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Professional Development of EFL Teachers in Colombia: Between Colonial and Local Practices*

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The professional development of EFL teachers represents a challenge for teachers, teacher educators and policy makers in the accomplishment of better standards in education. Literature reviews on the area reveal the need for new models of professional growth for Colombian teachers. Within the framework of “*Colombia Bilingüe*”, the Ministry of Education proposes a professional development model that aims to reach a significant number of teachers. This paper presents a critical review of this program in the light of national and international literature on teacher education. Conclusions suggest the need for more post-method approaches, for locally produced knowledge to be recognized, and for the collaborative work of policy makers and national scholars to generate teacher development programs more adequate to our reality.

Key words: professional development, language policies, EFL, research

El desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera representa un reto para los docentes, los formadores de docentes y los legisladores, para obtener mejores estándares educativos. Dentro del marco del programa Colombia Bilingüe, el Ministerio de Educación Nacional propone un modelo de desarrollo profesional que pretende abarcar un número significativo de docentes. Este artículo presenta una visión crítica de este programa, a la luz de la literatura nacional e internacional sobre formación de docentes. Se concluye que e hace necesario incluir nuevas propuestas basadas en la concepción postmétodo, la valoración del conocimiento producido localmente, y el trabajo colaborativo entre los legisladores y los académicos nacionales, para generar programas de desarrollo profesional más adecuados a nuestra realidad.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional, políticas lingüísticas, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, investigación

Le développement professionnel des professeurs d'anglais langue étrangère, représente un défi pour les professeurs eux-mêmes, pour les formateurs de professeurs et les législateurs en ce qui concerne l'acquisition de meilleurs standards éducatifs. Dans le cadre de l'accord *Colombia Bilingüe*, le Ministère de l'Éducation propose un modèle de développement professionnel qui prétend couvrir la formation d'un nombre significatif de professeurs. Cet article présente une vision critique de ce programme, et ce à la lumière de la littérature nationale et internationale sur la formation des professeurs de langues. Les suggestions vont dans le sens du besoin d'inclure de nouvelles propositions basées sur la conception post-méthode, la mise en valeur de la connaissance produite localement et le travail collaboratif entre les législateurs et les académiciens nationaux pour concevoir des programmes de développement professionnel plus adéquats à notre réalité.

Mots-clé: développement professionnel, politiques linguistiques, anglais langue étrangère, recherche

1. INTRODUCTION

The professional development of teachers is a constant concern in TESOL research (Richards, 1990, 1998; Richards and Farrell, 2005; Freeman, 1989). Johnson (2000) sees teachers' learning as a permanent process that initiates when they are learners in classrooms and schools, and continues when they are participants in teacher development programs, and when they learn from their experience teaching in their own schools. Diaz-Maggioli (2003) defines it as a permanent process in which teachers engage voluntarily in learning to adjust their teaching to their students' needs.

This concern is also valid in Colombia because better qualified teachers have the power to promote social change. The national government is developing several projects to extend quality education coverage to the majority of the population through "*la Revolución Educativa*" (Education Revolution) (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2002). One of the subprojects of the "Education Revolution" is *Colombia Bilingüe* (Bilingual Colombia). This institution is in charge of the main four components of the project: the national standards for teaching and learning English, the professional development of English teachers, the policies of English testing, and the accreditation of institutions that teach English.

In this paper I will focus on a critical analysis of the model of professional development proposed. My appraisal is divided into four sections. First, I present some background information relevant to understanding the main actions taken by the Ministry of Education. In the second part, I will present my major concerns about the justification and implementation of that professional development model. The third part shows how *Colombia Bilingüe* represents a colonial academic perspective that disregards the local construction of knowledge on ELT. After that, I propose a framework for the construction of more pertinent programs in professional development that are sensitive to Colombian educational contexts. Finally, I draw some conclusions from this critical analysis.

2. THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL: SOME CONCERNS

2.1 THE USE OF AN IMPOSED FOREIGN LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK

The professional development model discussed in this paper is aligned with the British Council's choice of the CEF as the paradigm for standards in language teaching and learning (Council of Europe, 2001). In relation to this choice, some of the creators of the National Standards for English Teaching and Learning report having studied other models such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), the American Standards for Foreign Language Learning, the TESOL/NCATE ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students, and the Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia, among others. However, no documents have been issued to support the benefits of using the CEF over other professional development models.

One of the first of still very few reactions towards the adoption of the CEF for defining the language policy and standards was proposed by Ayala and Alvarez (2005). The authors argue that the implementation of the CEF may be quite complex for our setting. The authors find profound differences between Colombia and Europe that are strong enough to question the adoption of the CEF as the support for a national English teaching policy. They believe that the "practice of adopting foreign models as standards needs to be revised" and invite the government, administrators, and the academic community to "be aware of the complexities of educational standardization" (2005:20). In their conclusions, they urge "all actors involved in foreign language teaching-learning processes" to assume a critical view of the adoption of foreign models as changes in education must fulfill the particular needs of the learners.

In a review of the implementation of the CEF in Europe, Virkkunen-Fullenwider (2005) reports that, in most countries, university language teachers have had some training in using the CEF, and that the CEF book has been widely available and read by many. Contrary to the European situation, the Ministry of Education did not provide training in understanding the CEF, did not distribute copies of the CEF book in schools and universities, and did not promote academic spaces to discuss its applicability.

Although this analysis has focused on the use of the CEF, the adoption of any foreign language framework for teaching and learning English is an inadequate approach to promote bilingualism in Colombia. There is no one single model that fits our reality regarding the diversity of settings, achievement of standards, resources, teacher preparation, student motivation, and curricula. The construction of a Colombian framework for foreign language teaching and learning would have been the most relevant support in developing the policy. Ironically, advocates of *Colombia Bilingüe* did not consider the Colombian Framework for English (COFE) project carried out in the 1990's (Rubiano et al, 2000). This collaborative effort, lead at the time by the British Council and sponsored by the Ministry of Education, brought major Colombian universities together to introduce teacher educators to the field of action research and professional autonomy, incorporate research as a major issue in teacher training programs, consolidate writing and reflection processes on their daily activities, and to design graduate studies.

2.2 The notion of Bilingualism

Colombia Bilingüe reduces bilingualism to the learning of English by Spanish speakers, disregarding the linguistic complexity of the country and perpetuating inequalities in terms of linguistic prestige (Mejía, 2006b). Mejía (2006a) advocates the construction of a wider notion of bilingualism as a way of constructing a more tolerant society in Colombia. She concludes that “restricting the notion of bilingualism to Spanish/English bilingualism leads to a distorted view of the complex interrelationships between languages, cultures, and identities in the Colombian context” (2006:165).

2.3 The leading role of a multinational academic empire

The decision to have the British Council lead this national policy was made by the Ministry of Education, possibly based on its academic tradition and prestige value attached to British English and on recent political and economic agreements. Wilson (2005) claims that all over the world many obligatory teaching practices “have been adopted and imposed on periphery teachers by governments rather than center agencies.” The British Council’s webpage in Colombia reports its devotion to strengthening Colombian governability and

to attaining social change. Sharing experiences between the United Kingdom and Colombia in areas such as democracy, civil society, civic education, and human rights are some of the key purposes of its presence in the national educational scenario.

The imposed leading role of the British Council, or of any other academic foreign institution that might have been chosen to guide the policy of Bilingual Colombia, holds back the development of a local community with enough validity to construct a language policy.

2.4 The teachers' proficiency diagnosis stage

The Ministry of Education conducted an assessment project to diagnose the English language proficiency of students and EFL teachers in Bogotá and Cundinamarca in 2003 and 2004. Further assessments conducted in 2005 showed a very low level of language proficiency for high school students, placing the majority at the A1 level of the CEF (Cely, 2007). This fact motivated the government to diagnose the proficiency of English teachers on a wider scale. The instrument used in the assessment was the Quick Placement Test (QPT), designed by Oxford University Press.

Hernández (2007:33) says that “a correlation between the students' performance and the teachers' performance was found. For this reason, it was decided to promote the improvement of the pedagogical competences of the teachers”, (translation mine). The use of one single instrument, the QPT, is a foremost concern about the validity of the study. Although these findings on teachers' language proficiency and knowledge of teaching have paramount importance in teacher education, the summaries presented by the representatives of *Colombia Bilingüe* and their webpage are not systematically documented. Therefore it is not possible to understand the scope, methodology, participants, data collection and analysis, conclusions drawn, or the references used to support them. Without these vital scientific criteria, one may doubt their validity and reliability.

Additionally, some concerns may be raised when one analyzes the test and the use of the information gathered from its administration. Firstly, the results may

be used as a means of discrimination and marginalization, as well as in making political choices (Shohamy, 2001). Secondly, the results of an electronic test may be affected by the test taker's abilities to use the computer. Wallace and Clariana (2005) found that test mode familiarity may have an impact on test results. This may be true for English teachers who may not be fully acquainted with the use of technology and who might have taken longer to answer the questions. Thirdly, the true language proficiency of a teacher, and of any student, may not be assessed through only passive skills. Bachman (1991) observes that advances in language testing see language ability as multicomponential, recognize the influence of the test method and test taker characteristics on the results, and incorporate principles of "communicative language teaching" such as situational and interactional authenticity. Finally, the use of grammar is no longer seen as a main component in language competence. Linguistic and sociolinguistic competence is composed of multiple factors that go beyond the accurate knowledge of the structure of a language (Bachman, 1990).

It is, thus, clear from the above discussion that the test instrument has several drawbacks that may lead us to question whether the results can be used as real indicators of the proficiency of Colombian teachers. The use of some other tests may have shown different results.

2.5 The use of the TKT

The fact that Colombian English teachers showed low language proficiency motivated the Ministry of Education to assess their teaching and envision a corresponding teacher training model. The Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), designed by the University of Cambridge, was used in 2005 and 2006 as part of this national evaluation (Cely, 2007).

The widespread use of the TKT among teachers and future teachers is not only inappropriate, but also in no way reassuring. This instrument promotes alien discourses that need to be mastered, consists of fixed answers, and is constructed by colonial views on English teaching. In short, the use of the TKT prolongs our conditions of inequality in the knowledge of teaching as it does not measure what we really know.

2.6 The use of the ICELT model

The ICELT model seems to ignore the principles of continuing learning, learning from personal experience, and the individual's will to become involved in professional development. From the information presented in the background section, one sees a course that lasts a limited number of hours, lacks the promotion of autonomous work and networking, and imposes a pre-established package of pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the ICELT model's capacity for universal adaptation is an issue of concern because it reflects the old idea that a method can be used a recipe for all settings (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) and disregards the different needs of Colombian teachers (González et al. 2001).

The implementation of the ICELT model of professional development was carried out using the cascade model. An initial group of teacher educators were invited to participate in the experience, and after completing it, were asked to replicate it regionally to have a wider impact on the teaching community (Hernández, 2007). Hayes (1995, 2000) criticizes this model of replication which is based on an in-service experience developed in Sri Lanka. The content disseminated in the cascade model was often reduced to a trickle by the time it reached the classroom teacher, the figure ultimately responsible for implementing the policy in the classroom. According to him, development programs which are sensitive to the context, constructed collaboratively, and promote teachers' reflection are much more effective. This reflection is comparable to the findings of local studies such as González et al (2001, 2002), Cárdenas and Faustino (2003), and Clavijo et al, (2004). The arguments presented here reflect the inadequacy of using the ICELT model as the main option for promoting professional development nationwide.

2.7 Disrespectful of local knowledge

Universities, mainly public, are the main protagonists in the development of knowledge of teachers' professional development in Colombia. Local studies and inter-institutional networking have generated interesting dynamics contributing to the systematization of successful experiences. Some of the main contributions are:

The possibility of implementing professional collaboration between schools and universities in the teaching practicum and undergraduate teacher education

courses is supported by Quintero et al., 2003; Usma and Frodden, 2003; Cadavid 2003; Cárdenas and Faustino, 2003; Castellanos, 2004; Viáfara, 2005 a,b; Cárdenas et al. 2005; McNulty and Usma, 2005; Cárdenas, 2006; González, 2006b; Luna and Sánchez, 2006; Prada and Zuleta, 2005, among others. These collaborations include aspects such as the involvement of student teachers in the agency of change within schools, promoting more student-centered classes, introducing content learning in English curricula, and transforming assessment practices.

Research developed in graduate studies reveals the consolidation of innovative practices through the qualification of data collection and analysis, and the rationalization of teachers' experiences. Themes include the analysis of methodologies used in Colombian EFL classrooms, critical literacy approaches, English students' needs, and student teachers' decision making (Mora and Ramos, 2003; Chapetón, 2004; Hernández and Samacá, 2005; Piñeros and Quintero, 2006; Becerra, 2006).

Regional professional development programs have incorporated qualitative research to raise the standards of teachers, consolidate the impact of innovative practices, and design curricula sensitive to local contexts, resources, and needs (Cárdenas, 2004; Cárdenas, 2003; Pineda and Clavijo, 2003; Clavijo et al. 2004; Ortiz et al., 2006).

The new standards in accreditation in higher education have demanded Colombian universities to produce higher academic work. As a result, research is seen as paramount in all universities. Research groups and publications have augmented significantly in the last four years, mainly in the areas of humanities and education. None of these developments seemed significant enough to be included in the literature review written by British Council advisors or the MEN reports (Cely, 2007; Hernández, 2007).

2.8 Theoretical weaknesses of *Colombia Bilingüe* and its professional development model

Colombia Bilingüe and its model of professional development for Colombian EFL teachers reveal some serious theoretical weaknesses. I highlight the following as particularly troublesome:

- a. The ownership of English is not a privilege of the native speakers of the inner circle. It is a collective construction of speakers of the outer circle and the expanding circle (Kachru, 1992; Norton, 1997). This assumption is not present in the current policy of Colombian bilingualism as it clearly favors the presence of British English, probably the most prestigious variety of English in the inner circle, over any other variety of the outer circle. This is demonstrated by the CEF's choice of British English, British authors, as well as textbooks, tests and test preparation guides produced by British publishers. Moreover, it clearly rejects the possibility of using materials and academic resources written in "Colombian English", a variety placed in the expanding circle.
- b. The traditional concept of the supremacy of the native speaker as a linguistic model is no longer adequate as new postcolonial communities use English and more exchanges take place among non-native speakers all over the world (Graddol, 1999; Pennycook, 1997, 1998). Moreover, communicative competence may not be defined in terms of the myth of the native speaker, but more as an international construction of the interaction of native and non-native speakers (Alptekin, 2002). New studies advocate the construction of pedagogies of world Englishes and English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2006). The superiority of the native speaker advocated by *Colombia Bilingüe* is reflected in its failure to recognize the need of a specific pedagogy for Colombian English.
- c. The role of Nonnative-English-Speaking teachers has grown dramatically in the field of TESOL (Liu, 1999) giving them empowerment, voice, and identity in the profession through their engagement in critical praxis, although it is not a linear or simple process (Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, 1999; 2001). Llorca (2005 b) declares that more research is needed into the identity of non-native speaker teachers and the specific contexts where their teaching takes place. The ICALT model favors the adoption of a top-down model in which teachers do not have voices, are not invited to teach reflectively, and are not agents of their own development.
- d. The value of central knowledge produced in the traditional paradigm of dominance over local communities is diminishing. New forms of peripheral knowledge emerge as equally important in the global-local dialog of post-modernity (Canagarajah, 2005a). The local work of Colombian teacher

educators is not considered as a valuable source of scientific knowledge in the development of the strategies of *Colombia Bilingüe*. It is seen as being focused on localized realities that cannot be generalized and, therefore, is not considered valid.

- e. The neutral and apolitical role of English teachers is not sought as a value anymore. They are to identify themselves as active participants of society with a particular view of the world in order to fight the discourse of colonialism in ESOL programs and the perpetuation of social inequalities (Chacón et al. 2003). The academic values promoted by *Colombia Bilingüe* and its professional development model perpetuate the colonial view of the profession. Professional development options based on politically divergent concepts that challenge the established programs are eliminated from academic spaces provided by the Ministry of Education.
- f. The demise of “the method” as knowledge to be mastered from a model has led to the acceptance of “post-method approaches” in language teaching and teacher education (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2003; 2006). The implementation of the ICELT model still advocates “the model of teacher training”. It rejects any informed decision made autonomously by the teachers regarding other ways to teach or to improve their teaching practice.
- g. The consolidation of critical pedagogies as counterdiscourses to the tradition of received wisdom in ELT practices has given teachers the opportunity to have a critical consciousness of their knowledge, roles, and contributions in the profession (Pennycook, 1994, 1997, 1998). *Colombia Bilingüe* has been supported by some Colombian teachers and academics that obediently follow the government mandates without becoming critical of the decisions made.
- h. The pertinence and effectiveness of teachers’ professional development are far removed from teacher training practices (Woodward, 1991; Ur, 1997). Rueda (1998) argues that professional development needs to be “focused on fostering professional communities of learners and lifelong support programs. The current emphasis is to embed knowledge and skill acquisition within a framework of teacher growth and development, collaborative programs, and interactive research within a community of learners”. Pontz (2003, cited by Diaz-Maggioli) presents some conditions for being effective in the education of adults, and therefore in professional

development: “clarity of goals, adequate levels of challenge, capitalization on previous knowledge, sustainability over time, organizational support, and alignment of achievement with the goals set”. The ICELT model does not advocate the need to have autonomous reflective practitioners that participate in networks. Its most notorious limitation is probably the failure to recognize and value teachers’ expertise and knowledge outside the dominant discourses.

2. COLONIAL DISCOURSE VS. LOCAL DISCOURSE ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EFL TEACHERS

The professional development of language teachers has recently become an area of research in Colombia. This growth corresponds with the dynamics of teacher development introduced by Arias (1994). In her model there is a progression from individual teachers, groups of teachers, institutions, to groups of institutions moving from awareness, to reflection on teaching, reflective teaching, and action research.

Gu (2005) reports experiences of the British Council’s development of language teaching and teacher development programs in China. In her study, the intended collaboration between this agency and the local government, aimed at introducing educational changes, was jeopardized by factors such as perception gaps across cultures, and differences “in professional beliefs and knowledge regarding ELT and teacher education”. These conceptual differences are present in Colombia in the local and colonial discourses on foreign knowledge teaching and professional development.

Colonial discourses on professional development may face several problems in their delivery of a pre-established package of teaching methodologies to local teachers. Both policy makers and agencies promoting educational change are aware “that professional knowledge and beliefs are not only personalized, but also characterized with values embedded in a whole range of contexts ranging from classrooms and schools to the wider nation” (Gu, 2005: 298). Delens (1999), argues that to achieve sustainable transfer of knowledge, expatriate specialists need to “build on indigenous values and attitudes, and bridge the

cultural gaps between donors and recipients”. Gu (op.cit), reflecting on past mistakes made in foreign and local joint projects, says that tensions and conflicts “are driven by deeply rooted socio-cultural factors and different ideological values”. Leach (1999, b) concludes that two important lessons that foreign agents should learn are; one, that “donors need to exercise a little humility and recognize that others, albeit poor and powerless, have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute to the development process” (op.cit: 391); and two, that “despite the huge sums of money and unlimited “expertise” at their disposal, the best known and most successful projects have tended to be “home grown”; in other words, they have been initiated by individuals or groups working directly with communities in the countries concerned, with few resources and little influence” (op.cit: 390).

The main differences found between this peripheral discourse and the colonial discourse of national policy are presented below:

- 2.1 González (2000) states the need to promote joint efforts in the work of ELT teachers and teacher educators to face the new challenges of the 21st century: Improving teacher and student proficiency; acknowledging the existence of different teaching settings; training teachers taking into account their access and lack of access to technical resources; doing classroom research; motivating teachers to participate in professional development programs; networking; and educating teacher educators. The ICELT model fails to address crucial issues such as; the variety of teaching settings because it proposes a set of rules that work ideally in any context; the idea of teachers working together because it selects certain teachers to be trained with the model; and the recognition of an agenda to discuss the professional needs of teacher educators.
- 2.2 González et al’s (2001, 2002) study on the professional needs of EFL teachers, reports that teachers from public and private schools in Colombia express some differences regarding what they require in order to grow professionally. However, their needs can be placed in three main domains: teachers as workers, as instructors, and as learners. As do the majority of training programs, the ICELT model considers teachers mainly as instructors. Their needs as learners are reduced to the language

improvement component. It ignores important aspects that they see as priorities in their daily work such as school violence, early pregnancies, anorexia and bulimia, and lack of hope for the future. The status of teachers as workers, with regard to issues like fair salaries, work load or legal rights, is not addressed in the model, nor does the Ministry take it into consideration. This may come from the apolitical “value” of the model which avoids raising awareness and generating labor conflict. The separation of learner and worker domains prevents teachers from having a holistic development option.

- 2.3 González and Quinchía (2003) found that teachers highly rate four main attributes in any teacher educator or professional engaged in their development: Knowledge of local realities, command of the language, broad experience in teaching EFL, and experience in research. This was seen by teachers as the specialized knowledge necessary to becoming teacher educators in professional development programs. Rajagopalan (2005:9) observes that “generally speaking, specialist knowledge is knowledge produced and disseminated in the heartland of academia, composed mainly of high-profile universities, prestigious research centers and the like that somehow manage to exist in cozy and self-imposed isolation from the communities that host and maintain them”.
- 2.4 The professional development of EFL teachers through in-service programs in Colombia was, until recently, restricted to limited options. González (2003) shows that many Colombian EFL teachers rely on three main sources of professional development: one, graduate courses; two, ELT conferences at regional and national levels; and three, publisher’s sessions. None of these mechanisms offers a complete alternative for teachers’ professional growth. It is important to highlight that the participants of the study reported feeling “abandoned” by universities because they had not proposed adequate alternatives for their development. The author concludes that professional development programs are successful if they value teachers’ knowledge, are practical, promote language acquisition and practice, involve local experts and teachers in classroom research, and are designed collaboratively with the support of several institutions. The ICELT model performs inefficiently in the involvement of local experts and the promotion of networking.

In brief, it is lamentable that an expensive and widely advertised program like *Colombia Bilingüe*, probably one of the few funded by the national government, does not compile local expertise to strengthen the professional development of EFL teachers.

Proposals from Colombian universities not only fulfill these requirements, proposed by Woodward (1991) and Ur (1997), but do include components of language improvement, teacher autonomy, and classroom-based research conducted by the teacher. These last two components represent major differences with the ICELT training model, which does not include them.

3. TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A SITUATED MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EFL TEACHERS

The future of professional development for EFL teachers in Colombia must be created under a new paradigm. A new model is required, constructed with the following characteristics:

3.1 Constructed within the framework of the post-method pedagogy in its parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, and macrostrategies for language teaching: (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2003). Concerning the parameter of particularity, the model proposed by the British Council does not comprise the versatility needed to be adapted to the great variety of settings in Colombia. The practices recommended are generic and applicable in an ideal, artificial classroom. The parameter of practicality is not found in the ICELT model because teachers are given a pre-conceived theory of teaching. The model does not allow for the presence of theory produced by the teacher through exploration. Moreover, the content presentation takes up most of the course time, thus limiting the space for reflection on the action taken. The parameter of possibility is ignored because it limits teachers' agency and voice in the development process. As a consequence, teachers do not completely fulfill their professional needs of expression of self-esteem, sense of belonging to a community, and self-realization (Maslow, 1998; González et al, 2002). The use of a model of professional development

which originated in the United Kingdom by the tradition of white, native speaker, ESL specialists serves the purpose of maintaining our status as second class teachers who are passive consumers of theory on teaching and learning, textbooks and tests.

The framework of macrostrategies as “guiding principles derived from historical, theoretical, empirical and experiential insights related to L2 learning and teaching” (2003:38) is disregarded in the ICELT model since it is based on a pre-established specific package applicable to any teaching context.

3.2 Strengthening the practice of peripheral knowledge construction

(Canagarajah, 2005): Celebrating local knowledge means a “process of negotiating dominant discourses and engaging in an ongoing construction of relevant knowledge in the context of our history and social practice” (2005:13). Geographical, social, and geopolitical local scenarios are used as the starting point of our thinking, writing and academic analysis. This recognition implies gaining consciousness of the double vision of local and colonial discourses. Canagarajah (2005:15) warns us about the need to “move beyond the myopic entrapment of the local. Celebrating local knowledge should not lead to ghettoizing minority communities, or forcing them into an ostrich-like intellectual existence. A clear grounding in our location gives us the confidence to engage with knowledge from other locations as we deconstruct and reconstruct them for our purposes”. The author defines the construction of local knowledge as two parallel processes: deconstructing established knowledge to understand its local shaping and reconstructing local knowledge for contemporary needs. The first implies the reflective interpretation of established knowledge for local needs. The second process entails the accommodation of local knowledge to current conditions so that it can be relevant for other settings beyond local needs.

Colombian development of knowledge in ELT has already started this process, but it requires a more consistent dialog among regions within the nation. We are still undergoing the first process, but we need some further work to make our discourse competitive with dominant discourses. The work of Colombian ELT academics has to be structured in order to serve as a model for other local and global discourses.

3.3 Developed by means of adequate communication with local scholars and policy makers: The future options of professional development for

EFL teachers should result from dialog between local scholars and the educational authorities. New ways of understanding and transacting need to be established in order to bridge the evident gap in the construction of a national policy for ELT. González (2006 a) describes the construction of the national policy for ELT, and for professional development (see figure 1.), as a pyramid in which the higher the position, the fewer the decision makers, but the more people affected by those decisions. Policy makers need to allow equal participation to local scholars in the construction of academic standards for teaching and testing in order to foster more appropriate models for teacher development and educational change.

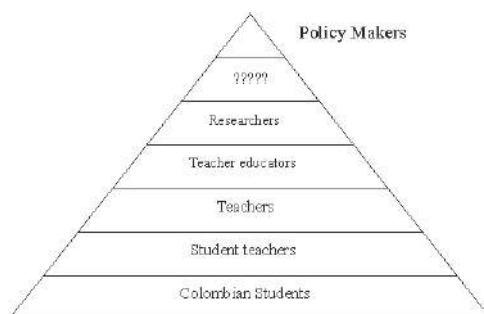


Figure 1. The Pyramid of Colombian ELT Policy (González, 2006)

The initial step in this communication must be the acknowledgment of the value of local academia. Once we can get our voices heard, our concepts taken into account and debated, we will be ready to truly engage in the construction of a professional development model more suitable for our local needs. Moreover, it must be shaped according to the characteristics of an adequate program, as described in local research, in terms of its themes, permanence across time, interdisciplinary foundation, and local pertinence. This needs to be guaranteed independently by the political party holding the political and economic power to make educational decisions.

The experiences in the implementation of the ICELT professional development model are not reported in academic publications. Once these experiences have been documented and analyzed, it will be very productive to establish some dialog between the different academic positions and

the Ministry of Education. Local and foreign knowledge may coexist and produce alternative models of professional development if the appropriate mechanisms of recognition and negotiation are established. However, extreme caution needs to be held as the local may tend to disappear.

3.4 Allowing the existence of counterdiscourses and a critical theory of teacher education

Because the model of professional development was imposed as a top-down strategy, it generated some resistance and the need to create a counter discourse within some academic communities (Cárdenas, 2006). El-Okda, (2005:34) sees the academic decisions made by higher authorities as “conceptualized in terms of a set of hierarchically ordered processes that are centrally initiated and controlled and that are usually performed by selected expert committees. A decision is made by the supreme authority in the educational system to start the whole process”.

Issues such as the absence of discussion on the pertinence of the CEF and the ICALT model, the predetermination of selected readings, all coming from central sources of knowledge, and the explicit decision to overlook studies and articles published in Colombia about the development of teachers, were some of the matters that divided the academic community originally invited to participate in the project. Some declined “the invitation” because they did not see an equal role for the advisors of the British Council and Colombian scholars. Some other teacher educators accepted the “challenge” and participated in the experience because the aforementioned issues were not troublesome for them. This hybrid model of apparent joint authorship participation constructed by the British Council and local teachers would work very well. Canagarajah (2006:8) expresses his concern about the combination of peripheral and colonial knowledge saying that, “although the notion of hybridity gives life to the local with one hand, it takes away its radical potential by hyphenating it with other Western and global cultural constructs”.

Some of us believe that *Colombia Bilingüe* serves certain economic and political purposes. The sponsoring of the British Council, the obvious participation of two major testing and publishing industries, and the provision of an in-service model, all coming from the United Kingdom, were arranged to guarantee the achievement of the standards in teaching

and learning English. Colombian scholars who present counterdiscourses to this professional development model are often labeled as “enemies of the national bilingualism project”. The academic proposals of some of these critics are rejected or seen as inconvenient by national and local authorities, mainly because they represent a divergent voice. I personally defend the responsibility and right of teacher educators to raise awareness of the hidden agendas of educational policies and to contribute to their critical analysis. These voices need to be heard more often, ideally sharing the stage with the advocates of the professional model reviewed in this paper. Unfortunately, divergent voices tend to be considered as subversive and often, as enemies of the establishment.

4. CONCLUSIONS

If Colombian EFL teachers were to make a decision regarding their professional development options, apparently they would not face a dilemma. On the one hand, they may access the ICELT model, internationally validated and supported by the British tradition and academic authority, and, for the most part, without cost. This model is supported by the Ministry of Education’s sponsoring and communication strategies, factors which make it available to a vast number of teachers. On the other hand, local universities have designed alternative professional models based on studies that involve the development of peripheral knowledge, but that have impacted a much smaller number of teachers.

The current professional development model proposed in *Colombia Bilingüe* seems inadequate to fulfill the needs of teachers, as argued in the local studies cited. There is a need for new forms of teacher development programs that respond to the requirements of different teachers, teacher educators, professional development agendas, and methodologies because the ones proposed are not sensitive to our educational needs.

The current teacher development model is a representation of colonial, traditional, and central discourses in ELT that must be reshaped by the new, local, and peripheral knowledge constructed by Colombian ELT scholars and teachers. The deconstruction of colonial discourses and the construction of

new local discourses in ELT are required to establish more equal academic relationships among peers undertaking the task of the professional development of teachers. To attain this goal, the creation of mechanisms for respectful dialog between policy makers and teacher educators and researchers is a must.

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