

Bilingual Colombia Program: Curriculum as Product, Only?

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Bilingual Colombia Program (BCP), the current educational language policy, aims to develop English language proficiency at an independent user level, equivalent to B1 in the Common European Framework. Previous studies of the BCP have revealed a limited conceptualization of bilingualism, unfavorable school conditions for its implementation and school practices not contributing to its main goals. The ideological view of curriculum embodied in policy documents of the BCP has not been analyzed yet. Based on Shirley Grundy's (1987) heuristics for understanding curriculum theory and practice and supported by research in the field of language policy, the paper unveils the product-oriented view of curriculum present in the BCP. It also explains why it is possible to encounter differing appropriations of this educational language policy, despite the type of curriculum promoted by the policy texts.

The presence of English as a compulsory subject in educational systems nowadays is unquestionably pervasive. Cha and Ham (2008) assert that English has become a "taken-for-granted" constituent of curricula regardless of its usefulness for specific groups of people, reflecting a worldwide trend that responds to wider institutional dynamics rather than to local needs. Perhaps the most common way in which governments rationalize the inclusion of English as a compulsory subject in school curricula is connecting it to processes of economic globalization, such as in the cases of China (Hu, 2007), Japan (Gottlieb, 2008), Bangladesh (Hamid & Honan 2012), Chile (Glass, 2008); Uruguay (Canale, 2011), and Mexico (Sayer, 2011, 2012, 2015), to mention a few examples.

Following this trend, the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) released the National Program for Bilingualism (NPB) in 2004 to regulate the teaching of English in the country. The main goal of the NPB, now called Bilingual Colombia Program (BCP), is "lograr ciudadanos y ciudadanas capaces de comunicarse en inglés, de tal forma que puedan insertar al país en los procesos de comunicación universal, en la economía global y en la apertura cultural, con estándares internacionalmente comparables" (MEN, 2006, p. 6).¹² It is expected that students attain an independent user level of competence in English, equivalent to B1 in the Common European Framework (CEF).

Scholars have raised a number of concerns about BCP, as evidenced in research and reflection articles that address different aspects of the policy. First

¹ This and all subsequent translations from Spanish to English translations in footnotes and brackets are my own.

² "ensure that citizens are able to communicate in English, so they can insert the country into universal communication processes, in the global economy and in cultural opening with internationally comparable standards."

of all, the name of the program has contributed to a limited conceptualization of bilingualism among people with no expertise in the topic. Bilingualism is seen as restricted to language competence in English (S. Valencia, 2005, 2006; Guerrero, 2008) and for most Colombians, a bilingual person is one who can speak English in addition to Spanish, as we can conclude from the mass media, casual conversations, and policy documents, such as the *Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English* (MEN, 2006). This critique is linked to a second aspect addressed in the literature: the undervaluation and invisibility of native languages. Colombia has more than 60 indigenous languages and two creoles, but being bilingual in any of the aboriginal languages is linked to underdevelopment and poverty (de Mejía, 2006, 2011) whereas bilingualism in Spanish and English is a sign of prestige and power (de Mejía, 2002).

Other scholars have studied the conditions under which the BCP is to be implemented. They have found that the methodology used by teachers mostly focuses on formal aspects of the language and not in its real use, a situation that is often linked to limitations in their school contexts (Chaves & Hernández, 2013; Hernández & Faustino, 2006). In fact, the lack of teaching resources and inadequate infrastructure, as well as the absence of certain school management practices such as assigning time for meetings where teachers can work collaboratively, seem to represent a constraint for teachers to develop more sound pedagogical practices (Miranda & Echeverry, 2010, 2011; Miranda, et al., 2016). Scholars have also confirmed that, after the release of the BCP, no significant changes have been made in curricular aspects, such as in the time allotted to English in the week schedule (Cárdenas, 2006; Guerrero, 2010; Sánchez & Obando, 2008) or the allocation of teachers who are proficient in English at the primary level (Cadavid, McNulty, & Quinchia, 2004; Cárdenas, 2001; Correa & Gonzalez, 2016; Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez-Jiménez & Lugo-Vásquez, 2012; Maturana, 2011).

The BCP has also been critiqued because of the instrumentalist view of language learning that it carries. In policy documents, developing English language skills is mostly seen as a way to increase Colombians' employability (Tejada & Samacá, 2012; Usma, 2009), although this does not always occur (Herazo Rivera, Jerez Rodríguez, & Lorduy Arellano, 2012).

All the studies aforementioned have disclosed different aspects of the current educational policy for foreign language teaching and contribute to a better understanding of the BCP. Their focus on the limited conceptualization of bilingualism, the characterization of school settings which revealed limitations in its implementation, and school practices that do not contribute to its main goals have helped create a clearer picture of the policy. The ideological view of curriculum that BCP embodies remains unclear, however, as none of these studies has examined this area. This paper aims to contribute to such understanding by providing an analysis of the orientation to curriculum promoted by the BCP. As the BCP aims to directly affect school practices, this is an important question dealing with teaching and learning. Unveiling the BCP's orientation to curriculum can help policy actors in different policy contexts to take a critical stance towards this orientation and make informed decisions on whether the educational efforts will reflect this ideological view of curriculum or not. Informed agents are in a better position to exercise their autonomy even within a restricted notion of curriculum such as the one present in the BCP. In the next section, I include a brief overview of

the approach to educational policies and curriculum adopted in this paper before I explain the methods used for the analysis.

Educational Policies and Curriculum

Educational policies tend to be seen as a set of goals and plans devised by governmental bodies to guide educational processes towards desirable outcomes. However, educational policies transcend written guidelines in official documents and are also situated within practices. According to Ball (2006), policies might be seen as texts that are interpreted and recreated in different ways, and as discourses that direct or constrain action. When referring to language education policies, McCarty (2011) uses a critical sociocultural approach to emphasize that policy is done in practice, in the course of everyday interaction. Similar to educational policies, curriculum is both what is planned on paper and what is lived in practice (Graves, 2008; Grundy, 1987). It is a social construction that can be understood as arising from “a set of historical circumstances and...a reflection of a particular social milieu” (Grundy, 1987, p. 6).

Policy documents constitute curriculum planning at an *institutional* level where “what public schooling should be with respect to a society” (Deng, 2010, p. 384) is determined. There are power relations within policy texts as they are normally written by a few whose ideologies, influences, and agendas are recognized as legitimate (Ball, 2006), marginalizing those of others.

Policies become visible in legal dispositions devised by the invested authorities, who are primarily Ministries or Secretaries of Education. This happens at the *programmatic* level of curriculum planning when the governmental expectations are translated into frameworks that take the form of standards, guidelines for instruction or evaluation criteria (Deng, 2010). The curriculum frameworks, when released to the public, serve as a bridge between the top and the bottom levels of curriculum planning.

Curriculum planning at the institutional and programmatic levels is part of the official curriculum and reflects policy intentions and texts. However, policy texts are subject to different practices, regulated by interpretations that are situated and influenced by particular histories and contexts. In this sense, policies are open to different readings, interpretations, appraisals, and enactments.

Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) assert that policies create certain circumstances that condition action, but they do not determine a particular type of action. Policy texts need interpreters in different levels of policy enactment (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Hornberger & Johnson, 2011) who, while making policies *real*, mold them into particular curricular practices to fit particular needs. Policies become situated processes performed by different actors who exercise their agency to implement, re-create, transform, ignore, or resist them. Johnson (2013) uses the term *appropriation* to include the various activities in which a policy is put into action, which includes teaching and learning.

Luke (2010) refers to the teaching and learning events as the *enacted curriculum* as opposed to the official curriculum, and asserts that there is no “direct hypodermic effect” between the two (p. 2). In the field of language teaching, Graves (2008) also states that enactment is the central process in education to which curriculum planning only contributes. Policies are not just texts, then, but also practices.

Policies as practice constitute the *enacted curriculum*, which lies largely in the interrelationship between the teacher and his/her students. Here, the policy in the form of curricular guidelines takes the shape that teachers and students give them in the intimacy of the classroom.

Methods

To answer the question of the ideological view of curriculum embodied in the BCP, I use Grundy's (1987) curriculum orientation framework together with Johnson's (2009, 2013) category of goals in his heuristics for language policy analysis. Grundy asks what types of cognitive interests drive curriculum and, based on the answer, she introduces a tripartite curriculum orientation frame: as product, as practice, and as praxis. This structure facilitates the understanding of the educational possibilities and constraints as presented within prescribed and enacted curricula. On the other hand, Johnson's methodological heuristic consisting of agents, discourses, contexts, processes, and goals serves as a tool to operationalize data collection and analysis in ethnographic language policy studies. The analysis of the goals category coupled with the curriculum orientation framework offers a way to unveil the ideological view of curriculum embedded in the BCP and critically examine its possible effects in practice.

Grundy's Framework for Curriculum Orientation

By linking curriculum to Habermas's three fundamental human interests, Grundy (1987) offers a framework to approach curriculum theory and practice that helps to understand them from different perspectives. She connects the *eidōs*—the guiding idea—of the curriculum to Habermasian *technical*, *practical*, and *emancipating* interests. This means that curriculum can be driven by an interest in control and technical exploitation of knowledge, which renders a curriculum oriented to product; an interest in understanding, which sees curriculum as practice; or an interest in change, which is related to a view of curriculum as praxis.

A *technical* interest results in a curriculum that controls what the teacher needs to teach and the student needs to learn *prior* to their encounter. There is within this view of curriculum, an ideal of a product that has been established and which needs to be achieved through educational processes, which means that the success of an academic proposal depends on the similarity or distance between what is prescribed and what is achieved. Strategic action is used to get the intended results; strategic action "is always taken to achieve certain predetermined and quite specific objectives" (Grundy, 1987, p. 23). Therefore, the focus within a technical orientation to curriculum is on two of its elements: a prescriptive document and the outcome, this latter verified through evaluation. The evaluation is done to the product—"evaluations of what was desired" (Halvorson, 2011, p. 34)—rather than the learning process, and its aims are linked to certification processes in many cases.

In his 1949 book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Construction*, Ralph Tyler presents a model of curriculum which starts from a list of objectives selected by experts based on the logic of job analysis (as cited in Halvorson, 2011). What

education must provide from this limited view of curriculum (Díaz-Barriga, 2002, 2008; Grundy, 1987; Halvorson, 2011) is education for work, conceptualized as the implementation of proposals that have been devised by others and conceived within capitalist models. These models often privilege the development of macro-economies, which in many cases ignore specific contextual realities and needs. The school, according to this view of curriculum, must respond to the needs dictated by supranational organizations and governmental entities. These needs seem to be centered on specific aspects: during Tyler's time, on industrialization, and in our times, on global economy processes. The school is transformed into a training site for the development of competencies that are needed for what the world economy demands. As a consequence, curriculum is designed with the aim of increasing employability. Nonetheless, Luke, Woods, and Weir (2013) state that the level of definition in curriculum planning matters. High definition or extremely elaborated curriculum specifications limit teachers' deliberation and autonomy of action, while low definition or less elaborated curricula leave spaces for teachers' exercise of their professionalism, judgment, and autonomy.

In contrast with the Tylerian technical orientation of curriculum, a *practical* view of curriculum focuses on the interpretation and practice of teachers as decision-makers who, through the interaction with their students, can judge what is "good" (Grundy, 1987, p. 63) and necessary to learn and teach. From the curriculum-as-practice perspective, curriculum creation, implementation, and evaluation might lead to pedagogical actions that are different from what is prescribed. Determining what constitutes what is relevant and advisable in the educational processes in which teachers are involved implies their deep and sound reflection. Stritikus and Wiese (2006) captured an example of this critical reflection and decision-making in the case of Angelica, a teacher who opposed Proposition 227, a law which mandated all children in California be taught in English, regardless of their native language. Because "Angelica believed that Proposition 227 was a direct challenge to her core values and felt that the assumption behind the law was that teachers don't know what is best for the children" (p. 1117), she defied the prescriptive law and continued providing bilingual education to her Latino students.

In a curriculum that is guided by a practical orientation, teachers and students move from being school actors whose actions are highly guided by prescriptions, to reflective subjects whose decisions are not only about content and ways to learn it, but also about ultimate educational goals. This is done based on and through concrete practices that value particular interpretations of norms. Norms constitute proposals that "could inform the teacher's judgments about what action he/she might take" (Grundy, 1987, p. 62), but that are not taken as prescriptions of the actions.

In order to be able to assume a stance like this, teacher professional development is paramount, and a proper way to achieve it is through research (Stenhouse, 1975, as cited in Grundy, 1987). Teachers are critical agents in curriculum development and their sound judgment guides their decisions regarding which situations must be interpreted and taken care of at school. In Stenhouse's definition of curriculum as a particular way to organize teaching practices in which "each school will have to assess its own problems and evolve its own policy" (as cited in Grundy, 1987, p. 72), it is clear that the plans that are pre-established by external entities cannot entirely prescribe what will occur inside schools given the particular internal dynamics in which they are immersed. In fact, Deng reminds us that

the advancement of schooling does not depend on the formulation of academic standards and competency frameworks but on real-world practice in schools or classrooms which is contextual, situated, and 'practical' in nature, having to do with 'real things—real acts, real teachers, real children.' (Deng, 2013, p. 588)

On the other hand, emancipatory-oriented curriculum goes beyond comprehension and interpretation. Curriculum as praxis is aimed at emancipation, understood as the critical awareness that social processes are cultural rather than 'natural' and, as such, are subject to change. This implies a critical analysis of current ideologies and practices and, at the same time, claims the possibility of human beings to create new realities while working in collaboration with other people. Grundy (1987) draws on Paulo Freire's ideas on critical pedagogy and his literacy program with adults to exemplify this stance on curriculum.

Within curriculum as praxis, theory and action act in a dialogic relationship. They are inseparable, and therefore, the focus is on creation and implementation. Within the daily practices in the classroom, there is dialogue, reflection, and decision making to take action. A case in point is the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) developed in Tucson, Arizona. As Cammarota and Romero (2009) report, high school students in the SJEP engaged in participatory action research projects that raised their critical consciousness while supplementing educational standards. There was no prescription for the project topics; they emerged from students' observations of their contexts. Students gathered information of critical problems and devised solutions. Although in some cases it was not possible to implement these proposals, the development of the projects raised students' awareness of their values, problems, and unfair situations.

Similar to the SJEP, in curriculum orientated to praxis, pedagogical experiences are organized through reflection and dialogue between teachers and students and in some cases, parents. These practices are aimed at the transformation of oppressive social dynamics or forms of behaviors that do not allow the subjects' fulfillment. Besides Freire's work with peasants in Brazil, other educational experiences that show an emancipatory orientation are *Fe y Alegría* (Ortiz & Borjas, 2008), *Educación Popular Autónoma* (Viens, 2009), and *Casita de Niños* (Larrahondo, 2011)³. These pedagogical endeavors try to reaffirm learners' identities, value their cultures and respect those of others, construct the curriculum collaboratively, use funds of knowledge, and transform lives. Through an orientation to curriculum as praxis, teachers respond to but also construct sociocultural realities.

Johnson's Heuristic for Ethnographic Language Policy Studies Data Collection

Hornberger and Johnson (2007) introduced the ethnography of language policy as a methodology to connect the macro and micro levels of policy. The ethnography of language policy compares critical discourse analyses of language policy documents with thick descriptions of local educational contexts. To guide data collection in ethnographic language policy studies, Johnson (2009) proposed a methodological heuristic that includes processes,

³ Although Larrahondo states that the pedagogical experience in *Casita de Niños* does not have a specific pedagogical approach or theory, the work they do clearly resonates with emancipatory ideas (Torres, 2009).

agents, discourses, contexts, and goals. While in this study the focus is on goals, in the next paragraph I offer a brief explanation of Johnson's heuristic to situate the goal category within the framework.

Processes, one of the main categories in the heuristic, is defined as the various steps and actions that policies go through and include policy creation, interpretation, appropriation, and instantiation (Johnson, 2013). These processes are not linear and, within a sociocultural perspective of language policy, they should be understood as interconnected and mutually influencing. Agents are the various policy actors involved at different stages of policy processes, and they exercise different levels of power. Agents with disproportionate amount of impact on language policy and educational programs are called language policy arbiters (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Discourses are the ideas and beliefs that circulate in the contexts of policy; they help to generate and maintain the policy while restricting ways of thinking and acting. Contexts include historical, social and physical milieus where policies are created, interpreted, appropriated and instantiated.

Goals are defined as the intentions expressed in policy documents (Johnson, 2009, 2013). They are normally set by policymakers who have been invested institutionally to determine not only what is to be learned and why, but also the mechanisms to verify that learning happens. Scrutinizing goals is a crucial task in policy analysis as they might limit teachers' and other policy actors' agency despite their own beliefs. While in Johnson's analytical framework of goals, orientations toward minority languages are studied (Ruíz, 1984, as cited in Johnson, 2013); in the case of this paper it is curriculum orientation that is examined through policy goals. Through the analysis of the goals as stated in the policy document *Standards for English Language Teaching* (MEN, 2006) and its links with other policy documents as well as the news about the policy in the media, I provide an account of the national English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum orientation and its effects on teacher autonomy and on student evaluation.

The *Basic Standards* document was the first official text signed by MEN that contained explicit linguistic goals for English language teaching and learning within the BCP. As such, I consider it reveals the intentions that engendered the policy. Two previous policy documents, the Education Law 115 (MEN, 1994) and the Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages (MEN, 1999), contained general aims and principles for foreign language teaching and learning but neither of them specified English as the language to be learned at schools or specific levels of attainment. News pieces from a national radio broadcasting network, RCN, and two regional newspapers, *El Colombiano* and *El Universal*, are used and clearly exemplify the discourses on the failure of the educational language policy implementation.

BCP and Its View of Curriculum

The analysis of the BCP goals made through Grundy's (1987) framework shows the product-oriented type of curriculum of the educational policy and its effects on teachers' autonomy and student evaluation. Below I reveal the policy centeredness on global economy and competition and how this restricts the autonomy teachers can exercise in the creation and development of language curricula. Then the links between the BCP goals and student evaluation are disclosed as well as how the media helps perpetuate the discourse of student failure. Finally, based on the

openness of policies as texts, I contend that a curriculum oriented to praxis is possible within the policy in practice. In order to better situate the analysis, the context of the BCP policy is introduced first.

The Bilingual Colombia Program

Colombia is a multilingual country with a population of 47 million (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2005) and 60 languages, Spanish being the language spoken by the great majority (over 42 million), followed by Wayuu (122,000 speakers) and Embera-Catio (15,000; Ethnologue, 2013). In 1991, the new national constitution recognized the multilingual character of the country by stating that aboriginal languages are official within their territory. In accordance with this, the General Act of Education mandates that bilingual education in Spanish and the native language be provided by the government in those territories (MEN, 1994).

English has foreign language status in Colombia as “[it] is not spoken in the immediate and local context because the daily social conditions do not require its permanent use for communication” (MEN, 2006, p. 5). English, together with French, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and an indigenous language were included in the curriculum in 1826 through what is considered the first explicit educational language policy, which did not have any effect in practice (Rivas Sacconi, 1993, as cited in Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016). Two years later, a curricular reform was issued to promote English and French to be part of the curriculum only in those contexts with enough funds (Pineda, 2000). After a visit of Colombia’s president to France in 1979, a decision was made to adopt French as a compulsory subject in the last two grades of Secondary School, while English continued to be taught in the rest of the grades of this educational level.

The General Act of Education issued in 1994 (MEN, 1994) brought two main changes regarding the teaching of foreign languages: it did not specify which languages should be part of mandatory curricula and foreign languages were included in the Primary level. The status of English as the first and only foreign language started in 2004 with the then called National Program for Bilingualism (NPB), now Bilingual Colombia Program. This status was reaffirmed through the *Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English* (MEN, 2006) and later the *Ley de Bilingüismo* or Bilingualism Act (Congreso de la Republica, 2013).

The BCP established target competence levels in English for different groups of populations, including primary education, first to fifth grades (MEN, 2006), as noted in the third column of Table 1. However, throughout the first years of the BCP implementation, it was proven that the country did not have the necessary conditions to provide primary students the solid bases that they needed to reach the target competence levels, in this case, A1 in first grade and A2.1 in third grade (MEN, 2016, p. 32). Most Colombian primary teachers’ majors are in disciplinary areas other than foreign language teaching, resulting in their lack of competence in English and in foreign language methodologies (M. L. Cárdenas, 2006; R. Cárdenas, 2001; Cárdenas & Miranda, 2014). The MEN then reassigned all the target English competence goals to secondary education as seen in the fourth column of Table 1. The target language competence level goals set by the BCP have become central in attaining other aims, as can be seen in the next section.

Table 1
Colombian Target Communicative Levels

CEFR ⁴	Colombian standards for ELF excellence	Target student population	
		2006	2016
A1	A1	3rd grade	6th grade
A2	A2.1	5th grade	7th grade
	A2.2	7th grade	8th grade
B1	B1.1	9th grade	9th grade
	B1.2	11th grade	10th grade
	B1.3		11th grade

Source: adapted from Council of Europe, 2002; MEN, 2006, 2016.

The BCP Goals as Its Guiding Idea

The BCP conceives the teaching of English as a strategy for the economic competitiveness of the country (MEN, s.f.; Usma, 2009; Peña-Dix & de Mejía, 2012; M. Valencia, 2013). There is a pre-conceived image of the result of the BCP's implementation in secondary education: to develop B1 users of English who will facilitate Colombian efforts to join global economic processes. This guiding idea of the BCP is consistently presented through written documents emanating from official bodies. In the Standards, for example, one can read:

Los Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras...contribuyen a que los estudiantes colombianos se preparen para afrontar las exigencias del mundo globalizado. La cartilla que hoy presentamos es un reto que el Ministerio, a través del Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo, entrega al país con el propósito de contribuir a tener ciudadanos y ciudadanas capaces de comunicarse en inglés, con estándares internacionalmente comparables...Ser competente en otra lengua es esencial en el mundo globalizado...Ser bilingüe amplía las oportunidades para ser más competentes y competitivos.⁵ (MEN, 2006, p. 3)

In a similar way, *Altablero*, the MEN newspaper directed to teachers, published a special issue on bilingualism and the BCP back in 2005, when the BCP was starting to become known among the academic community. It is noteworthy that the section "Letter by the Minister" was entitled "Bilingualism: a strategy for competitiveness." Here, the former Colombian Minister of Education stated:

A partir de la necesidad de fortalecer la posición estratégica de Colombia frente al mundo, determinada por los tratados de libre comercio, la glo-

⁴ The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR), is a policy document developed by the Council of Europe (2002). Its original aim was to provide guidelines for language curriculum development in countries across Europe.

⁵ "The Basic Standards for Foreign Languages...contributes to Colombian students' preparation to meet the demands of a global world. The handbook that we present today is a challenge that the MEN, through the BCP, turns over to the country in order to make a contribution to have citizens that are able to communicate in English, with internationally comparable standards... Being competent in another language is essential in the globalized world... Being bilingual broadens the opportunities to be more competent and competitive."

balización de las industrias culturales y el desarrollo de la sociedad del conocimiento, el gobierno tiene el compromiso fundamental de crear las condiciones para desarrollar en los colombianos competencias comunicativas en una segunda lengua.⁶ (Velez-White, 2005)

As it can be seen in Velez-White's letter, the discourses of global economy and the need of new citizens who can make their countries part of it are central. Within this frame, it is the MEN's duty to set goals and enforce policies that ensure the necessary 21st centuries competences are met, being competent users of English, one of them.

The link between the goals of the policy and the efforts for globalization persists in more recent official documents, as in the *Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines* (MEN, 2016), where bilingualism—meaning competence in English—is seen as one of the strategies to make Colombia an “internationally competitive country” (p. 15). Similarly, the nation's 2014–2018 *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, or Development Plan, presents second language competence as a way to increase competitiveness and people's opportunities to find a job (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2015). The Colombian government has signed several free trade agreements with countries of different parts of the world within the past several years (see Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2013) and a strategy within the field of education, the BCP, is deployed to help respond to this fact.

The guiding idea of the policy is one: reaching an independent level of English. Consequently, the results of its implementation need to be the same, despite the different forms that curricular actions at the school or classroom level might take.

Policy Goals and Teachers' Restricted Autonomy

There is a contradictory view of autonomy within the BCP. Although the policy was first conceived by policymakers at the national level, a sign of a top-down model, the development of standards that followed it integrated private and public educational institutions, teachers and scholars, under the coordination of the British Council⁷ (MEN, 2006). This participation might show signs of a deliberate attempt to give voice to different actors in the policymaking process and open a space for the exercising of their autonomy; however, once the policy goals were set, they became fixed, and the role of teachers was limited to that of implementers. *The Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English* establishes what the students must know and be able to do in order to demonstrate a B1 proficiency level at the end of eleventh grade. This policy document states that:

La tarea de todas las instituciones educativas es velar por que sus planes de estudio y las estrategias que se empleen contemplen, como mínimo, el logro de estos estándares en dichos grupos de grados y ojalá los

⁶ “Starting from the need to strengthen Colombia's strategic position in the world, determined by free trade agreements, the globalization of cultural industries, and the development of the knowledge society, the government has the central commitment of creating the conditions for the development of Colombians' communicative competences in a second language.”

⁷ The role of the British Council in the BCP has raised controversy within the Colombian academic community. For an extended discussion on this, see Gonzalez (2007); Usma (2009); Peña-Dix & de Mejía (2012).

superen, conforme a las particularidades de sus proyectos educativos institucionales y a sus orientaciones pedagógicas.⁸ (MEN, 2006, p. 11)

Once again, the pedagogical activities for the teaching of English should be strategic for the attainment of the competence level goals established in the basic standards or higher levels. In the technical view of curriculum, “once goals are set, they tend not to change...goals guide the developing of means [but] means do not guide the shaping of goals” (Werner & Aoki, 1980, as cited in Halverson, 2011, p. 38). Schools and teachers are not given the option to decide which language is more relevant for their specific context, such as the case of Portuguese in the border region of Colombia and Brazil. The flexibility of policy documents rests only in the means to achieve the established B1 language proficiency level goal in English. The limits are clear in the following quote from the BCP:

Going back to the diversity axis and the characteristics of flexibility and adaptability, the intention is for each institution to make the necessary adjustments to this [curricular] proposal. This means those with a greater intensity of hours may surely aim to achieve the total goal of a complete B1, while those institutions with fewer hours a week shall evaluate mechanisms to assign the English class this minimum intensity of hours a week and establish actions for these defined times to be met.⁹ (MEN, 2016, p. 32)

With all the disparities that exist in Colombia among public and private, low-income and high-income, and rural and urban, one would expect that the different decisions schools make do not necessarily coincide with the B1 level in English established in the BCP.

Additionally, in the *Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English*, the former Minister of Education affirms that “standards assist Colombian students in getting ready to meet the demands of the globalized world” (MEN, 2006, p. 3). The “demands of the globalized world” appear as something natural that admits no discussion, and is taken as an absolute truth. An education that does not respond to what “the globalized world” expects would be inadequate. As a consequence, teachers and students would not be able to decide what is relevant and advisable to teach and learn in English is different from those expectations. According to Guerrero (2009), in general, the *Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English* “introduce[s] common places as facts and in this way, [it] impose[s] a particular view of the world” (p. 259). Divergent views do not have a place, limiting the exercise of autonomy.

Policy Goals and Evaluation

Regarding evaluation, the BCP has concentrated its efforts on tracking the English section results of Saber 11, the school-exit exam that serves as an admission requirement to higher education studies. The content of the English section in this test seeks to assess if what students learned during school is consistent with what

⁸ “The task of all institutions is to ensure that all their syllabi and the strategies that are undertaken include, at least, the achievement of standards [set] for each grade-level cluster to meet and hopefully surpass, taking into account the particularities of the institutional educational projects and their pedagogical approaches.”

⁹ This text is originally in English.

is expected—that is to say, the B1 level of competence established in the BCP. Year after year since the BCP was released, the results of Saber 11 have shown that students are not achieving the desired proficiency. Sanchez-Jabba's (2013) study, for example, which considered the 2007–2011 time-frame proved that more than 90% of students do not reach the expected level and the study found significant differences among schools. The low results have been acknowledged by the MEN (e.g., Jaramillo Manjarrés, 2013; MEN, 2016) and widely presented in the media.

It is not uncommon to read newspaper headlines and opinion columns such as “*Los colombianos se rajan en dominio de inglés* [Colombians flunk English proficiency]” (RCN, 2013) or “*Colombia fue calificado con nivel bajo en dominio del inglés* [Colombia was rated low in English proficiency]” (El Universal, 2013) that focus on results and lead the public to disregard other aspects of foreign language education, such as the need to have support from outside school in the provision of more learning opportunities for students. Since 2011, students' performance has also been compared with other countries through the English Proficiency Index by Education First, which has consistently placed Colombia in the lowest positions. These results have been covered in the news with little or no critical review of the differences and similarities among countries (e.g., in *El Colombiano*, 2015) even though these disparities undoubtedly influence such test results.

Despite the students' repeatedly low scores in Saber 11, the final goal of the BCP remains the same and policymakers' efforts continue to be in the direction of reaching the desired level. There is no space to reason that it is there is something wrong in the policy. Grundy (1987) reminds us that in a product oriented curriculum, the goals of educational processes come from outside the school and tend to be fixed. The outcome of pedagogical practices is assessed in terms of how well it measures up to the goals. Learning that indicates real achievements for particular schools, even if they do not match the national standards, is neglected within this particular view of curriculum.

The BCP presupposes a linear curriculum that goes from objectives to results, and evaluation represents the last link of a chain: the BCP sets objectives at the top, and this implies certain practices at school that should later render specified outcomes in the state exam. While there is certain flexibility in the definition of contents, methodologies and evaluation as presented by the MEN in the policy document *Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines* (MEN, 2016), the students will continue to be evaluated towards a B1 level at the end of their secondary school. Again, the teaching and learning of English is seen as a strategy within the school system to achieve preconceived notions of learning goals, limited in this case, to a certain level of competence.

Only Product?

The BCP's centeredness on economic competitiveness, teachers' restricted autonomy, and the effect on student evaluations represent a technical view of curriculum that privileges the attainment of a previously imagined product rather than critical reflection in schools. This view restricts the establishment of learning goals and school practices based on local needs, interests, and contexts.

The BCP has been pronounced by an authoritative voice in the national educational system, and as such it carries power to direct its particular view

of curriculum and to constrain divergent views (Ball, 2006). The discourses present in the BCP permeate society, exercising pressure on schools to comply with standardized outcomes and suggested contents and methodologies. The responsibility for students' expected results travels from national authorities to schools and remains on teachers, who are made accountable for the outcomes, a fact that is emphasized by the media in Colombia (M. Valencia, 2013).

Despite this restrictive space signaled by the discourses of the BCP, schools have the possibility to enact policies in different directions (Ball, 2006; Stritikus & Wiese, 2006). The view of curriculum embodied in policy documents can change when the policy is appropriated in schools. It is true that policy documents exercise power, but they are not necessarily closed texts that cannot be re-written when they are interpreted as processes to which people give life in unexpected ways (Johnson, 2009, 2013).

The BCP goals for teaching and learning English, the scope of teachers' autonomy, and the focus on evaluation can be negotiated within schools based on reflection and collaboration because just like policy, curriculum does not reside in paper but in activities that happen mainly in the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom (Graves, 2008). What the BCP engenders is an idea of what is taken as good to be achieved in formal schooling, however what is actually enacted in schools is the lived curriculum. What constitutes "the good" (Grundy, 1987, p. 63) for learning might coincide with what has been stressed in the BCP policy, but it might also transcend it to a broader view of education that considers goals that are not only linguistic.

An example of the different direction that a prescribed curriculum for EFL teaching and learning might take in schools is exemplified in Zhang and Hu's (2010) study in China. Zhang and Hu investigated how the intended curriculum in the English Language Curriculum Standards which exhorted the use of task-based teaching was enacted in the classroom. To accomplish this, they analyzed policy documents, did class observations and interviewed teachers. What they found in the classroom was quite different from what the policy document recommended; a teacher was convinced she was using task-based methodology when she was really approaching teaching through traditional form-focused methods; another teacher intentionally delayed the use of tasks because he found they were too rigid and students were not yet prepared; and a third teacher used them sporadically, when she thought it was relevant and had time to prepare the tasks. Teachers' interpretations, appraisal, limitations, and creativity molded the policy, informed by their own judgment, beliefs, and perceived needs of their students. Zhang and Hu conclude that the intended curriculum does not necessarily match the classroom curriculum, they criticize the importing of methods that do not recognize contextual particularities, and advocate for the advance of local knowledge and curriculum development from the roots. Deng's (2010) distinction of three levels in curriculum planning—institutional, programmatic, and classroom—helps us understand the mismatch in Zhang and Hu's study.

Concluding Remarks

Combining educational theory with language policy analysis seems to provide a rich path to investigate educational language policy (see Zhang and

Hu, 2010, above). Much research on educational language policy has been conducted under the umbrella of language acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989) with strong connections to linguistics (e.g., Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2013), social theory (Ball, 2006; Foucault, 2010) and anthropology (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). These lenses have offered fruitful and interesting insights on the creation, implementation, appropriation, and instantiation of educational language policies. Nevertheless, as educational language policies are a concern and endeavor of ministries of education and schools, research in this area would benefit from a deeper exploration of connections with educational theory. As noted earlier, educational language policies deal with teaching and learning and aim at impacting school practices, which are issues inherently linked to education.

The use of general curriculum theory (Deng, 2010; Grundy, 1987), language education curriculum theory (Graves, 2008) in combination with language policy research analysis (Johnson, 2009) has helped identify constraints and possibilities of the BCP. The open nature of policy as text, the sociocultural view of curriculum, and the dynamic relationship between the institutional and enacted curriculum open spaces for exercise of teachers' autonomy despite the guiding idea and limiting discourses of the BCP.

Further studies are needed in the agency of teachers exercising power over arranged curricula that emphasize the product rather than the learning process itself or other humanistic goals. If policy and curriculum are sociocultural processes that inherently allow permanent, situated, and different constructions according to specific contexts, as policy and curriculum theory as well as research have proven (Ball, 2006; Deng, 2010; Graves, 2008; Grundy, 1987; Johnson, 2013), then one would expect to find many different ways in which the intentions prescribed in the formal policy document are innovatively re-created into different ways. Some of these might be trying to achieve the BCP goals as in the case of policy enthusiasts (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Huy, Hamid, & Renshaw, 2016) and others might be concerned with much greater or just different goals. Johnson (2007) asks "if the local educator interprets a policy in a particular way, does it matter what the intentions were?" (p. 258). This question reminds us of the paramount role of teachers' interpretation and agency in the midst of the current standardized foreign language educational policies.

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