

English Teachers' Beliefs about Communicative Competence and their Relationship with their Classroom Practices

Creencias de los profesores de inglés sobre la competencia comunicativa y su relación con sus prácticas de clase

*Moravia Elizabeth González Peláez**

ICFES & Universidad Nacional de Colombia – Sede Bogotá, Colombia

This article describes a research project conducted with two English Teachers from the Extension Program at Foreign Language Department, National University in Bogotá. The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between what English teachers understand on communicative competence and what they actually do in their English classes. The teachers were observed during 4 months, and they were also interviewed. The findings show how hard it is to define what communicative competence is in teachers' own words. Data also show how important students are in the English classrooms. English teachers should make careful decisions to help them develop their language competence.

Key words: Communicative competence, English teacher's beliefs and reflections, classroom practices, English students' roles, decision making

Este artículo describe un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo con dos profesores de inglés de la Unidad de Extensión del Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, en Bogotá. El estudio tenía como objetivo establecer la relación entre lo que los profesores comprenden sobre la competencia comunicativa y lo que ellos realmente hacen en el salón de clase. Los profesores fueron observados por un período de cuatro meses y también fueron entrevistados. Los resultados del estudio muestran lo complejo que resulta para los profesores definir la competencia comunicativa en sus propias palabras. También es posible evidenciar la importancia que los estudiantes tienen en el salón de clase de inglés. Los profesores de inglés deben ser cuidadosos al momento de tomar decisiones con el fin de ayudar a los estudiantes a desarrollar su competencia en la lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: Competencia comunicativa, creencias y reflexiones de los profesores de inglés, prácticas de clase, roles de los estudiantes de inglés, toma de decisiones

* E-mail: egonzalez6@gmail.com
Address: Calle 71B # 76-06. Barrio Santa Helenita. Bogotá.

This article was received on February 5, 2008 and accepted on August 5, 2008.

Introduction

As Colombian language teachers are aware, education has gone through many changes during the last few decades. Those changes are related mainly to the purpose of teaching and specifically to what Colombian students need in order to deal with the national and international contexts in which they have to be 'competent'. According to Bogoya (2000), to be considered competent certainly depends on the type of circumstances in which a person has to act while making use of certain knowledge. Based on this, he proposes an interdisciplinary work in which the individual, while acting in a context, takes into account some aspects regarding different areas of knowledge.

The changes mentioned above have been integrated into the Colombian educational system based on the National Ministry of Education proposals which include Ley General de Educación (MEN, 1994), Resolución 2343 (MEN, 1996), Lineamientos Curriculares - Foreign Languages Area (MEN, 1999), and more recently, the National Standards on Foreign Language Competence (MEN, 2006). The intention of all those proposals is to give teachers and administrators guidelines to develop students' communicative competence in a foreign language. But how do English teachers understand the concept of communicative competence? Moreover, how do their teaching practices inform us about their understanding of communicative competence? The current article deals with the possible answers to these two questions.

Literature Review

The three main constructs which supported the study are: the definition of communicative competence, teaching practice and teachers' beliefs.

Defining Communicative Competence

Savignon (1983) defines communicative competence as follows:

"[...]it is a dynamic rather than a static concept[...], it depends on the negotiation of meaning[...], it applies to both written and spoken language as well as to many other symbolic systems[...], it is context specific[...], it takes place in an infinite variety of situations[...], it is defined as a presumed underlying ability[...], it is relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved" (Savignon, 1983, pp. 8-9).

Savignon's definition is related to Canale & Swain's communicative competence model (1980, in Savignon, 1983). For them, communicative competence has four different components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. These components allow teachers to develop a classroom curriculum and to structure teaching practice. Canale & Swain's model can be seen in an English classroom when meaning negotiation takes place, and when all the participants in the classroom are involved in trying to develop their communicative competence. When you have students negotiating meaning, it is important to provide an appropriate atmosphere in which students feel free to interact

cooperatively. Regarding interaction, Stern (1990) refers to a classroom in which social and cultural components are part of the students' interaction. He particularly suggests that language teaching gives greater importance to these components rather than to the language structure.

Beyond Canale & Swain's model, Bachman (1990) proposes a model for evaluating students' language competence, which, in my opinion, is related to what teachers should do in the English classroom. His model includes different competences from organizational competence to sociolinguistic competence which are related to structural, cohesive, functional and social aspects of the language. This implies that teachers should have many aspects in mind when deciding about what to teach and how to do it. That also involves seeing language not just as a system, but also as a means of communication.

Besides the said models, the Common European Framework (Council of Europe) describes Communicative language competence "[...]as comprising several components: *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic*. Each of these components is postulated as comprising, in particular, knowledge and skills and know-how" (CEF, p. 13). This definition goes beyond language knowledge and emphasizes on knowing how to use the language, and to act with it.

Teaching Practice Discussion

In an article published by the Colombian National Ministry of Education (1998), teaching practice is described as

a crucial social event to which the field of pedagogy has a lot to contribute. They state that this 'social task' has evolved and changed throughout time going from a 'simple' duty developed in a particular setting (the classroom) to an elaborated task that might have a social, cultural and political impact, etc. This article also suggests that teaching practice is not abstract; rather, it is factual and verifiable. It is possible to identify its outcomes and to relate them to the society in which we live. That is why, based on an individual's behavior in society, we can picture the type of education they were involved in.

Another important discussion on teaching practice is found in Richards (Richards & Nunan, 1994). He highlights the systematic way teachers are working now in contrast to the way they used to act based on intuition or common sense. Now, he argues, teachers are taking advantage of theoretical issues that might help them understand and improve the way they teach. He also mentions that nowadays second language teachers are interested in examining language development, pedagogy, acquisition, and curriculum, along with other issues, which allow them to assume an autonomous behavior to some extent.

Finally, Bartlett (in Richards & Nunan, 1994, p. 203) proposes characterizing teachers' actions as follows: "[...]teacher's actions are influenced by intentions in the social settings and by the beliefs and chains of reasoning that are held before and after the occurrence of the action". This shows the close relationship between what teachers do in the classroom and what they think or believe in, and how

the former makes teachers' understanding about what teaching is evident, for instance.

Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Practices

Johnson (1999) establishes a relationship between reflective teaching and teachers' beliefs by asking the following question: What are teachers' beliefs and how do they influence teachers' reasoning? She answers it by defining the term 'beliefs'. She says that beliefs have a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component. She also states that all human perception is influenced by beliefs which influence the ways in which events are understood and acted on.

Johnson also mentions that teachers shape their beliefs based on who they are and what they do. Their beliefs are the product of their personal and professional experiences. If the affective component of teachers' beliefs is taken into consideration, it is possible to see how difficult it is for them to deal with criticism and changes that might affect their teaching practice.

On the other hand, Richards & Lockhart (1999) assume teachers' beliefs are constructed based on many aspects such as goals, values, understanding about teaching content and process, their work environment, and their roles. All these aspects constitute teachers' background when making decisions and acting or what it is known as "culture of teaching" (p. 30). They say that when studying teacher-thinking, some questions like these should be asked:

- What do teachers believe about teaching and learning?
- How is their knowledge organized?

- What are the sources of teachers' beliefs?
- How do teachers' beliefs influence their teaching?

(Richards & Lockhart, 1999, p. 30)

Those are some of the questions I posed when deciding on conducting this research. Closely related to them are two investigations in the area teachers' beliefs and their practices, which are worth summarizing.

The first study is about the congruence of student teachers' pedagogical images and actual classroom practices conducted by Fung & Chow (2002) in Hong Kong. The purpose of this research was to establish a profile of pedagogical images of a group of student teachers, and to see if there is congruence between their pedagogical images and teaching practices. The researchers developed a questionnaire to explore teachers' views about teaching, and this was administered to 59 first-year student teachers before and after their teaching practicum in physical education for secondary schools. The researchers found that student teachers have an approach in mind, but when they are in actual classes they have a mixture of approaches. It means that they considered themselves as teachers who have in mind child-centered approach, but when having their classes they actually followed a teacher-centered approach.

The second study was conducted in Colombia and was done by two novice teacher-researchers in Bogotá (Zuleta & Prada, 2005) with four primary school student teachers. It was a case study in which researchers were interested in questioning student teachers about

their practice based on their teaching preparation and how they dealt with some difficulties. They used student teachers and practice counselor's journals and conferences as well as semi-structured interviews as instruments to collect data. The study results showed that student teachers faced stressful situations when developing their practicum, especially when they found difficulties; however, they felt happy at the end of the process. Results also showed that the reflective approach chosen by the practice counselor allowed student- teachers to see their practice from a critical perspective and it was enriching for them.

These two studies are very closely related to my research in terms of the type of questions or inquiries researchers have. They seek to compare student teachers and teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and ways of seeing teaching with their current practices.

Methodology

Before portraying the setting, participants and instruments used to collect the data, it is necessary to say that the study carried out with in-service teachers followed the descriptive case study features pointed out by Cohen & Manion (1995). They state that a researcher who develops a descriptive case study observes and describes a group of people who represent a specific community that can be characterized based on the data analysis. That is what I did as researcher. I observed and described a group of English teachers, and then analyzed the phenomena that characterize them.

Participants

The participants of this study were two English teachers. Both of them got their undergraduate degree at the National University in Bogotá, one of them in the mid-nineties, and the other in 2000.

The first participant, Martha Correa¹, is an English teacher whose experience began in 2001 after getting her degree. But she actually started working as a teacher before graduation while doing her teaching practice. During the three years before her participation in this study, she taught at different levels and in different settings. She began teaching in primary school, then went on to high-school students (eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh graders); and after that worked with university students at two universities. She has also been part of the program called ALEX, at the National University of Colombia, which is based on an autonomous paradigm that was started by the Foreign Languages Department some years ago in order to teach foreign languages to students who were studying different majors at the university. She has also worked as an assistant researcher at the same university.

The second participant, Patricia Rojas² is an English teacher with ten-years of experience. She holds a postgraduate degree in applied linguistics (*especialización*). She has taught English at different levels and in different settings, but mainly she has worked in a school in the northern part of the city for ten years. There, she has taught

1 This is a fictitious name used to protect the participant's identity.

2 This is a fictitious name used to protect the participant's identity.

English at all high school levels and she has been in charge of the Foreign Language Area. She also has worked at the National University of Colombia in the extension courses for more than seven years. She also had the opportunity of teaching Spanish and English to high school students at La Chorrera (Amazonas) for one year. Finally, she got a scholarship and worked as a Spanish teacher in Manchester (England) for one year. During that period of time, she enrolled in an advanced course in English literature.

Setting

The study was done at the National University in Bogotá, mainly in the Extension English courses that take place at night from Monday to Thursday. At the time the data was collected, the courses were divided into four different levels, which were also divided into two. For instance, students in an elementary level began with 1A, continued with 1B, and then were promoted to the second level (2A), and so forth.

The students who attended those courses were adults who work and/or study during the day, and were studying English for different reasons, which varied from personal interests to job requirements.

Teachers organized their classes following a textbook. This means that the program was mainly based on the textbook. However, teachers were allowed to use extra materials related to the topics proposed by the textbook. In each one of the levels throughout the entire course, teachers had to develop a minimum of four units from the textbook ready.

Collecting Data

Interviews and observation sheets were used to collect the data. Regarding interviews, the format employed was based on Seidman's proposal (1998) about the use of the three-interview series designed by Dolbare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982, cited by Seidman, 1998). Seidman argues that when this series of interviews is used, the interviewer guarantees an environment in which interviewee's background is taken into account.

Due to restrictions on the participants' availability, it was decided to merge the three-interview series in which they were asked about Seidman's proposal issues. Despite the fact that I did not do the three interviews, their responses to the semi-structured interview made it possible to elicit their beliefs about communicative competence in relation to their life history and professional experience at the same time.

The second instrument used to collect data was observation sheets. This was used to see the relationship between their beliefs and their actual teaching practices.

The two participants were observed before the interviews were done. I attended nine class sessions of two hours each with the first participant and six class sessions, also of two hours each, with the second participant. This was done on a weekly basis from October to November 2003 and from October to November 2004.

In the class sessions observed, everything that happened during the class was described following a narrative structure using the observation sheet. After the first three observation sessions, the interview was done in November 2003. This took

about one hour. It was recorded and the corresponding transcription was made.

Finally, I believe these instruments allowed me to elicit teachers' beliefs and practices better. Calderhead (1988 in Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 2001) mentions that it is difficult to ask teachers about their beliefs or 'principles,' because teachers' professional knowledge is embedded in their actions. That is why it is complex for them to make those beliefs explicit. Breen et al. also suggest that this data collection can be done by observing and using elicitation techniques. These guiding principles were important for negotiating with the teachers to avoid the influence of their affective component and the resistance they might have towards a research oriented to describing and analyzing their way of acting as professionals in the educational context.

Findings

While reading the data, I used some coding techniques as suggested by

Strauss & Corbin (1990). One of these consists of analyzing the interview and observation line-by-line. Based on this, I started by reading the data collected with the observation sheets in which some comments were included in the right hand column. When the interview was transcribed, I contrasted it with what had been found through the observation process. The comments included in the observation sheets were mainly labels or concepts, as Strauss & Corbin (1990) call them. After that, I grouped and listed them in a matrix where I tallied their frequency. While tallying, I used different colors to identify some commonalities that drew my attention. In relation to commonalities, I read the data gathered, looked for some regular patterns and highlighted them. I mainly concentrated on the ones related to those already found through the observation instrument.

After having identified the commonalities I came up with categories and subcategories, as follows:

Table 1. Categories drawn from data analysis.

Core category	Sub-categories	Sub-categories' characteristics
Acting upon the dynamics of the class based on personal beliefs of communicative competence	1. Starting from students' needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Planning and doing based on students' interests. – Promoting confidence. – Teachers' attitudes that support students.
	2. Deciding upon classroom organization and environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Going beyond what is supposed to be used. – Having students work cooperatively. – Coping with multiple competences and language abilities.

In the core category we can see teachers' actions which are mainly based on what they consider is important to develop students' communicative competence. Based on this, many of the teachers' actions show that communicative competence development implies different aspects beyond language itself. It embraces students' needs (affective and language needs), the way they interact in the classroom (classroom organization and ways of working in class), and the type of materials teachers use.

Teachers' beliefs could be also identified: they were represented by different attitudes seen in the classroom when I observed them and by their awareness when they were asked about their practices. Those beliefs have to do with the ways teachers see their students and mainly, what they consider their students need to develop their language competence. Based on those beliefs, teachers also start to reflect upon what they consider should be taught and how. These considerations allowed me to talk about two sub-categories: Starting from students' needs and deciding upon classroom organization and environment.

Starting from Students' Needs

First of all, Seedhouse (1995) considers learners' needs really important, because it allows teachers to set their class goals, and it is directly related to what happens in a classroom. From the very beginning of each class, I noticed that participants in this study consider learners not only individuals in a classroom, but also people who deserve consideration. This makes students feel

comfortable and relaxed, which is why teachers greet them: "Hello! Good evening", in a friendly manner and ask them about their day, for instance. Here is some evidence from the observation sheets and from the interviews to illustrate this sub-category:

Teacher greets students by asking them how their day was. One of the students says that she had a terrible day and the teacher asks: "Why? Tell us".

(Observation sheet N° 01. Entry: November 12, 2003)

Teacher begins by saying: "Hello!" Then, she addresses a student and says to him: "Nice to see you again".

(Observation sheet N° 06. Entry: October 13, 2004)

This evidence shows teachers' attitude towards students in terms of considering classroom atmosphere important; that is why they have a particular way of starting the class in order to, perhaps, have the appropriate atmosphere to begin with the class. To do that, they take care of greeting and asking students about themselves. I interpret this attitude as a way showing concern about their students as the human beings they are.

Secondly, some evidence taken from the interviews is also relevant to illustrate this sub-category in which teachers' opinion or view about class atmosphere is expressed.

Teacher 1 (Martha):

681. My students' work environment

682. is very important for me so

683. I try to make them feel comfortable,

684. get to know each other and see that

685. they are not sitting with a

686. stranger in the first class.

(Interview. November 22, 2003)

Here, we notice how Martha considers creating the appropriate conditions before starting the class really important. Conditions that include having students interacting among themselves to meet their own interests, or at least to share their personal information, which later on will allow them to interact in a friendly manner. At the end, they will feel really comfortable in the class and that will help them to develop language competence.

Teacher 2 (Patricia):

419. ...well, ahhh, first I would say that

420. before teaching an English class,

421. it's... you need to [sic] open your

422. heart to the students and feel that

423. they can give a lot and that

424. they aren't afraid to want to say

425. things in English because that

426. limits them a lot.

427. It is a disease that many have.

(Interview. November 29, 2003)

In this evidence, we can see Patricia's feelings in terms of offering students some opportunities to feel free to say what they think without fear of being judged. This is also an example of teachers' purpose about creating an appropriate atmosphere for learning, which implies thinking about students' needs.

When thinking about students' needs, teachers' beliefs were reflected in three important aspects that show how they consider students' interests and confidence when developing communicative

competence. In other words, teachers believe that communicative competence implies thinking broadly about students' needs. That is to say, when developing communicative competence, students bring to class what they are in terms of themselves, their feelings and their interests; so teachers should control all these aspects by providing the appropriate conditions in order to guarantee an appropriate learning environment.

Promoting confidence is one of the characteristics of this sub-category, which I consider really important when teaching. With respect to it, we can see teachers' beliefs about the importance of avoiding student anxiety by fostering confidence were evident. "Communicative language teaching requires a sense of *community* –an environment of trust and mutual confidence, wherein learners interact without fear or threat of failure" (Savignon, 1983, p. 122). This quotation reveals the importance classroom atmosphere has in the development of communicative competence.

There are some pieces of evidence taken from the data analysis to illustrate this discussion:

Teacher 1 (Martha):

692. "...but what we try to do is to

693. lower the level of anxiety and

694. make the environment become

695. more friendly and perhaps

696. that is one of the nice things".

697. Researcher: "So you are talking

698. about the environment in class".

(Interview. November 22, 2003)

Teacher 1 (Martha):

699. "For me this is very important
700. because it allows them to talk...
701. intervene, they don't feel reprimanded
702. by me nor by their classmates.
703. This is a part that I have realized that
704. they don't talk because xx no,
705. it is that the person beside me
706. is going to say that I xx these concepts
707. that we call representations here xx
708. I try to change them.
709. Now that we trust each other xx
710. so xx we play a little game xx and
711. go on with the topic because now
712. they are relaxed and now they can
713. work on the topic we are dealing with
714. in class or the one we are going to
introduce."

(Interview. November 22, 2003)

Teachers' interest in giving students confidence was also noticed in the way teachers acted, for example, they smiled frequently during a class.

...She nods very often while she is listening to a student asking a question. Sometimes she does so when she says: "yes." While listening to students, she also smiles regularly.

(Observation sheet N° 03. Entry: October, 29, 2003)

Some aspects related to teachers' role in the classroom can be seen in this observation. When communicative language teaching is followed, Richard & Lockhart (1999) identify the role of the teacher as that of a facilitator whose attitudes and behaviours influence students' progress.

This role is easily observed and evident in the way one of them nods when students are participating, as a way of assenting (Observation sheet N° 03. Entry: October, 29, 2003).

Deciding upon Classroom Organization and Environment

Coming back to the sub-categories, now I am referring to the second one. This second sub-category involves some aspects related to the way teachers have students interact in class, the use of extra-material for developing some activities, and a core aspect of this study--the relevance teachers give to developing communicative competence through the different sub-competences, and the development of the four language skills.

In the majority of the classes I observed, I noticed how teachers changed from one activity to another and this implied also changing students' organization in the classroom. The students seemed to enjoy these changes. Something that called my attention was that some students who were reluctant to participate in a certain activity changed their attitude when they were asked to arrange desks in a complete different way. Here we can see how teachers' decisions regarding different classroom arrangements are related to the way they think this would help students to develop their communicative competence.

Teacher 1 (Martha):

921. Researcher: "And in the end
922. how does the organization of your class
923. with your students work?
924. How is it related, shall we say,

925. with that goal that is the development
 926. of communication competence?
 927. Is there a relationship?
 928. Do you feel like there is a relationship
 929. when you think about organizing the class?"
 930. T: "Of course, because look,
 931. this thing of developing communicative
 932. competence is not an individual matter
 933. xx I don't sit there in a classroom and
 934. look at certain structures like they do
 935. in certain kinds of classes.
 936. That makes you think of:
 937. one desk behind another and
 938. another desk behind that and
 939. like managing a class on anatomy
 940. or something like that. This is not
 941. the same. So you have to create spaces
 942. and structures such as a half-moon,
 943. small circles, groups of three where
 944. they can exchange knowledge.
 945. They can xx that they have a
 946. common reference to be able to share it
 947. and that seems very important to me.
 948. I always try to do it. Whenever I have lecture
 949. classes, the desks are one behind the other
 950. but when I am practicing, the format is
 different".

(Interview, November 22, 2003)

In the last part of this interview (lines 949-952), the way the teacher decided to have students organized differently depending on the type of process they were going through in the class was noticeable. In other words, when the

teacher introduces a topic, she has students sitting in rows one behind the other. But if she has them practicing, students are organized differently depending on what it is. That means, students have the opportunity of practicing the language while they are organized in ways that imitate real communication to develop their communicative competence. Rivers (1992) supports my thinking by saying that since language is a vehicle of communication it must take place in communicative situations in which students can interact among themselves and with the teacher.

Finally, let's look at some of the evidences concerning how participants coped with multiple competences and language abilities, an important characteristic of this sub-category.

Teachers' beliefs about communicative competence can be seen through the way they incorporate a competence model into their classes. They express their belief by including activities and tasks which make students develop their competence (organizational and pragmatics competence) following Bachmans' model (1990), for instance, without being aware of it.

Teacher 1 (Martha):

774. "Communication competence is made up
 775. of various things. That is to say, what
 776. I taught my students the other day,
 777. it is not only that you know the structure
 778. but when you can use that structure.
 779. Because you are not going to use
 780. 'quiubo' / 'what's up?' with your boss
 781. because you can't do that.

782. There are many things that this
783. implies and I believe that as a professor
784. one knows that but putting it into
785. words just like that is difficult x
786. for me it is difficult right now.
787. How do you develop your students'
788. competence? I don't know.
789. I try to make them work a little on
790. each thing that communicative
791. competence is made up of".
(Interview, November 22, 2003)

In the previous data, it is possible to see how teachers incorporate some of the elements Bachman (1990) talks about regarding communicative competence. They give great importance to the appropriate use of language structure depending on speakers' role. In that sense, they are considering grammar and pragmatic competences. They also see the relation between Bachman's communicative competence model and the development of the four language skills.

On the other hand, teachers think communicative competence implies a complex process because it involves many things such as form, function, purpose and use, for instance. They argue that it is difficult for them to define what communicative competence implies. However, they take into account many of the elements they consider part of what communicative competence embraces. This discussion can be related to what Savignon (1983) mentions in regards to communicative competence. She says that this notion goes beyond linguistics and psychology, that it also covers

anthropology and sociology. Based on this, it is understandable that communicative competence is seen as a macro concept as one of the teachers suggested. Her reason was that she found it hard to fulfill all the requirements and, therefore, proving that a teacher is really working on students' communicative competence is not easy.

Conclusions

Teachers revealed communicative competence complexity in their teaching practices. Nonetheless, the analysis of data gathered allowed me to answer the inquiries posed in this research.

First of all, here are some of the conclusions related to my first sub-question: How do English teachers understand the concept of communicative competence? It was observed that teachers find difficult to define what communicative competence is. They state that communicative competence can be seen as a macro concept and that its development goes beyond language. They also believe or think there is a model of communicative competence composed of elements such as grammar, lexis, functional aspects, and the four language abilities as well. It turns, these components are seen as an integrated whole in the classroom.

Communicative competence is also described by teachers as related to functional issues in terms of having language use in mind when teaching language structures to students. This is closely related to the fact that teachers consider communicative competence a context-based issue. Nonetheless, participants think that nowadays teachers do not take into account all of the components of communicative

competence when they work on developing it in the classroom.

Secondly, the following conclusions are related to the second sub-question: What do their teaching practices tell us about their understanding of communicative competence? Teaching practices show that teachers act based on their beliefs about communicative competence. Teachers consider students' needs thus, they plan and do things in the classroom while keeping in mind what students prefer. Likewise, while developing communicative competence, teachers believe students need support.

Participants think that communicative competence development depends on classroom atmosphere, classroom organization and the use of extra-materials. They assert that the development of communicative competence implies thinking about the students themselves as well as the way they interact in the classroom.

Pedagogical Implications

This study shows how teachers are going through a reflective process that leads them to see themselves as professionals who have certain beliefs about teaching that shape what they do in class. These reflections are necessary for socialization with the English language community. This process implies having teachers interacting among them and sharing these experiences. That is one of the main flaws in the current educational system. There is no room for teachers to really reflect about how they teach

and learn together about teaching and learning issues, along with other aspects.

Based on that, I believe these findings show how important and necessary it is to have the space to discuss educational issues such as the ones described here. These spaces have to be established by teachers themselves and facilitated by the government and institutions if they are to succeed in this attempt. Spaces like these should bring teachers not just the possibility of sharing reflections and beliefs but also of thinking about ways to enrich their teaching practices. These would also have to do with the type of available courses, or even graduate programs for teachers to make them more qualified. In that sense, government support is needed to implement programs in which teachers can be updated in terms of political and educational changes that allow them to reflect upon their practices and make decisions to improve them quickly.

Another pedagogical implication has to do with the teaching practice itself. First of all, from this study it is possible to see how teachers' decisions in the class have a purpose and a basis which comes not only from their knowledge, their experience and their beliefs but also from institutional patterns that, in many cases, shape the way teachers act in the classroom. Based on this, it is necessary to see the teaching practice as the complex process it is. Not only that but more importantly, to see English teachers as individuals who have to struggle with many problems to do their task: developing students' foreign language competence.

The second issue has to do with the awareness teachers must have when

assuming the responsibility of teaching a foreign language in our country. This awareness is related to the relationship between theory and practice. In this study, I saw how teachers faced difficulties when putting some concepts into practice in the classroom. Then, I asked myself: Is it a matter of simply relating one thing to another one or is it a matter of being updated in terms of studying, and why not, doing research? I think that teachers have plenty of literature that can help them become updated in terms of teaching, but they also have ample opportunities to question their practices that perhaps would minimize the problem of relating what they know with their actual practice.

References

- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bartlett, L. (1994). Teacher development through reflective teaching. In J. Richards & D. Nunan (Ed.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 202-214). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bogoya, D. (2000). *Una prueba de evaluación de competencias académicas como proyecto*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Unibiblos.
- Breen, M., Hird, B., Milton, M., Oliver, R., & Thwaite, A. (2001). Making sense of language teaching: Teachers' principles and classroom practices. *Applied Linguistics Journal*, 22(4), 470-501.
- Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1995). *Research methods in education*. London: Routle.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (1994). *Ley General de Educación. Ley 115*. Bogotá: Author.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (1996). *Resolución 2343*. Bogotá: Author.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (1998). *Serie documentos especiales*. Bogotá: Author.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (1999). *Lineamientos Curriculares. Idiomas Extranjeros*. Bogotá: Author.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (2006). *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés*. Bogotá: Author.
- Common European Framework. *A common European framework of reference for languages*. Retrieved February 2, 2005, from Council of Europe Web site: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp
- Fung, L., & Chow, L. (2002). Congruence of student teachers' pedagogical images and actual classroom practices. *Educational Research*, 44(3), 313-321.
- Johnson, K. (1999). Teachers' beliefs: The rock we stand on. *Understanding language teaching*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle publishers.
- Richards, J. (1994). The dilemma of Teacher Education. In J. Richards & D. Nunan (Ed.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 3-15). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. & Lockhart, C. (1999). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rivers, W. (1992). *Communicating naturally in a second language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Savignon, S. J. (1983). *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice*. U.S.A.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Seedhouse, P. (1995). Needs analysis and the general English classroom. *ELT Journal*, 49, 59-65.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stern, H. H. (1990). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London: Sage.

Zuleta, X. & Prada, L. (2005). Tasting teaching flavors: A group of student-teachers' experiences in their practicum. *PROFILE*, 6, 157-170.

About the Author

Moravia Elizabeth González Peláez holds a B.A in Philology and Languages from Universidad Nacional de Colombia - Sede Bogotá. M.A in Applied Linguistics for TEFL. Teacher at the PROFILE Teacher Development Program and ALEX Virtual program at National University of Colombia. Eleven years experience as test designer and manager at ICFES, Colombia (tests for high school students, foreign language teachers, and for the undergraduate exam, ECAES).