Education for Bilingualism: Connecting Spanish and English from the Curriculum, into the Classroom, and Beyond

Educación para el bilingüismo: español e inglés conectados desde el currículo hasta el salón de clase, y más allá

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I present here the results of a qualitative research study on the impact of a curriculum that connects learning events in Spanish and English in authentic communicative performances during its first year of use in a private school in a medium-size Colombian city. I did discourse analysis of interviews with participating teachers and class observations including small in-situ interviews with teachers and students. They revealed positive changes in the language learning environments of the school, the teachers' ideas about language and language learning, and the students' communicative skills and ways of learning. I use these results to introduce the concept of *education for bilingualism* to replace that of *bilingual education* we use in Colombia. I find the practices of the latter ineffective in our mostly monolingual context.

Key words: Bilingual curriculum, bilingual education, bilingualism in a monolingual context, education for bilingualism, research on bilingual curriculum.

Presento aquí los resultados de una investigación cualitativa sobre el impacto de un currículo que conecta eventos de aprendizaje en español e inglés en desempeños auténticos comunicativos durante su primer año de uso en un colegio privado de una ciudad intermedia colombiana. Hice un análisis discursivo de entrevistas con los maestros participantes y observaciones de clase que incluyeron pequeñas entrevistas *in-situ* con maestros y alumnos. El análisis revela cambios positivos en los ambientes de aprendizaje de lengua del colegio, las ideas de los maestros sobre la lengua y su aprendizaje, las habilidades comunicativas de los alumnos y sus formas de aprender. Uso estos resultados para introducir el concepto de *educación para el bilingüismo*, en contraposición al de *educación bilingüe* que usamos en Colombia, cuyas prácticas encuentro inapropiadas para nuestro contexto, mayoritariamente monolingüe.

Palabras clave: bilingüismo en contexto monolingüe, currículo bilingüe, educación bilingüe, educación para el bilingüismo, investigación en currículo bilingüe.

Bilingual Education in Colombia

Two facts about language acquisition are consistently supported in research. First, everyone can learn one or several languages; and second, the success of this learning depends on the real need or wish to use the new language(s) in authentic communication (Snow, 2007). These facts exist because what motivates and promotes the learning of language is the social need and the pragmatic demands of communication; that is, the characteristics, relationships, and purposes of those who communicate and the contextual conditions in which they do so (Ninio & Snow, 1996). This is why a main problem we face in Colombia (when teaching foreign languages like English that we accept as necessary in today's life) is that our socio-linguistic context is mostly monolingual in Spanish. This means that we do not need to use English to function in society, which makes it especially difficult for us to motivate our children and adolescents to learn it.

In our limited experience in international languages and with school bilingualism, we see that the institutions perceived as most successful are the schools we call bilingual. These are mostly elite private schools located in our large cities. They have adopted bilingual education models developed for contexts alien to ours (Ordóñez, 2008). Many follow the programs and practices of Canadian immersion and even programs, policies, and accreditation systems used by and for monolingual schools in Europe or the United States (De Mejía, Ordóñez & Fonseca, 2006). But they also follow common sense: if the foreign language does not occur naturally in our social context, creating the need for it at school makes sense. So they set up *artificial* environments in which the foreign language of interest becomes necessary for communication and academic success through four basic actions: the introduction of the foreign language at the earliest possible age, normally at preschool level and often in partial or total immersion programs; the learning of academic areas different from the language itself in the foreign language; the hiring of as many native foreign language teachers as possible; and the requirement that everyone in school speak in the foreign language in and outside of class.

But the very little research done in these learning environments reveals that policy-makers can easily ignore important facts of language acquisition. A probable exaggerated concern for the lack of second language use in the immediate social context causes many of our so-called bilingual schools to concentrate on it and neglect the development of Spanish, apparently taken for granted (De Mejía et al., 2006). Some of this research has even produced evidence of impoverishment of some communicative skills in Spanish and a strong influence of the rhetorical characteristics of English as regards the Spanish oral narratives of students from these schools when compared to those of students from Spanish monolingual schools (Ordóñez, 2000; 2004; 2005). Although there is no evidence from research of bilinguals exhibiting the same skills of two monolinguals and it is not expected that they do so, a considerable reduction of skills in the first language is not justifiable for the sake of alleged bilingualism, especially in a monolingual sociolinguistic context.

The goal of bilingualism cannot override a central fact of language acquisition: After four or five years of age, the main stimulus for the development of language is the school experience. This is because entering school creates the need for the child to communicate with a variety of new people, in a variety of new communicative situations, and in the context of a variety of new topics and discourse types associated with them.

Additionally, reading and writing start formally in school and become the largest possible source of linguistic expansion (Barriga-Villanueva, 2002; 2003) This is true for the foreign language when its development is a school goal, but it is first true for the first language, whose development should not be neglected in school.

In addition to this, children born in a monolingual environment can become bilingual in school, but they will be *consecutive* bilinguals, having acquired a lot of their first language before entering school. This means that they will naturally use their knowledge of the first language to learn the second one and will need to be able to consciously recognize differences between the two. Schools which commit to the goal of bilingualism in our monolingual context need to find ways to respond to the needs not only of foreign language learning, but of sophisticated development in the first language.

School Bilingualism in Crisis

The difficulty of our monolingual sociolinguistic context for the learning of English varies in intensity in the very different circumstances in which communities live in a country as diverse as Colombia. For example, it is a little easier in our big cities to find English speaking people, books in English, and places where English is in use (e.g. in touristic and commercial activities). But in our smaller cities, the use of English is farther away from the daily life of children and youngsters. However, the social pressure for learning English is so strong that many schools in medium-size and small cities have followed the model of our apparently very successful bilingual institutions, without considering the extra difficulty posed by the socio-linguistic contexts in which their students socialize. The school where the present research was conducted is located in a medium-size Colombian city.

The school had struggled for around 15 years to produce bilingual individuals by implementing the abovementioned policies with poor results. The students did not speak English easily, naturally or willingly. They often showed actual resistance to using it, and instead of English they used something like Spanish with English words. In 2007 I was invited as a consultant by the school administrators to discuss these problems. Among the possible reasons for the situation were mentioned the level of English and of the pedagogic effectiveness of their teachers, the lack of enough foreign teachers, and their inability to put English into use in enough classes, school events, and places in the institution. They were surprised at my explanations related to the very little sense that the students found in the use of English in their lives, and at the solution I proposed: real bilingualism through fostering increasingly complex development of communicative abilities in Spanish and establishing connections between Spanish and English language developments. The administrators were open to new possibilities and hired me to try ideas not typical of the model bilingual school. I worked with both their language departments.

The New Curriculum

The work on curricular design started with a group of some of the English and Spanish teachers chosen by the school and the coordinators of the two areas. For eight months the group discussed language development in the school, the curriculum in use, and a few theoretical documents that illuminated new possibilities for achieving bilingualism. As a result, the group accepted that change was necessary and designed some activities that were tried out in both English and Spanish classes in 2008. At the end of that year I converted the collective experience into a new curriculum with the following characteristics: it applies constructivist

principles of human learning, the one relating to authentic action for learning connecting to communicative linguistic theory to produce a curriculum focused on "authentic communicative performances". It is actually bilingual, due to the application of theory on first and second language acquisition in connection to the importance given in constructivism to previous knowledge in the building of the new one; and it covers three contexts of language development: that of daily communication and communication through the mass media, the communication necessary when approaching knowledge in different academic disciplines, and artistic and cultural expression.

The characteristics of the curriculum are consistent with four basic constructivist principles taken from the work of different researchers who have contributed to the complex construct that is, today, this description of human learning. The first one points out the fact that learning occurs when doing things. Piaget (1970) refers to manipulating elements in the environment; Vygotsky (1978) to social actions with others with different levels of cognitive development and knowledge; Perkins (1998) to performances of understanding; and Dewey (1945) and the theory of situated cognition (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Díaz Barriga, 2003), to action as it occurs authentically in life. Authentic activity with language is always the representation, transmission, and purposeful use of meaning in communication among interlocutors or writers and readers. Hence, the curriculum is composed of "authentic performances" (Ordóñez, 2010). In this case they are communicative actions or processes performed in specific contexts by people who use their constructed knowledge in their daily or professional life when acting as learners or as experts to fulfill real-life purposes.

Applied linguistics enables us to identify authentic communicative performances in the real world on the basis of the pragmatic conditions that define communicative acts. These pragmatic conditions have been specified by researchers during more than 30 years of development and use of the communicative approach to language analysis (Widdowson, 1978; Van Lier, 2005), to wit: the characteristics of the sender of the message, the position from which he/she sends it and his/her purpose, the characteristics of the receiver, the relationships between sender and receiver, and the context in which communication occurs.

The curriculum, then, focuses on authenticity and its application depends completely on the teachers' ability to analyze their own and others' communicative experiences in order to design class performances. These should correspond to real-life communicative situations, actions, processes, and products. Authenticity for specific groups of students is further supported when performances are related to their contexts and interests, when the students themselves participate in decision-making about what to learn, what to do to learn, and how to do it and when communicating requires the use of different sources of information, knowledge from different disciplines and types, and interactions with others. All this is what happens in the real world when one acts using or looking for real understanding of phenomena and events.

The recognition of work with others as an authentic feature of real life performance is reinforced by the second constructivist principle. Socio-cultural in nature and initially established by Vygotsky (1978), it recognizes interaction with others as basic for individual learning. As a result, teaching and learning on the basis of this curriculum are highly based on collaborative work.

The third constructivist principle indicates that all learning occurs naturally as processes (Piaget, 1970). For this reason, the curriculum just indicates starting points for work on specific communicative

performances, but not ending points. After a communicative performance and its associated language are introduced, they appear and re-appear repeatedly in different contexts. As a result, the same or very similar performances also appear in different grades, to be done in increasingly complex ways according to the age of the students and their accumulated language repertoire, which is maintained in permanent use. This corresponds to Dewey's description of a cyclical curriculum (1948), whose purpose is not to differentiate learning periods or school grades on the basis of content, but to guide learning processes.

The fourth constructivist principle contributes to this cyclical nature of the curriculum, as it states that all new learning is built on knowledge previously constructed (Piaget, 1970; Ausubel, 1968). The application of this principle requires the curriculum to constantly connect the performances and language already used to the new performances and language presented. It also supports building skills in the foreign language on the basis of those in the first language, a feature that defines the curriculum as bilingual.

The curriculum is bilingual, then, because all communicative performances occur first in Spanish and then serve as support for similar ones in English. Spanish and English teachers, then, have to work together in planning and designing instruction. On many occasions, starting from the students' interests in really communicative, authentic activities that they cared about in Spanish, the curriculum allows teachers working in collaboration to motivate the students to do those activities in English too. Thus the two languages end up being used for similar communicative purposes and bilingually in the same performances whenever possible and natural, with the support of teachers from both areas (e.g. looking for and using information in bibliographic research;

interviewing speakers of both languages as informants in journalistic, personal, or empirical research; developing bilingual radio and TV shows, news programs and newspapers). This also allows teachers to complement each other's knowledge when the students need help in comparing their two languages to understand how they work similarly or differently.

Finally, the three contexts for communicative development covered in the curriculum –daily life and the media, academic, and aesthetic-cultural communication– are not unknown to language teachers. However, one or several of them can be forgotten or at least neglected in their classes. The curriculum permanently reminds teachers to include communicative performances in the three contexts and to connect them whenever possible.

The research I present here started at the end of 2008, the year participating teachers tried out a few examples of performances planned by the design group and some others created by the teachers. The first data come from information provided by the teachers about these piloting efforts. In 2009 the previous curriculum stopped being used and the new one was adopted in the whole school.

The Study

In agreement with the school, I designed a qualitative study to evaluate the impact of the curriculum on the learning of students and teachers in its first year of use. A qualitative methodology was consistent with the nature of the changes that the curriculum was intended to produce initially, which had to be apparent in what happened inside the language learning classrooms, in the actual performance of teachers and students, and through their opinions and observations. The impact of the curriculum on the language development of the students, the final goal of the whole project, would need to be evaluated quantitatively through

standardized tests after a longer period of time. Therefore, the following are the research questions I and three student research assistants set out to answer in this initial exploration:

- How was the curriculum put into practice?
- What did the teachers learn?
- What did the students learn?

Data were collected in field trips from Bogotá on Thursdays and Fridays on three occasions during the academic year (December/February, April/May, and September). All the English and Spanish teachers who gave classes on those days from grades transition to eleventh were observed and filmed in one of their courses. The observations included short, in-class interviews with the teacher and some students about what they were doing. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with all the participating teachers and coordinators.

At the end of the year the data which were complete for the same teacher and students on all three collection occasions were chosen as the final sample for analysis, as this ensured that the participating teachers had worked steadily with the curriculum from the beginning of its implementation. The data came only from three English courses taught by Colombian teachers (kindergarten, with 6 to 7 year-old children, and sixth and seventh grades, with 12 to 14 year olds) and six Spanish courses (transition, second and fifth grades, with 5 to 11-year-old children, and grades eight, nine, and eleven, with adolescents from 14 to 19 years of age). Data from the English courses were very incomplete due to the constant change and movement of both Colombian and foreign English teachers, a common phenomenon in bilingual schools.

Videos and interviews were transcribed, and discourse analysis was done on the transcriptions in search for specific information to answer the research questions. To determine final results, findings from the interviews and the class observations were triangulated.

Results

Evidence from the data reveals a process in which Spanish and English teachers improved their confidence, effectiveness, and quality in the design and implementation of communicative performances and in making them as authentic as possible for their students throughout the year. Most of them also found the coordination of their planning with the teacher of the other language productive. All this changed the nature and characteristics of the language learning environments in the school and the teachers' conceptions of language, language learning, and their role as teachers. These changes helped students improve their skills in Spanish and English and their ways of learning. The results describe in detail the new environments and what both teachers and students achieved in the process, which includes pedagogical, linguistic, pragmatic, attitudinal, and metacognitive learning.

How Was the Curriculum Put into Practice?

The characteristics of the language learning environments in the school show that all participating English and Spanish teachers brought authentic communicative performances to their individual classes in the three contexts of communicative development in the curriculum. These performances were generally described in the curriculum and discussed in our meetings, but it was the teachers who managed to specifically design them for their students, in spite of big doubts they constantly expressed about their decisions on the authenticity of what they planned.

In the areas of daily and media communication, the English teachers had their students, even the

youngest ones, handle question-answer exchanges as minimal oral production units and use the questions to get real information about people outside the classroom. In both their Spanish and English classes the students developed and presented autobiographical scrapbooks to their classmates, performed a variety of role plays, created and presented different types of radio and television shows and news programs, wrote different types of journalistic articles running them through successive critical readings and editing them repeatedly, and published them for different readers.

In the area of communication in the academic disciplines in both Spanish and English, students conducted bibliographic research projects and personal learning projects using multiple types of sources and data from interviews; they made different types of presentations of reports to real audiences and wrote different academic texts for different readers with successive drafts. In turn, in the area of aesthetic and cultural communication, the students chose to read their favorite literature in both English and Spanish, shared their understandings and interpretations with their classmates orally, in writing and in public performance, recommended books to others in different ways, planned, wrote and presented scripts from literary works, created and acted out original scripts, and learned, composed and interpreted songs before audiences.

All teachers planned for their performances to occur in ways as close as possible to how they happen in reality and using authentic materials, allowed student participation in deciding what to do, on what topics, and how to do it, and stimulated and supported collaborative work. Additionally, all except for one Spanish teacher (who insisted on working mostly from literature carried out with their students' performances related to their

families and social contexts, their school and the city where they live) and only two Spanish teachers did not work on performances connected to other language or academic areas.

Illustrations of all these different learning environments and the levels of authenticity achieved are abundant in the data. In 6th grade English, for example, the teacher speaks about the use of students' interests and collaborative work, and comments on the changes that the latter naturally produces in the children's work, in a performance that combines academic and aesthetic communication.

> They are creating… [a magazine] on [an academic] topic they chose… First they asked questions about what they would like to investigate… and that [was] the opportunity to work on how to ask questions correctly… Today… they had to bring information from the Internet, books, magazines, in Spanish or in English, to start discussing and answering those questions here. Several groups have realized that the questions they initially proposed were limited [according] to what they have found. For example, that group… [started] with… what was a comedy...; but now… they want to compare movies and take… the characteristics of a comedy from them… Then I told them [to look at their questions and see if they really worked for what they wanted, and they decided to change them]. (Class observation, 6th grade English, February)

Additionally the teacher's words indicate that she used the opportunity to work on the grammar and syntax of questions because the students actually needed to clarify the questions they had on their topic of personal interest in order to be able to focus their bibliographic search. This academic performance also allowed students to use materials in English and Spanish, even though they were in the English class.

In turn, the following 3rd grade Spanish teacher talks about a performance similar to the previous one, which combined journalistic and aesthetic

communication. The students are authentically engaged in the production of their own magazine. The teacher used a real one as a model and allowed these very young students full participation in the real work of an editorial committee.

> I took the school magazine to class so that we could see how it resembled [our magazine] and if we were really using the language of a magazine... They saw a page called 'editorial', written by the school Principal, and they told me: 'Teacher… your picture is going to be here and you write our editorial… you also come to the front of the class [and present your text] and we give you suggestions…' I wrote the editorial telling what had happened in class and read it to them… [The] suggestions [they made]… were the nicest thing…: 'Teacher, why don't you write there that you congratulate us for what we are doing?' This is something one keeps as a teacher and fills you with great satisfaction. (Interview, 3rd grade Spanish, September)

The teacher was pleased with his students' playing their role as editors; and the children include their teacher as a member of the group who works with them as an equal. The role of this teacher has become that of an associate in his students' learning.

Even at the preschool levels language learning occurred in interactions which were made as authentic as possible, inside and outside classrooms. In the following communicative performance introducing the academic and aesthetic topic of autobiography in kindergarten English, children bring to class information about themselves after obtaining it from those who really have it.

> We had a biography [performance] called "When I was a baby"… First they [wanted to do] an interview with their parents asking them, obviously in Spanish, what they did when they were babies, if they cried a lot, what they ate, things like that. Then they said that in Spanish and we helped them translate it. Then they could say: "When I was a baby, I used to eat baby food"… They brought pictures of [themselves] when they were babies [and] then [said] "When I was a baby…" showing the picture. And then they talked

about a classmate: "He used to like this, his favorite program was this". (Interview, Kindergarten English, May)

By sharing their autobiographical information with their classmates, these 5 and 6-year-old children used questions and answers with rather complex language for their second year of English learning. The authenticity of their interests provides the teachers with the question-answer structures that the children learn, without *pedagogic* attention to its complexity.

In Spanish, in 2nd grade, the children developed their own version of a news program from a real one. The program is constructed from events that occurred in the school and that the children are interested in.

> Teacher: For today we have an exercise I had promised you…
> Student 1: We are going to watch the news...
> Teacher: We said we were going to create a news program, but not like the news programs we don't like to watch on TV because they talk about topics that sometimes we do not understand, about tragic things that happen… We are going to create a news program that we… Like… About things that happen in our…
> Student 2: School!
> Teacher: Let's make a news piece about our institution, about things that are going to happen or that have happened and that we consider important to be in the news…
> Teacher (to researchers): [We'll] watch the news in the systems room… To observe the vocabulary used, what types of news are shown, how they are shown, how long the news pieces take… Then... In groups… [They'll] think about the sources from which they'll collect information [for their own news], the interview [they'll do], whatever. Then, we start… the writing process, obviously supported by the teachers. Once they have it, we start the staging of vocals, oral expression, to start organizing the news program to present it to their classmates, and maybe the parents… (Class observation, 2nd grade Spanish, September)

The development of the news program allows the teacher to work on the pragmatics of TV news

shows, the language associated with narration, future events, and oral expression, as children play the role of journalists and newscasters. The authenticity of the news is provided by the context of the school community, where so many things happen that not everybody knows about them. The children decide what is important to report to that audience and work together in writing their news.

What Did Teachers Learn?

The data presented in response to the previous question are also evidence of the teachers' learning as they put into practice our connected Spanish-English curriculum. Some of those data and the ones I present below reveal that they learned much more than designing communicative performances and making them as authentic as possible for their students: throughout the year they improved their skills and confidence in handling pedagogic planning; in actually putting into practice the constructivist principles that support it and in identifying and working with the students on the language that they can learn as they perform communicatively. They also showed learning related to the process of evaluation and their role as teachers.

Authentic performances –often long term processes with multiple stages to reach finished products– represented big planning challenges for teachers used to carrying out activities ending in fast achievements. All participating teachers speak explicitly about improving in their handling of both the number of performances completed in a determined planning period and their duration. This was possible mostly by having the students work on performances in more than one of the three curriculum communicative contexts simultaneously (e.g. reading a book and doing research on an academic topic), something teachers considered impossible at the beginning of the year.

Actually putting into practice the constructivist principles was also a challenge for teachers that have heard about them repeatedly but have never really seen what they look like in classrooms. The curriculum helped them direct learning as a process and use students' prior knowledge, including that of their native Spanish, because of its cyclical nature and the relation it establishes between the two languages. All participating teachers expressed that they gradually learned to handle the distinction between grades and between complexity levels in similar performances appearing in different grades. Additionally, all but one Spanish teacher expressed and demonstrated in their performances the use of collaborative work among students.

The ability to analyze instances of communication and decide what grammar and syntax to bring to classroom practice is one of the most complex linguistic and pedagogical skills for teachers used to teaching what textbooks dictate. The class observations show that all but one of the participants, a Spanish teacher, did it well, even though they expressed insecurity on this subject in their interviews.

Finally, through the use of the curriculum, the teachers really experienced other concepts common in teaching discourse but not easily seen in practice. Thus, all but one Spanish teacher spoke of having developed a new conception for the evaluation of learning, based on the observation of processes and the participation of the students. Also all but one English teacher talked about having adopted a new role as supporters of and companions in their students' learning.

The following examples illustrate some of this learning in the words of the teachers. The 5th and 6th grade Spanish and English teachers, for example, talk about how they handle aesthetic performances and performances in academic and media communication with a lot of flexibility in

their planning. This flexible management allows teachers and students to face unexpected class situations without problems.

> The fourth phase [of the creation of a school news program] was work in the systems room. There we had a problem with the filming and the cameras… [and] we had to ask the engineer to change the format of the videos. Then, while that happened, I had to do something else, so we worked on other performances at the same time. [The kids were reading their books from the] reader's plan and [we had] compositions [to edit]. (Interview, 5th grade Spanish, May)

> Now we are working on biographies and autobiographies and, at the same time, we are working on the reader's plan, which is totally free [reading] because its purpose is to enjoy the text they bought at the book fair. (Interview, 6th grade English, May)

An English teacher from kindergarten, very early after her first try-outs with authentic performances, realized the changes they were to produce on the way learning and evaluation proceed. She compares the new way with her previous work with traditional achievements.

> The performances provide logical continuity. The objectives [we worked with before] came as islands, detached from logic, and with the message that they have to end and be done with… An objective… was closed, and evaluated, and gone, and if [the student] failed, then there was remedial work and the child had to study in three days and take a remedial test… With performances, instead, we have like a continuum; it is work in a more sequential way and more logical, and in addition the evaluation process is going to change too, which brings many benefits for the children. (Interview, Kindergarten English, December)

This teacher, at an early stage, even predicts the change that is to come in the evaluation of children's learning. This change is already a fact for the following 2nd grade Spanish teacher, who describes it in her May and September interviews.

> For me the most complicated part has been to understand the evaluation process of the new curriculum … Before one knew that a guide was given [and graded] … But [now] you don't have a moment of evaluation; the evaluation is more the process. (Interview, 2nd grade, Spanish May)

> I think that today, with the results we have obtained, I have understood it more… Those children who… require more time to elaborate the information and approach it, transmit it and put it in a context… have been the ones who have benefited the most with this process, because you don't make an activity or develop three or four activities and close [them] because a new one has to start. (Interview, 2nd grade Spanish, September)

This second grade teacher explains how it is possible now to respect the different learning processes in the children. This idea is also very clearly stated by the 9th grade Spanish teacher who, below, connects the cyclical characteristic of the curriculum with the management of learning as a process and its implication in evaluation.

> The students have realized that it is easier for them now… that everything is done again. Then they are not so lost… in the process, because they know that if they could not argue well in this text, they can do it better in the final draft, and if not there, in another performance. Then it is like the possibility to develop more skills and strengthen their processes. (Interview, 9th grade Spanish, May)

In turn, the transition Spanish teacher, working with the youngest children in the school (5 years of age), describes change related to her work in collaboration with the Canadian English teacher. She started the change in her early try-outs with authentic performances. At two different moments in the project, she indicates the important advantages this change has for students.

> [The performance] was worked at the same time with English, so what was done in Spanish, [the English teacher] would now work in English… [The English teacher] was telling me that he was astonished to see how Transition children had developed more English thanks to their Spanish native language, so we are working together. (Interview, Transition Spanish, December 2008)

I was not working with the English teacher … for many reasons. But now we reread the curriculum and there I really understood the importance of working with the English teachers, because the children assimilate English on the basis of their mother tongue … Now we do meet… we have improved team work… We try to identify the language [we need to teach]; we plan a performance together… For the children it has made it easier to understand many things more in English. (Interview, Transition Spanish, September)

The teacher recognizes that her very young students benefit from her work with the English teacher, thus increasing their understanding of what they are learning.

What Did Students Learn?

Finally, our teachers talk about having observed important learning in their students. On the one hand, all English and three Spanish teachers mention formal language learning in terms of a lot of vocabulary, grammar and structure. At the same time, all point out improvement in the skills of comprehension and writing of different types of texts and general development in communication skills.

But according to the teachers, students' learning goes beyond language and communication. They report seeing children skillfully search for, select and connect information from different sources in bibliographical research and choose and use with comfort different forms of oral presentation and audiovisual media. They see them participate responsibly as self and co-evaluators of finished work, collaborate with others to learn, and work with autonomy and responsibility. And finally, they acknowledge a new attitude towards language learning: their students show interest in their classes.

In 6th grade English the teacher describes learning related to linguistic form, linguistic aware-ness and collaborative work:

As for language… the structure and the correct management of tense [have improved]. [The students] themselves [said] that they were disorganized and did not respect structures; but… we have reached a point at which they correct, monitor themselves. We were just in class and a student was telling me about something he did not do and used a structure in present, and a classmate said: 'No, don't no, didn't'. (Interview, 6th grade English, September)

And in kindergarten English, it is a pleasure hearing the teacher talk about the way in which the youngest children communicate in English even outside class. We even had the opportunity to see that in our class observations, as we had to answer the students' questions about who we were, where we came from, and what we did.

They already communicate with an unknown person… they already ask him things like where he lives, what he likes; they say what they like; what they dislike; what they want to do; they compare… ask questions and answer, things that the children did not do last year. They speak in well-organized complete sentences. Listening skills have developed because they do understand everything and they follow instructions very well… The question-answer [interchange] is what has surprised me – I like that a lot! (Interview, Kindergarten English, September)

In 9th grade Spanish class, the teacher describes a media communication performance in which students display multiple skills for bibliographic research, oral and written presentation:

They have watched national news programs [and asked] different questions on how a news program is produced in Colombia… They accessed the [Radio Cadena Nacional] webpage, where there is information about writing… and about the participation committee… They could see that there are teams that interact to produce a news issue.

Then… they wrote a plan for a news program… They also found different articles and news that could be used in their own the broadcasting and presented them. There was a sports section, the presentation of a political topic, a social section. That is, they presented the news program they wanted to see on television…

From this they made an expository text on the news and news programs in Colombia. (Interview, 9th grade Spanish, May)

Finally, the English teacher for 6th and 7th grades comments on two different occasions on her students' learning values:

[I observe] values like group work, not underestimating the one who knows less or who makes more mistakes, the development of autonomy. What I do is make plans with them and [decide what] their final product has to be; they are responsible for handing that in. Some already work by themselves [without supervision]. Sometimes they go to work in [the systems room or the library]… and then return to the classroom. (Interview, 6th and 7th grades English, May)

As for the curriculum, [now they understand] the dynamics; they know that they have to hand in products, that they cannot waste time… They have gained independence in that sense. Collaborative work has been key [because] they ask each other questions… support each other… help one another… Before they wanted to have everything completely explained [to them]; now there is more elaboration by them. (Interview, 6th and 7th grades English, September)

Autonomy, responsibility, awareness of the need to work, initiative, mutual help and other behaviors the students from the different levels show in both their English and Spanish classes are also evidence of real motivation in learning. It is intrinsic motivation coming from the students as a response to the possibilities they discovered for their learning during this year of pedagogic change. As a final illustration of all this learning, here is the description made of what was observed in a kindergarten English class. Here is a group of 6-year-old children, only in their second year of exposure to the language, working completely in English after having planned with their teacher how they wanted to talk about the profession of chef and what they wanted to be able to say. The teacher only acts as a coordinator of presentations.

In this class, the students are presenting recipes as part of a performance in which the daily activities of people from different professions are investigated and described. Here they talk about chefs. The children organized themselves in groups of three; the first child presents his group and the recipe they are going to prepare; the next one presents the ingredients and the utensils they are going to use; and the last student prepares the recipe, describing what he is doing. For this activity, each student dressed up according to his role and the group brought to class the ingredients and the materials they were going to use. (Class observation, Kindergarten English, September)

Discussion

Working in pedagogic change in practice for a year constitutes for me the most effective professional development program I have directed in many years of dedication to this activity and the one that has produced the best results in terms of student learning. At the same time it is evidence that *education for bilingualism* is possible in our monolingual context. This is the kind of education which corrects the deficiencies of what we call bilingual education but is mostly education for the learning of a foreign language without sufficient regard for the development that Spanish has to undergo in school. *Education for bilingualism* is based only on the language classes and is focused on achieving a high level of development of the two languages as useful instruments for communication and learning. It can be done if we use curricula like the one implemented in this school –which cater to the first language first; which make first and foreign language teachers work together in designing and implementing bilingual communicative teaching adapted specifically for their students and which also allows them to help students see and use the similarities and differences between the two languages in order to learn them both. Several reasons contribute to explaining these conclusions.

First of all, making our Spanish-English curriculum work required, from the teachers who did it, openness and dedication to design, implementation, self evaluation and revision of their work as well as change in their ideas about what should happen in a language class. They did it in an exemplary way and managed to change the nature and characteristics of the language learning environments in the school and to change their students' observed learning outcomes. From this totally practical experience, the teachers developed learning that has to do with applied linguistic analysis, pedagogical planning and design consistent with the way people learn plus practical ways to support learning processes in others. Not all teachers produced performances of the same quality and degree of authenticity or allowed the same active participation from students in their pedagogic decisions; however, all changed their previous pedagogic ways to some extent and ended with a conscious realization, developed and lived in real practice, of the need for communicative activity in language learning, the possibility of achieving it in authentic ways, the process and social nature of learning, and the importance of supporting the first language and connecting it with the foreign one in the process of achieving real consecutive bilingualism. Some teachers even moved to connect developments in their language to those in other academic areas.

Secondly, the change in the classrooms and in the teachers also brought positive changes for students. The classroom extended to the whole school, its different spaces, events and means of communication, the students' homes, the city itself, and the Internet. Because of this extension, the participants in the students' learning and the sources of stimulus and information for that learning increased. All this supported developments in the two languages and beyond, in autonomy and learning skills.

Thirdly, the achievements were numerous even though the teachers did not stop expressing their doubts and insecurities. I consider this natural in teachers who so bravely embarked on a radical change without the support of textbooks, models, or detailed descriptions of what they had to do. They should be capable of helping others make their own changes and will advance even more if they continue working with the curriculum and increase collaboration with their colleagues.

As indicated in the research methodology, this qualitative project was a necessary exploration of the initial impact of the curriculum, specifically through its ability to produce changes in the language learning environments and in the learning of teachers and students in the school. All the observed changes are criteria enough, then, to qualify the experience as successful. But this was only a beginning; there is a lot still to be done.

In the first place, the school must stimulate and facilitate the continuation of the experience and –like any educational institution really interested in improving the quality of students' learning– resolutely support the teachers' work. They are the architects of success. It is necessary to schedule extended periods of work for students and time for Spanish and English teachers to plan collaboratively. Additionally, all of the school's information media, written, oral, audiovisual, and virtual, should become authentic communication resources for the whole community, handled by students with the guidance of their teachers and dedicated to the authentic publication and broadcasting of their work.

Secondly, it is necessary to further evaluate the impact of the new curriculum quantitatively at a later stage as a year is probably not enough to allow improvement to register quantitatively in any

significant way in standardized tests. The students take different standardized tests in school and outside, which should show the observed advances formally if the work with the curriculum continues.

A weakness of the curricular implementation process was that I did not work with the teachers in the use of the Internet as a basic resource for authentic communicative performances. They were not regular or skillful users of the Internet, so it was too difficult to dedicate time to this when so many other important changes were happening. But the Internet is, nowadays, the richest resource for the authentic use of a foreign language in a monolingual environment like ours. There should be extended work on finding virtual ways to communicate with speakers of English, for example.

It will be necessary to extend the development and use of this type of curriculum connecting developments in the first and a foreign language and the research on its impact if there is interest in working in effective *education for bilingualism.* It is important, for example, to develop and use this type of curriculum in other socio-cultural and socioeconomic contexts and observe the differences in pedagogical design and in outcomes occurring as a result of the different conditions surrounding the experiences.

It will also be interesting to intervene in areas in which it was not possible to do so in this specific institution. For example, I would consider formalized learning of the foreign language later than preschool, to let the students develop Spanish more solidly or at least to allow for the first stages of the development of reading and writing to consolidate before starting. Bilingual education has convinced us that it is necessary to start early with the foreign language and the arguments against this are not known in schools (e.g. Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000). A combination of more mother tongue, professional development for change, and authentic communicative practice, adapted differentially for specific contexts, could be the answer in the achievement of really functional bilingualism.

With the same educational purposes oriented towards bilingualism in school, it would be interesting to influence the forms of connecting what happens in other areas of learning with what happens in language. Language is a vehicle for all learning, and it is important to involve all teachers in its development. On the other hand, simply decreeing the teaching of different areas in one language or the other may not be effective if schools value the outcomes in both the areas and the languages. Handling the language needed in approaching academic knowledge in the language classes in collaboration with the other areas and teachers may be enough for language development and may contribute greatly to learning in the areas. In *education for bilingualism,* it is important to envision wide developments around connected curricula and to reflect on the linguistic and learning principles on which these developments can be built.

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