

## INTRODUCTION

*“We have a profession which is informed by established practice... That practice is challenged by theory and also by the experiences of many practitioners. We must take these challenges seriously. One thing is sure. If teachers are to be able to offer their learners a range of language learning activities, if they want to find out how best to meet the needs of their students, if they are to take full advantage of a range of teaching materials and to keep abreast of new teaching opportunities, then they need to adapt to new values, new approaches to language, to learning and to students. They need to assimilate a range of new techniques and procedures. They need to be prepared to experiment and innovate.”<sup>1</sup>*

Educational reforms, students' expectations, technological development, and new views on assessment are just a few of the pressures today's English language teachers are encountering. If the foreign language profession is to provide first class instruction to its students while keeping up with a growing list of demands, support for high quality teacher preparation and continuing professional development must be given high priority.

English language teachers must maintain proficiency in the target language and stay up to date on current issues related to the target culture and language teaching. Regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process and these cannot solely depend upon policy makers or administrators' plans. Though teachers' skills and knowledge can be fostered by external agents (advisors, colleagues, supervisors, university programmes / professors, policy makers, among others), beliefs and attitudes cannot be attained if they are not based on individuals' willingness. Beliefs and attitudes are the main internal forces that can lead to development and cannot be attained if teachers' commitments towards their importance are not genuine.

Teachers interested in their growth see professional development as an on-going process and thus take part in different activities to gain

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Willis, in Willis, J. & Willis, D. (eds.). (1996). *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: McMillan, p. vi.

experiences, to validate their expert knowledge, to keep updated, or to maintain contact with academic communities. In any case, we can see that development is attained when we engage in reflective cycles that integrate practice and knowledge. These two components inform and support each other and can then contribute to expansion of our pedagogical knowledge. As a result of this interplay, we gain deeper understandings of educational phenomena, solve problems, answer questions, confirm theories, test hypotheses or introduce **Innovations**.

Given the fact that we always seek transformations in our practices, I can argue that innovative proposals should be based on theory. That theory could stand for new findings after having carried out new explorations; it can also embody the expansion of existing principles, or the confirmation of hypotheses. In any case, our theories cannot be the result of the emotion of change. In contrast, as an innovation may work for some people but not for others, they should be realized through an appropriate methodology which illustrates how those constructs operate in real situations. In view of this, the values and principles which lie behind any innovation must be made explicit. These considerations can somehow justify why we do not only value the topics or the results of innovations we hear about or come across in publications, conferences or just when we exchange views and experiences with other teachers. We need to know about the assumptions behind innovations and the processes they implied. In other words, we enquire about the “how” so that we can figure out why particular results are achieved. It is very likely that this information can serve as the basis for other teachers’ innovative initiatives.

Being aware of our teaching profession involves a cyclical process of stating what we know about an aspect of our teaching; questioning; trying to account for what is known and believed, that is to say, exploring what others have found out about our area of interest; reconceiving; and seeing things differently from new perspectives and/or proposing alternative ways of doing things and thinking about them. This cyclical process can be fostered in continual teacher preparation, but its actual effect can only be observed in teachers’ decisions to make it part of their daily practices. Keeping these reflections in mind, the first part of this PROFILE Journal issue starts by drawing the readers’ attention towards what constitutes teachers’ knowledge base. In order to somehow contribute to the development of our knowledge base, we include some articles concerning aspects such as the features of a communicative classroom, the factors influencing the learning of a second / foreign language, and the importance of

approaching the individuals encountered in the preschool classroom by applying the theory of multiple intelligences. It is expected that frameworks like the ones addressed in those papers contribute to the development of our pedagogical understanding. Likewise, the second part of this edition gathers a series of papers written by teachers who participated in former in-service courses and who describe innovations they have built-in in specific teaching contexts. Innovations presented here cover areas such as story-telling, the promotion of oral communication through extra-curricular activities, the development of students' self-esteem to speak in English, the use of task-based learning to enhance classroom interaction, and the management of children's aggressiveness when playing competitive games in the English class.

By focusing on teachers' innovations we can re-evaluate myths which most of the time associate change with policies or outsiders' decisions and interventions. Departing from the assumption that teachers are agents of change, we value the importance of presenting a series of experiences teachers wish to share with others. It is hoped that principles and conclusions they present in their papers generate the readers' interest to explore those issues in their classrooms through further investigations or to react by writing other papers that can contribute to widening our professional knowledge.

Melba Libia Cárdenas B.  
Journal Director