EFL teachers cannot become full-time students to pursue their degree. They add the student condition to the one of being teachers. Although the programs are designed for a two-year- period, the time devoted to the thesis is generally extended making the whole program last around three years. Carlos, A teacher that works in a private school, remarks on the difficulty many teachers face to pursue a graduate program. He says,

*“Although there may be some good graduate programs, teachers must pay the whole tuition in the majority of cases. They represent five or six times the minimum wage making it very difficult for public school teachers. This makes [the graduate programs] quite elitist... hard to be afforded by all teachers”.*

## **b. Professional Conferences**

The second option which teachers see as a valuable opportunity for education are professional conferences. In this particular study, EFL teachers see the annual



ELT regional conference in Medellín as the most reachable and useful option in teacher education. They place in the same category the national conference organized by the Colombian Association of English Teachers when it takes place in Medellín. Even if it is for a short time, teachers value the opportunity to use English, learn new things, share experiences, obtain materials for their lessons, and be in contact with experts in the field from Colombia and from abroad. They complain about the lack of similar opportunities that last longer than a couple of days for sharing and learning with other colleagues. Teresa, a teacher from a public school, states,

*“I feel some sort of aversion for graduate programs. I believe much more in options that are short, agile such as the ELT conference. However, they could be longer, a week or five days. I am not interested in graduate programs, they are very time consuming”.*

The impact of the professional conferences is summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8. Impact of professional conferences**

Reachable
Useful
Practical
Transitory effect

Even if teachers appreciate the efforts made to consolidate the conference as an academic tool, we know that its impact on the teachers' beliefs and practices may be quite superficial and transitory. Interest sessions often raise awareness and enthusiasm to tackle some issues such as interinstitutional groups, but they conflict with the teachers' limitation of time to work together after the conference. The publication of articles and presentations in the proceedings of the conference is often quite limited and does not reach a considerable number of teachers.

The aforementioned NCES report indicated that for a professional development program to improve the teachers' feeling of preparedness for classroom challenges, teachers need to spend more than a day in training sessions oriented



toward a relevant content area and need to be involved in collaborative activities with other teachers. Moreover, the report stated

*“that unless professional development programs are carefully designed and implemented to provide continuity between what teachers learn and what goes on in their classrooms and schools, these activities are not likely to produce any long-lasting effects on either teacher competence or student outcomes”.*

The requirements are not met by the regional ELT conference in Medellín even if it lasts two days and promotes practical activities and group work in the concurrent sessions and workshops.

### **c. Publishers' sessions**

Meetings scheduled by publishers to present textbook series and didactic materials are not intended to provide teachers with professional alternatives. However, the majority of participants in this study reported these activities as contributing to their professional growth. The purpose of the meetings is generally the promotion of a given textbook, dictionaries, or complementary aids that have the potential of being adopted by language centers and schools. The best way to get the teachers' attention is to include some academic topics and organizing the presentations in top hotels where teachers are served some snack and receive some complementary copies or small gifts. Native speakers are often hired to do the presentations because an English name is much more appealing than a Colombian name. Besides, presenters must possess entertaining skills to keep the audience interested while the books are presented. Isabel, a teacher from a private school, expresses the opinion of many teachers about these publishers' sessions saying,

*“I am one of those that does not miss the training offered by publishing companies because I am also very interested in the gifts such as books, dictionaries, and other goodies. I usually attend those focused on elementary school... Then we share the experiences at school.”*



Teachers value the opportunity to meet the author of the book and learn from his/her experience. There is an additional bonus in these sessions when teachers can practice English. Isabel adds,

*“The person in charge of the book, the one that wrote it, that knows it, when that person is a teacher, he/she knows about the book because he/she designed the exercises, understands the book... Everything is training for us because he/she is sharing his/her experience as a teacher through the book”.*

The benefits of the presentations of publishing companies, considered as useful training sessions by some teachers, have many limitations as a professional development option. First, teachers are aware of the little content addressed in the presentations and the lack of frequency in these meetings. William states,

*“ Those publishers such as A and B take you there and to persuade you to buy their book or their dictionary, they have a seminar or a lecture oriented towards methodology... but one feels there is a lot missing”.*

Second, the sessions tend to develop the same topics again and again as they aim to cover a great number of people. This may make the presentations quite repetitive. The simplicity in the repertoire of topics prevent some teachers from attending them. Paulina, a teacher that works in an extension program at a university, says,

*“Let’s suppose that Publisher C gives a seminar about a topic that has been treated again and again, something like Learning Styles, and it is not that I think that I am too bright, but they have always the same topics...one says, “this again?”.*

Third, the publishers’ sessions are not available to all EFL teachers. Publishing houses barely schedule presentations for public school teachers, and they seldom organize them in schools located in underprivileged neighborhoods. This may be a consequence of the belief that less privileged students are not potential customers for their products, therefore investing time, materials, and an expert may not represent



any profit for their business. Liliana, a teacher from a public school, complains about the fact that publishers seldom send those invitations to their workshops to colleagues in her school district saying,

*“ I wish that training, that education, that information arrived at the schools, and went straight to the secretary or the principal so that they could be in charge and pass it to the teachers.”*

The impact of the publishers' sessions is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9. The impact of publishers' sessions on EFL teachers**

Contact with native speakers Little content addressed Repetition of topics Restricted quite often for private school teachers
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So, how will we educate EFL teachers?

I have so far discussed the three agents that educate EFL teachers once they have finished their preparation stage. Out of the three, only graduate programs are really intended to educate teachers and promote the skills required to be better professionals. If teacher educators are to answer the desperate call of EFL teachers, a different teacher educator is required by our sociocultural conditions. Universities should take a more proactive role in the proposal of agendas in professional development going beyond the graduate programs. More open, dynamic, and practical paradigms of teachers and teacher educators as co-workers, co-researchers, and co-educators are needed. Collaborative agendas between the organizing committee of the regional ELT conference and universities must create continuing spaces for reflection on classroom challenges, teaching standards, and professional concerns. The demands of EFL teachers regarding their in-service training should be assumed by new teacher education programs oriented by local researchers from our universities.

I would like to highlight the fact that language teaching is beyond the “best method”. In the postmethod stage (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) teachers defend their own needs,





standards, and possibilities. There is special emphasis on the teachers' experience and the contact with the particular conditions of teaching English in real EFL classrooms. Since there are many well-prepared teacher educators in EFL settings who are willing to help colleague teachers, we must get together and design the agendas in teacher education to make the professional development of teachers an effort in which collaboration, reflection, situated experiences, and a theorizing opportunity are the guiding principles (Johnson, 2002). The education of EFL teachers should be a collective concern. The construction of more adequate professional programs needs the active participation of individuals, groups of teachers, and institutions. As Arias (1994) presents it (see Table 10), raising standards in the profession should move from awareness through actions that are taken after doing research. It should also overcome the barriers of individuals and gather groups of institutions.

**Table 10. The dynamics of teacher development (Arias, 1994)**

	Awareness	Reflection on teaching	Reflective teaching	Research: Action-research	
Individual teachers					Training Education Development
Groups of teachers					
Institution					
Groups of institutions					
	<i>Needs, interests, capabilities, resources, and goals</i>				

## CONCLUSION

Even if universities are expected to participate in the creation of dynamic pro-active agendas for EFL teachers, teacher educators still have a limited involvement. Most



of our academic action is reduced to Masters' degrees or random seminars. Listening to the testimonies of teachers has highlighted their claim for more immediate action from higher education institutions. This call is particularly important for public universities as they have the social mission of making education accessible for people. We cannot turn our backs on the several voices that ask us for spaces to share knowledge, concerns, materials, or learning tasks. Many Colombian EFL teachers are alone in their search for ways to grow professionally and raise the standards of our teaching job. The demands for universities and for teacher educators are to propose continuing education programs that:

- a. Value the acquired knowledge of teachers. We are to learn from the teachers' rich experiences and cultures to co-work in the articulation of in-service training.
- b. Are practical. We are to help teachers solve their everyday problems without running the risk of becoming followers of recipes.
- c. Promote language acquisition and practice: We are to provide teachers with linguistic challenges that maintain and improve their proficiency through advanced courses.
- d. Involve experienced local experts that investigate our realities. We are to scrutinize our classroom practices, write about them and validate the findings in the creation of more realistic programs that focus on our teachers' needs.
- e. Are constructed in collaboration among institutions. We are to give EFL teachers more space for participation in their own education options through the joint efforts of institutions.

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