

## **Conceptualizing as Regards Educational Change and Pedagogical Knowledge: How Novice Teacher-Researchers' Proposals Illustrate this Relationship**

**Conceptualizando acerca del cambio en la educación y el conocimiento pedagógico: Cómo las propuestas de profesores-investigadores principiantes ilustran esta relación**

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Our insights regarding the relationship among the concepts of change, transformation, and innovation concerning pedagogical knowledge are present throughout the manuscript. We focus on the conceptualizations of change resulting from experiential and academic knowledge. Our shared perspectives as a teacher educator and a student teacher from which to see teaching, learning, language, and literacy are also at the core of the discussion. We complement our discussion with theoretical information from specialized sources and practical experiences that have taken the shape of thesis and monograph projects. In them, we looked at reflections and questions about language and literacy in pedagogical practices, alternatives for school life experiences, the balance between theory and practice in educational contexts, and the social dimension of knowledge.

**Key words:** Educational change, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical innovation, teacher research

Este artículo contiene la relación entre los conceptos de cambio, transformación e innovación relacionados con el conocimiento pedagógico. Nos concentramos en las conceptualizaciones de cambio resultantes del conocimiento experiencial y académico. La enseñanza, el aprendizaje, el lenguaje y la lectoescritura son vistas desde nuestras perspectivas compartidas como formador de educadores y docente principiante. Complementamos estas discusiones con información teórica y experiencias prácticas que han tomado la forma de tesis y monografías. En éstas, miramos el proceso de reflexión, el proceso de indagación acerca de lenguaje y lectura y escritura en prácticas pedagógicas, alternativas para experiencias de vida escolar, balance entre teoría y práctica en contextos educacionales y la dimensión social de conocimiento.

**Palabras claves:** Cambio educacional, conocimiento pedagógico, innovación pedagógica, investigación por profesores

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## PRELIMINARY IDEAS FOR OUR DISCUSSION

Initially, our personal positions about the need for language educators to implement transformations in their current pedagogical practices relate to our images as follows: A teacher educator who favors a humanistic, inquiring, and critical approach to language teaching and learning. A teacher educator who opposes the rigidity of a technical view of language curriculum. A teacher educator who conceives language curriculum as the set of school life experiences in which both teachers and students find opportunities to share, activate, and build new understandings of the world.

A novice teacher who has undergone change as an opportunity to explore teaching duties in the near future. A novice teacher who has expanded on concepts such as language, learning and teaching as more than mere instructional tasks. A student teacher who has also had the opportunity to interact and learn about new pedagogical perspectives that transformed beliefs in terms of theory and school life experiences.

As part of the expectations we had when writing this article, we can mention our intention to make known to the ELT community members the need to have a reflective component in teacher education programs and a research agenda that result in an exploration of alternatives for changing and constructing new knowledge regarding literacy and language education. We also expect this to be an opportunity to make sense of reflective and research experiences beyond the university classrooms.

The theoretical review for this article includes our conceptualization regarding change supported by Freire, Nieto, Lerner, Fullan, Shamin, Ballenilla, and Shor. Likewise, our conceptualization as regards knowledge is supported by Giroux, McLaren, Ladson-Billings, Golombek, Pineda, Richards, Schulman, and Clavijo. The issues tackled in the literature review are the politics of change, the collective and individual dimension of knowledge, alternatives for transformation, crisis, critical pedagogy, resistance to change, and construction.

In connection with our conceptualization, the theme of knowledge transformation became appealing to us since we started to observe the need to find alternatives for viewing language as a means rather than a purpose. Besides, we discovered new ways of being educators in contrast to being only instructors of language. We started to designate terms for situations we did not know had a name before. This happened as a consequence of the interaction with the literature that shaped the discussions. This led us to analyze the reflective component in our academic daily practices in teacher education programs and, subsequently, analyze some actions that also became research projects (i.e. theses or monographs) by student teachers. These practical projects that serve as ways to illustrate our points are theses developed by Ochoa and Alvarez. Similarly, we include the monographs whose authors are Bonilla, Mendieta, Ospina and Muñoz, Piñeros and Mendez, and Moreno, Rojas and Urrutia.

One of the factors to examine in the projects we have selected for the practical component in our article is how teachers' practices have generated change and how that change is conceptualized by educators through their declarative statements. These declarative statements reveal the way teachers themselves make sense of change and innovation that is socially and culturally situated from a language curriculum perspective. The declarative statements are reflective practices in the dynamics of change (Clavijo, 2001 and Clavijo Guerrero, Torres, Ramírez, and Torres, 2004).

In order to be focused when looking at practical experiences, we examined the following aspects in the theses and monographs: The reflection upon the balance between theory and practice regarding teaching, learning, and language, and the social dimension of knowledge (i.e. individual and collective dimensions) in the literature review and data analysis; then, alternatives for school life experiences in the instructional design.

## CHANGE, TRANSFORMATION, AND INNOVATION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Our conceptualization of the transformation of pedagogical knowledge has evolved out of an initial review of the literature vis-à-vis change and knowledge where the terms transformation, change, and innovation are closely related to one another and mutually determinant in this article. We use the term innovation to refer to the individual and collective intentions to implement new alternatives in educational practices. As for change, we will refer to the perspectives from which both researchers and practitioners see their own implementation and the duration of their innovations. The accounting for this situation by the protagonists of educational practices constitutes what we call transformations.

In our same initial conceptualization, we have seen change to be the emergence of alternatives to improve school life experiences (i.e. from a perspective of experience; change is due to observed needs or aspects we considered to be reevaluated, reexamined). These alternatives might result from different sources, but particularly from experiential and academic knowledge. These two sources make any change experience informed. Change, in this sense, needs to be procedural, systematic, dynamic, lasting, natural, spontaneous, and balanced by both internal and external factors. We refer to these internal and external factors in what follows in this section.

We agree with the ideas found in literature that, among the players necessary to understand change, there are students, members of the educational community, educational communities as a whole and teachers themselves. From these players, we highlight the presence of both teachers and students as agents of change. For instance, teaching is an activity that consists primarily of social relationships and is seen as a political commitment rather than a technical activity; it is then unquestionable, according to Nieto (2003), that what educators need to pay most attention to is their own growth and transformation as well as the

lives, realities, and dreams of their students. We would like to illustrate this aspect by acknowledging the description of the profile of the participants in a monograph project by Mendieta<sup>1</sup> (2004).

Regarding the socio-cultural background of the group, I can state that most seventh graders' families belonged to socioeconomic level two, and they lived in neighborhoods close to the school; their parents were workers who had the opportunity to study secondary school but not all of them reached superior education. The kind of jobs the parents had were traders, sellers, nurses, employees in industries or textile factories, etc. Among them were two mothers in charge of the family and house cleaning. The families were composed of the father, mother and siblings, some of them studying also in the same school in lower or higher grades. But in spite of being a public school, it did not reveal high conditions of poverty; on the contrary, children lived in a good environment that permitted them to do well at school. And they had the necessary things they needed to study with as well as their parents' supervision (p. 67).

In order to make sense of Mendieta's description, let us refer to what Nieto (2003) calls individual and collective stories of teachers as a useful reminder that, just as schools need to undergo an institutional transformation if they are to become places where all students learn, teachers need to experience a similar transformation. Specifically, teachers need to learn about their students, identify with them, build on their strengths, and challenge head-on the many displays of privilege and inherent biases in the schools where they teach.

Mendieta's work can also relate to what Lerner (2001) shows as a concern that transformative

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<sup>1</sup> Mendieta, J. is a former student-teacher who worked on literacy practices that connected home and school as part of her monograph project.

teachers have about the use of traditional methods for teaching reading and writing. These methods, maintains Lerner, have promulgated an aversion in students towards literacy development practices in both academic and nonacademic settings. Lerner also shows a concern for the “instructional” responsibility that demands from students physically acquired skills. This responsibility relates to the education of individuals able to read and write.

We can also see in the participants’ profile of Mendieta’s work one factor regarded as a crucial one in studies concerning educational community development: parent involvement in schools. Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) maintain that teachers need to reach out to parents and communities with empathy, and interact meaningfully with them. They also assert that being a teacher can no longer mean remaining isolated in the school.

In turn, Nieto also shows aspects that constitute critical issues in the personal and professional transformation of teachers. Among these issues, she discusses the confrontation of one’s own identity, the role of teachers as learners who learn from their students, identification of teachers with students, the cultural dimension of teachers, biases in the teaching practice, and the development of critical communities. As an example, in the following quote, Ochoa<sup>2</sup> (2005) gives an account of the professional dimension as a critical issue identified in her thesis.

Even though those who teach in primary school must be prepared, teachers think that it is a choice that involves many people and institutions (human beings and material resources). They think that teachers must be more committed to the community. Besides, the transformation must be in order to improve and certain conditions are necessary. As Kagan

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<sup>2</sup> Ochoa, M. is a public school teacher and an M.A. in applied linguistics to TEFL. Her thesis is an account of the reflections of a public school teachers’ study group on teaching English to children without having received any education in order to do so.

(1992) says, developmental tasks depend on at least three major factors. One of them is the context in which practice teaching occurs, the nature of pupils, beliefs of, and relationships with other teachers in the school, availability of material, principal’s beliefs, relationship with parents (p. 155).

Continuing with Nieto’s presentation of the critical issues of the professional dimension of teaching, the next excerpt illustrates how a student teacher’s conception of teaching and learning evolved after her experience with students. Bonilla<sup>3</sup> (2005) presents in the literature review of her monograph project her view of teaching and learning as follows:

This project gave me the opportunity to open my mind to different perspectives regarding the educational part, teaching and learning. Teaching is not only what a teacher proposes without noticing students’ needs and interests, it is a negotiation between teacher, students and the institutions’ needs while learning is the process in which students and teacher participate in all the decisions about the class in order to improve their process of acquiring a foreign language. That is the conception I had built from the application of my research study and it encouraged me to continue improving English teaching and research (p. 14).

The professional dimension we discuss above also relates to a two-way relationship between a person and the members of a group to which that person belongs. This relates to what we call the individual and collective dimensions of change.

Concerning the individual and collective dimension of change in education, we quote Fullan (2001), who maintains that change cannot be managed. It can be understood, led, but it cannot be controlled. “Real change, then, whether desired

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<sup>3</sup> Bonilla, T. is a former EFL student teacher who developed her monograph project over communicative teaching and learning.

or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; and if the change works out it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and professional growth" (p. 32). He also explains that change involves loss, anxiety, and struggle; that change may occur either voluntarily or be imposed on us. He cites Morris and Schön, who equally agree that change, besides being individual, is a social phenomenon.

In addition, Fullan remarks on the importance of sharing with others because, that way, teachers have the possibility to come up with new ideas. This is what he calls shared meaning and program coherence. Interaction is a key point for transforming tacit knowledge into shared knowledge.

Regarding this collective dimension of change, Ballenilla (1999) describes three levels involved in the process of initiating change. Those levels are as follows: the students, the context and the teachers. In the first level, he names students' motivation, adaptation to change, and organization of activities, among other classroom intricacies. Concerning the second level, Ballenilla mentions contents, directors, colleagues, and parents as main components of change initiation process. These two levels deal with the external factors of change. In the last level, that is, the teacher, it will only depend on the teachers' willingness to change. He remarks that change is a matter of being consistent and practicing our professional autonomy. Ochoa in her findings shows us an example that illustrates the collective dimension of change that emphasizes the relationship between teachers and students:

Sharing teaching experiences were part of the meetings. Teachers narrated an episode of their lives in order to illustrate their points of view in an aspect of discussion. When teachers reflected, they referred to their experiences. They remembered students and events that were appropriate for the meetings and that enriched the pedagogical knowledge

experiences (p.72).

One of the main factors in the implementation of transformations is the nature of pupils and their relationships with other teachers in the school. In this way, teachers analyze their responsibility as societal leaders who hold education in their hands.

Concerning our conceptualization of change, we have learned that change is not only the result of common sense. Rather, it needs to be systematic and procedural in order to take place. The need for strategies to document and substantiate change is what makes it systematic. These strategies are, among other things, thought of, designed, implemented, and evaluated. This occurs systematically, i.e. in a procedural fashion. In the following excerpt, we show how a pedagogical innovation related to critical literacy practices and developed by Piñeros and Mendez<sup>4</sup> (2005) uses research procedures to make it systematic:

We carried out a research with students and their lives, the relationships among the individuals and their realities. We inquired about issues related to the reading of literature and life experiences observing the connections among them and the way students revealed their understandings through their expressions. For that reason, qualitative research was a key element to support our project methodology. In connection to this, Merriam (1998) says that "all types of qualitative research are based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p.6). This assumption sustained our research interest due to the fact that human beings and the society establish a strong and dynamic connection, which allows individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Piñeros, C. and Mendez, J. are former student teachers who developed their monograph project over the implementation of literature circles to explore students' life experiences.

to reflect on themselves and the world around them. Being able to understand this phenomenon requires a deeper abstraction which is explored and supported by the qualitative approach.

Furthermore, we focused on the description of a specific situation. Then, we constructed meaning from students' responses and our theoretical foundations. We and the participants had a constant voice in the research because we negotiated some aspects related to the project. Besides, data were taken from different sources: students' responses, teachers' observations and students-teachers' expansions. Merriam explains (1998) that "the key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's. This is sometimes referred to as 'the emic', or insider's perspective" (p. 6). We also collected data to analyze, interpreted the participants' voices and recognized the abstractions students presented in their responses. In that sense, we used the students and our own interpretations because we described social interactions expressed through experiences and the way students made sense of them (pp. 56-57).

We can explain this example by referring to Lerner (2001) who says that the current educational situation requires an urgent change. For the implementation of changes, it is of paramount importance to consider that teachers need to be formed under the principle that literacy does not consist of reproducing language but creating new meanings as a consequence of the interaction of different views expressed through texts. Literacy also extends the formal coding and decoding practices to alternative ways of self-expression. This is how literacy teachers then could turn into generators of change in their students' literacy practices. The change of conceptions of literacy that teachers may have constitutes an influencing factor in the change of the conceptions of literacy

that students may also have. These conceptions, in turn, will affect the school curriculum. This can also be evidenced by an excerpt taken from the monograph work that Ospina and Muñoz<sup>5</sup> (2005) developed regarding the way students observed reading and writing practices after their pedagogical implementation took place. They assert that students perceived literacy practices as a way to recreate their experiences and perceptions of the city:

Consequently, students perceived that reading and writing were learning tools in which they could recreate their background and their perceptions of the city. Moreover, these practices contributed to their critical construction of knowledge. Students observed the city could also be part of a significant reading and turn into an argumentative writing practice. They showed sensitiveness and imagination during the spontaneous realization of their tasks and explored different languages to communicate their particular vision of the world by using different materials (p. 39).

Lerner discusses continuous teacher development as a strategy to start, maintain and follow up on transformations in literacy education. To remark the need for teachers to transform, both teachers and students need to broaden the conception of literacy as that of search, exchange, and the transmission of information. Literacy emerges as a critical activity that identifies, creates problems, and solves issues relevant for social reality. In this sense, the exploration of a broadened conception of literacy implies a challenge to take a critical position about it and leads to change. Change, then, is dynamic and evolving as teachers and students grow and expand on their own conceptions.

The above ideas imply the necessity to evolve from traditional literacy practices to educational

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<sup>5</sup> Ospina, L. and Muñoz, D. are former student teachers who developed their monograph project over the development of critical literacy through the exploration of students' experiences living in Bogotá.

innovation and research activities. Real innovations in education start in schools. Lerner affirms that when these innovations take the shape of research and become procedural and systematic, it is when teachers can lead to transformation in literacy education. Research involves acts of reading, writing, interpreting, reflecting, analyzing, etc. Interpretation leads readers to start personal, social, and cultural transformations. It promotes independent readers and writers as well. Ospina and Muñoz illustrated this as they observed their students' difficulties in literacy practices. The research project that they developed supported their students' needs and opened spaces for opinion and reflection:

One point to initiate our project was the observations carried out at the school. We perceived that the students presented difficulties at the moment of writing and interpreting free texts. They wrote limited informative pieces. Their writing did not include their opinions or points of view. The implementation of critical literacy activities supported them in their expression of a personal sense of a diverse set of experiences. Besides, learning was incorporated into everyday practice and a reflective process (p. 10).

Making a transition now from valid and well-supported changes in school curriculum, we turn our attention to the resistance and obstacles that teachers might encounter. The complexities that change in the curriculum can bring about are related to the openness of participants in school life experiences. We would like now to address some complexities that teachers might encounter when leading towards a culture of change. Among those difficulties, we encounter learners' resistance to change, education policies, and reforms in education laws.

In our review of pedagogic literature, we have seen that the authority structure and the norms of interaction at the different levels of society, including

academic contexts, learners' beliefs about knowledge, learning and classroom as well as larger community behavior, relate to the issue of learners' resistance to teachers' classroom innovations. Shamin (1996) reports on a case study of her experience in trying to introduce change in methodology. She maintains that her attempt failed due to learners' resistance. She examined the factors that contributed to this failure to innovate. She argues that this resistance was influenced by students' beliefs derived from their culture as well as the short preparation students received to accept this type of innovation in the classroom. We learn from this that teachers need to prepare students and help them engage in the practices that constitute innovation in order to lessen the pressure that is present when something new is brought into the classroom. In that way, according to Shamin, teachers might perceive a different attitude in students as well as cope with tensions when implementing new practices.

In the same line of thought, Shor (1987) affirms that learners' resistance is a consequence of alienation at schools, alienation which is seen as the inequality in teaching and learning interaction that spawns teaching inequality, literacy problems and an educational crisis. However, learners' resistance is not the only difficulty that teachers face. New policies and governmental laws are requiring teachers to do more than they are prepared to, and this, of course, causes uncertainty and brings in questions and doubts related to teaching and learning chores. Two excerpts taken from Ochoa show how teachers are being affected by new policies in terms of rights, duties and experience:

As a consequence of the new reorganization of the teachers of Bogotá (Distrito Capital) and the rest of the country, many have had to move to other schools, work different schedules, different levels and to teach subjects that are not their specialization or else they have had to quit to their jobs. Elementary schools have

been specifically affected by this phenomenon, so teachers now have more teaching hours (previously 20 hours of 45 minutes, and now 22 hours or more of 50 minutes), more courses, more groups and more classroom students (around 45) (MEN, 2002); in other words, more work. Although they do not have better salaries or work stimuli and their jobs are not as permanent as in previous years, they are teaching all the subjects, including English; they do not have enough experience or knowledge for teaching this subject (p. 5).

The policies seem contradictory because they want the educational sector to generate an important contribution by teaching English in schools, but each day, the conditions of public schools are worse such as lack of teachers, more classroom students, not enough classrooms and schools, bad salaries, no specialized rooms, and so on (El Tiempo, 2003). Teachers also have other problems that affect teaching; for instance, lack of teacher updating courses, more class hours for teachers, fewer for students (MEN, 2002, p. 9).

Teachers have to deal with difficulties that government generates. Shor thinks that different agencies of the government complain about the quality of teacher formation with regard to literacy and work discipline. Shor explains that there are only a few teachers in the profession and the quality of education decreases due to this lack of teachers. Although teachers are blamed for this low quality, we are conscious of the fact that the roots of the problem stem directly from the state with continuous budget cuts in public schools, short supply of materials and classes too large to manage. Then, inequalities exist because the government demands from schools the same results without taking into account that not all schools have the same possibilities.

After we have conceptualized as regards innovation, transformation, and change, we now turn to the discussion of pedagogical knowledge.

## PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

To start this section, we would like to state our understanding of knowledge. Knowledge relates to the constant and dynamic interaction of experiences between theory and practice. Theory gathers many of the fundamental aspects we need to have in teacher education as well as the concepts we construct along this process. Practice includes not only experiences as educators but also a learner's perspective in educational contexts. This also relates to an individual dimension of knowledge that implies a mental attitude towards everything that comprises our sensitivity to the world. The state of mind an individual might have can be cause and consequence of knowledge construction. Individuals put forward their knowledge in order for others to understand, debate, acknowledge or refuse. This relates to the collective and interactional traits of knowledge which is known in educational literature as the social dimension.

In relation to the above, we are here interested in general pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical-content knowledge (not information). The former addresses the generic teaching strategies, beliefs and practices related to classroom management; in other words, to methodology of teaching. The latter is related to the means of representing and communicating the subject clearly and comprehensively to other people. It represents the methods for teaching simple and complex topics in the subject. Fullan makes a distinction between information and knowledge. He maintains that information is machines and knowledge is people. Information becomes knowledge when it acquires "social life". He also comments on the humanistic dimension of knowledge that has to do with emotions, aspirations, hopes, and intentions. This is what distinguishes knowledge from information.

Knowledge sharing implies giving and receiving with the understanding of some responsibilities by the parties and the existence of some opportunities. Knowledge creation refers to the roles played by members in exchanging knowledge.

It takes place in what Fullan calls knowledge activation (i.e. enabling, not controlling) and knowledge creation. He adds that in education, knowledge needs to be contextualized and shared, too. Knowledge sharing takes the shape of educators' networks in which the more that educators model it themselves in their daily work, the more their students will learn to do so. We would like to present an excerpt of the abstract of the research project developed by Ochoa where she describes how a group of elementary teachers gathered around some reflective meetings in order to discuss topics of concern in terms of the teaching of English as a foreign language in the school as part of the new policies given by the government for the project "Bogotá y Cundinamarca bilingües en diez años":

A group of elementary school teachers' reflections on teaching English is significant considering the current condition of public schools, in which in-service teachers have to teach English without having received education English or enough knowledge of this language. In a public school located in Bogotá, a group of elementary school teachers has decided to meet and reflect as a way to overcome these situations. Thus, this study focuses on the experience of their reflections, their contextual knowledge, their expectations and beliefs regarding teaching-learning experiences. In addition, teachers' grouping generates collaboration, autonomy, individual or group decision-making and transformation (p. 2).

In relation to the connections likely to be established between our general conception of knowledge and pedagogy, can be explained by analyzing what McLaren (2003) discusses concerning critical pedagogy. What we would like to remark on from McLaren's discussion is his academic approach to critical theory by explaining that dialectical thinking enables the researcher to

view schools not only as places for instruction but also as a cultural terrain that promotes students' empowerment and self-transformation. It is well known that schools function as a means of potentially empowering students around topics such as social justice; then, it can well sustain dominant class interests in order to create reproducers of capitalist models in which some are dominant and some are subordinate.

McLaren explains that critical educators do not believe in only one side of the question; rather, there are many sides that are usually linked up with class, race, gender interests, among others. McLaren quotes Giroux to make a distinction between micro- and macro-objectives. The distinction relies on what he calls productive knowledge and directive knowledge. The former relates to micro-objectives and is about the manipulation of data. The latter deals with macro-objectives and has to do with the dialectical mode of inquiry and the sociopolitical application of knowledge; in other words, the social function of particular forms of knowledge. The purpose of this dialectical educational theory is to provide students with a model that permits them to examine the underlying political, social, and economic foundations of the white supremacist capitalist society.

We can make a distinction between the productive and directive knowledge teachers have based on Giroux's proposal. On the one hand, there is the knowledge student teachers acquire along the process of teaching formation in terms of form and function of the language and all the basic principles and theories of pedagogy. All of this is visible in practice when they face school situations that challenge and allow them either to reproduce or create alternatives in order to handle such situations. On the other hand, our beliefs and the transcendence we give to language as a means and not as a purpose, and what it could be used for in order to empower students to become active members of the society, is what we call directive knowledge. This can be illustrated as follows by

the monograph project developed by Moreno, Rojas, and Urrutia<sup>6</sup> (2005):

However, for us, critical literacy relates not only to the role of the reader. For the purposes of this research process, we have concentrated more on the role of the writer and the idea of using the language with an objective. In this case, expressing students' perceptions about their identity and not reproducing paragraphs in which the writing process is a repetitive mechanism without sense; on the contrary, critical literacy practices imply going deeper in a text by means of examining, questioning, interpreting, believing, valuing, and contextualizing (pp. 22-23).

We see in the excerpt above how Moreno et al. show their position concerning the alternative to instrumental and mechanical use of language in writing. This position relates to the opportunities the authors of the monograph give their learners to use language as a window for self-expression. Their position and their practices imply knowledge not only of language, but also of the learners and their contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Among the perspectives that we have found as related to knowledge of learners and knowledge of educational contexts is the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims and conceptions of knowledge. About the former, we agree with Ladson-Billings in that knowledge emerges in dialectical relationships. These dialectical relationships are healthy to exist as long as they do not perpetuate the tradition of the teacher as an authoritarian figure of knowledge promoting transmissionist models of knowledge replication, and repetition instead of knowledge creation. Knowledge creation is an alternative of meaning making, as a product of dialogue between and among individuals, that is known as dialogical

relationships. The latter relates to how teachers think about knowledge, e.g. knowledge is not static, it is shared, recycled, and constructed. Knowledge must be viewed critically. Knowledge is about doing. Participants in educational activities learn from one another. Knowledge and expertise must not be only a given (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a way to illustrate the conceptions educators have of knowledge, a thesis project by Alvarez<sup>7</sup> (2005) shows us the following in his findings:

#### Building Knowledge: An Ongoing Process

This category refers to how teachers conceived their knowledge construction as an ongoing process that has been nurtured by learning throughout their pedagogical journey. The pedagogical journey is explained as the process that entails the formal instruction and all the experiences that help teachers shape their knowledge base during their educational life; that is to say, during their elementary, middle, high school, university or other, and continuing along their teaching practice. In order to explain this category, two subcategories came up, namely, *foot prints in the sand* and *a bridge between theory and practice* (pp. 50-51).

In the same line of thought, Pineda (2002) establishes that educators center their interests in a definition of what is called knowledge base in teaching as a profession; however, to understand what knowledge base means requires more than a simple definition. She explains that it is difficult to determine the nature of teachers' knowledge base. For a long time, this base was associated with the basic skills required for teaching, the competency of teachers in the subject matter and the use of pedagogical skills. But educators have found other variables that are part of this complex term where classroom context, physical and psychological characteristics of the learners, personal and

<sup>6</sup> Moreno, Rojas, and Urrutia are former student teachers who worked on a monograph related to the exploration of children's perceptions of their Colombian identity through literacy practices.

<sup>7</sup> Alvarez, J. is an M.A. graduate in applied linguistics to TEFL who studied teachers' knowledge base through reflections in his thesis.

practical experiences, reflective practices and research skills are included. Richards (1994) proposes a theoretical model that embraces some of the following categories for defining a knowledge base: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of the learner, and knowledge of educational goals and their philosophical bases.

The dynamic traits of teachers' knowledge base can show a balance between abstraction and generation of meaning by teachers through reflective practices. Pineda suggests that to possess every kind of knowledge is not enough. It is necessary to allow different types of knowledge to interact and establish relationships. Teachers are required to reflect constantly in order to build this teaching knowledge base. She adds that reflection entails thoughtfulness about educational theories and practices. This allows the teachers to examine educational traditions and make a decision on what is favorable for learners, thus, leading to more critical positions regarding the old and new proposals for teaching and learning. It also implies reflection upon practices to construct a solid conceptualization of teaching.

Teachers' reflections upon their knowledge determines the conceptualization of what they know. Concerning this issue, Golombek (1994) maintains that what constitutes appropriate teachers' knowledge depends on how teachers' knowledge is conceptualized. The problem is that traditional research on teachers' thinking has focused on teachers' knowledge as external to the teacher and has attempted to quantify and categorize what the teacher needs to know. Such an approach to teachers' knowledge, furthermore is based on assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge and how teachers should be valued as learned people. Conversely, we think that teachers' knowledge cannot solely be conceived in cognitive terms. It is permeated with an affective, moral, and aesthetic component and is always used in response to one's purpose and values, among other personal factors.

Golombek insists on making clear that researchers should attempt to understand teachers from their own perspectives. Teacher-as-researcher is one alternative to conducting research and implies a different theory of teacher knowledge in which the systematic inquiry of teachers by the teachers themselves can generate individual and public knowledge about teaching. In the process, teachers create their own voice in research and its application. Actively integrating teachers' stories and interpretations and using a language that is close to teachers' experiences provides a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The concluding chapter in Alvarez's thesis project exemplifies this situation as follows:

The main objective of this research was to evidence the issues that arise in regards to teachers' knowledge base when they reflect upon their pedagogical life experience. In addition, this study aimed at describing the most salient aspects of knowledge base that foreign language teachers consider to be the components of their professional competence. ...the construction of their professional knowledge was a lifelong process that started from the moment they set up their pedagogical journey. This ongoing process was enriched by all the critical people and experiences that had formed part of their lives before deciding to become teachers; and afterward, as preservice and inservice teachers (p. 103).

After reading the above excerpt, one may think that it is teachers, and not mainstream researchers, who should be the principal generators of the knowledge needed to understand the profession of education. Moreover, this knowledge leads educators to transform classroom practices and to reform curricula. This is one reason why we need to value teachers' knowledge (Golombek, 1994).

The alternatives for the implementation of transformations in classroom practices and

curriculum count as knowledge in teachers' innovations. These innovations can be related to the different ways of approaching language and literacy teaching and learning. Teachers and learners reciprocally approach this as an experiential dimension of knowledge that includes reading not only written texts but also the world. In relation to this, Clavijo et al. (2004) found in a research project that teachers and learners approached language and literacy through experiences that included "reading" the city of Bogotá as a text and relating it to other types of school learning. Literacy became understood as a way of constructing knowledge in all the areas of the curriculum by building students' awareness of the importance of local history through the exploration of oral traditions or constructing life histories as knowledge that serves to reflect upon societal values. In terms of knowledge, teachers' innovations showed that knowledge that they provided the students with through different possibilities for learning to learn, learning to think, and learning to solve present and future problems, was most valuable. In the section below, we expand on the relationship between change and pedagogical knowledge that relates to the issue of education as a change agent.

#### **FINAL IDEAS THAT SERVE AS POINTERS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

We have now started to discuss jointly the topics of pedagogical knowledge and innovation. We think it is suitable, then, to put forward our position in regards to what Shor (1987) proposes as a change agency in education. He stands for community empowerment and community school reform. He affirms that equality empowers people, and that power and hope foster motivation. Motivated people, in turn, are involved and this helps people learn. Then, this motivation together with learning and empowerment increases teachers' morale and interest in the profession. Inspiring classrooms can also encourage both learners and teachers to see themselves as intellectuals who critically see the world and struggle against crisis,

thus, improving the school quality life. It clearly shows how influenced education is by determining factors, which are economics, politics, community life, and literacy.

This is arduous work because it requires paying attention to many different grounds of school life, and it is inevitably accompanied by conflict. Nieto (2003), based on Freire, maintains that conflict is necessary for change to take place. One aspect worth discussing further and that is related to our article is that the implementation of transformations by teachers is not free from despair and pain since teachers need to abandon the "comfort" of ready-made answers and recipes in teaching in order to explore the "far-possible" of risking their own selves both as people and professionals.

In connection with these thoughts, McLaren (2003) points out that educators need to have an agenda for an equal education through a Freirean pedagogy which is more participatory, critical, values-oriented, multicultural, student-centered, experiential, research-minded, and interdisciplinary. This pedagogy focuses on the equality of the activity rather than the equality of the skills or facts memorized. Therefore, he suggests dialogue teaching to reduce students' withdrawal and teacher talk in the classroom, critical literacy to provoke critical awareness and desocialization in all the subjects, giving a more important role to reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and listening to others in order to produce self-inquiry about the society and the subject under study. Critical literacy invites teachers and students to reflect deeply on all subjects of study. McLaren invites educators to consider "situated pedagogy" as a way to situate learning in students' culture and lives. In this sense, learning is more experiential and knowledge is seen as something real and tangible. Change Agency makes sense to us because educators need to study the community where they will be agents of change and the consequences it might bring.

In the practical experiences we have used as illustration, we see that one way to provide a theoretical ground for the decisions the authors

of the monographs and theses have made for the implementation of instructional strategies is the proposal by Cummins (2001) regarding what he calls “transformative pedagogy”. The author prefers the term transformative pedagogy to the term critical pedagogy because it more clearly communicates that an active focus on social change is its central goal. Interactions between educators and students serve as the means to realize transformative pedagogy. In turn, these interactions are ways of fostering collaborative relations of power. The creation of these interaction patterns is one aim of transformative pedagogy. These patterns effectively challenge and transform the ways in which schools have traditionally reproduced social and economical inequalities.

Collaboration, critical inquiry, and transformation are only three factors that are common to the monographs and theses we have used as examples. Cárdenas, Nieto, and Martín (2005) point out that educators and learners live research as part of their daily routines and construct pedagogical knowledge. We agree with that view because we realize that educators are the ones who live the classrooms realities to enable learners to analyze and understand the social realities of their own lives and of their communities.

Where transformative pedagogy goes beyond the notion of “effective instruction” is in its understanding that sustained effectiveness requires that students engage actively in the instructional process and this will happen among subordinated group students only in contexts where their identities are being affirmed. Transformative educators acknowledge that educational structures are rooted in a sociopolitical context that traditionally has disempowered subordinated group students and these educators arrange interactions with their students that challenge these forms of disempowerment. In short, their conception of what education is all about and why they are in the classroom is fundamentally different from that of most policy-makers who see education primarily in terms of the efficient delivery of a service. The

struggle between these very different conceptions of education will ultimately determine the extent to which schools continue or not to reproduce social inequalities or, alternatively, effectively challenge the roots of inequality (Cummins, 2001).

We truly believe that there is change when educators come to question and are able to change beliefs and habits. For us, the meaning of educational change relates to change in practice. To accomplish this, change needs to be multidimensional (Fullan, 2001). That is to say, it is viewed from different perspectives. Educators can think of changes in materials, changes in approaches, methodologies, and styles of teaching as well as changes in beliefs, as in the theories that lead teaching practices. All these aspects are necessary to achieve change in practice or effective change.

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