From a Bureaucratic to a Critical-Sociocultural Model of Policymaking in Colombia

De un modelo burocrático a un modelo crítico-sociocultural de hacer política lingüística en Colombia

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In the context of the National Bilingual Program 2004-2019, currently called "Program for Strengthening the Development of Competencies in a Foreign Language," the Colombian government has implemented a series of actions to raise the level of English proficiency of teachers and students and insert the country into globalization processes. The purpose of this article, which is the result of a project conducted by the authors in Antioquia (Colombia) about the stakeholders' views of the program, is to show how these actions fit a bureaucratic policymaking model which has been highly questioned by policy experts and to propose a new model which can be used to make deep changes in the program with the participation of all stakeholders.

Key words: Bilingual Colombia, critical sociocultural model, English language policy, foreign language policy, National Bilingual Program

En el marco del Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo 2004-2019, actualmente denominado "Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera", el gobierno Colombiano ha implementado una serie de acciones encaminadas a aumentar el nivel de suficiencia en inglés de docentes y estudiantes del país e insertarse en los actuales procesos de globalización. El propósito de este artículo, originado a partir de un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo por los autores en Antioquia (Colombia) acerca de la visión de los actores educativos sobre el programa, es mostrar cómo estas acciones se ajustan a un modelo burocrático de hacer política lingüística que ha sido altamente cuestionado por expertos en política lingüística y proponer un nuevo modelo que nos permita efectuar cambios de fondo en el programa a partir de la participación activa de todos actores educativos.

Palabras clave: Colombia bilingüe, modelo crítico sociocultural, política en lengua extranjera inglés, política lingüística, Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo

Introduction

Acknowledging the importance of English as a lingua franca in the global market and in the context of several free trade agreements which were being negotiated with countries around the globe, the Colombian government in 2004 launched the National Bilingual Program (NBP), Colombia 2004-2019, currently called "Programa de Fortalecimiento del Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera" (Program for Strengthening the Development of Competencies in a Foreign Languages, or PFDCLE). The program had as its main objective "to have all citizens be able to communicate in English so that they can insert the country in[to] universal communication processes, in the global economy, and cultural openness, with standards that are internationally comparable" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2006, p. 6).

To achieve its purposes, the Colombian government, through its National Ministry of Education, carried out a series of actions among which we can find the following six: (a) the introduction of a new notion of bilingualism in the country in which being bilingual means being able to speak Spanish and English, (b) the establishment of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the guiding document from which teachers' and students' levels of English proficiency were to be determined, (c) the insertion of a series of competency standards based on this framework, (d) the institutionalization of international models of professional development for English teachers, (e) the normalization of English competency assessment procedures for both teachers and students around the country, and (f) the mandate that all English centers or *Instituciones de Formación para el Trabajo y el Desarrollo Humano* (Educational Institutions for Work and Human Development in the area of languages), as these were now called, get accreditation (Usma, 2009a).

This article aims to show how all these actions fit a bureaucratic (Bentley, 2010), rationalist (Heck, 2004), or traditional (Young as cited in Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009) model of language policymaking which not only has made it hard for the government to achieve its program objectives but has taken a toll in the relationship between policymakers and the stakeholders in charge of implementing the policy. To do this, the authors draw on Colombian authors such as Ayala and Álvarez (2005); Cárdenas (2006); Cárdenas and Hernández (2011); Escobar (2013); González (2007); Guerrero (2008, 2010a, 2010b); Guerrero and Quintero (2009); Herazo, Jerez, and Lorduy (2012); Miranda and Echeverry (2011); Sánchez and Obando (2008); Usma (2009a, 2009b); Valencia (2013); all of whom have greatly contributed to a better understanding of the program. They also present a summary of the findings obtained from a study carried out by the authors of this article, and by three of their colleagues in Antioquia between 2009 and 2010. The study explored the views that the different stakeholders had of the program, of the actions taken by the government to

implement it, and of the actions needed to improve the teaching and learning of English in the state (Correa, Usma, González, Sierra, & Montoya, 2012).

Following Levinson et al. (2009), the article also aims to propose the adoption of a new critical sociocultural model which can be used to make deep changes in the program with the participation of all stakeholders. These stakeholders include Colombian academics and researchers, English teacher educators from different universities around the country, English teachers at all educational levels, principals from both public and private schools, Secretaries of Education from large and small cities, indigenous communities representatives, and all of the stakeholders that were excluded from the process of formulation of the policy and whose voices have yet to be heard.

To achieve these objectives, the article has been divided into three main parts. The first part describes the bureaucratic, rationalist, or traditional model, analyzes how the NBP fits this model, and summarizes the findings of the study mentioned above. The second part presents the critical sociocultural model and discusses some of the changes that a movement towards this model would require. The third and last part of the article provides some conclusions as to the demands that such a movement would make from all stakeholders and calls on policymakers and stakeholders to get together to make these changes without the rough patches and disagreements that have characterized the implementation of these policies in Colombia.

The Bureaucratic, Rationalist, or Traditional Model of Policymaking

The bureaucratic (Bentley, 2010), rationalist (Heck, 2004), or traditional (Young as cited in Levinson et al., 2009) model of educational and linguistic policymaking is a rigid way of making policy that has become popular in the last two decades. One of the main characteristics of this model is the way in which decision making occurs. According to Heck (2004) and Levinson et al. (2009), under this model decisions are made by the top of the organization, ignoring historical antecedents and evolving conditions, and the inclusion and exclusion patterns that take place in the process. Besides, they are made based on the acceptance of certain texts and discourses, social groups and individuals—foreign ones for example—or on assumptions about the problem which do not permit individuals to form a broader picture of the phenomenon at hand. Lastly, they are determined in a rush, without verifying that there are enough resources and adequate external conditions.

The model is also characterized by its insistence on standardizing measures of performance, the contracting of key services, and the entry of new service providers (Bentley, 2010). Moreover, it is distinct from others in its adoption of a type of work called "adaptive

work," in which people are mobilized "to solve problems or meet challenges which go beyond the existing capabilities or technical solutions at their disposal" (Bentley & Wilsdon as cited in Bentley, 2010, p. 38). Finally, it is recognizable by its "mercantilist" approach to educational knowledge; its political economy of textbook production, consultant, and in-service training (Luke, 2003); and its strengthening of accountability measures designed to evaluate the effectiveness of policy actions (Bentley, 2010).

The National Bilingual Program and the Bureaucratic Model

An analysis of what has happened with the NBP from its beginning in 2004 shows how the program perfectly fits the descriptions provided by Bentley (2010), Heck (2004), and Luke (2003) of the bureaucratic, rationalist, or traditional model. First, as has been repeatedly pointed out in the Colombian literature (González, 2007; Guerrero, 2008; Sánchez & Obando, 2008; Usma, 2009a, 2009b), the program was formulated without the effective participation of all the stakeholders. This reflects a way of doing policy in which decisions are made top down, without acknowledging the diversity of opinions and conditions that exist in the country. Indeed, a substantial number of Colombian academics, who have repeatedly demonstrated through their publications that they have ample knowledge of both language policy and foreign language teaching and learning theories, were left out of the policy formulation stage. So were many other important stakeholders, such as English teachers, without whom the policy could never be more than good intentions on paper, as Shohamy (2006) has pointed out. In leaving teachers and academics out of this important stage, as González (2007) and Guerrero (2010a) pinpoint, both parties were treated as "technicians," people who do not have the capacity to contribute to the formulation of the policy and can only be called on to collaborate in its implementation.

In addition, the program was defined without taking into account contextual and historical facts such as the existence of bilingualism among many of the 65 indigenous communities existing in the country (Cárdenas, 2006; González, 2007; Valencia, 2013), and among the communities of San Andrés and Providencia (De Mejía, 2004). This omission not only perpetuated the inequality that already exists in Colombia in terms of language prestige (González, 2007) but also, as Usma (2009a) argued, contributed to the propagation of exclusionary processes in which some groups, languages, and discourses get imposed upon by others.

What is more, as pointed out by Guerrero (2010a), Herazo et al. (2012), Usma (2009b), and Valencia (2013), the program was formulated on the basis of borrowed global discourses which were greatly deceiving. Indeed, they proposed that being proficient in English is the key to "facing the demands of the global world, and to getting access to qualified jobs" (MEN, 2005, "Bilingual Colombia," par. 9-10 [trans.]), when it has been demonstrated that access to

social mobility does not depend only on proficiency in the language of power but on many other factors such as the economic, social, and cultural capital of the citizens (Luke, 1996). On the other hand, as Guerrero (2010a) states, the majority of the jobs that are recently being created "are found in the service sector where high levels of education are not needed" (p. 44), and neither are high levels of bilingualism.

Moreover, the program was designed on the basis of a series of tests or standardizing measures of performance, as Bentley (2010) has called them. These include the Quick Placement Test (QPT), designed by Oxford University Press, and the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), designed by the University of Cambridge. These tests intended to diagnose the communicative and pedagogical competence of teachers and the communicative competence of students in Colombia. However, as stated by Cárdenas (2006) and González (2007), the tests lacked validity and reliability, since they were not applied in conjunction with other instruments that could measure all the aspects not included in the tests. Nor could they be replicated given the small amount of information that was provided about how they were conducted, with whom, and so on. Besides, the tests did not take into account the multiple aspects that might be influencing the way that English was being taught and learned in Colombia, such as teachers' working condition, the quality of the professional development programs that were being offered, and the socio-economic and sociocultural conditions under which teachers and students lived.

Furthermore, once the diagnosis was made, a big part of the program efforts were placed on the imposition of the CEFR and of English Competence Standards for grades one through eleven (Escobar, 2013; Valencia, 2013). These efforts went in line with the new global standardizing trends. However, as Cárdenas and Hernández (2011) explain, they were bound to produce negative results, especially in rural and underprivileged schools since they did not explain "how to handle regional and community differences" (p. 240). What is more, as Miranda and Echeverry (2011), and Sánchez and Obando (2008) point out, the program was launched before ensuring that all public and private schools in the country had the internal and external conditions necessary for its implementation. These conditions included the physical, material, and technological resources needed for the effective teaching of a foreign language, and a sufficient amount of qualified motivated teachers who could be in charge of English teaching both in primary and secondary schools.

Additionally, given the low number of English teachers graduating from universities each year and the new requirement to offer English from grade one, the program adopted the adaptive work model mentioned by Bentley (2010) and a cascade model mentioned by González (2007). In the first, primary school teachers who had never studied English formally had to be responsible for the teaching and learning of English in their institutions, a task that went well beyond primary teachers' existing capabilities. In the second, teachers

attending the professional development courses were expected to act as multipliers of knowledge to their colleagues, a task which had already been assigned to teachers in countries like Sri Lanka with mostly negative effects due to the fact that by the time the content got to the teachers attending the multiplying sessions, this had already been reduced to its minimal expression (Hayes as cited in González, 2007).

On top of all of this, the program relied on foreign education service providers, such as the British Council (BC). This act not only exempted them from accreditation requirements as an incentive to stay in the country, but also exempted them from freely competing with other service providers on the market that were starting to consolidate around the teaching, learning, and evaluation of foreign languages in Colombia (Usma, 2009a). Besides, the organization was given a central role in the formulation and implementation of the policy, through multimillion dollar consulting contracts which are still in place (Usma, 2009a; Valencia, 2013). Additionally, it was given the monopoly of knowledge through the promotion of the goods and services produced by its editorial allies, including school textbooks, dictionaries, games, learning kits, and methodology texts as well as a primary role in the standardization and marketization of educational knowledge (Escobar, 2013; Usma, 2009a; Valencia, 2013).

Finally, the program launched a series of accountability measures among which was the use of the same imported tests that had been used to diagnose the problem, namely the TKT and the QPT, which, as Usma (2009a) remarks, served more as standardization tools for teachers' English and their pedagogical practices than as valid and reliable assessments of their communicative and pedagogical competences, given the numerous problems outlined above.

Stakeholders' Views of the Program

According to a study conducted by the authors of this article and three of their colleagues in the nine regions of Antioquia between 2009 and 2010 on how stakeholders viewed the NBP and the way it was being implemented in different municipalities (Correa et al., 2012), the NPB not only perfectly matched descriptions of the bureaucratic model but also had some of the big faults associated with this type of models. Namely, it was disconnected with the actual needs of public schools and the people that worked and studied in them (Correa et al., 2012). Indeed, participants in the study reported how their schools definitely lacked the financial, technological, and didactic resources that were needed to carry out an English class. Besides, they continued to ache from all of the problems they had had in the past, such as low number of qualified English teachers that could provide instruction in this language both in primary and secondary schools, low number of hours of English per week, large classes, excessive

workloads, high number of temporary teachers and high job mobility among these teachers, and lack of motivation towards English on the part of the students.

In an effort to remedy at least one of the problems, that of not having enough qualified teachers, the government—through the hiring of several local universities—offered several professional development courses. However, according to the participants in this study, these also contained enormous faults. These faults included inconsistencies in the way the contracts were assigned; disarticulation, low enrollment, and discontinuity of the programs; excessive heterogeneity in the way groups were formed; inadequacy of course contents; lack of support for teachers once professional development (PD) courses were over; and insufficient spaces for teachers to attend the PD courses and to multiply or teach what they learned during these; and little program accountability (Correa et al., 2012).

All these faults in the program, as reported by the stakeholders directly in charge of implementing the policy, point to the need for a change of model that would allow for reconsideration not only of the problem and its causes but also of the actions that are being taken to solve it. Below we present such a model along with an analysis of how it can help us make changes at all levels and get the program to have a more positive and real impact in the teaching and learning of English in Colombia.

The Critical Sociocultural Model

According to Levinson et al. (2009), proposers of the critical sociocultural model try to understand how top down policies, such as NBP, are used "to reproduce existing structures of domination and inequality" (p. 769) and also help to extend the interests of those in power. This model is different from the bureaucratic, rationalist, or traditional one in several respects. First, in this model language and educational policies are not formulated on the basis of external discourses that deny the particularities of a country or region. Neither are they formulated based on assumptions about the problem, or on insufficient evidence. They are defined on the basis of discussions and agreements by all stakeholders about different aspects such as the languages that are going to be promoted, the issues that are going to take priority, and the concrete actions that need to be taken to achieve the goals that they have agreed upon (Brown, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). They also originate in ethnographic longitudinal multisite case studies and other types of qualitative studies (Levinson et al., 2009) which allow policymakers to form a more complex and ample picture of the issue being studied, and even conclude that the issue initially identified is only one component of the problem to be resolved (Heck, 2004).

On the other hand, in this critical sociocultural model, decisions are not made top down following the logics and interests of the state officials in the central government. Instead, they are made bottom up and include the participation of all stakeholders (Hill & Hupe, 2002),

steps which guarantee that a great number of voices and perspectives are included, that contextual and historical factors are taken into account, and that stakeholders are not considered as "technicians" but as thoughtful and intelligent individuals with enough agency "to engage with or resist policy in different ways" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 769) and "to question the privileged status of scientific or expert views" (p. 788).

Moreover, the model does not search for the homogenization or the standardization of knowledge. Instead, it tries to have each community respond in its own particular and pertinent way to the unique situations that arrive (Menken & Garcia, 2010; Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2012; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). For this reason, proponents of this model do not rely on external institutions to decide for them, through their consulting, their literature, and their service packages, what needs to be done in their particular communities. Instead, they try to utilize local expertise (Paciotto & Delany-Barmann, 2011; Shohamy, 2009) and to create with them new pedagogical practices (Luke, 2003) that fit their realities.

Finally, the model does not insist on the strengthening of accountability measures or limit these to the application of a series of standardized tests, a phenomenon that is quite common in bureaucratic approaches to educational policy. Instead, it emphasizes the carrying out of ethnographic longitudinal multi-site case studies (Levinson et al., 2009). These are complemented with other types of data to not only diagnose the problem, as was explained above, but also to understand how the different stakeholders are appropriating the policy; that is, how they are interpreting it and how they are assimilating elements of the policy and "incorporating these discursive resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation and action, their own 'figured worlds'" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain as cited in Levinson et al., 2009). It is based on this multiplicity of data and evidence that educational reforms need to be carried out and evaluated.

Implications of the Critical Socio-Cultural Model

As can be concluded from the previous section, moving towards a critical sociocultural model in regard to the NBP, now called PFDCLE, implies making changes related to both the way the problem is conceived and the way the solutions have been stated and put into practice. Making changes in regard to the way the problem is conceived requires opening up the umbrella of possibilities and making a careful study of not just test scores but of all the factors that can be affecting the teaching and learning of English in Colombia. We are convinced that such a study would allow us to see that the problem does not lie with the low levels of English and pedagogical proficiency on the part of teachers, as has repeatedly been stated by the MEN in its communications, and as has been uncritically parroted by the media (Escobar, 2013; Valencia, 2013). Instead, it lies with a myriad of factors, such as those mentioned by the participants in our study.

Making changes in regard to the solutions requires going beyond the offering of a series of isolated and unarticulated professional development courses, which try to raise the level of English and pedagogical knowledge of teachers. These changes require for policymakers to begin taking actions that respond not to the often uninformed views of their international service providers about what could work in our context but to the local needs of each region and community. In our view, these changes towards a critical sociocultural view of policymaking can be grouped into the following five categories: democratization, real strengthening, contextualization, articulation, and monitoring. In the following paragraphs, we discuss our own proposal and the proposals made by socio-critical scholars both from Colombia and abroad in relation to each of those categories.

Democratization. The first change in foreign language policymaking in Colombia should be oriented towards democratizing the whole process of formulating and implementing the reform plans. The change implies for the MEN to revise their vertical decision making so that the policymaking process can include, as proposed by Levinson et al. (2009), a bigger number of voices. The change also implies, as proposed by Guerrero (2010a) and González (2007), giving more agency to local stakeholders by allowing them to be the ones to set the policy agenda and to make the most important decisions concerning language teaching and learning. These decisions include the type of studies that need to be carried out to establish the problem, the type of measures that need to be taken to solve it in each region and community, and the actions that need to take priority.

With this call, we do not deny the contributions made by international organizations such as the BC in this and in previous projects developed in Colombia, such as the Colombian Framework for English Project (COFE) carried out in the 90s. However, we do claim that it is inadequate for them to be the ones determining what we need to do in our country regarding English teaching and learning. This arrangement has not and will not work because it disregards the richness and complexity of our country, of its regions, its cities, and its rural areas, and most of all, of its public schools, especially those located in rural areas and marginalized neighborhoods. In this country, there is extant capacity and a good number of experts both in the area of language teaching and learning and in the area of language policy whose knowledge has been ignored. It is necessary for the MEN to start listening to them, and to students, teachers, parents, administrators (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005), and people from other sectors of the country (Herazo et al., 2012) as well.

Listening to the above-mentioned parties would not only contribute to having more realistic and centered policies but also allow the country to have a more inclusive model (Usma, 2009a) that represents us all. Maybe, this way, we can all realize that the strengthening or development of the teachers' linguistic and pedagogical competences, to cite their new title, is not a MEN issue, or an issue to be solved by those only in Bogotá, but an issue to be

solved by all of us together. It is also likely, although nothing is certain, that with the active participation of all stakeholders and with the continuous critical re-contextualization of the program, the teaching and learning of English in Colombia can become a topic that concerns all of us and in which all of us may accept responsibility because we have all helped to shape it and we are all "invested," to use Norton's (1995) term.

Real strengthening. This change implies, first of all, guaranteeing adequate material conditions for teachers, as Luke (2003) proposes. To achieve this, the country would have to make a huge investment in resources of all types (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005), including human resources. This includes making sure that all English teachers are professionals in this area, revising hiring policies so that the number of full time English teachers exceeds the number of provisional teachers, and over all, increasing the number of qualified English teachers both at the primary and secondary levels. It also means providing better incentives for teachers so that they are motivated to keep up and improve their level of proficiency in the language, and solving the great disparity that now exists between schools in rural and urban areas, and between public and private schools, a disparity that has been widely documented by authors such as Cárdenas and Hernández (2011) and Usma (2009a), and which seems to be an issue that affects the whole educational system (Usma, Quinchía, & Rodas, 2013).

Real strengthening also implies improving the professional development programs being offered (González, 2007; Miranda & Echeverry, 2011). This means hiring local universities with a proven trajectory in educating English teachers who can provide sustainable, well organized, and continuous programs (Cárdenas, 2006) to all the teachers that need it. It also means creating local, regional and national teachers' networks based not on imported models of adaptive work but on models that work in our context (González, 2007), and opening spaces outside the classroom for the promotion and use of the English language among students (Herazo et al., 2012). All of these actions can help us construct and consolidate professional development models that respond to the local needs of students and teachers inside schools, while making it possible for English to begin to permeate other spaces different from the English classroom.

Finally, this change requires attending to all the social problems that affect our municipalities, including violence, poverty, and unemployment (González, 2007; Guerrero, 2010b; Usma, 2009a; Valencia, 2013). These factors are closely related to the teaching and learning not only of English but of any academic area inside schools and thus cannot be left aside from this analysis and proposal. Students such as many of the ones found in the study we referred to above, who do not know how they are going to survive the day, are not likely to be interested in learning English or any other subject since surviving takes precedence over any other task—always.

Contextualization. This change implies revising current efforts to standardize and market knowledge through the importation of standards, goods, and service packages and to start, as socio-critical scholars propose, taking actions that will allow us to situate our policies, our programs and our curricula (Menken & Garcia, 2010; Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2012; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Maybe this way can they actually respond to our social reality instead of just reflecting the frequently uninformed visions of policymakers or the marketing based rationale of international subcontractors.

Situating our policies implies, as pointed out by several Colombian authors, doing a careful analysis of the concrete objectives that we are pursuing with the teaching of English in Colombia (Sánchez & Obando, 2008). The change also requires taking into account the political, economic, cultural, and social reality of our country (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005; Valencia, 2013). Besides, it implies adopting a critical perspective that could help us, on the one hand, analyze issues such as who benefits from the policy or the connection between bilingualism and employment (De Mejía, 2006); and on the other hand, deconstruct the promises and the prevalent misconceptions about bilingualism in our country (Escobar, 2013; Sánchez & Obando, 2008). Finally, it requires taking into account other local languages (De Mejía, 2006) and examining the role that English plays in the different regions (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005), in the Colombian labor market (Herazo et al., 2012), in the different levels of the Colombian educational system, and in the life of Colombians. It is not the same to learn English in a cosmopolitan city like Bogotá as it is in the countryside, or in a highly touristic town like Santa Fe de Antioquia as in a farming town like Yarumal. But all of this diversity of objectives and contents is lost when imported homogenizing standards, methodologies, texts, exams, and professional development proposals are used.

Situating our programs implies hiring local institutions with trajectory in teacher education and professional development programs for the carrying out of these programs. It also requires that these programs be articulate and continuous, that they have an ample enrollment, that they respond to teachers' needs and English level, that they be based on methodologies that have a place in our classrooms (González, 2007), and that they use existing physical, material, and technological resources. It also means adequate and sufficient support for teachers in their classrooms so that there is evidence of how the methodologies taught in the professional development courses are actually being put into practice.

Situating our curricula implies, first of all, developing "general standards" (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005; González, 2007) or "Opportunity to Learn Standards" (Cárdenas & Hernández, 2011) that are aligned with our reality and that are achievable in our public schools. These standards need to take into account the number of English hours that are taught in our schools per week, the number of students per group, the material resources available, and the proficiency level of our English teachers, among other aspects. Secondly, it

also implies revising the use of imported textbooks designed, for the most part, for immigrants living in contexts where English is spoken as a first or second language, or for European students who have a lot more opportunities to practice their English outside of class (Guerrero, 2010b). We need to start designing our own English materials, and these materials need to respond to our own socio-economic and sociocultural conditions, our own history, and our own motivations. Finally, we need to stop buying into the idea that a single teaching method could be valid for all types of contexts (González, 2007) and start figuring out which methodologies better fit our context.

Articulation. This implies for the government to start building a connection between the following three dyads: the policy with the current educational legislation, the policy with the Schools' Educational Project (SEP), and the different institutions that offer professional development programs. A greater connection between the policy and the current educational legislation means revising a series of aspects, such as the number of hours dedicated to English a week both in primary and secondary schools (Miranda & Echeverry, 2011), the number of students that are allowed per group (Miranda & Echeverry, 2011), the requirements needed to apply for an English teaching position in public schools around the country (De Mejía, 2006), and the fusion of English and Spanish as a single area of knowledge which can be passed by getting a good grade in one of the two subjects. We cannot continue to expect that students will learn English in two hours of class taken with 39 other students, where the teacher in charge has never studied English formally or has received only one or two discontinuous, unarticulated, and decontextualized crash courses, as is the case with many of our primary school teachers. Neither can we expect students to learn in classrooms where the only resources teachers have at their disposal are chalk and a board and where, to pass English, the only thing students need to do is to pass Spanish. It is mandatory that these conditions change, and for that, it is necessary to change the legislation; otherwise, there is nothing that teachers with even the best intentions can do.

A greater connection between the policy and the SEP (Miranda & Echeverry, 2011) implies having SEPs that put the interdisciplinary development of English in the forefront. It also implies having all teachers agree with this goal, and providing spaces for teachers of other subject areas to work together with English teachers to decide what topics are going to be jointly developed, how they are going to be taught, what the goals of the collaboration are, what standards are going to be addressed, among other aspects. It is imperative that English teachers stop working in isolation and begin working with teachers of other subject matters on joint projects that will allow students to see English as a tool that they can use to access knowledge in other subjects and to develop a multi-disciplinary view of the world.

Finally, a greater articulation between the institutions hired to offer the professional development programs implies that these institutions start making sure that the different

proposals are not only integrated but also in line with the goals of a new, contextualized, strengthened and democratized policy. We need, as Cárdenas (2006) suggests, sustainable professional development programs in which teachers have access to full, well-developed contextualized, continuous, articulated programs which will allow them to further develop their linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, regardless of the level with which they begin.

Monitoring. This change implies moving beyond the application of tests such as the TKT or the QPT, in the case of teachers; or beyond the knowledge tests (Pruebas Saber), in the case of high school students, to the development of better, more varied, and more trustworthy assessment mechanisms for both teachers and students (Cárdenas, 2006; González, 2007). Such mechanisms can consist of, as proposed by Levinson et al. (2009) and by Luke (2003), longitudinal multi-site case studies or other types of qualitative studies. These would provide researchers with the opportunity to analyze the way in which the different local stakeholders are appropriating the policy and putting their recently acquired knowledge into practice through their actions in school and in the English classroom. On the other hand, they would allow researchers to diagnose the complexity of teaching and learning a foreign language in the different educational settings in our country so that they can offer new innovative alternatives for how to teach English in Colombia.

The mechanisms could also consist, as proposed by Sánchez and Obando (2008), of performance-based assessments or in classroom observations to teachers who have participated in the professional development programs. This way, policymakers can qualitatively assess the impact these programs are having. Besides, teacher educators can be in a better position to both identify those aspects that affect teachers and that often times stop them from doing their jobs effectively and to help them figure out proper solutions through continuous, formative, and systematic support. It is our belief that regardless as to which of these mechanisms are used, teachers' classrooms need to become our "unit of analysis." We cannot support an assessment system that does not concern itself with what happens with teachers when they arrive to their settings. This is an aspect in which we cannot make concessions.

But teacher and students are not the only ones in need of proper assessment. We also need to make sure that the mechanisms used to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development programs are valid, reliable, contextualized, negotiated, and systematic. They cannot continue to be simple formalities, or quantitative reports written by the same institutions that carried out the program, in which the latter try to cover the ineffectiveness of their program by throwing in numbers of how many teachers participated or how many finished the course, as is the case with many of the reports these institutions have published so far.

Conclusions

This article aimed to show how the actions taken by the Colombian government as part of the NPB fit a bureaucratic model of language policymaking. Consequently, the article described many of the actions taken by the MEN before 2012, when the program was re-launched as the SPDCFL, and analyzed them exhaustively; besides, and herein lies one of the contributions of this article, it carried out the analysis in light of both Colombian scholars' critiques of the program and several authors' conceptualizations of the bureaucratic, rationalist, or traditional model. In doing this, and in presenting some data from a study they had conducted in Antioquia about the views participants had of the program, the article made the need for a change both visible and clear. This proposed change referred not merely to the name of the program but also to the way both problems and solutions are conceived when dealing with the teaching and learning of English in Colombia.

A second goal of the article was to propose a movement towards a critical sociocultural model of making policymaking in Colombia. Accordingly, once the previous analysis had been made, the article moved on to describe the critical sociocultural model and to propose a series of actions that could be taken, drawing on this model; furthermore, and herein lies another important contribution of this article, it collected these proposals and those made by Colombian authors before them, around five main pillars: democratization, real strengthening, contextualization, articulation, and monitoring.

It is our hope that with this analysis and proposals we can contribute to the paradigm switch that the country so urgently needs. However, it is our belief that to have a real switch in the way language policymaking is being conceived and carried out in Colombia, we would need more than a government willing to make the changes outlined above. We would need to be willing to not only "reinvent the relationships between educational institutions" as proposed by Luke (2003, p. 105) but also reinvent the relationship between policymakers and the rest of the stakeholders. We would also need to be willing to go back and un-walk the path that has been walked, mend errors, and heal all those wounds that were inflicted when the program was launched in 2004 and that now have scholars and policymakers sitting at different ends of the same table and working separately on the same goals. We would need to be willing to leave our jealousy, resentments and frustrations aside and listen to one another without apprehensions, dogmatisms, and hidden agendas.

It is essential that the MEN and the Secretaries of Education show appreciation for what we, the stakeholders, know and are doing to improve the teaching and learning of English in Colombia. It is also of paramount importance that they acknowledge that the task is in the hands of all of us, not just a few, and that it is never going to be successfully accomplished if some of the actors are excluded. Furthermore, it is imperative that they start listening not only to the allies but to the policy dissenters in the different settings. Finally, it is essential that we,

the stakeholders, also value the efforts that people from the MEN and from the Secretaries of Education are making to improve the teaching and learning of English in Colombia, regardless of what we think of the way in which these efforts have been made. This is why, more than a formal conclusion, this is an invitation to try to overcome the differences that have separated policymakers and stakeholders in Colombia and start working together for a common realistic overarching goal that not only takes care of the structural aspects that affect the teaching and learning of English in Colombia but also deals with the social, personal, and professional aspects. Only then can we really move forward and switch paradigms.

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