

INTRODUCTION

We perceive teachers to be agents of change who are characterised by high self-esteem as well as by cultural and professional identity. Likewise, we suppose teachers possess solid knowledge of their teaching fields and abilities to identify problems as well as to provide solutions to them within particular educational contexts. For those reasons, and in order to help teachers strengthen their professional knowledge, the programmes offered to English teachers in the Foreign Languages Department of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia since 1995 have included three main components: language development, methodological updating and classroom research. The first two components respond to the trainees' manifested needs to maintain or improve competence in using and teaching the target language, whereas the last one attempts to foster innovation.

Regarding innovation, we should point out that it cannot take place without previous research. We opted for action research as a means to encourage teachers to investigate the classroom despite the limitations of their working conditions as well as the research tradition in the area of English language teaching and learning in our country. Keeping in mind Wallace's remarks, we admit that action research "is not for everyone. For one thing, it makes demands on our time, and also requires the ability to look at

evidence of our own practice in a more detached and objective way than we normally do. Nevertheless, if we can find the time and energy to do it, and we find it congenial, there is ample evidence that this approach can provide all sorts of interesting and helpful professional insights". (Wallace, Michael. 1998. *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1).

The teachers who took part in the TPD Programme carried out from 1998 to 1999 selected the working system that would respond to their personal interests. Some of them decided to work individually in solving a problem in their place of work whereas others opted for team-work. In the former case, teachers chose data collection procedures such as surveys, audio and video recordings, documentary evidence (students' work) and diaries as a means to do self-observation and to keep track of research in progress. In the latter, the topic of investigation was selected bearing in mind common concerns among members of a team and the generalisability of findings, that is to say, the possibility of applying innovations being implemented in the classroom under investigation in other teachers' classrooms. This allowed them to do peer observation in a systematic way.

Due to the integration of action research into the TPD Programmes, we have observed several gains: collaborative work, validity and reliability of findings as a result of the examination of phenomena from different perspectives, the sharing of teachers' findings, and changes in beliefs about the role of the

teacher as a researcher, among others. These achievements have shown that classroom-centred research provides a great deal of useful information about how classes are taught and promotes self-monitoring by classroom practitioners. Likewise, we can contribute to bridging the gap between theory and practice by encouraging teachers to adopt an investigative orientation to their own classrooms. In so doing, teachers can evaluate acquired knowledge and suggested innovations in the light of school life.

The *PROFILE* Journal is an annual publication for professionals interested in continuing their professional development. This journal is mainly concerned with sharing the results of classroom research projects undertaken by primary and secondary school teachers while taking part in Professional Development Programmes in our University.

The first part of this issue contains some papers written by teacher educators who participated in the 1998-1999

programme. The second section includes a series of articles based on the classroom research projects developed by teachers either individually or in small groups and which follows the principles of action research. Finally, we include a list of research projects worked out by teachers in the programmes carried out from January to May, 1995 and from September 1996 to September 1997. The complete versions of the research reports can be viewed in our Department. There, we can find a detailed account of theoretical issues, research procedures and findings in various teaching settings.

The papers included in this first number represent the culmination of countless hours of work on the part of school teachers involved in the in-service programme. The editor is grateful for their dedication and thanks them for giving us the opportunity to learn from them and with them. •