Bilingual Education Policies in Colombia: Seeking Relevant and Sustainable Frameworks for Meaningful Minority Inclusion

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Abstract Since the late 1990s, as a response to the General Law of Education (1994), the Colombian Ministry of Education has launched several versions of a national bilingualism policy to revolutionize how we learn and teach English in our regions. These policies have also produced conceptual documents related to teaching standards and curricula. Nevertheless, a closer look at the policies and documents shows a disparity across sources related to goals for learning English, the most appropriate methodologies, as well as the positions and definitions regarding bilingualism. In addition, the policies and documents have fallen short of taking into account the needs and roles of minorities and migrant communities in Colombia. This chapter critically analyzes the documents related to bilingualism policies in Colombia, as well as the critiques and debates surrounding them. Through this analysis, relying on elements from culturally relevant pedagogy, we outline the potential in the policies for this expansion and introduce challenges for our national government to ponder, as we partake in new social processes in our country and in light of recent efforts to solve our internal conflict.

Keywords Bilingualism · Bilingual education · Colombia
Indigenous populations

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Throughout Colombian history, especially after the passing of our new Constitution and the General Law of Education (Law 115 from here on; Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994) in the 1990s, our government has constantly sought a bilingual education model (González, 2010; Usma Wilches, 2009b). Law 115, as a consequence, triggered multiple state, province, and city government measures aimed at promoting the learning and teaching of English at the school and community levels. Other outcomes of these policies include revised English as a Foreign Language standards (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006) and, more recently, a series of documents on learning rights and curriculum proposals (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016a, b, c).

Despite the push for bilingual education (understood as English/Spanish education) in Colombia, larger issues remain about the agendas behind the documents (Gómez Sará, 2017) and the different groups still on the margins of the policies and curricula. Specifically, analyzing who was left out of the conversations in the bilingual plans and policies was the topic of an undergraduate seminar in 2015 in which all three authors participated. This chapter revisited our initial conversations in the seminar, which continued into the development of a proactive proposal on the interpretation of policies into comprehensive and inclusive practices in our curricula (Mora, 2016).

A historical background sets the beginning of this chapter to help readers understand how bilingualism policies and the documents related to language teaching and bilingualism have evolved in Colombia. After a critique of some shortcomings in these documents, we will draw from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a) to introduce our proposal for more inclusive and sustainable (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) language policies.

1   A Caveat: English and Bilingualism Overlap

Our discussion of ideas about bilingual policies, bilingualism, and English teaching overlap consistently throughout this chapter, as many of the examples we share seem to emphasize this overlap. Furthering our conversation throughout this chapter, we argue that this is one of the main areas that Coombian bilingual and in many cases, multilingual policies and curricula need to improve to attend to the language realities of Colombia as we move forward. Please note that all quotes from public papers in Spanish were translated to English by us, the authors of this chapter.

2 A Historical Overview of Language Teaching and Language Policy in Colombia: From the Colonialism to the Formation of Basic Learning Rights

This section has a dual aim: on the one hand, we believe a historical overview of the policies is necessary to understand some of the issues we, as Colombians, face today. On the other hand, we intend for this chapter to inspire other countries and regions with similar challenges on bilingual and multilingual education to adapt some of our ideas in their local solutions, thus reaching a global audience.

2.1 A Brief Introduction

Colombia, initially part of the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada in the 1700s, first declared its independence from Spain in 1810 and ultimately became a fully independent nation in 1819. Between 1819 and 1886, when the 'Republic of Colombia' became the official name of our nation, at the time, it had five different names (Alta Consejería para el Bicentenario de la Independencia, 2010). A careful revision of the history of our land (spanning over 300 years) indicates that language learning and teaching has been an ongoing concern. This review will first trace some of the early colonial influences to then describe language learning and teaching efforts since the late 1980s.

Language learning and teaching: the earlier times. According to Zuluaga (1996), the first examples of language teaching appeared during the early days of the colonization of America. Spanish, Greek, and Latin were the languages of the Church, used in their collective efforts to "humanize" the indigenous peoples of the region. This initial language learning impetus expanded later into the first settlements of European migrants and their offspring beyond the independence period (between the 1600s and early 1800s). As the new élites emerging during the colonization period began leading and ruling the territory, they started sending their children and relatives to study overseas to countries as France, Germany and England. Consequently, French, German, and English joined Spanish as new dominant languages, which coincided with the arrival of progressive ideas from the French Revolution and independence movements in Europe and other countries in Latin America. Unfortunately, a side effect of the arrival of new immigrant European languages in the region was the enhanced marginalization of the local indigenous languages, once again set aside and associated with ignorance and socio-cultural underdevelopment (Anderson and Uribe-Jongbloed 2015; Guerrero, 2009; de Mejía, 2004; Uribe-Jongbloed & Anderson, 2014; Zuluaga, 1996).

Language learning and teaching: Post-WWII. The aftermath of World War II (c. 1950–1980) set a new trend for language teaching in Colombia. Especially between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, schools embraced the teaching of English and French in the curriculum as part of an effort toward economic and political

internationalization (de Mejía, 2004; Zuluaga, 1996). As an example, in 1979, during the visit of then President Julio César Turbay Ayala to France, the government issued Decree 1313. This decree made English a compulsory subject for grades 6 and 7, French for grades 10 and 11, and left teaching either English or French in grades 8 and 9 as a school choice (de Mejía, 2004; García León & García León, 2012; Torres-Martínez, 2009).

A breaking point for Colombian [language] education in 1991. As a response to the concerns of multiple societal groups at the time and the current conditions of our nation, in 1990, President César Gaviria Trujillo chartered the *Asamblea Nacional Constituyente* (National Constitutional Assembly; Echeverry-Campuzano & Ramirez Bacca, 2014; Granda, 1994). The Assembly, comprised by different political parties, unions, indigenous organizations, and other key players, was entrusted with rewriting the 1896 Colombian Constitution. In 1991, the Colombian Congress approved the new Constitution, which continues to regulate the country to this day. The 1991 Constitution (República de Colombia, 1991) opened new spaces to understand and operationalize education in years to come (Pineda Camacho, 1997). For instance, Article 67 made education a fundamental right. Article 10 declared Spanish as "the official language of the territory" while granting the various Colombian ethnic languages and dialects official status "within their territories." Article 27, meanwhile, guaranteed Colombian residents the freedom to participate in learning, teaching, research, and scholarship activities within educational settings.

As the 1991 Constitution opened new spaces for education, in 1994 the Colombian Congress enacted the National Law of Education, commonly known simply as Law 115 (*Ley 115 de 1994,* Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994). The main goal of Law 115, as stated in its Preliminary Dispositions in Article 1, was to

> Highlight the general standards to regulate the Public Service of Education and the social role it meets, in accordance with the needs and interests of people, family and society. It is founded on the principles in the Public Constitutional regarding every person's right of being educated; the freedom of teaching, learning, researching, and scholarship, and in its character of public service (Preliminary Dispositions, art. 1).

As such, Law 115 became the first consolidated law regulating our educational system, including foreign languages. For instance, Article 21, *specific objectives of basic primary education* (i.e. Grades 1-5), made "the acquisition of speaking and reading elements at least in one foreign language" compulsory (numeral *m*). Article 22, *specific objectives of basic secondary education*, prioritized "the comprehension and capacity to express on one foreign language" (numeral *l*) for initial secondary education (Grades 6-9). Foreign languages (along with Spanish and Humanities) are deemed *mandatory and fundamental subjects* (Article 23), which for grades 10 and 11 should be covered "at a deeper level of study" (Article 31). Finally, private bilingual institutions could employ national or international professionals with non-education degrees to teach either foreign languages or other subjects in said languages under the promise of providing pedagogical training for them (Article 199).

The COFE Project: Colombia's first attempt to frame language education. In 1991, Colombia and the United Kingdom established a bilateral agreement featuring 26 universities, the Colombian Ministry of Education, the British Council,

and Thames Valley University in England. This agreement, known as *Colombian Framework for English,* or COFE, became the first systematic attempt to improve the quality of English instruction in teacher education programs (Cárdenas, 1996; Rubiano, n.d.; Rubiano, Frodden, & Cardona, 2000; Uribe, 1996; Whitehead, 1996). The COFE project intended to foster a "qualitative change" (Rubiano, Frodden, & Cardona, 2000, p. 38) in preservice English teacher education, develop conceptual and practical elements in teacher preparation, and actively involve regions away from the traditional capital cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, or Cali.

In the first phase, the COFE Project (lasting four years) included scholarships for Colombian teachers to attend Thames Valley University for professional development, advisories from the British Council, and the creation of resource centers (Rubiano, n.d.; Rubiano, et al., 2000; Simpson, Ossa, & Rutter, 2009; Vergara Luján, Hernández Gaviria, & Cárdenas Ramos, 2009). Institutions involved in the project reformed their teacher education programs (Rubiano, Frodden, & Cardona, 2000), engaging in more teacher research (McNulty Ferri & Usma Wilches, 2005; Usma Wilches, 2009a; Vergara Luján, Hernández Gaviria, & Cárdenas Ramos, 2009). However, the implementation itself had incongruence issues in terms of implementation (Usma Wilches, 2009a), compliance with COFE's expectations, and availability of resources in the regions (McNulty Ferri & Usma Wilches, 2005). Although the COFE Project never had a second phase, it contributed a blueprint for the next version of a bilingual policy. It was also the first time where multiple stakeholders from academia, language institutes, and the government itself converged to profile English teaching in Colombia.

The National Bilingual Program. After the General Law of Education and the COFE Project, a few years passed until a new model for language/bilingual education emerged in Colombia. The rationale for this new model, as the Ministry of Education (2005a, b) explained, was part of a larger agenda to "strengthen Colombia's strategic position before the world" and the government's "fundamental commitment to set the conditions to develop communicative competence in a second language for Colombians" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a, Introduction, pa. 1). The government argued that this new proposal was necessary because students were not attaining high competence levels in schools, as a two-year diagnostic had attested (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a). Diagnostic results showed, on the one hand, that "only 6.4% of a sample of students from grades 8th–10th reached the desired level [… whereas] The same diagnostic showed that only 11% of teachers reached the expected English level." (Introduction, pa. 5) To focus on this situation, the Colombian Ministry of Education launched in 2005 a "long-term, far reaching, and comprehensive policy" (Usma Wilches, 2009a, p. 128), framed within a larger educational intent to reach both formal and informal levels in the educational cycles. This ambitious initiative was labeled National Bilingual Program (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez Jiménez, & Lugo-Vásquez, 2012; Galindo & Moreno, 2008; González, 2010; González Moncada, 2007; Herazo Rivera, Jerez Rodríguez, & Lorduy Arellano, 2012; Mejía-Mejía, 2016; Miranda & Echeverry, 2011; Sánchez Solarte & Obando Guerrero, 2008), which, with minor changes over the years (Gómez Sará, 2017), is ongoing.

To meet the government expectations, the National Bilingual Program proposed a multi-pronged approach, as follows: (a) developing consistent standards for language teaching and learning, (b) creating coherent and sound assessment procedures, (c) engaging teachers in ongoing professional development, (d) incorporating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for instructional purposes, and (e) consolidating multilingual models for different indigenous and ethnic groups (Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez-Jiménez, & Lugo-Vásquez, 2012; Gómez Sará, 2017). As additional support to the National Bilingual Program, the government issued Decree 3870 (Ministerio de Eduación Nacional, 2006a) to regulate the organization and performance of Work and Human Development Education and dispense all the mandatory conditions for compliance. Regarding languages, this decree mandated the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Ayala Zárate & Álvarez, 2005; Council of Europe, 2001) as the basis for language learning, teaching and assessment (Article 2). It also regulated the organization and functioning of foreign language programs (Articles 3-6) and made the accreditation for language programs offered in universities compulsory (Articles 5-6). However, it did not require additional certification for programs in cooperation for international organizations (Art. 7). (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006a).

Local bilingual initiatives. The National Bilingual Program had a ripple effect at the province and city levels (Alonso, Gallo, & Torres, 2012; Ayala Zárate, 2012; Correa, Usma, & Montoya, 2014; López, Peña, de Mejía, Fonseca, & Guzmán, 2001; Miranda & Echeverry, 2011), with local assemblies and councils replicating such examples for their cities (e.g. Concejo de Bucaramanga, 2014). The cases of Medellin and Antioquia illustrate two governmental approaches to bilingual education.

In the case of Medellín, the earliest evidence of bilingualism in development plans appears in mayor Sergio Fajardo Valderrama's "*Medellín la más educada*" (Medellín, the most educated, Alcaldía de Medellín, 2004, 2007), describing the need to increase the levels of competence in a second language, a term we will clarify later in the chapter. Mayor Alonso Salazar Jaramillo's development plan for 2008–2011, "*Medellín es solidaria y competitiva*" (Medellín is solidary and competitive, Alcaldía de Medellín, 2008), further examined the importance of a second language, highlighting "the command of a second language to increasingly qualify human talent" (p. 6). Mayor Aníbal Gaviria Correa's development plan, *Medellín, un hogar para la vida 2012–2015* (Medellín, a home for life, Alcaldía de Medellín, 2012), followed similar goals for bilingualism from previous administrations, prioritizing second language learning as an important factor to increase the city's economy and development. Sections for projects related to bilingualism described supplying schools with technological resources to bridge ICT and bilingualism and setting goals to improve the competence levels in English for teachers and students as specific actions.

For the 2016–2019 period, mayor Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga's plan, "*Medellín cuenta con vos*" (Medellín counts on you; Alcaldía de Medellín, 2016) proposes having a "multilingual Medellín" (although the document uses both "bilingual" and "multilingual" to refer to the same actions). Some goals for learning a second (or foreign, depending on paragraph) language consisted of improving quality of life,

employability, and the overall visibility of Medellín as a tourist and economic destination.

For the province of Antioquia, the most systematic example appeared in then-governor Sergio Fajardo Valderrama's program, "Antioquia la más educada" (*Antioquia, the most educated,* Gobernación de Antioquia, 2012), an extension of the original plan Dr. Fajardo had proposed in his tenure as mayor of Medellín. This plan has a section specifically devoted to bilingualism for the province, seeking, "To enable the development of necessary competences to communicate in English, with internationally comparable standards, that help start the insertion of the province of Antioquia in the universal communication processes, the global economy, and cultural opening" (Gobernación de Antioquia, 2012, p. 97). In contrast, current governor Luis Pérez Gutiérrez's plan, "Pensando en grande 2016–2019" (*Thinking big 2016–2019*, Gobernación de Antioquia, 2016) does not say much about language learning or bilingualism. The rare mentions of second language learning (defined as "any other than the mother tongue" in a footnote on p. 80) are tied to the training of entrepreneurs (p. 80) and teachers at large (p. 221).

Language and bilingual education regulations. For over 26 years, the 1991 Constitution sparked an interest to rethink language education (or English education, for that matter) and bilingualism in Colombia. In this section, we describe the three chief documents that have influenced other efforts since the appearance of the General Law of Education: The *Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1999), the *Basic Foreign Language Standards* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006), and the most recent *Basic Learning Rights and Suggested Curriculum* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016a, b, c).

Curricular Guidelines. Although the 1994 General Law of Education (Law 115 from here on), openly stated the need and conditions for Colombian students to learn a foreign language, it never singled out any. However, during the 1990s English became the de-facto foreign language of instruction with the publication of the Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1999). The guidelines perpetuated the perception that English was the fundamental language for citizens in the new millennium. This perception continues to be in other documents and as the focal point of language and bilingual education literature (Gómez Sará, 2017).

Foreign Language Standards. Before 2006, there was no document that more carefully clarified the distinction between second and foreign language. The document "Basic Foreign Language Standards: English (Guide 22)" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006b) makes a clear distinction, returning to the initial idea in Law 115, and defines English in Colombia as a foreign language. At the same time, it features working definitions to clarify how Colombian teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers should understand ideas such as "bilingualism," "second language," or "foreign language," while laying the foundations for the National Bilingual Program. Guide 22 offered a very large shift from the initial documents for two main reasons: on the one hand, despite retaining official status as a government regulation, it was a document that underwent extensive expert review from school teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty. This document aimed at fixing some of the

shortcomings from the Guidelines, offering clearer rationales for the importance of teaching English and why English sustains a foreign language status.

Suggested English Curriculum. When the government released Guide 22 in 2006, it intended to foster the development of bilingual education policies around the country to train more competitive students in a globalized world, as Díaz Monsalve and Rúa Vergara (2016) explained. Guide 22 was the first attempt to propose comprehensive goals for elementary and secondary schools, while referencing communicative competence (i.e. linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences; Gumperz, 1972; Paulston, 1974). In 2016, the Ministry of Education released three documents related to language learning: The Basic Learning Rights (BLRs from here on) from preschool ("*Transición*") to 5th grade (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016b) and from 6th to 11th grade (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016a) and the Suggested Curriculum for secondary (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016c). The BLRs are supposed to be "an essential tool for ensuring quality and equity in education for all children in Colombia […] structured coherently with the Curricular Guidelines and the Basic Standards of Competence." (p. 8). One problem arising from the implementation in the Suggested Curriculum lied in the sequencing: whereas the Standards were introduced in a bottom-up fashion and all at the same time, the Curriculum was introduced in a top-down fashion and at separate times. This led several readers (e.g. Raúl, who was part of the external reviewers) to inquire whether the curriculum and the standards were not synchronized enough.

2.2 Revisiting the Bilingual and Language Initiatives: Whom Are We Marginalizing?

Over the past 25 years, we have witnessed multiple efforts to implement bilingual language policies in Colombia. Although there have been some successes, larger questions still need answers. This section will survey and critique some of the issues we found across all the documents.

Issue 1: **The lack of consistency in terminology**. Looking across the different initiatives and documents, the inconsistency of these documents regarding languages is somewhat troubling. It is important to recall that Law 115 framed the sections on language teaching around the notion of foreign languages, understood as "learn[ed] mainly in the classroom" (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008, p. 7), an idea that has persisted in all the documents ever since. The Guidelines, for example, feature a footnote distinguishing "additional" languages as, "one of those spoken in bilingual community" and "foreign" languages as, "national languages from other countries." (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1999, p. 10). The Foreign Language Standards briefly defined bilingualism, second language, and foreign language, adding that "In the Colombian context and for the scope of this proposal, English is considered a foreign language" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006, p. 5).

However, it is not uncommon to see government plans talking about "second," "foreign," or even "additional" languages as interchangeable ideas and some of the other documents make this distinction even hazier. For example, the introduction to the Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines stated, "The following document intends to propose some basic ideas that may serve as guide and support to teachers of second languages (foreign)…" (p. 2). A word search of this document showed 66 references to *second language* and 106 to *foreign language,* sometimes even in the same paragraph or even the same sentence. They also introduced the term L2 to refer to any language besides the mother tongue (coincidentally, a word search for *L2* showed they only used this term six times in the document).

The other troubling issue, one documented across the Colombian literature in English teaching (e.g. Gómez Sará, 2017) and language education (e.g. Galindo & Moreno, 2008) is the overall framing of *bilingualism*. On the one hand, working definitions for bilingualism are not extensive in the different documents and they always seem to leave bilingualism as "English/Spanish." From a different perspective, the conceptual base that appears in the documents is rather scarce, featuring shallow rationales for bilingualism (Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez-Jiménez, & Lugo-Vásquez, 2012) that usually link learning another language to socioeconomic goals, but not necessarily to language development and overlook the presence of indigenous languages in this process (Guerrero, 2009).

Issue 2: Languages not present in the initiatives. The 1999 Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines affirmed English as the favored foreign language in the curriculum, while linking it to ICTs (also noticed in the local bilingual contexts) given the international language nature of English itself (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1999). The Foreign Language Standards reinforced the value of English by placing "English" in the title and linking all descriptions of vocabulary and usage directly to English. The idea of English as the main foreign language of the land remains present in the Basic Learning Rights and the Suggested Curriculum. Despite this emphasis, the 1999 Guidelines added French, Hebrew, Portuguese, or German as other foreign languages of instruction (all of which are absent from subsequent documents).

Two main problems stem from this emphasis on English. On the one hand, different private schools across the country (also taking advantage of the existing bilingual discourse) are offering languages such as Italian, German, or Japanese in their curricula, and several teachers are hired from abroad to teach in these schools. This is concerning because these schools embrace English as a *third language*, giving that these schools and their students a competitive advantage and further perpetuating issues of élite bilingualism (de Mejía, 2002, 2004).

Nevertheless, other immigrant languages, such as French, remain in the teacher education curricula, albeit in a diminished role. We can still find a few *licenciatura* and translation programs aimed at preparing French teachers and the professional association for French teachers in Colombia (ACOLPROF) is quite active. The presence of other languages in higher education programs, however, is something that is not as common, oftentimes reduced to language centers.

A noticeable absence from the conversations about language and bilingual initiatives is Portuguese. This is especially concerning given the geographical proximity

of Brazil and its importance in our social, economic, and political domains. We introduce economy and politics here because, as previously explained, the push for the teaching of French had less to do with historical alliances and more with the French government's political and economic influence. Nevertheless, language initiatives have long ignored the connections between Portuguese and Spanish, evident for example in cities on the borderland, such as Leticia and Tabatinga in Colombia and Manaos in Brazil, where both Spanish and Portuguese (and the interlanguage coined as *portuñol;* Lipski, 2006) are languages of trade and everyday communication (Rojas Molina, 2008). If we are going to have an encompassing bilingual education policy, we need to transcend English. We also need to explore other immigrant languages that have that have made an impact on our political, economic, or social life while influencing educational policies, standards, and curricula.

Issue 3: **Spanish as official language and indigenous as regional official languages**. As stated before, there are differences in perception and education policies for languages declared as official only within the context of region and Spanish as Colombia's official language, as detailed in Law 115. For instance, one of the goals for education in Colombia is "the critical understanding of the national culture and the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country, as a foundation of national unity and identity" (Article 5, numeral 5). In its numeral *c,* Article 21 sets as a goal for elementary education, "The development of the basic communicative skills to read, comprehend, write, listen, speak, and express oneself correctly in the Spanish language *and also in the mother tongue* [our emphasis], in the case of ethnic groups with their own linguistic tradition…" (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994). The idea of indigenous languages reappears in Article 57, "Over their territories, ethnic populations teaching with their own linguistic tradition will be bilingual, taking as school basis their respective mother tongue, with no prejudice on the statements presented in Article 21, numeral *c* from this law."

Looking at the relationship between Spanish and indigenous languages that the initial documents pose, any conversation we have about bilingualism in Colombia is incomplete unless the indigenous populations are a part of it (Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón, 2010). Guerrero (2009) examined how the state is at fault here, as it has both failed to promote language study and not enabled indigenous language users to use them as true sources of linguistic capital (p. 22). Guerrero also added, "Anecdotal evidence shows that in graduate programs where people need to demonstrate proficiency in a second language, people who speak an indigenous language have had to struggle to get their languages accepted to fulfill that requirement." (p. 22)

The emphasis on English as a foreign language (or second language, depending on what section of the documents is read) overlooks Guerrero's (2009) illustration. In addition, it does not follow post-1991 laws' intent or the stated goals of the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a), which emphasize English at all levels of education for teachers and students and the ability to "respond to new bilingual surroundings, and promotes and protects the use of other languages in ethnic, *raizal* and borderland populations" (Introduction, pa. 5). Although the government has passed recent legislation to support indigenous languages (Presidencia de la República de Colombia, 2012), none of the iterations of the bilingual initiatives

so far has mentioned the involvement of indigenous and Afro-Colombian languages (Rico Troncoso, 2017).

In fact, we would take these conversations further and ask, *why are indigenous languages and dialects excluded as teachable subjects in other contexts?* If we are going to really talk about bilingual policies in Colombia, this is a question that the government, higher education, and language organizations need to tackle. While we have an increased expansion in the teaching of English, the teaching of indigenous languages remains scarce. For example, very few universities offer such languages in their curricula (despite some gains our educational system has attained in terms of ethno-education and educational access to indigenous regions).

Issue 4: **Other excluded populations**. As we looked deeper into the documents, we realized that other communities remain absent. For instance, It is regrettable that bilingual initiatives exclude both the education of the deaf and braille education for the blind. Although it is true these are emerging topics in the country (León Corredor & Calderón, 2010) and Colombian Sign Language is recognized as L1 for deaf people, we must still address the role of Spanish and other languages for individuals with disabilities, as well as their particular language accommodation needs.

Another missing group in the bilingual and language education documents are immigrants. In the past 20 years, as the country has progressed to becoming a more peaceful society, academics, entrepreneurs, and pensioners from different regions outside Latin America have chosen to migrate and settle here. Although the government has an initiative in place to promote Spanish for foreigners (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 2015), this language proposal is not articulated with the other language plans that the Ministry of Education has promoted, and the inclusion of Spanish as a second language only appears in a handful of undergraduate and master's programs in Colombia.

The presence of language teachers (Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018), despite being explicit in the law, needs to be more consistent across the documents. Their roles in the documents ranges from nonexistent (as was the case of some initial iterations of language laws) to mere feedback givers (as was the case of the Standards and the Suggested Curriculum). Although their presence is noted, we need more congruent professional development proposals that encompass preservice and inservice education, as well as advanced education as build-up to more meaningful language policies (González Moncada, 2007, p. 323).

3   Toward Responsive, Sustainable Bilingual/Language Education Policies: Our Proposal

Our analysis of the different attempts at language and bilingual policies and documents in Colombia has showed that, despite some evident progress, the shortcomings are still glaring. Different individuals and groups remain ignored by these initiatives, ultimately raising questions about the real target audiences for such proposals. How-

ever, there is potential for improvement. Several articles posed challenges to look ahead, but very few of them proposed attempts to bridge the gaps. Our nation is dealing with the biggest historical shift in the past 50 years, as the gradual moves toward a sense of peace across the land are set in motion. You do not have to agree with everything that is in motion (many Colombians do not), but language educators, researchers, and policymakers cannot remain on the side of these debates. This historical moment should be a space to revisit what we have done and find places to improve. As Hyland (2009) argued, we need to think of how legislations and government initiatives need to find better ways to support teachers and communities.

In this section, we propose a model to tackle these shortcomings previously pointed out. We believe that bilingual and language education policies in Colombia must consider the needs of indigenous populations, individuals with disabilities, or migrants, to name a few. We wish to go deeper than signaling who is marginalized (Young, 2010) in the documents, instead seeking alternatives to prevent that in the future. We are calling, then, for proposals that are responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, b, 2011, 2012) to the actual needs of those directly affected by these initiatives and that can be sustained (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012) over time and not left to the desires of one government over the next. Our purpose for this section, therefore, is to set some guidelines that both current and upcoming generations of Colombian scholars can take into consideration, as we rethink what our country in the "Post-conflict Era" (Aguilar et al., 2015; McKay, 2017) should look like in terms of how we frame languages.

3.1 Defining Relevant and Sustainable Practices: The Notion of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, b) is an approach to developing curricular and instructional initiatives that recognize the importance of validating students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. We will use CRP in this chapter as an umbrella term (see Milner, 2011, for an explanation) covering a host of related ideas such as *Culturally Relevant Teaching* (Gay, 2002), *Culturally Sustainable Pedagogy* (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017), or *Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy* (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Although each idea has some conceptual differences, all authors credit CRP as the bedrock for their new proposals. It operates from the perspective that it is not uncommon for school policies and curricula to be oblivious to the different inequities their proposals perpetuate and their effect on teachers and students. As Nieto (2013) explained, "teachers are too often swallowed up by a system that is inequitable and hegemonic, that replicates power and privilege, and that rewards students according to their identities" (p. 15).

It is the presence of these inequities that CRP intends to counter. By acknowledging, responding to, and celebrating cultural aspects in students from all cultures and backgrounds, CRP invites teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers to attend to

students' academic needs, not merely make them "feel good." CRP intends to engage students and teachers into a culture of academic excellence by transcending the traditional oversimplification (Sleeter, 2011) of culturally sensitive matters (something we often notice when ideas about culture appear in language curricula) and instead moving toward critical consciousness (Milner, 2011) and true "sensitivity to cultural nuances" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

3.2 Incorporating CRP Principles into Bilingual/Language Policies: A Three-Pronged Proposal

Looking back at some of the principles for CRP by Ladson-Billings (1995a, b) and Gay (2002), we propose three principles that current bilingual and language policies should keep in mind for future revision and implementation, as follows: (a) developing a knowledge base toward ethnically and culturally diverse initiatives, (b) expressing cultural caring when communicating with diverse audiences, and (c) building culturally-congruent instructional practices. We will now describe what each principle means in terms of developing policy and curricula.

Developing a knowledge base toward ethnically and culturally diverse initiatives. Building bilingual and language policy plans, revisiting Ladson-Billings (1995a, b) begins from a sense of sociopolitical consciousness. That means that we need to keep in mind the different factors that affect cultural construction in our communities. Specifically, the different languages beyond the traditionally dominant ones that are part of such communities (e.g. indigenous, Afro-Colombian, migrant, borderland, and sign languages). It also means we need to move past the otherwise neoliberal (Sleeter, 2011, 2012) tone that permeates most initiatives (as is the case, for example, of our government's desire to become a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; OECD, 2017). This economic push often favors international standardized test scores over the needs of our communities as progress benchmarks, furthering the existing marginalization of different groups that we described in the previous section. This knowledge base also entails transcending existing stereotypes about language learning and teaching. Ethnically and culturally diverse initiatives require looking at issues of marginalization and stereotypes from multiple viewpoints beyond language and pedagogy (Young, 2010).

Current models are not doing enough to disrupt the stereotypes about the best way to teach languages, the questions about native versus non-native speakers as teachers (Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018), and the different approaches to teach language and culture. In the case of indigenous populations, for instance, bilingual and language initiatives need to help them regain "a sense of pride in their cultural heritage through [language] education" (Maina, 1997, p. 294), making the learning and teaching of indigenous languages the center piece, as opposed to side options after English or Spanish. As Ortiz (2009) explained, indigenous languages are only present in legislations across Latin America either as core legislation, as "support

to the Spanish language" (p. 103), or, as we have argued in this chapter, English. Different minorities affected by such legislations need to grant meaningful input to the spirit of the initiatives, not after-the-fact feedback, as it is sometimes the case.

Transcending marginalization also means debunking "deficit" (Schmeichel 2012) perspectives about language learning and minorities. In this case, revisiting the idea of "good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 2015b; Schmeichel 2012) that permeates CRP becomes necessary. Good teaching practices within CRP look carefully at the relationship between teachers and their communities to develop the necessary sensitivities and empathy toward their students, especially those far from the mainstream. It also requires a critical look at policies that homogenize (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008) students. As we previously discussed, that homogenization is present in the different documents, as they are not followed with strong guidelines about how to help different students reach the standards based on the realities of their communities. One possibility to break this homogenization, one that some recent reforms to teacher education programs have hinted at but not developed in detail, may lie in field experiences, as Lucas et al. (2008) explain,

> Teacher education programs can also prepare prospective teachers to teach ELLs by requiring them to spend time in schools and classrooms where they will have contact with ELLs during fieldwork courses and fieldwork requirements in regular courses. Without such contact, ELLs will remain an abstraction, defined by their lack of proficiency in English and likely to be perceived through prevalent media stereotypes of immigrants. (p. 370)

Expressing cultural caring when communicating with diverse populations. Returning to Lucas and colleagues (2008), a follow-up question emerges: How much are we keeping in mind the linguistic backgrounds and repertoires of Colombian students and communities? Although it is true that recent examples such as the Basic Learning Rights made a degree of progress in that regard, they need to go even further. References to the community, recalling Villegas (1991), cannot be either vague or abstract. They need to be the result of a careful conversation with different communities in urban, rural, and exurban areas, racial minorities, indigenous groups (Maina, 1997), or individuals with disabilities, among others. Policies going forward need to show genuine appreciation for their contributions to the growth of our societies and the languages present across the country; doing otherwise may appear to be only words of policies and legislations, which may not turn into concrete, realistic curricula and instructional actions (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Hyland, 2009).

Cultural caring, in the case of policies, means ensuring the validation of different groups (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Ortiz, 2009). It means, again using the principles of CRP, that the different policies enacted must lend themselves to the construction of organic (Forgacs, 2000; Zavala & Golden, 2016) curricula that can operationalize the value that official documents (e.g. Colombian Constitution; Law 1381) have already given to, for example, indigenous languages (adding that we may also need such strong legislation in the case of sign languages) to make such value more explicit.

Cross-cultural communication, according to CRP (Gay, 2002), is an essential feature of creating cultural caring with diverse populations. As Lopez (2011) argued, infusing CRP as we build future policies in Colombia and elsewhere is necessary

to emphasize language practices that help use languages as a means for mutual and collective understanding. Such understanding cannot just be conceived outwardly (as is the case with the current emphasis on English under the National Bilingual Program): it must also incorporate an inward (Mora, 2017) look at ourselves and our different cultures. As McCarty and Lee (2014) explained, "Indigenous languages are inseparable from this educational approach. Language is vital to cultural continuity and community sustainability because it embodies every day and sacred knowledge and is essential to ceremonial practices." (p. 109).

In this sense, we cannot have an inside look at our different communities without adding their languages to our curricula. It means that the learning and teaching of indigenous, Afro-Colombian (Guerrero, 2009) and sign languages needs to appear in the curricular offer of teacher education programs and language centers. In the case of English, returning to the ongoing bilingual initiatives, this implies that immersion programs in English, for example, need to revisit the role of English in the local culture of the province of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina (González, 2010; Mora, 2015), and not just thinking of language immersion to North America and Europe.

Building culturally-congruent instructional practices. One important issue that must be part of a revision to bilingual and language education policies is their translation (Mora, 2016) into classroom practices. CRP's interest in cultural sensitivity and its importance for designing teaching and curricular practices should guide the improvements to the existing bilingual and language policies and how they permeate our classrooms. CRP, as Howard (2003) argued, invites us to look back at the history of language policies (as briefly described here), look carefully at their successes and propose ways to move past just talking about communicative competence. Instead, as Howard claimed, such policies and curricula need to provide teachers and teacher educators "with the necessary skills to reflect on their own racial and cultural [in addition to linguistic] identities and recognize how these identities coexist with the cultural compositions of their students" (p. 196). Phuntsog (1999) goes even further, adding that CRP "demands that schools make profound changes in the way teachers views culture, learning, language, and teaching" (p. 7). Villegas (1991) also expressed that "unless teachers learn to integrate the cultural patterns of minority communities into their teaching, the failure of schools to educate students from these communities will continue" (p. 19). In that sense, documents such as the Foreign Language Standards (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006) or the Suggested Curriculum (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016, 2017) must become catalysts for such instructional changes to renew the potential of the language curriculum to help foster new models of equity toward language in our country (Phuntsog, 1999) and "to make meaningful and transformative contributions to society" (Milner, 2011, p. 69).

One possible way to promote such congruity is to renew the push for Colombian-culture-based materials to learn English. Although we have had examples of textbooks from Colombian educators over the years (Bastidas, 2017), the trend these days is to use imported materials, usually from British publishers (Rajagopalan, 2010). Such attachment to outside resources, we argue, runs counter to the principles of CRP. If we want people to learn, we need meaningful content that Colombian

citizens willing to learn English, as well as our teachers, can adapt to their way of life (Cuasilpud Canchala, 2010; de Mejía, 2006; Ramos Holguín, Aguirre Morales, & Hernández, 2012; Zuluaga Corrales, López Pinzón, & Quintero Corzo, 2009).

4 CODA: Embracing a More Inclusive View of Bilingualism in Colombia's Shifting Landscape

We embarked on this chapter as the combination of different positions regarding bilingualism: Raúl looked at this from a historical perspective as someone who lived the changes in the Constitution and Law 115. Raúl also began his teaching career (now spanning 25 years) at the apex of the COFE Project. Since then, Raúl has actively been involved in the different changes and proposals for bilingual and language education, as he has had the chance to review the Foreign Language Standards in 2005 and one portion of the Basic Learning Rights and Suggested Curriculum in 2015. He has also been critical of the National Bilingual Program and other legislation surrounding it, calling for revised views for how we frame English in Colombia (Mora, 2012, 2013, 2017).

On the other hand, Tatiana and Julián approached this chapter as two very critical and assertive young teachers, who are also involved in research and leadership both at our university and nationally. They come to the conversation mostly from the perspective of how the National Bilingual Program has evolved in the past few years, with an interest in issues of bilingualism. In addition, Tatiana has explored Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Chiquito Gómez, 2018) as a topic she wants to look further as part of her initial research agenda (it was, in fact, Tatiana's idea to explore CRP as part of bilingual policies).

Our views converge in this chapter in the middle of the most striking societal transformation in the past 50 years, triggered by the signing of the peace accords between the Colombian government and the former guerrilla movement FARC (Brodzinsky, 2016). Whether one agrees or disagrees with the accords (and there are varied views of it, from full support to absolute opposition), the effect of this transition is evident in educational circles: teacher education programs, professional associations, publications, and research projects have gravitated toward issues of peace education and justice. These deliberations are not foreign to the bilingual and language education communities, as recent conferences in English teaching have attested. The new sociopolitical landscape envisioned for Colombia might signal new goals and agendas for language learning, as detailed, for instance, in the documents from the Suggested Curriculum, where the topic "Democracy and Peace" is one of the three featured thematic clusters (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016c). Our proposal to add elements from CRP to undertake the initial shortcomings also responds to the reality our country will face in the next years and how language education must envision itself as a change agent.

Our analysis and proposals are only a voice to the current debates on the validity and potential of language policies in Colombia. We know that one big issue that our society must respond to is the current polarization and radicalization of different positions in our nation. In the case of bilingual and language policies, we add our views to other calls in the Colombian literature for initiatives to stop marginalizing groups who usually remain away from these conversations. We have turned toward CRP as an alternative to bridge these gaps between the policy and the inclusion of all communities involved. We know that writing this proposal means we also need to do more collaborative research with other Colombian and international scholars to explore CRP more deeply in our different curricula and to involve different government stakeholders to learn more about our ideas. CRP is, after all, about community building, both in our own country and internationally. We have talked about Colombia, as this is our land, but we know that there are several other places, especially in the global south, facing similar challenges about how to make more inclusive policies. This chapter is our first contribution to a new conversation about how to finally bridge a more encompassing view of education, teaching, learning, advocacy, and research on bilingual education.

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