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ENHANCING PRE-K TEACHERS' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATION BY ARTICULATING TWO UNIVERSITY EXTENSION APPROACHES: A REFLECTION

PROMOCIÓN DE LA TRANSFORMACIÓN PERSONAL Y PROFESIONAL DE DOCENTES DE PREESCOLAR MEDIANTE LA ARTICULACIÓN DE DOS PROGRAMAS DE EXTENSIÓN UNIVERSITARIA: UNA REFLEXIÓN

ENCOURAGER LE DÉVELOPPEMENT PERSONNEL ET PROFESSIONNEL DES PROFESSEURS À L'ENSEIGNEMENT PRÉSCOLAIRE PAR L'ARTICULATION DES DEUX PROGRAMMES D'EXTENSION À L'UNIVERSITÉ : UNE RÉFLEXION

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ABSTRACT

University extension has been expected to fill the existing gap between academia and society in order to improve universities and contribute to societal development. Different types of interventions have been sought, professional development programmes being an example. However, professional development programmes intended for pre-K teachers have been significantly scarce in the field of in-service teacher education in Medellín, Antioquia. This paper reflects on a pedagogical experience through a professional development programme resulting from a joint effort between Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, a local private company, and a local government office. The Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme (in Spanish, *Programa de Desarrollo Profesional Docente: Pre-K English*) is aimed at (re)defining teaching strategies and developing the communicative dimension of English in a group of about 425 pre-K teachers and librarians from different local public schools across the city and in its surrounding rural areas. Such didactic transformation and language development contributed to the English language being introduced gradually and naturally in the pre-K setting; however, the programme's inner dynamic and pedagogical interests proved not to be in alignment with the interests and expectations of the University extension division, enterprise, or local government office.

Keywords: Pre-K Teachers' Professional Development Programme, redefining teaching, English communicative dimension, didactic and pedagogical considerations, perception

RESUMEN

Se espera que los programas de extensión de las instituciones de educación superior reduzcan la brecha entre la academia y la sociedad con el fin de contribuir al mejoramiento de la institución educativa y al desarrollo social. Para ello, los programas de desarrollo profesional docente han sido uno de los tipos

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de intervención propuesta. Sin embargo, en el campo de la formación de docentes de preescolar en servicio, este tipo de programas ha sido significativamente escaso en Medellín, Antioquia. La reflexión que se presenta aborda una experiencia pedagógica a partir de un programa de desarrollo profesional docente resultado de la alianza estratégica entre la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, una empresa privada de la ciudad y un ente gubernamental. El Programa de Desarrollo Profesional Docente: Pre-K English estuvo orientado a resignificar las prácticas docentes y al desarrollo de la dimensión comunicativa en inglés de un grupo de aproximadamente 425 maestras y maestros de preescolar y bibliotecólogos y bibliotecarias provenientes de diversas instituciones públicas de la ciudad y corregimientos aledaños. Las transformaciones didácticas, así como el desarrollo del lenguaje contribuyeron a la introducción del inglés de manera paulatina y natural en el aula de preescolar. La dinámica interna, así como los intereses pedagógicos del programa demostraron no alinearse con los intereses y expectativas de la empresa privada, el ente gubernamental y la división de Extensión de la Universidad.

Palabras clave: Programa de Desarrollo Profesional Docente: Pre-K English, resignificación de la enseñanza, dimensión comunicativa en inglés, consideraciones didácticas y pedagógicas, percepción

RÉSUMÉ

Nous espérons que les programmes d'extension des institutions d'éducation supérieure réduisent la distance entre l'académie et la société dans le but de contribuer à l'amélioration de l'établissement éducatif et au développement social. Pour ce faire, les programmes de développement professionnel des professeurs ont été l'un des types d'intervention proposés. Cependant, dans le domaine de la formation des professeurs travaillant au niveau préscolaire, ce type de programme a été rare dans la ville de Medellín (Antioquia, Colombie). La réflexion suivante aborde une expérience pédagogique à partir d'un programme de développement professionnel pour les professeurs, résultat d'une alliance stratégique entre l'Université catholique Luis Amigó (Medellín), une entreprise privée et une agence du gouvernement. Le programme de développement professionnel pour des enseignants : Pre-K anglais vise à donner une nouvelle signification aux pratiques et au développement de la dimension communicative en anglais d'un groupe de 425 professeurs d'écoles préscolaires publiques de Medellín, ainsi que de bibliologues et bibliothécaires. Les transformations didactiques, de même que le développement de la langue, ont contribué à l'introduction de la langue anglaise à l'école de manière naturelle et progressive. La dynamique interne ainsi que les intérêts pédagogiques du programme ont montré ne pas être alignés avec les intérêts et les attentes de l'entreprise privée, des organismes du gouvernement et du bureau d'extension à l'Université.

Mots clés : programme de développement professionnel pour professeurs de préscolaire, re-signification de l'enseignement, dimension communicative en anglais, implications et transformations, considérations didactiques et pédagogiques, perception

Introduction

...far from losing the essence of the university and higher education, this is enriched conceptually and strategically by directing actions towards great social problems and the development of intervention proposals aimed at the well-being of individuals and communities.

(ASCUN, 2011)

The ethical dimension of social responsibility entails practices, stances and principles that frame the present and the future of any institution or organisation. Vallaes (2008) delineates some characteristics stemming from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that might well support and sustain University Social Responsibility (USR). Awareness of the self, the environment, and the role the institution plays within such an environment emerges as the initial link in the chain. This awareness interweaves with the deeply ethical intention of doing the right thing for all those involved, providing, at the same time, values and principles serving as pillars of the institution's aims and goals.

At the university level, this social commitment has gone through different stages, extension programmes historically playing the leading role in bridging cooperation between universities and society. From a historical and conceptual perspective, three important modalities are stressed—altruistic, holistic social development, and market-based. University extension emerged in Latin America (Tünnermann, 2000) as a result of the student movement and subsequent Argentine university reform of 1918 in Córdoba, Argentina, whose call for universities to fulfil their social function has since remained a *leitmotif*. In so doing, Latin Americans owe this reform the emergence of the third substantive university function—along with teaching and research—whose earliest altruistic or traditional approach held social justice as a principle and featured a paternalistic and assistentialist character towards the least advantaged members of society. The search for social change as a main criterion

and genuine interest within Latin American universities proved to be the salient feature which differentiated them from their European counterparts. Public health brigades, training programmes, social internships for students, and legal aid clinics illustrate this social and humanistic intention.

It was not until the second Latin-American Conference on Extension and Cultural Diffusion held in Mexico in 1972 that education was ultimately recognised as a social subsystem which, despite also being global, would be autonomous and free enough to promote changes and exert influence over society (Serna, 2007). Consequently, university extension acquired a greater and more complex significance under the modality of a holistic social development (González & González, 2003), urging universities to take a step further into articulating the different substantive functions of a university in favour of ethical, equitable, and sustainable programmes to the real benefit of communities. In this regard, and aligned with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), respect and preservation of cultures, protection of the environment, and eradication of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and intolerance have been considered the keystones universities should address through substantial cross-disciplinary efforts. (UNESCO, 1998; UNESCO, 2010; Roberts & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013). Following this approach, university extension has become the driving force in enabling a bi-directional dialog of shared knowledge and understanding between university and society, causing the democratisation of knowledge to emerge as paramount under this informative and awareness-raising approach. In this context, the role of the former is to communicate the cultural expressions and technological advances produced within the institution to society, and the latter is expected to promote critical thinking and consciousness conducive to transformative actions based on Freire's liberation and empowerment tenets.

The connection between university and enterprise came into existence by the mid-1980s as another

modality to university extension. Under this new approach, university funding and profits gave rise to concern about the dangers of depriving extension of its primary social aim because community and societal needs are left aside while emerging market-based interests are favoured (Serna, 2004).

Regardless of the approach, it has been argued that extension should be considered responsible for articulating and incorporating the other substantive functions of higher education institutions—i.e. teaching, research and international functions—in order to manage and solve context-specific social, educational and cultural issues. Such an articulation would allow a multi-directional conversation and integration within and outside institutions, as well as the full realisation of USR. As Colombian University Association (Asociación Colombiana de Universidades—ASCUN—, 2011) highlights, USR should catalyse the research and teaching functions' articulation in order to generate new knowledge emerging from social problems and needs. From this perspective, the teaching function widens its scope in two main aspects: on the one hand, the pedagogical construction of teaching and didactic environments, and on the other, the promotion of social habits, routines and practices that enhance social coexistence.

This paper illustrates how the dichotomous combination of two extension approaches—awareness-raising and university-enterprise partnership—intertwine. A deliberate and sound pedagogical stance from academia and cooperation with the school system embody the former approach, while economic support from a national private enterprise and a local government assistance office represent the latter. In this experience, having a local government office's participation contributed to enlarge the university-enterprise partnership by paving the path between these two agents. The following pages will describe and reflect upon a pedagogical experience called "Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme" (in Spanish, *Programa*

de Desarrollo Profesional Docente: Pre-K English) (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó), which was carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó (the University, hereafter) in Medellín, Colombia. This paper has three sections. The first part gives a general, factual overview of the political circumstances surrounding the pedagogical experience and the participants. Part two describes and reflects upon the *mise en scène* from three perspectives: pedagogical considerations; perceptions and implications; and transformations and lessons. The last part gives an account of the major contributions of this pedagogical experience.

Political considerations and implications

Los sentimientos de temor y abandono fueron constantemente expresados por las maestras que iniciaban su proceso formativo. Una sensación, casi similar a la que viven "nuestros niños cuando se separan por primera vez de sus padres al ingresar a la educación formal" [...] con ello se ratificaba una vez más la predisposición para el aprendizaje del inglés y la urgencia de poner en acción una propuesta que [...] provocaría transformaciones personales y rupturas, pensadas por muchos como imposibles.¹

(Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 95)

Linguistic Policies in Colombia established by the Ministry of National Education (MNE) have been supported by projects in regions throughout the country. An example of this is Decree 01973, of December 2015 issued by the Medellín Mayor's Office, which passed Agreement 089 of 2013 (entitled "Languages for Medellín") to adopt a public policy for foreign language education in the city. This local policy promotes the design of plans and programmes intended for professional

1 Feelings of fear and abandonment were constantly expressed by the teachers who began their educative process. A feeling, almost similar to that experienced by "our children when they are separated for the first time from their parents when entering formal education" [...] this affirmed, once again, the predisposition to learn English and the urgency to put into action a proposal that [...] would provoke personal transformations and ruptures, thought impossible by many. (Our translation)

and linguistic improvement as well as for the formation of strategic local or international and public or private partnerships. The local government office's aim was to provide teachers with solid linguistic knowledge and didactic tools (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2012), as well as to establish linguistic requisites for preschool teachers aligned with the Colombian National Technical Norm (NTC) 5580 of 2007. Similarly, the local government office's 2012-2015 development plan stressed the role that preschool teachers have in children's first learning experience with English as a foreign language. As they normally do not have previous experience with English language and didactic studies, they need targeted training to fulfil that role. Consequently, a strategic alliance between the local government office, the enterprise, and the University was set to train preschool teachers in the development of the communicative dimension in English as a foreign language at level A2 of the CEFR needed to teach preschoolers (Fundación Nutresa, Secretaría de Educación de Medellín, Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2014, p. 1).

However, far too little attention has been paid to preschool teachers' proven needs and interests. In Colombia, the teachers have been the catalysts of tensions arising from diverse sources, the first being neglecting policies that do not consider them either active and intellectual actors in their pedagogical tasks or pedagogues working on their transformations (Mieles-Barrera, Henríquez-Linero & Sánchez-Castellón, 2009). The second is the dichotomous expectations that parents have regarding what children should learn, do, and develop when in preschool. The third is a minimalist perspective about a preschool teacher's role that has created erroneous beliefs associating early childhood education with providing mere care and playful activities, and training children for when they are enrolled in formal primary education. Finally, the fourth is strong social demands that have forced the educational system to focus on standardization to reach high scores without a clear connection to the formal academics and

human advancement that should occur within the classrooms.

A serious limitation also emerged from national policy. Neither Law 115, nor Law 1651, *Ley de Bilingüismo*, has defined specific requirements to teach English as a subject or as part of the communicative dimension in preschool. In addition, *Expedición Currículo*, an educational project posed by Education and Mayor's offices with the participation of teachers from different public and private institutions in town, developed a 13-document framework needed to restructure curricula from preschool to high school. In addition, although Document N.º 2, *El Plan de Estudios de la Educación Preescolar* (Alcaldía de Medellín & Secretaría de Educación, 2014), does express the concept of language, it does not specifically clarify how to develop the communicative dimension in English.

It was only in 2016 that the MNE published a series of didactic books, such as *Basic Learning Rights of English*, *Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines*, and *Suggested Curriculum Structure from Transition to 5th Grade*, which put forward English teaching in preschool based on specific modules and topics. This series of publications presents English teaching and use in preschool contexts under a comprehensive structure that regards teacher not only as the creator of communicative tasks, but also as someone who, acting as a resource-person, provides support to allow beneficial social interactions (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2016b, p. 26) and recognises him/herself as a learner-teacher and as an educator who is willing to enrich the guidelines and grow professionally by improving the pedagogical exercise (p. 50). Unfortunately, at the time this paper was written, this theoretical and pedagogical effort had thus far only surpassed the conceptualisation and design stages.

These aforementioned tensions and policies have permitted the administrative staff of schools to request preschool teachers to start teaching

English in their classes. The situation has caused teachers fear language and its teaching, as well as getting involved in training programmes that have not fulfilled their needs and expectations, but have instead made them feel frustrated about the language, its teaching and their own performance in the classroom. The Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme came about as a response by academia to the demands and needs posed by preschool teachers.

Participants

Programme participants belonged to three groups: teachers, librarians and academic staff. Teachers comprised two preschool levels: a) teachers from approximately 146 public institutions from the city and its rural areas who served the transition grade, and b) teachers from the governmental programme *Buen Comienzo*, who worked with children under six years of age. Librarians, the second group, promoted reading in the institutions. Participants from these two groups came from different institutions in the 16 communes of the city and its 5 rural areas. The group was made up of approximately 422 women (99.3%) and three men (0.70%), with ages ranging between 21 and 60 years. These facts show the participants were extremely varied regarding teaching experiences and methodologies used in the classroom.

The academic staff were composed of one administrative and one academic coordinator, one pedagogical advisor, one *sistematizador* (a person in charge of systematising the whole process) and six tutors. The last term was used to refer to the teachers from within the University responsible for teaching the teachers. It is important to mention that none of them had had prior experience teaching preschool teachers or belonging to a professional development programme focused on teaching.

Table 1 summarises the characterisation of the academic staff who were assigned to the English and preschool teaching programmes from the Faculty of Education and Humanities at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó.

Table 1 Academic staff characterisation

Role	Education	Job Description
Administrative coordinator	Master's degree in teaching English as a FL	Administering academic and financial aspects
Academic coordinator	Master's degree in education	Coordinating and adjusting of the academic proposal
Pedagogical advisor	Master's degree in education	Assisting academic staff and teachers with psycho-pedagogical aspects related to preschool education
<i>Sistematizador</i>	Master's degree in education and human development	Systematising the pedagogical experience
Tutors	Master's degree students in areas related to education and languages.	Developing the academic proposal with the teachers

Source: Estrategia de formación para maestros de preescolar (2013).

The academic staff played a determinant role. Its members were encouraged to serve in a program that was not simply aimed at reaching an important number of schools in the city and its rural areas; they were active staff members seeking to meet the aims of Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme.

Mise en scène

*Si yo participara en una estrategia de formación diferente...*²

(Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 23)

Considering the characteristics of this pedagogical experience, the Pre-K English Teacher Professional

2 If I participated in a different educative strategy... (Our translation)

Development Programme intended to impact the participants' pedagogical praxis upon developing their communicative dimension in English and (re)defining their didactic strategies. These two axes provided participants personal and professional opportunities to experience a learning environment free of pressure and standardisation. Integrative, inclusive and ludic pedagogical practices (Decree 2247, 1997) alongside participants' disposition allowed natural inclusion of the English language both within the Pre-K programme classes and preschool classroom settings. Therefore, language was constructed by constant interactions in English and Spanish and the relation amongst form, meaning and use.

As for a professional development programme, two significant features shape any type of programme that promotes and favours reflection upon the pedagogical praxis and seeks the improvement of teaching and learning conditions: working with voluntary participants and being an ongoing teacher-centred, self-growth process. Fandiño (2010) highlights this fact by stating that professional development entails

a process of self-discovery, updating and fulfilment in which teachers are active knowers who are responsible for expounding their insights about the nature of their professional lives and critical agents who are capable of acting on that knowledge to transform their practices and circumstances. [...]teacher development is a process of self-examination that helps teachers to become dynamic knowers and analytical agents who are capable of realizing and understanding how and why they do what they do and are committed to sharing and communicating their findings and conclusions to others. It is, therefore, a process that must provide teachers with empowerment and pedagogic know-how. (p. 112)

Being socially and educationally contextualised, the Pre-K programme provided fertile ground for a symbiotic relationship between the participants' reflection upon their practices and the intended deconstruction, (re)signification, and construction of their teacher identities, as well as their pedagogical and didactic praxis.

Pedagogical and didactic considerations

Dos ejes dieron cuerpo a dicha articulación: "Bien-SER" y "Bien-ESTAR"; con ellos como núcleos articuladores se impactó un sinnúmero de situaciones de tipo personal y profesional, asociadas a la motivación, el éxito, y la identidad, entre otros.³

(Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 90)

The issue of child development has prevailed throughout history in education, especially preschool. From the first 1998 *Serie lineamientos curriculares: Preescolar* [Curricular Guidelines for Preschool] to the latest 2016 Suggested Curriculum Structure, socio-affective, cognitive, spiritual, bodily, ethical, aesthetic, and communicative dimensions for comprehensive education have been advocated for as pillars of both teaching and learning. For the academic staff of the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme, human development is not circumscribed to any particular population; it is a lifelong process that embodies the desire and intention to improve the conditions for being, knowing and doing, eventually leading to better acting and more effective teaching and learning. Thus, the journey towards the development of the communicative dimension and the redefinition of teaching practices has established the remaining aforementioned dimensions as secure scaffolding.

Departing from the premise that having both languages—Spanish and English—coexisting within the pre-K classroom would favour the participants' partaking in the Programme and their disposition towards the language and the deconstruction of their teaching practices, the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme was brought under the scope of three pedagogical, didactic, and theoretical tenets.

3 Two axes informed this connection, namely "Bien-SER" and "Bien-ESTAR" (*well-being*). Having those as articulating centers, a number of personal and professional situations associated with motivation, success, and identity, among others, were impacted. (Our translation)

Interactionism and communicative dimension

Social interactionism, based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural model, has given insight into the fact that observing interaction and then recreating it to solve a communication problem provides a strong basis upon which language is founded. Within the Pre-K classroom, tutors were first responsible for leading the Pre-K teachers through this process of interaction and recreation. The teachers in turn did the same with their students in their own settings. Eventually, the Pre-K teachers and their students entered into a cyclic interaction fed by what they constructed within the Programme and recreated inside their classrooms.

Thus, interactionism paved the way for the initial construction of the communicative dimension. Understood as the ability to intentionally use the language to establish communication with the other and the self, as well as interact with the world, the communicative dimension emerged as a paramount mediator in the promotion and consolidation of the remaining dimensions, i.e. socio-affective, cognitive, spiritual, corporal, ethical and aesthetic. This comprehensive perspective in terms of language pushes teachers to attempt to turn isolated sounds and words into phrases and sentences, and even to dare to try coherence and cohesive discourses not only to refer to themselves and their immediate world, but also to enrich their planning for their students.

Truly, the natural coexistence of Spanish and English languages helped Pre-K teachers to strengthen their confidence with the language, which led their linguistic ego to be bolstered by discovering language on their own. Bruner (1961) suggests that both children and adults interact despite not being able to speak; games and non-verbal communication become essential in such instances. Notwithstanding Bruner's position, the previously mentioned language coexistence aided Pre-K teachers in taking risks with the language and contributed to the initial construction of English language structures.

Given this tenet, the role of tutors and peers can be considered an equally salient feature in the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme, since it entails a sufficient amount of cooperative and collaborative work for horizontal and bidirectional participatory and responsive learning and teaching processes in order to take place, as stressed by one teacher: "*Me hace sentir feliz el apoyo de mi tutora y de mis compañeras y estas últimas apoyan en la medida en que la tutora lidere, motive y cohesione.*"⁴ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 124).

Embedded in this type of work were various tenets of situated learning, including legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), which demands, in short, authentic activities that might enable participants to acquire, develop, and use cognitive tools—for this programme akin to the whole range of dimensions—that would eventually turn teacher-participants from newcomers into old-timers within the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Learning from this stance is thus perceived as part of social practice: "learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35). Therefore, the three LPP constituents represent three quintessential and indissoluble conditions for situated learning to happen: a) sense of ownership and community engagement; b) "multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and -inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36); and c) relationships established within communities of practice that allow for articulation and interchange.

The shift the Programme signified in terms of the role of languages within the classroom, and the meaning of learning from a social and

4 The support from my tutor and classmates makes me feel happy; the latter give support to the extent the tutor leads, motivates, and unites. (Our translation)

contextualised perspective presupposes that the construction of language and deconstruction of teaching practices were potentiated by the sense of community built amongst all the programme participants. This permitted the improvement and reshaping of the locus of learning and teaching.

Rituals, projects and artistic languages⁵

Document 20. *Sentido de la educación inicial* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014) states that arts, games, literature, and world exploration are the main principles upon which teaching and learning in preschool rely. Henceforth, those principles, together with projects and rituals, have underpinned the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme's pedagogical and didactic strategy because it also resembles the pedagogical actions adopted by teachers in their preschool settings. As an integral strategy, it has considerably served two intentional purposes. On the one hand, it has provided tutors with a framework to plan rich, provoking, contextualised, and experiential learning environments useful for the teachers to gain confidence and reach the programme goals. On the other, it provides teachers with a myriad of methodological input and insight possibilities for them to try out potential ideas in their classroom settings.

For Doblas & Montes (2009), rituals are everyday learning situations characterised by being permanent, constant, and predictable. Within the programme, the more the English language was used at certain moments, such as arrivals and departures, warm-ups and prayers, wrap-ups and closures, the more natural its transition to other class activities. Notably, this pedagogical intention shed light on what rituals meant for the programme. This view is supported by Spagnola & Fiese (2007), who oppose routines to rituals, while recognising that sometimes an action might reflect both. Viewed as permanent,

repetitive and predictable, the former appears to be devoid of significance, while the latter consists of meaningful actions due to its real purposes, symbolic nature and subjective experience. Table 2 illustrates this difference.

Table 2 Routine and ritual features

Routines	Rituals
Instrumental communication involving a momentary time commitment, devoid of special meaning	Communication filled of symbolic meaning and understanding what it means to be a member of a group
Focused on "here and now"	Time commitment and continuity
Disruptions are a hassle.	Disruptions might be a threat to group cohesion
Possibly similar tasks between groups	Distinct and unique to particular groups
Disconnected series of events	Story-telling or consisting of a celebration, tradition, or pattern of interaction

Source: Based on Spagnola & Fiese (2007).

By the same token, class projects—characterised by being ludic activities that connect topics and learning objectives, and allowing teachers to experience their own learning process to emulate it in the preschool classroom—gather together a range of meaningful teaching and learning experiences, not to mention the high and rich methodological complexity that allows promoting and developing critical thinking. More specifically, ludic-pedagogical projects are characterized by favouring cooperative learning to generate integration between the dimensions of development and knowledge. The interdisciplinarity and diversity of the tasks and activities they carry out make them a powerful pedagogical-didactic strategy in the classroom. (Quintero Arrubla & Maturana Patarroyo, 2015).

The key concept for the third element of the triad is expression. Drama, songs, storytelling, painting, drawing, puppet shows, games, reading aloud, amongst others, illustrate what artistic languages embody. From those languages, teachers in the

⁵ Referred to in Spanish as *lenguajes expresivos*.

programme created and recreated language within the construction of learning experiences. By way of illustration, one teacher said: “*Este es el mejor estudio que he hecho en toda mi vida, porque aprendo divirtiéndome, moviéndome y haciendo lo que me gusta.*”⁶ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 99). Due to the pressure-free environment artistic languages promote, they encouraged dynamic participation and interaction among teachers and their peers and tutors, as well as fostered recognition of their language and didactic strengths and weaknesses, and strengthened their motivation, memory, perception, etc.

Socializing constructions

Delving into their constant constructions, within both the Pre-K programme classroom and their own pre-K settings allowed teacher participants to share their understanding and knowledge of the language and its teaching with the academic community. This socialisation goes beyond simply telling the class and teacher the assignment to set itself as the occasion when being heard, confronted, and questioned are paramount. It also permits a more horizontal relationship to grow amongst the participants in the construction and promotion of conceptual bases and pedagogical practices (Maturana Patarroyo, 2013).

Accordingly, socialisation helped strengthen the sense of belonging to a community of practice. Teachers shared their learning and their changing knowledge, skills and discourses during two types of sessions: academic meetings (classes) and *jornadas pedagógicas* (pedagogic meetings or workshops), which covered diverse topics related to the teaching scenario that allowed them redefine their teaching practices. They were didactically oriented, featuring both general didactic elements and English-specific ones in the preschool classroom. Planning and assessment in

preschool, artistic languages and phonetics are some illustrative examples. Linguistic, didactic and pedagogical constructions were then put into action whether in the academic meetings or in *jornadas pedagógicas* through meaningful experiences, material design, teaching strategies, narratives and teaching demonstrations.

According to the person in charge of systematising the experience: “*Estas estrategias pedagógico-didácticas fueron altamente valoradas por las maestras y en ellas se pusieron en acción elementos teóricos, prácticos y para el fomento de la creatividad y la iniciativa en la didáctica del inglés a los niños.*” (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 43). The comprehensive strategy together with the theoretical and practical stances described proved to instil in teachers a sense of belonging, feelings of achievement and confidence, and motivation for exploring, reflecting on and articulating their teaching and learning practices.

Perceptions and implications

Undoubtedly, implementing a professional development programme such as the one described and discussed demands all actors involved to consider a wide variety of aspects in order to share intentions, expectations and interests. For this programme, the way each actor perceived it was of the utmost importance.

Even though the programme was framed within a combination of awareness-raising and university-enterprise extension approaches, the roles it demanded from actors made it more difficult to come to agreements. Both the enterprise and local government office certainly shared common political interests which were not necessarily in accordance with the pedagogical stance the academic staff had. As an illustration, for the

6 This is the best course I attended to in my entire life, because I am learning while having fun, moving around and doing things I like to do. (Our translation)

7 These pedagogical-didactic strategies were highly valued by teachers, and they put theoretical and practical elements into action, as well as elements to promote creativity and initiative in English didactics for children. (Our translation)

enterprise and the local government office, impact and visibility were more related to the amount of participants involved and to mass media promotion. The capacity to positively influence the teachers' performance and language perception, as well as students' and parents' responses to pedagogical and didactic changes was more encompassing in intent than the former ones. In the final interviews conducted for systematisation purposes, teachers and school principals pointed out:

Yo aún no sé inglés pero mis niños ya lo aman. Yo tenía muchos bloqueos, pero ya hasta me arriesgo a trabajar con los niños.⁸ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 95]

Tengo unas profesoras muy maravillosas...creo en ellas y las apoyo. Aquí se respira el inglés. Siento que lo importante es que no se quede ahí, que el año entrante los niños de primero tengan esta posibilidad y hasta ahora no se garantiza.⁹ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 129).

Extension programmes, as previously noted, are intended to summon substantive functions of higher education institutions to design and implement programmes which would benefit both the institution and society at large. However, in this pedagogical experience, it proved difficult to align university extension administrative views with academic aims and endeavours.

The single most striking perception and implication emerged from the nature of the programme. While the external actors—the enterprise, and extension and local government offices—could scarcely differentiate between the significance of a professional development programme and a training one, those actors bringing it to life—teachers

and academic staff—concurred with each other on the idea that professional development is strongly tied to a conception of willingness, disposition and availability, sense of community, deconstructions and constructions. The statements of two participants clearly illustrate this point:

Se ha terminado un maravilloso encuentro con personas llenas de conocimiento, comprensión, ternura, amor y entrega por lo que hacen. Lo que aprendí me ayudará a crecer no solo en el conocimiento del idioma, sino en el lenguaje expresivo que momento a momento pudimos compartir.¹⁰ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 82).

Primera vez que siento que se respeta el rol del niño y esto se vive en lo cotidiano en lo que hacemos en las clases...porque, aunque sea clase con adultas, lo que se hace, lo que se enseña, lo que se reflexiona tiene como un eje articulador al niño. Aunque no haya niños en las clases con las tutoras, los niños siempre están presentes. Pre-k tiene en cuenta a los niños en toda su dimensión, en toda su capacidad y con esto nos acompaña y orienta ante un sistema educativo en el que a veces se quiere tratar al niño como adultos en miniatura.¹¹ (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 4).

Consequently, a programme like this had very little to do with instrumental intentions, but humanistic, cognitive, and metacognitive ones instead. A training programme like that expected and described by the Heads of Agreement of 2013

8 I do not know English yet, but my children love it. I had a lot of mental blocks, but now I take the risk to work with the children. (Our translation)

9 I have some wonderful tutors... I believe in them, I support them. Here, we breathe English. I feel that it is important this does not stop here. Next year, first graders should have the same opportunity, but this is not guaranteed yet. (Our translation)

10 A wonderful meeting with wonderful people full of knowledge, understanding, tenderness, love and commitment to what they do, has come to an end. What I have learned here will help me grow, not only in knowledge about the language, but also in the expressive languages we were able to share at each moment. (Our translation)

11 This is the first time I feel that the role of the children is respected, and this is lived daily in what we do in the classes...because, even though the classes are with adults, what is done, what is taught, what is thought has children as the linking axis. Even though there are no children in these classes with the tutors, they are always present. Pre-K takes the children into account in all their dimensions, all their abilities, and with this, it accompanies us and orientates us in the presence of an education system that sometimes wants to see the child as a miniature adult. (Our translation)

(Fundación Nutresa, Secretaría de Educación de Medellín & Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2014), and which has been favoured for decades, has its basis on helping participants to acquire tools and knowledge to do tasks; thus, it is closely tied to performance and ready-to-use procedures. From this reductionist approach, a training programme like the one described is likely to be assessed by the high number of participants or by results on a standardized test. A professional development programme, on the other hand, goes beyond and takes time, effort, disposition, availability, and commitment as it is “a long-term process that includes routine opportunities and systematic experiences planned to foster growth and development in the teaching profession” (Fandiño, 2010, p. 111). Professional development programmes, then, embrace reflection, understanding, deconstruction of the teaching practice, and teacher identity.

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Lessons and transformations

Es cierto que ya no somos iguales. Somos agentes educativos que han entendido que los lenguajes son para llevar al aula y dar lo mejor de sí, a través de experiencias significativas de aprendizaje.¹²

(Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015. Closing Event)

The Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme has not been solely a strategy for the preschool teachers of the city; it has been one for the people involved in its design, conceptualization, and *mise en scène*, and based on this account, it could be said the transformations have been for all those who have been a part of it.

The first transformation to be examined is the one seen in the teachers attending the Programme. By joining the Pre-K teacher programme English

classes, pedagogic meetings, tutoring, clubs and others, teachers overcame sociocultural barriers and developed self-confidence (Brown, 2007) to accomplish their tasks either as students or teachers. The target language appeared as a tool that was not only appealing for the purpose of adding a new repertoire to their teaching abilities, but also as an interesting topic to be covered, studied and analysed. At the same time, it could become a motivational aspect in their professional practices. Attending this teacher professional development program (TPDP) provided challenges, possibilities and experiences in their teaching and personal realm.

Firstly, the Pre-K teachers discovered themselves as constant learners in terms of English or other languages that could become meaningful (Brown, 2007) for their teaching scenarios. Through exposure to linguistic and pedagogical classes, educators discovered that there were diverse techniques and learning strategies to be used and shared with students, e.g. the use of videos went from simply exposing the children to watching and repeating, to the creation of strategies that were connected to other topics worked into the communicative dimension in the subject area of Spanish.

Such occurrences offered teachers another learning possibility worth noting. It has been common to witness the Pre-K teachers stating that they are always looking for additional ways of expressing things; consequently, they are ready to become better English users for their students and transcend the teaching of simple lists of words. This fact exemplifies how decision making is a more conscious aspect in the teaching practice of the participants (Burden and Byrd, 2003 as cited in Schulte et al., 2005).

Secondly, the participating teachers and their peers started to build a community of preschool English teachers. It grew into a scenario where they shared strategies with each other, even those holding, for example, a B.A. in languages or a linguistics certification, with the well-supported objective of reinforcing and spreading awareness

12 It is true we are no longer the same. We are educational agents who have understood that languages are meant to be taken to the classroom, and [that we] give the very best of ourselves through meaningful learning experiences. (Our translation)

about the positive experiences that occurred within the Pre-K classrooms throughout the city. As Perrenoud (2004) states, working as a team is a matter of competencies. It embodies the strong conviction that cooperation is a professional value (p. 67), an experience that gave preschool teachers a voice in the decisions regarding what to teach and how to teach it to their students, while also focusing on the real needs they have and putting into action the substance learned during the time spent in the TPDP (Marcelo & Vaillant, 2009).

The second transformation appears more as an understanding of the real function of extension in Antioquia's universities. The Pre-K TPDP acted as a catalyst to help with the revitalization of the academic role it should have as opposed to a merely administrative one. It is essential to start building up a relationship of interaction and reciprocity within the context of affinity that societies and universities have through clear systematization—with a research perspective—of the processes offered.

When reviewing the theoretical construction of the function of university extension programmes and departments, it is imperative to highlight that these projects should be the answer to community needs. This aspect calls for closing the gap between the administrative and academic exercise experienced within the function of extension. A TPDP should not only focus on showing numbers of participants as an achievement of its goals and objectives; it should deeply examine what those numbers mean, and what transformations in terms of personal, economic and professional growth the actors involved in those projects are having (Román et al., 2016). This aspect requires a clear follow-up and evaluation of projects to gauge impact on participants, and then, when this is understood, analysed, and discussed properly, the extension division could give back to society what it needs: a clear social transformation. This last statement portrays a demand that could be summarized in a simple question: What should happen in extension when a project has

been closed? Román et al. give a simple answer to this question, “a substantial aspect that universities should consider is the evaluation of the extension to value the participation of the universities within the national and international reality and the diffusion of the benefits of its cultural and social action” (2016, p. 175).

The third transformation to be examined is the one experienced by the academic staff. First, they maintained a state of constant questioning regarding content selection, which nurtured the linguistic and didactic modules worked on with participants. The core of this exercise was to go beyond providing linguistic or didactic knowledge to the teachers to find the multiple possibilities they had to work with the children of the city and its rural areas. This appeared to become one of the most treasured traits of the pedagogical community that the Pre-K English staff wanted to build up.

Along with building a pedagogic community within the programme, the second transformation in the tutors was understanding the difference between teaching to teachers and teaching to other kinds of professionals. Naturally, many questions about how to teach properly to experienced teachers came up, which served as another task to justify the existence of a stronger pedagogical community within the team. As a response to this need, the Programme established specific actions: 1) Pre-K teachers needed to learn the language by being immersed in well-structured didactic activities. 2) They needed to become proficient language users according to Colombian linguistic policies. 3) Pre-K teachers needed to enhance their self-confidence (Brown, 2007) in their English teaching and language performance in the classroom. 4) They needed to acquire didactic elements that had a positive impact on the preschool classrooms of the city and its rural areas. Amongst the academic staff, these tasks increased the understanding and vision of what needed to be considered when becoming teachers of teachers.

The third transformation in the academic staff was getting to fully understand what preschool education really means and what it requires. Working with pre-K teachers allowed the tutors to gain a complete and deep vision of all the profound pedagogical and didactic knowledge this group of teachers has about the children, their needs, and their contexts, emphasizing the importance of assuring that this level of education should be embodied not only by dynamic and creative teachers, but also by those with a sense of pedagogy that helps children to reach all their potential through academic life. In brief, this experience made pre-K teachers of the city “practitioners” (Kumaravadivelu, 2002) capable of the self-empowerment necessary to reshape the characteristics and content of what was required to be taught to them. This came about in the establishment of a coherent practice that unveiled the pedagogical constructions and de-constructions used and reshaped during the teaching exercise within the Programme.

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The abovementioned transformations emerged over the course of the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme, and involved all of its actors and boundaries, as well as the interconnection that all of them would need to maintain to achieve the specified goals by focusing on the needs of preschool teachers and realities in their classrooms.

Conclusions

*Yo no puedo enseñarte nada más. Tienes que marcharte de aquí como un famoso maestro que ha aprendido a entender y transformar.*¹³

(Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2015, p. 284)

This paper has given an account of the implementation of the Pre-K English Teacher Professional Development Programme, which resulted from a joint effort between the economic, political, and

academic sectors. Political, didactic, and pedagogical considerations were discussed in order to illustrate the way an intended and sound pedagogical posture appropriated the policies to develop a person-based programme. A person, a teacher, a tutor who transforms him—or her—into a practitioner, who connects knowing, being and doing, and whose intention is to act upon the world to transform it as an agent of action.

Given this point, the present pedagogical experience makes some noteworthy contributions to future experiences. In the first place, it can be concluded that preschool teachers should be seen as subjects and agents of their own professional development process in two ways: pedagogical-didactic and communicative. The experience indicated that when preschool teachers were impelled to reason about what happened within the classroom setting and used the constructions, understanding, and knowledge they had gained in their own scenarios creating and designing meaningful experiences for children, they became actors who analysed, considered and implemented English as a part of classroom work based on well informed decisions.

Additionally, the design and offer of accurate and pertinent programmes should be conducted on the basis of teachers’ professional, personal, and political needs, interests, and contexts. In the search for a critical stance towards language, a strong emphasis on situated teaching and learning might facilitate the articulation of theory and social practice, thus giving insight on pedagogical decisions such as when, where, why the language should be taught, and what strategies to use.

Finally, this pedagogical experience demonstrated that extension programmes should embrace a more active role in the construction of society, bearing in its needs mind by offering academic programs focused on societal growth instead of simply training courses. These offerings should put together all substantive functions through the design and the implementation of professional

13 I cannot teach you anything else. You must go from hence as a famous teacher who has learned to understand and transform. (Our translation)

development programmes for teachers that respond to context and can therefore be taken to different locations.

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