

# KNOWLEDGE BASE AND EFL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A COLOMBIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Colombian pre-service EFL Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) should study what constitutes the core knowledge base for language teachers to be effective in their profession. These programs must refrain from simply conceptualizing knowledge base as the acquisition of the basic skills required for teaching, the competency of educators in their subject matter area, and the use of pedagogical skills. Instead, they should strive to reflect on what Colombian language teachers need to know about teaching and learning, and study how their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes inform their practices. A starting point to do so is to interpret the variety of proposals that have been generated through the years in the field. This paper offers a review of what teacher knowledge base is, presents an overview of how Colombian EFL TEPs are working on teacher knowledge, and suggests some strategies to envision a more complete framework of reference for teacher formation in Colombia.

**Keywords:** teacher education, second language instruction, teacher qualifications, educational personnel training, knowledge base

## RESUMEN

En el siglo XXI, los programas de formación docente de profesores de inglés deberían estudiar lo que constituye la base de conocimientos esenciales para profesores de idiomas para ser eficaces en su profesión. Estos programas deben abstenerse de conceptualizar simplemente la base de conocimiento como la adquisición de las habilidades básicas necesarias para la enseñanza, la competencia de los educadores en su área temática y el uso de sus habilidades pedagógicas. Por el contrario, estos programas deben esforzarse por reflexionar sobre lo que los docentes colombianos de idiomas necesitan saber acerca de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje y estudiar cómo su conocimiento, creencias y actitudes informan sus prácticas. Un punto de partida para ello es la interpretación de la variedad de propuestas que se han generado a través de los años en el campo. Este artículo ofrece una revisión de lo que es la base de conocimientos docentes, presenta una visión general de cómo los programas de formación docente colombianos en inglés como lengua extranjera están trabajando el conocimiento docente y sugiere algunas estrategias para visualizar un marco más completo de referencia para la formación docente en Colombia.

Palabras clave: formación de docentes, enseñanza de una segunda lengua, competencias del docente, formación de personal docente, bases de conocimiento

## INTRODUCTION

EFL teachers must know how to face several challenges such as improving their language proficiency, teaching in diverse contexts, implementing classroom-based research, having access to professional development and networking (González, 2000). Such challenges ask them to be able to integrate knowledge about language, pedagogical practices, learning theories, and educational contexts. Besides, as a consequence of accreditation, globalization, and standardization, most Colombian EFL TEPs have undergone major curricular and pedagogical changes in the last years. These changes have mostly been the result of imported discourses and models, which have not only caused curricular and pedagogical changes in teacher education programs, but have also affected the language, the actions, the attitudes, and the conceptions of teachers themselves (Muñoz, Quintero & Munevar, 2002). As a consequence, there is evidence of the existence of practices in which colonial and instrumental perspectives displace our internal realities and knowledge. Some of these perspectives are linked to the figure of the native speaker as role model and the accreditation of knowledge production (González & Sierra, 2005).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Colombian pre-service EFL TEPs should study what constitutes the core knowledge base of the language teaching profession so that language teachers can be effective and critical practitioners. As Shulman (1986) states, EFL TEPs should avoid considering teacher education from the perspective of content or pedagogy as mutually exclusive domains. Instead, efforts should be made to conceptualize what Colombian language teachers need to know about teaching and learning, and how their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes inform their practices. Within the framework of knowledge base, this article discusses some of the issues that Colombian EFL TEPs need to incorporate in order to prepare pre-service teachers to acknowledge and examine the underlying premises that form and guide their

professional performance. Some of these issues are: knowledge base, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical reasoning and action (see section below).

### 2.1 Knowledge base

Pineda (2002) says that for a long time, the conceptualization of knowledge base was restricted to the attainment of the basic skills required for teaching, the competency of educators in their subject matter area, and the use of pedagogical strategies. However, there are other variables that are critical in teaching: the classroom context, the physical and psychological characteristics of the learners, the personal and practical experiences of teachers, their reflective practices and research skills. Such a wider consideration of what constitutes the teaching profession can enable EFL TEPs to envision a more complete framework of reference for future professional application.

A starting point for conceptualizing how knowledge base evolves in the minds of language teachers consists of understanding the variety of proposals that have been generated through the years in the field. An overview of the literature, mainly in Kaur G., Yuen and Kaur S. (2011), reveals that an effective teacher needs to master at least two types of basic knowledge: *content knowledge* and *pedagogical knowledge*. The former refers to the knowledge a teacher should possess in the subject itself while the latter refers to the teaching and learning of subjects and their curricula.

More concretely, Shulman (1987) states that teachers' knowledge base must not simply be regarded as a set of professional and experiential skills to be built up. Instead, he argues for a framework that includes and combines content, pedagogy, curriculum and context. To him, teachers' knowledge base consists of different categories of knowledge which are needed for effective teaching. In his framework, Shulman differentiates three types of content knowledge:

(a) *subject matter knowledge*, (b) *pedagogical content knowledge*, and (c) *curricular knowledge*. In addition, this framework includes categories such as *knowledge of learners, knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends* (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. *Teachers’ professional knowledge base categories* (Adapted from Shulman, 1987, p. 8)

	CATEGORY	DEFINITION
General dimensions of teacher knowledge	Knowledge of educational ends	A comprehension of the purposes and values of education as well as their philosophical and historical grounds.
	Knowledge of educational contexts	An understanding of the sociocultural and institutional dynamics of schools, communities and cultures.
	General pedagogical knowledge	Command over the main principles, methods and strategies needed for effective teaching and learning.
	Knowledge of learners	An understanding of learners’ cognitive, psychological and affective characteristics, behaviors, interests and developmental stages.
Content-specific dimensions of teacher knowledge	Curriculum knowledge	A comprehension of the syllabus, topics, and instructional materials designed for and expected in the teaching of a particular subject.
	Subject matter or content knowledge	Academic comprehension of both the content and the structure of a subject.
	Pedagogical content knowledge	A combination of content and pedagogy that helps teachers make a subject comprehensible to others.

When talking about teachers’ knowledge, Fenstermacher (1994) makes a distinction between *formal knowledge* and *practical knowledge*. For him, formal knowledge is based on literature derived from research about effective teaching. On the other hand, practical knowledge is generated by teachers as a result of their every day experimentation and reflection within the classroom context and as such it is personal, situational and tacit. When discussing Shulman and Fenstermacher’s proposal, Polyzou and Postlethwaite (2000) suggest that teachers’ subject knowledge and curriculum knowledge are essentially formal forms of knowledge; their pedagogical subject knowledge is essentially practical knowledge and their knowledge of student learning and educational contexts may be an amalgam of both.

The above theoretical perspectives imply that it is important to identify and understand any general, specific, formal, or practical type of knowledge teachers need to acquire and develop. It is essential, then, to establish the basic elements or dimensions that EFL TEPs should provide EFL pre-service

teachers for their working life. In addition, it is important to approach the situation of Colombian EFL TEPs in regards to teacher knowledge in order to suggest a set of alternatives and strategies that allow the formation of more effective and critical EFL professionals. Accordingly, the main features of L2 teachers’ knowledge base are presented next.

## 2.2 Knowledge base of L2 teachers

In the field of second language teaching, a wide variety of proposals about what constitutes knowledge base have been proposed. Different scholars have strived to offer a systematic and comprehensive view of how teachers construct and develop knowledge from the interplay of content, pedagogy, context and curriculum. Due to space constraints, the following literature review focuses mainly on a brief historical overview of the past two decades of theory about knowledge base in L2.

Lafayette (1993) maintains that there is a specialist component of foreign language teacher education, which consists of proficiency in and knowledge about the language, literature and culture to be

taught. He suggests that there are three domains which encompass L2 teachers' knowledge: *language proficiency*, *civilization and culture*, and *language analysis*. To him, L2 teachers should have an advanced command of the language in order to be effective users and models. In terms of civilization and culture, Lafayette argues that L2 teachers should be cognizant of issues such as literature and customs so as to help their students develop cultural sensitivities and awareness towards people and things unfamiliar to them. In regards to language analysis, Lafayette states that L2 teachers should not only be informed about language structures, but also be knowledgeable about applied linguistics and second language acquisition.

In the same year, Day (1993) proposes a framework that includes four domains of knowledge: *content knowledge*, *pedagogic knowledge*, *pedagogic content knowledge*, and *support knowledge*. In this framework, content knowledge refers to knowledge of subject matter connected to issues such as syntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics, and literary and cultural aspects. Pedagogic knowledge consists of knowledge of teaching practices; e.g., classroom management, lesson planning, etc. Pedagogic content knowledge deals with specialized knowledge of the teaching of an L2 (grammar, speaking, etc.), whereas support knowledge includes knowledge of different disciplines that inform language teachers' approaches to the teaching and learning of an L2; e.g., linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, etc.

Following Shulman's conceptualization of knowledge base, Richards (1998) proposes six dimensions: *theories of teaching* (theoretical bases for approaching teaching as well as instructional practices), *teaching skills* (essential dimensions of the repertoire of any teacher), *communication skills and language proficiency* (competence in language use and information exchange), *subject matter knowledge* (specialized disciplinary knowledge of language teaching), *pedagogical reasoning and decision making* (complex cognitive and problem-solving skills underlying teaching

practices) and *contextual knowledge* (information about educational and linguistic policies as well as familiarity with students, institutions, and programs). The development of these dimensions in EFL TEPs, contends Richards, can help L2 teachers understand the bases of their classroom realities and improve their educational experiences. This development can, ultimately, bring about critical reflection and change.

For their part, Freeman and Johnson (1998) argue for a re-conceptualization of the knowledge base of language teacher education based on the premise that language teaching can be enriched when examining systematically how language teachers come to know what they know and do what they do in their work. To them, such re-conceptualization implies that teacher learners and their learning processes cannot be adequately described or understood without taking into full account the socio-cultural contexts in which their learning takes place. Consequently, the core of knowledge base must focus on the activity of teaching itself, the teacher who does it, the contexts in which it is done and the pedagogy by which it is done. As a result, they posit that a re-conceptualized knowledge base for second language teaching (SLT) should concern three interrelated domains linked by processes of socialization, community creation and activity participation: (a) *the teacher as learner of language teaching*, (b) *schools and schooling as historical and socio-cultural contexts for teacher learning* and (c) *the teacher's pedagogical thinking about teaching, the subject matter and its contents and the language learning process*. The integrated discussion of language teaching, the contexts of schools and the teacher's pedagogical reasoning, explain Freeman and Johnson, can lead to an informed exploration of language teachers' actions and practices, which can ultimately help understand and develop their knowledge base.

In 2005, Tarone and Allwright point out that Freeman and Johnson's framework lacks a key element: *the second/foreign language learner*. They propose that the teachers' knowledge base should

include a clear understanding of learners, who they are, why they learn, what they need to learn, and what motivates them, among other aspects. Furthermore, they argue that second/foreign language teaching must be regarded as different from teacher education for other disciplines since it has its own specificities and particularities. Therefore, EFL TEPs should draw on research that is unique to second/foreign language contexts: *second/foreign language acquisition* (SLA). To them, most of the research findings of SLA are relevant to teachers when they make decisions in classroom processes and curriculum planning. Consequently, they encourage teachers to collaborate on SLA research in order to better understand how L2 learners learn.

Up to this point, diverse proposals about what constitutes knowledge base have been presented (See table 2 to have a summary of this theoretical overview). Such diversity exemplifies the efforts of the L2 community to offer a systematic and comprehensive view of how teachers construct and

develop knowledge from the interplay of content, pedagogy, context and curriculum. However, it seems possible to state that, in second language teaching, knowledge base refers to the expertise, understanding, awareness, knowledge, and skills that L2 teachers need to possess in order to be effective teachers (Faez, 2011).

In addition, it is worth noting that proposals about the knowledge base of L2 teachers have moved away from simply listing “discrete” skills and competencies to focusing on sociocultural perspectives or models. As Freeman and Johnson (1998) point out, these models suggest that teacher knowledge is a contextualized process that takes place in specific circumstances. In this regard, Richards (2008) maintains that L2 teachers’ knowledge base should not be viewed simply as translating knowledge and theories into practice but as constructing new knowledge and theory through engaging in particular types of activities and processes in specific social contexts (p. 164). In other words, discussing knowledge base of L2

Table 2. Overview of knowledge base of L2 teachers

Knowledge base in second/foreign language	Lafayette (1993)	Language proficiency. Civilization and culture. Language analysis.
	Day (1993)	Content knowledge. Pedagogic knowledge. Pedagogic content knowledge. Support knowledge.
	Richards (1998)	Theories of teaching. Teaching skills. Communication skills and language proficiency. Subject matter knowledge. Pedagogical reasoning and decision making. Contextual knowledge.
	Freeman and Johnson (1998)	The teacher as learner of language teaching. Schools and schooling as historical and sociocultural contexts for teacher learning. The teacher’s pedagogical thinking about teaching, the subject matter and its content and the language learning process.
	Tarone and Allwright(2005)	The second/foreign language learner. The learner learning. Research on second language acquisition.

teachers does not only consist of being familiar with the elements, dimensions or domains that constitute it, but it demands understanding the models that shape it. In the section below, some of the most relevant models to work with L2 teachers' knowledge base are described. Once again, this presentation follows a historical chronology beginning with Shulman's pedagogical reasoning and action model and ending with Ohata's (2007) teaching alternatives through self-awareness and reflection.

### 2.3 Models of knowledge base for L2 teachers

In order to show how teachers can use their knowledge base to support their choices and actions, Shulman (1986, 1987) presents the model for pedagogical reasoning and action. This model presents a cycle that links the knowledge that teachers have with their thinking and their classroom practices. This cycle includes six components:

*comprehension, instruction, evaluation, reflection, new comprehension, and transformation.* According to Lee (2002), pedagogical reasoning begins with the comprehension of subject matter and continues with new comprehension after reflection on instruction. At the center of this self-perpetuating process is the transformation of knowledge, which contains, in turn, five sub-processes: *preparation, representation, selection, adaptation, and tailoring.* Preparation involves the examination and critical interpretation of knowledge of subject matter. Representation entails the repackaging of subject matter in a manner suitable for instruction. Selection comprises the choosing of appropriate educational strategies. Adaptation includes the alteration of subject matter to fit the characteristics of specific students. Tailoring is the special configuration of subject matter for students with individual needs. To have a better idea of this pedagogical reasoning and action, see figure below.

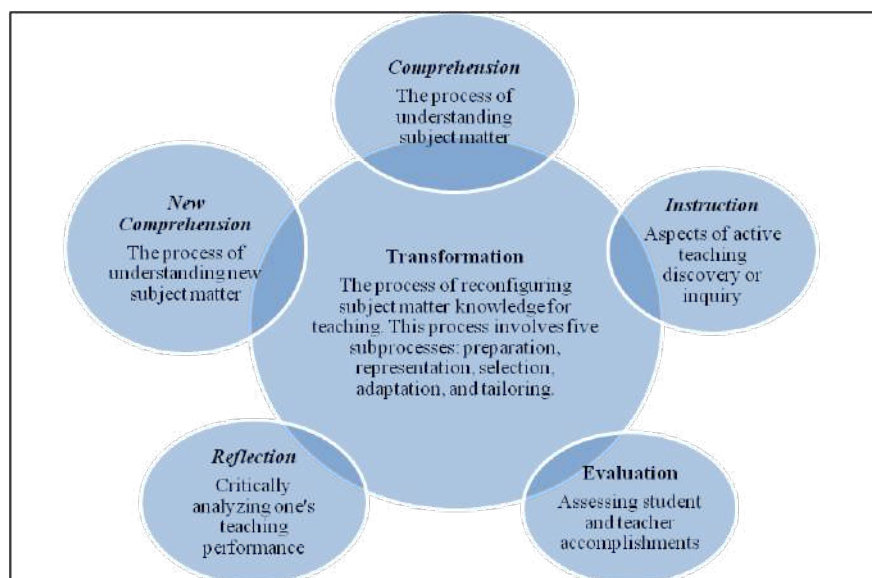


Figure 1. The model of pedagogical reasoning and action. Adapted from Wilson, Shulman and Richert (1987)

When discussing teacher knowledge, Calderhead (1988) proposes a teachers' professional learning model that acknowledges the interrelation among four aspects: *practical knowledge, academic*

*knowledge, meta-cognitive processes and conceptions of learning to teach.* To Calderhead, practical knowledge is action-related and emerges from teachers' classroom experiences whereas academic

knowledge is theory-based and results from teacher education programs. For its part, meta-cognitive processes allow teachers to compare, analyze and evaluate different types of information in order to produce functional knowledge for classroom practice. The conceptions that teachers have of the process of learning to teach, contends Calderhead, influence how their knowledge base is structured, represented and employed. Not only does this model allow us to study the interrelations among action, theory, meta-cognition and conceptions, but also it helps us understand how individual teachers build and develop their knowledge of teaching.

For their part, Wallace (1991) and Freeman (1991) identify models that characterize how the preparation of future teachers can be delivered. On the one hand, Wallace identifies three models: *the craft model* based on the imitation of what experts do; *the applied science model* based on practical application of the theories of scholars; and *the reflective model* based on an ongoing construction and interpretation of knowledge and practice. When applied to teacher education, Wallace's reflective model consists of three stages: (a) *pre-training*, a point in which teachers acquire preliminary conceptual schema or mental constructs when they are students; (b) *professional education or development*, a period when teachers learn the actual framework of teaching and become aware of the different classroom situations through received knowledge (theories and research about second/foreign language teaching) and experiential knowledge (practical experience derived from knowing and reflection about actions); and (c) *professional competence*, a competence which, thanks to recurrent cycles of professional development, allows teachers to make connections, create meaning, and make informed decisions.

On the other hand, Freeman (1991) avows that teacher education can opt for three views of teaching: *teaching as doing*, *teaching as thinking* and *teaching as knowing what to do*. First, the teaching as doing view is based on a behavioral

paradigm which emphasizes the development of skills through a craft model of teacher education. Second, the teaching as thinking and doing view follows a cognitive paradigm and calls attention to what teachers know and how they do things through an applied science model. Finally, the teaching as knowing what to do envisions an interpretative paradigm that encourages the development of frameworks of interpretation to theory and focuses on teachers' decision-making and reflection. To Freeman, the gradual progress through these views can help teachers undergo interteaching, which consists of a movement towards effective, creative and self-sufficient practice from stages of dependence, information reception, and guidance.

When examining TEPs and the ways they can work with knowledge base effectively, Day (1993) discusses four models: *the apprentice-expert model*; *the rationalist model*, *the case studies model* and *the integrative model*. These models or approaches characterize the overall way a program presents or delivers knowledge to its learners. The apprentice-expert model is the oldest form of professional education and consists of the trainee or beginner working closely with an expert teacher in order to acquire knowledge through observation, instruction, and practice. The rationalist model is also known as the rationalist learn-the-theory-and-then-apply-it model. This model involves the teaching of scientific knowledge to student teachers who, in turn, are expected to apply this knowledge in their teaching. The case studies model involves the discussion and analysis of actual case histories in the classroom. The basic objective of this model is the generalization of particular behaviors into broader understandings of the discipline. The integrative model is a systematic approach to second language teacher education that ensures that the learner gains pedagogic, content, pedagogic content, and support knowledge through a variety of experiences and activities. It includes a reflective practice component, which implies a critical examination of all the experiences and activities student teachers are engaged in.

Such reflective thinking seeks to help new teachers act in deliberate and intentional ways in order to devise new ways of teaching and interpret practice from a fresh perspective.

Based on Shulman, Calderhead, Wallace, Freeman and Day's proposals, it seems teacher education needs and has, in fact, moved from having a mere instructional emphasis to seeking a more reflective approach. In this regard, Ohata (2007) states that teacher education has undergone a shift from searching for better ways to train teachers to understand the process of learning to providing effective *alternatives to teach through self-awareness and reflection*. To him, teachers need to critically acknowledge the underlying premises that guide their professional practices before systematically examining specific activities or procedures for their professional development. The goals of this critical acknowledgement should not only be, explains Ohata, to describe and articulate what decisions are made while teaching but, more importantly, to challenge and explore how or why classroom actions or behaviors are influenced by previous experiences and personal assumptions or beliefs. Thus, TEPs must not see teaching as a static and prescriptive activity. Instead, they should regard it as a dynamic process characterized by reflection and change.

However, Manoucheri (2002) explains that a simple emphasis on reflection can fail to address the importance of socialization and social interaction in the development of professional knowledge. Following Bruner's (1990) view of education, she suggests that entering any educational setting is entering a culture that holds and maintains its own normative structures, all of which form and enforce common sense. As a result, student teachers do not simply learn the social norms and constructs of an educational institution. They also learn certain attitudes, practices, and performances which, in turn, interactively influence the making of meaning and set the standard for cultural and professional competence. Consequently, posits Manouchehri, *guided and systematic communication and collaboration* are needed in

TEPs so that student teachers can exchange ideas, articulate their thinking, and understand others' viewpoints. By communicating and collaborating, student teachers can develop their capacity to take on new perspectives and build new understanding about their profession.

Summarizing this part of the paper, it is possible to identify how over time different models have expanded and broadened their approaches to teachers' knowledge base. Such approaches have mainly focused their attention on relating or integrating different perspectives in order to help teachers produce knowledge and guide their actions in practice (see table 3 to have a basic view of the models presented in this article). In sum, all of these models seem to suggest that L2 teachers need to develop an interconnected and well-organized construct of subject matter, pedagogy, learning, learners, and context, which requires judgment, action, and the capacity to reflect and revise practices and decisions. The following section discusses whether Colombian EFL TEPs programs are giving pre-service teachers the necessary bases they need in order for them to be able to create and develop reflective and critical views of their educational realities.

### 3.1 EFL TEPs in Colombia and knowledge base

Despite their form movements, Vieira and Moreira (2008) explain that teacher education programs still tend to tell teachers what and how to do things (technical instruction) rather than facilitating a thorough understanding of and a purposeful intervention in educational contexts (reflective inquiry). To them, this state of affairs raises constraints on reflectivity, authenticity, dialogical interaction, openness to innovation and autonomy. If student teachers and teacher educators are to become critical agents, claim Vieira and Moreira, they should become not only critical consumer and creative producers of knowledge, but also informed participants in the improvement of the educational situations they experience.



Table 3. Overview of models of knowledge base for L2 teachers

Models of knowledge base for L2 teachers	Shulman (1986, 1987)	The pedagogical reasoning and action model.
	Calderhead (1988)	The teachers' professional learning model.
	Wallace (1991)	The craft model, the applied science model and the reflective model, which consist of pre-training, professional education or development, and professional competence.
	Freeman (1991)	The interteaching model which emerges from a gradual progress of teaching as doing, teaching as thinking and teaching as knowing.
	Day (1993)	The apprentice-expert model, the rationalist model, the case studies model and the integrative model, which includes a reflective practice component.
	Manouchehri (2002)	A cultural model to understand a student teacher's entrance to any educational setting.
	Ohata (2007)	A self-awareness and reflection model to acknowledge teachers' practical premises and examine teachers' professional development.

In Colombia, Cortés, Hernández and Arteaga (2008) state that our society expects EFL teachers to be not just excellent users of the foreign language, but more importantly analysts and researchers equipped with a general knowledge of educational philosophy, curriculum theory, teaching methods, learning approaches and ICTs. However, Calvo, Rendón and Rojas (2004) claim that, although there have been several efforts to strengthen reflection and research in TEPs, the articulation between the innovating teaching-learning model of the institutions and their real possibilities for better formative processes is still uncertain. Calvo et al. argue that such efforts may have been obstructed by the permanence of traditional pedagogical models that privilege technical training, which goes against theoretical, pedagogical, and curricular innovation and restructuring promoted by research and reflection. In a similar vein, Caicedo (2008) says TEPs need to be reconsidered, so they can implement new curriculum approaches to form educators who are able, among other things, (a) to develop critical and creative thinking, (b) to do and communicate research properly, and (c) to face today's challenges holistically.

Within the field of English language teaching, González (2009) states that the spread of the In-service Certificate in English Language

Teaching (ICELT) and the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) in Colombia plays a clear role in the homogenization, “businessification” and inequality of EFL professional development. In 2007, she maintained that the professional development model proposed in “Colombia Bilingüe” was a representation of colonial, traditional, and central discourses in ELT that needed to be reshaped by the new, local, and peripheral knowledge constructed by Colombian ELT scholars and teachers. Similarly, Quintero and Ramírez (2009) state that the history of most TEPs has been related to teaching as a passive activity in which state and private universities tend to train students to become teachers through highly theory-based courses or seminars that provide them with insufficient research practice in the classroom. As a result, Quintero and Ramírez argue that the following problems usually emerge: adoption of experts' suggestions for teaching practices that do not always meet classroom needs; use of isolated teaching and research techniques; lack of reflection skills; and few opportunities to improve professional skills to face the problems of real classroom situations.

When discussing the teaching models used in EFL TEPs in Colombia, Cárdenas (2009) explains that knowledge transmission and skills development-based models are still present, but she states that

more personal and social-oriented paradigms are observable in teaching proposals. The existence of behaviorist, humanist, constructivist, social constructivist and reflective perspectives in teacher education programs suggests a certain degree of eclecticism. This eclecticism, contends Cárdenas, can have two interpretations: a lack of conceptual clarity or an awareness of the need for multifaceted approaches to teacher education. From a methodological perspective, Cárdenas explains that teacher education programs seem to focus on the experiences and beliefs of future teachers, reflection-based processes, real context practices, ethnography and action research and performance and process-based evaluation. However, Cárdenas states that the influence of official regulations is shifting the emphasis of courses towards the preparation for exams, which seems to be in line with the spread of discourses about accountability and evaluation.

92 Within the framework of recent linguistic and educational policies, Usma (2009) suggests that the quest for standardization, internationalization and accreditation have undermined EFL TEPs' possibilities to acknowledge and promote awareness, autonomy, diversity and contextualization. To him, not only have certain decisions and sets of law imposed foreign discourses and practices at the expense of local knowledge, but they have stratified and excluded teachers and universities based on scores and rankings. In view of this situation, most EFL TEPs have had to comply with top-down requirements and demands, which are mainly based on traditional and central discourses; discourses that disregard teachers' expertise and knowledge and devalue reflection and interaction.

In regards to Colombian teachers' knowledge base, Piñeros and Quintero (2007) argue that this base shows an interaction between abstraction and generation of meaning through reflective practices. In other words, teachers are required to allow different types of knowledge to interact in order to establish relationships, which in turn construct a solid conceptualization of teaching: their teaching

knowledge base. In their view, this knowledge base leads teachers to take more critical positions towards educational theories and to make informed decisions on what is favorable for learners.

In a similar vein, Álvarez (2009) states that understanding the complexities inherent to teacher knowledge and its sources and characteristics can provide information about teachers' practices, give insights to examine language teaching policies and professional development programs. According to him, the construction of teachers' knowledge base is a continuous process that involves (a) teachers' experiences in and out of the classroom, (b) teachers' beliefs and values at different moments of their educational life, and (c) an interaction between pre-training knowledge, teacher education knowledge, and teaching activity. Although teachers value the technical aspects of language teaching such as content and methodological aspects, argues Álvarez, EFL teachers pay special attention to of issues that have to do with the humanistic sphere of education. This humanistic view entails knowledge and awareness of their roles, their students and their professional setting. In particular, Concretely, Álvarez states that EFL teachers' self-perception as pedagogues seems to play a significant role in constructing their knowledge base. As a result, he calls for more research to be done from an insider's perspective capable of studying the intricacies of teachers' inner selves.

The complex situation of EFL TEPs and the diversity of factors influencing teacher knowledge make it difficult to propose a "one size fits all" approach that helps prepare Colombian EFL teachers for the variety of sociocultural backgrounds that exist in our classrooms. However, we can start conceptualizing how this might be done by implementing inquiry and strengthening professional-based focuses in EFL TEPs in a methodical and deliberate way. This implementation and strengthening can help EFL student teachers and teacher educators construct local knowledge, examine their actions, and question the theories of others (see final section below).

### 3.2 Strategies for improving knowledge base in Colombian EFL TEPs

One possible alternative to help EFL TEPs generate a voice of their own in pre-service teachers could be the systematic and careful implementation of inquiry in TEPs. Such implementation, however, calls for more than simply having more reflective-based activities or including research-oriented guidelines. In this regard, Sharkey (2009) maintains that TEPs need to infuse inquiry into all aspects of the curriculum so that teachers can theorize their practices and interpret the theory of others. In her view, by systematically inculcating inquiry, TEPs can become professional and learning communities of praxis, operating on principles of collaboration and critical reflection. Through a commitment to praxis (theorized practice), contends Sharkey, these communities can transform educational practices and policies.

Another possibility is the search for new agendas for professional formation and development. In this regard, González and Quinchía (2003) state that EFL TEPs need to articulate at least three main focuses in order to expand teacher knowledge: (1) knowledge of local realities; (2) broad understanding of teaching EFL; and (3) direct experience with research. Among other things, these focuses can help EFL teachers become sensitive to the particular conditions of the socio-cultural milieu in which teaching and learning take place, explore their school environments and, ultimately, create disciplinary knowledge. González (2003) also states that TEPs should help student teachers and teacher educators develop their potential in three major domains: EFL teachers as workers able to participate in the decisions made at schools; EFL teachers as instructors equipped with new and effective teaching techniques to empower students; and EFL teachers as learners capable of constructing and participating in collaborative networks.

Finally, in 2007, González also proposes that EFL TEPs should be constructed with the following characteristics: (1) application of a post-method framework based on parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, and macro strategies for language teaching; (2) practice of peripheral knowledge construction; (3) establishment of adequate communication with local scholars and policy makers; and (4) acceptance of counter-discourses and a critical theory of teacher education.

### 4. DISCUSSION

To conclude, EFL TEPs should place reflective teaching at the heart of their curricular reforms. Observing, questioning, describing, taking notes, interpreting, reflecting, planning, acting, and writing are competences, states Fandiño (2011), that need to be included gradually, as a natural routine in the daily life of student teachers and teacher educators. Not only can this gradual inclusion create advanced knowledge on the basis of practical experience, but it can also improve the context or conditions in which language teaching and learning take place. Ultimately, reflective teaching can strengthen pedagogical practice and favor strategies for critical reflection and change.

EFL TEPs can search for a more complete framework of reference for teacher formation in Colombia by studying different proposals about teacher knowledge, infusing inquiry into their practices and incorporating effective focuses and characteristics in their proposals. By doing so, they can be committed to the development and improvement of the knowledge base of Colombian student teachers and teacher educators. Not only would these teachers be better prepared to respond to the educational needs and interests of the national ELT community, but they would also be capable of constructing their own theories from their daily practice.

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