Chapter 6

The Influence of EFL Policies on the Work of Teachers in a Public Primary School

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Abstract

In this chapter, I discuss how my experiences as a student, teacher and coordinator led me to inquire into the way that ELT policies influence the work of teachers in public schools. This study focuses on a public primary school in the Ciudad Bolívar District (Bogotá, Colombia), where I work and discusses my attempts, as a primary school administrator, to adapt those policies to the primary section of my school and analyze the relation between education and bilingualism in my school. First, I describe my school and the surrounding community and speak of the standpoint on ELT of the students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Then, I give an account of the policies that made the English language a mandatory subject, and some of the ELT programs in Bogotá. At the end, I present the questions and the objectives of this study of ELT policies.

Introduction

This is a personal study of how the people at my school think, feel, behave and make decisions in the field of English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) policies. To do so, we need to untangle the reasoning behind the policies (Popkewitz, 1998), which aim at a "social transformation by meeting quality standards which will thus make Colombia the most highly educated country

in Latin America by 2025" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN), 2015, p. 2 –my translation), despite the characteristics of different schools.

The first section, *Charter schools and traditional public schools*, discusses the school where I have been the coordinator of the primary section, the contrast between the administration of such schools and other public institutions, and what our students and their parents and our teachers and administrators feel about this situation. The emergence of different kinds of public schools causes inequalities. A traditional public school like mine does not have enough resources or specialized teachers (arts, music, English) in the primary section, as charters schools potentially do. Thus, parents prefer to send their children to charter schools. The second section is called *School diversity and monoculture teaching: a paradox* and describes the community of my school: teachers, administrators and families from different parts of Colombia and lately, a few from Venezuela. The third section, *Teachers at school versus English teaching*, speaks of one of my concerns as a curriculum administrator – ELT-- and some teachers' perceptions of the role of mandatory English in their lives. The following section, *ELT policies in primary schools here and there*, provides a short account of studies of mandatory English in public primary schools done in Colombia and other countries. The last section reviews ELT policies in public primary schools in Bogotá (the capital of Colombia) and some of the corresponding programs, which have been implemented since 2012, when I became a coordinator. Finally, I present the aims of my research.

Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools-

In Colombia three models of schools operate. One is the public school, which is financed and managed entirely by the State. Another model is the private one, which is sustained by charging each student. The third one is the model of public schools under concession, or what I call charter schools, along this document. Any student may enroll at the school where I work, regardless of his or her religion, race, gender, academic abilities, family situation, etc. There is another type of school in Bogotá: they are known as "*Colegios en concesión*"[16] or charter schools. The Center for Education Reform in the United States (2019) describes them as follows:

16 ***Colegios en Concesión*** "are built and equipped by the municipal administration, and then the city transfers their administration to private agents". (Contraloría de Bogotá, 2004, p. 5 –my translation)

> Charter schools are public schools that provide unique educational services to students, or deliver services in ways that the traditional public schools do not […] Charters survive — and succeed — because they operate on the principles of choice, accountability and autonomy not readily found in traditional public schools (paragraph 8).

However, Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999) have claimed that "Once a charter is granted, either by a local school board, a state board of education, or another entity, the schools operate with much less oversight regulation than traditional public schools. In exchange for their freedom they are, in theory, supposed to make the goals stated in their charters. If they fail to do so, they can lose their charter" (p. 174). Many parents believe that a charter school is the first and best option for their children because the students receive breakfast, refreshments and lunch; there is an extended school day (from 7am to 3pm;); the building has a music room with instruments, a dance class, well-equipped laboratories, and computer rooms; there are also sports facilities or agreements with external sports centers. Furthermore, there is a widespread belief that their students do better on State exams (the *Pruebas Saber 11* in Colombia). Wells et al (1999) also note that these schools operate on a marketing principle and compete with each other to attract students: "even in low-income neighborhoods, charter schools tend to serve students who are better off in terms of having parents who are actively engaged in their education" (p. 175). Both, schools and students compete. Schools to get students, and students to get into the charter schools. This means that charter schools can follow a very strict procedure for selecting their students. For example, in a traditional public school if a parent does not follow a summons to speak to a teacher or attend a parents´ meeting, there is little that administration can do: as a last resort and only if it believes that a child is at risk, it can threaten to report the problem to the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* -ICBF[17]) but the parents in question usually ignore the threat, because they know that the bureaucratic procedures are cumbersome and at worst, they will only receive a warning. The opposite happens in charter schools because the parents know that if they are irresponsible, their children will lose their place in the school. Recently, the Bogotá Secretariat of Education opened a new charter school in the city and many parents were eager to have their children admitted to the school.

A secretary in my school, whose child was in a private school, struggled to enroll him in that charter school. When I asked her why she was so insistent on that, she spoke of the ´kind of students´ who attend the charter school,

17 The ICBF is a government agency, which protects children and adolescents, and guarantees their rights.

who, in her opinion, are well-behaved, clean and belong to families who are better off than those who send their children to public schools, along with the benefits of responsible and specialized teachers who, in addition, will not go out on a strike. She also liked the very strict coordinators, the wholesome food, resources like musical instruments, the 7 a.m to 2 p.m schedule and the fact that it is free, among other reasons. Additionally, "the limited financial resources of working-class parents place constraints on their ability to enroll their children in the kind of extra-curricular activities in which middle-class children often engage and from which middle-class parents expect an educational dividend" (Lareau, 2002 in Giroux & Schmidt, 2004, p. 217). In other words, there is not any fair competition between charter schools and traditional public schools; parents by far prefer the former. If they do not find a place in a charter school for their children, they just resign themselves.

Along the same lines, the school where I work has facilities like a library, a computer classroom with thirty-five computers and other well-equipped classrooms with two data projectors. For example, each room has a TV set with an Internet connection. From my point of view, the main branch of the school has resources that teachers can use when they need them. In this way, Popkewitz (1998) says, "some groups use the resources of schools to their advantage while others do not" (p. 2). Are we (teachers/students/parents/coordinators) taking advantage of the resources we have to teach our subjects, including English? The school has also tried to organize extracurricular activities, like swimming lessons, chess classes, gymnastics, dance classes and a band. However, due to the way it would have shortened the lunch break and a shortage of rooms, the only activity that has survived is a chess class. Twice a week, children from the morning shift are taught how to play chess by an expert employed by the Secretaría de Educación del Distrito (henceforth SED (the Bogotá District Secretariat of Education), through an agreement with a family compensation fund[18].

The music teacher who directs the band only enrolls students from the fifth to eleventh grades, whereas second graders were included in the past. However, due to the distance between Branch A and Branch B, only students from the A branch are able to participate in these activities, because it takes about fifteen minutes to walk from one branch to the other and means that the students would have to cross a congested street that has no traffic light. That is why parents do not give allow their children to go to the main branch on their own.

18 Family Compensation Funds are private, non-profit entities which provide health and education services.

To sum up, in public schools under concession or charter schools, the buildings belong to the State, but the public funds are administered by religious communities, foundations, or family compensation funds. Then, charter schools are free to select their staff and students according to their own criteria, make their own rules and administer the school. In the opinion of the Center of Education Reform (2019)

> A charter school creates better educational opportunities for all students, because it uses the dynamics of consumer opportunity and provider competition to drive service quality. This principle can be found anywhere you look, from cars to colleges, but it is largely absent in our public school system and the poor results are evident (paragraph 3).

By contrast, Giroux (2012) claims that charter schools are the tools of a business culture that seeks to discredit public schools. He calls on teachers and teachers' unions to act as public intellectuals who train informed citizens and champion a democratic society.

This educational market, represented by charter schools, receives funding from the State in order to provide them with new and well-equipped buildings; specialized teachers including English teachers in primary schools; an extended school day that keeps students in a safe place, very far from the streets; and at least two meals (lunch and refreshments). A Colombian magazine reports that "It is also interesting to see how the level of school violence has dropped and how the number of teen pregnancies has fallen significantly" (*Revista Dinero*, 2009, p.11). In addition to those markers, the success of charter schools is measured by their students' scores on State exams, the number of students who are admitted to universities and the nutritional levels of their students (Alcaldía de Bogotá-SED 2018, p.48). The privileges enjoyed by charter schools seem to be a mechanism the State uses to ignore and discriminate against the students of traditional public schools. They do not exist, so they do not deserve specialized English teachers, for example.

In short, charter schools are public institutions under concession administered by private bodies, which have a good reputation due to their students' high scores on State exams, and amicable relationship with the school's community. In other words, public schools and charter schools compete on unequal terms. The next section describes the community of my school and its involvement in its educational dynamics and practices.

School Diversity and Monoculture Teaching: a Paradox

The school is located in the Ciudad Bolívar district in the south of Bogotá, far from the city center (Tollefson, 1991). The families there either earn a minimum wage or work as street vendors or informal recyclers. Its inhabitants, who are mostly *mestizos*, have different religious, political beliefs and backgrounds. Many of them have fled from their former homes in different parts of the country because of the current violence in Colombia. Some are indigenous, who no longer speak their native languages, and others are recent refugees from Venezuela, seeking "better opportunities": most miss the warmth of the lands they came from. The questions: Are we (teachers) aware of this rich panorama? Do we understand the variety of identities of the children who attend our school? Do we know who our pupils are? Are their subjectivities invisible? Sousa (2007) calls this problem the clash between "the monoculture of modern science and the ecology of knowledge. It is an ecology because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous bodies of knowledge and on the sustained and dynamic interconnection between them without compromising their autonomy" (p. 66). Sousa's ideas lead to further questions: Do we recognize that plurality? Do we value that cultural richness? Do we take knowledge of our students' families to our schools? Or do we just "deny the voices, experiences, and histories through which students give meaning to the world and in doing so, often reduce learning to the dynamics of transmission and imposition" as noted by Giroux and Simon (1988, p. 10).

Similarly, Maturana (2001) warns teachers "to not devalue our children based on what they do not know; we value their knowledge. Let's guide our children towards doing something that has to do with their daily world and invite them to look at what they do" (p. 17 - my translation). To me, this means that our classes would be more interesting if we were taken into account the diverse worlds of our students. However, competition, "as a human phenomenon which rests on the negation of the other" (Maturana, 2001, p. 6 – my translation), has infiltrated education, since schools are now measured in accordance with the scores of their students on State exams. If the school is not ranked among the top hundred by the MEN, it is in the 'not yet zone'- the school does not exist.

Our school is not on that list; we got 'poor' marks in mathematics and language (Spanish) on the Saber 11 tests and because of that, MEN and SED included our institution in a programcalled *Leer es volar*, aimed at improving the reading skills of third graders. What I can acknowledge is that MEN looked

for academics from Brazil who have been schoolteachers, and have worked with a similar population to ours. Giroux and Schmidt (2004) believe that "the greatest threat to young people does not come from lowered standards, the absence of privatized choice schemes or the lack of rigid testing measures". (p. 224). But, rather, that "society refuses to view children as a social investment, which condemns 12 million children to live in poverty and reduces critical learning to massive testing programs" (Giroux and Schmidt, 2004, p. 224). As a result, children are not getting what they really need to 'survive' in this complex society, and schools that aim only at obtaining good marks on standardized tests do not encourage social responsibility or democratic citizenship. Is this not a paradox?

Teachers at School versus English teaching

In my school's primary section, there are no licensed English language teachers. Some of them hate English. Others see this subject as an obstacle to continue their postgraduate studies, because one of the requirements to enter to study a postgraduate degree is to have the English B1 certification, in addition, most of them do not have any command of English. However, they are obliged to teach two weekly hours of English to their pupils. In fact, I agree with Clavijo (2016) when she says that this "decision seems to be based on a limited vision that learning another language is learning an isolated and decontextualized vocabulary or a matter of including English in the curriculum instead of having well-qualified English teachers." (p. 7). Guerrero (2018) notes that "Law 115 posed an enormous challenge to elementary school teachers because they were not prepared for this task" (p.123). I, as the coordinator, have seen situations where I wished that our staff were not forced to teach English. For example, once, when I entered a classroom, I noticed that the date was wrongly written on the blackboard, so I spoke to the teacher in private and suggested a correction, but he replied that he was teaching the cardinal or "normal" numbers, not the ordinal numbers, which are used to indicate dates. In addition to such mistakes, words are mispronounced and both students and teachers are frustrated by the poor results. But what matters more to me is to see teachers making their students unhappy.

These incidents reminded me of the painful experience I had when I studying English during my first undergraduate semesters at my university. I felt ignored by a teacher who did not pay attention to the students who did not speak

English fluently, and we had to listen to long conversations between her and our classmates from private bilingual schools. Even worse, a teacher sometimes laughed at me when I mispronounced a word or failed to express myself well during the oral exams. Going beyond that, Clavijo (2016) worries about Teaching English as a Foreign Language policies – TEFL-- because they place "elementary school teachers in an awkward and unethical professional position" (p. 7). Which teachers are going to teach English? How can they handle English classes if they are not adequately prepared? What worlds are they going to convey to their students? Which TEFL policies do they follow? What do they discard and why? These questions may help us to understand the dilemma of such teachers.

Along the same lines, Méndez (2018) points out that the "English teacher, as a subject, has been objectified to fulfill the requirements of policies, […]-or to explain the failure to reach the State's goals and even the lack of success of a bilingual program" (p. 203). I have noticed that most of the teachers do not want to teach first grade because that is when students have to learn how to read and write in Spanish, which is "a very demanding" (Guzmán, 2019) and time-consuming task which requires a lot of preparation. Guzmán stresses that the most qualified teachers should be in the first grades of school because this a crucial stage in children's development. I strongly agree that these years are the pillars of education. The problem clearly gets worse when English has to be taught to first graders. I thought that this situation only happened in the school where I work, but during meetings with the coordinators of other schools in Bogotá I found that this often happens. Thus, input from the coordinators of primary schools could help us to understand and, it is to be hoped, solve this problem. It would be useful to find out what we (teachers/coordinators) think of this situation and what students feel about their English classes. We would also need to ask ourselves why is English taught in primary schools.

For Maturana (2001), education needs

> to recover that fundamental harmony that does not destroy, that does not exploit, that does not abuse, that does not pretend to dominate the natural world, but seeks to accept and respect it, so that human well-being occurs interacts with the well-being of Nature. To achieve this, we must learn to look and listen without fear and let others live in harmony, without subjection (p.16).

The problem the teachers at my school face is that they are obliged to teach English but have not been trained to do it. In short, it is time to change ELT policies in Colombia.

ELT Policies in Primary Schools Here and There

In order to throw more light on ELT policies in Colombian primary schools, Table 1 lists a number of countries where English classes are also mandatory

Table 1. English as a Mandatory School Subject in Primary

Year	Country	Some characteristics
1898 1917 1949	Puerto Rico	The policies on ELT have been shaped by the ideologies of three political Parties: the *Popular Democrático* (pro-commonwealth); *Nuevo Progresista* (PNP, pro-statehood), and *Independentista Puertorriqueño*, especially their attitudes towards the United States. 1898-1917: classes in English only; 1917-1949: English – Spanish: 1949 to the present: classes in Spanish with English as a separate subject, (Maldonado-Valentin, 2016).
1944	Costa Rica	With the aim of promoting economic development, English has been a compulsory subject in primary schools since 1944, and in 1949 for secondary schools as well. (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
1994 2013	Colombia	The teaching of a foreign language began in 1994. English has been a compulsory subject since 2013, under Law 1651, (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
1996 2009	Chile	It is mandatory to teach English from the fifth grade onwards since 1996. Some schools have started to teach English voluntarily from the first grade onwards since 2013 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). The State aims to make Chile a bilingual country (Barahona, 2016).
1997	Turkey	Under Act 4306, English has been compulsory from the fourth grade onwards since 1997 (Görsev İnceçay, 2012).
2001 2003	Taiwan	English has been mandatory from the fifth grade onwards since 2001. In 2003, English became compulsory from the third grade onwards. The main aim is to position the country in the global economy (Wen-Chuan Lin, 2015).

Year	Country	Some characteristics
2003	Panama	Under Law 2, English has been a compulsory subject in public and private primary and secondary schools since 2003 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2006	Argentina	Under Law 26, English has been compulsory from the fourth grade onwards since 2006, due to the strong influence on Argentina of the United States and England. (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2009 2012 2016	Uruguay	In 2009, schools were ordered to teach a foreign language. Since 2012, English has been taught in urban schools from the fourth grade onwards. In 2016, schools had to choose between Portuguese and English. Portuguese is taught in three bilingual districts out of total of nineteen (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2011	Mexico	Under Agreement 592, English has been a compulsory subject from pre-school to the ninth grade since 2011. (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016; Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2011	Japan	The Ministry of Education made English a mandatory school subject in primary school. Fourth and fifth graders have English classes once a week (Ng, Patrick, 2016).
2014	Peru	Under Resolution 2060, a foreign language has been a compulsory subject in primary schools since 2014, but each province can choose the language (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2014	Ecuador	Under Agreement 0052-14, English has been a compulsory subject since 2014. The policy began to be implemented in the *Sierra* (mountain range) region between 2016 and 2017 and in the coastal (*Costa*) region between 2017 and 2018 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2016	Canada - Quebec	English, as a foreign language, is mandatory from the first and second grades onwards. However, the French-speaking population want French to be taught in public schools, in order to conserve their culture (Fallon & Rublik, 2011).
2018	Brazil	After much debate, English began to be a compulsory subject in 2017, under Law 13415, and the policy was implemented in 2018 (Almeida, 2016).

In Puerto Rico and Costa Rica, the establishment of the compulsory teaching of English in primary schools was owed to political and/or economic motives, especially the need to strengthen their economic relationship with the USA in the mid-1990´s. By contrast, culture has been a more important factor in Peru, Canada, Ecuador and Brazil. In Uruguay, the choice of the foreign language depends on the interests of each district. By way of comparison, Table 2 shows the situation in Colombia, specifically its national policies, the sectorial plans or norms, and the implementation of such programs.

Table 2. ELT Policies in Colombia and Bogotá

National Policies	Programs of the mayoralty	Ways of implementation
President: César Gaviria (1990-1994) **Political Party**: Liberal **Political Program:** "The Peaceful Revolution" **Educational program:** *Plan de apertura educativa* 1991-1994 **Law 1994** Article 21: Objective: teaching a foreign language in primary schools. Article 23 (7) A foreign language as a mandatory subject. *Most schools chose English **President:** Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) **Political Party:** Nueva Fuerza Democrática **Political Program:** *"Cambio para construir la paz"* **Educational Program:** *"Educación, Cultura y Formación para el Trabajo*	Memorandum of Association 2001: Making Bogotá a bilingual region. Voluntary Agreement 2003: "A Bilingual Bogotá and Cundinamarca in ten years". SED Bogotá and British Council Agreement 2004 – 2019.	Introducing English as a foreign language in public primary and secondary schools

National Policies	Programs of the mayoralty	Ways of implementation
President: Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) **Political Party:** *Primero Colombia* **Political Program:** *Seguridad Democrática-Hacía un Estado Comunitario* **Educational Program:** *La Revolución Educativa* **National Bilingualism Program 2005- 2008**	Sectorial Education Plan 2004 -2008 Bogotá: a great School Agreement 253, 2006: "Bilingual Bogota", Bogotá Municipal Council.	Program 8: Strengthening a second language. Three bilingual schools in District 9. Language Resource Centers-CRI -- for preschool and primary school teachers with no previous knowledge of English
Basic Standards of Foreign Language Competence English: 2006 These standards are based on the Common European Framework of Reference – CEFR. Level A1 for students in the first and third grades. Level A2 for students in the fourth and seventh grades.	Sectorial Education Plan 2008 – 2012 Quality Education for a *Bogotá Positiva*	Use of the "English Discovery" program. Teachers who have reached level B2 can teach primary school teachers .
	Sectorial Education Plan 2012 – 2016 *Bogotá Humana*	Language centers. Extended school day.

Source: Own

National Policies	Programs of the mayoralty	Ways of implementation
President: Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) **Political Party:** Partido Social de Unidad Nacional **Political Program:** *Solidaridad, Emprendimiento y Paz* **Educational Program:** *"Colombia, la mejor educada en el 2025"* **Law of Bilingualism** **1651** **2013** **National Education Plan 2006 – 2016** Objective 1 and goal 1: Guidelines for the teaching of English from preschool to the eleventh grade. **Bilingual Colombia** **2014 - 2018** One of the strategies is to promote the learning of English, especially in the fourth and fifth grades. **Suggested Curriculum for English 2016** **Derechos básicos de aprendizaje: Inglés** **Transition to the Fifth Grade** **The "Bunny" Bonita Collection,** aimed at children between the ages of four and eight years is a collection of videos, posters, and pedagogical guides in PDF meant to develop communicative skills in English.	(Sectorial Education Plan 2016 – 2020 "Bogotá: Better for Everyone Bogotá: Mejor para Todos)	Second Municipal Language Plan "Converging Grounds" is the name of an extracurricular multimedia strategy for teaching English and its cultural aspects. Language centers. Spelling Bee contest.

Source: Own

Chapter V of the National Development Plan, 1990 1994, offered grants to low-income students who wish to enroll in private schools with a proven high quality and effectiveness. In chapter VI, the National Council of Economic and Social Policy approved this program on March 19, 1999, with some recommendations. First, it called on the Ministry of Education to create a "zero" grade (the first grade of preschool level) and integrate public primary and secondary schools (p.3-4). In other words, the "Opening Plan" of the Gaviria administration sought to reduce the cost of education.

I have worked in two public schools which went through this integration, the small branch does not have neither a secretary nor a library and their staffs have to move between the different branches, in accordance with the needs of the students or teachers. Table 2 presents some of the programs and educational policies in Colombia and Bogotá. "Neoliberalism frames the purpose of education in terms of investments made in human capital. What students should learn and the value of education have to do with their possibilities of future earnings" (Hastings, 2019, p.1). Andrés Pastrana's educational program supported work training for students, by teaching vocational skills to the tenth and eleventh graders. Law 115 of 1994 and Law 1651 of 2013 contain norms for the teaching of a foreign language. The former does not specify a language while the latter chooses English. Following the principle that "language is an important means for doing things" (Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates, 2001, p.7), the Colombian Bilingualism Law makes English the priority foreign language.

Some of the reasons which the "Basic Standards of Foreign Language Competence" give to learn English are based on Neo-Liberal ideas: it will enable students to win grants to study abroad and get better jobs (MEN, 2006, p.9). These ideas include: a "pedagogical approach focused on employability, funding cuts, the push for private and charter schools, school-business partnerships, and the promotion of standardized testing" (Lund, 2015, p.270). As Table 2 show, the policies to teach English in public primary schools began in 2004 with the Sectorial Education Plans, based on an agreement between the SED and British Council, an example of how the educational system "is increasingly subject to neoliberal governance, as […] district schools are replaced by charter schools, and school resources, such as curriculum, testing, and even the training of teachers, are provided by private companies" (Hastings, 2019: p.1).

If you, as a teacher, do not reach the required level of proficiency, you do not exist. (E.g., primary school teachers must have a minimum level of A2 in English because their level cannot be lower than that of their students). Those standards set forth what students should know. Level A1 is for students in the first and third grades, and Level A2 for those in the fourth and seventh grades. (MEN, 2016, p.6.)

My Experience of ELT Policies in Primary Schools in Bogotá

Is the Colombian State really interested in improving ELT? According to one analyst, it is doubtful: "the country has more than three million people internally displaced by the violence of left-wing guerrilla forces, right-wing paramilitaries and drugs mafias. In these circumstances, the development of bilingualism is not a priority for the education system" (de Mejia, 2009, p. 110). For the MEN, on the other hand, "schooling is a permanent process of cultural, social and personal formation which regards people in an integral way: their dignity, rights, and duties". What does it mean to have the "most highly educated country"? Are standards a way to 'transform' teaching practices? Is the State promoting inequality when it requires some public schools in Bogotá to become bilingual?

English is a mandatory subject from first grade onwards, even if there are not enough resources or qualified teachers. According to Mejía (2009), "this leads to the rather paradoxical situation where the standards for English are applied to Grade 1, yet, for the most part, opportunities to improve their competence are restricted to teachers in Grades 6-11" (p. 111), that is, secondary school teachers are the main beneficiaries of State programs to strengthen their knowledge of English, as I was, when, as a secondary school teacher, I was able to take different courses, sponsored by the MEN and SED, that enabled me to obtain the "In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching" (ICELT model). Between 2001 and 2012, I taught English in two secondary schools, one in the San Cristóbal District, and the other in Engativá, and I participated in most of the Teachers Development Programs (TDP). A review of career may illustrate some of the points I have made.

1. In 2005, I participated in an ELT program for public primary school teachers in San Cristóbal, run by a public university. We were required to create a project to use the Resource Center for English, known as the *CRI*[19] in Spanish. Classes were held on Saturday from eight to midday, the teachers were assigned classes in accordance with their proficiency and they worked on the project during the week. In 2010 the *CRI* was finally installed in our school in 2010 but I had moved to another school by then, but so far as I know, the teachers there have taken advantage of it.

2. I attended the "Open Learning Teacher Development" program in 2006, which had three modules for the Teaching Knowledge Test (the course was run by the British Council). Afterwards, I passed the three TKT examinations, held by the University of Cambridge (ESOL). These examinations certify that teachers really know how to teach English. Nowadays, I believe, they do not only take into account teachers' university degrees (I ready had a Master's in Applied Linguistics), but also their professional experience.

3. I took a preparation course for the First English Certificate, aimed at an examination in 2007 (at a public university). When, on the first day, the teacher asked us why we were there, I replied that I wanted to be transferred from my current school to another one, which required the certification and stressed that I felt 'forced' to. Happily, I made some beloved friends there, and I got an A (C1) on the exam. The certification has been very useful, and it enabled me to be admitted to a doctoral program. I enrolled in the PFPD Methodology and Resource Center in 2008 (at a private university), where I learned how to manage computers and multimedia. So long as we followed the prescribed formats.

4. I enrolled in a postgraduate course at a private university, 2010-2011, where we students created a project to suit our needs: in my case, one in which my seventh grade students made their own books, read them aloud, and recorded their voices. The students were pleased and IBM acknowledged our project by donating a computer and thirty-one headphones to the school.

19 The CRI provides story books, dictionaries, grammars, textbooks, multimedia resources, CDs, a video beam, and special furnishings.

5. I participated in the "English for Teaching 1" program and the "CPO Cascade" project, in 2012 (run by the British Council and a private company). The aim was that we (English language teachers) would replicate the course at some public schools. Most of us refused to, because they paid us very little and we had to find teachers and students. I have since learned that it is well paid nowadays.

In the public school where I now work, primary level teachers have not yet received ELT courses, so far as I know. In other words, the MEN, which is the national education authority, shifts its responsibility for decisions about ELT policies from primary schools to the SED, which is the municipal authority, and to the schools themselves. Consequently, some public schools offer one hour per week of English in the primary level, while others do not teach English at all: it is up to each school to decide.

Guerrero (2010) writes that

> Governments and their policy makers should adopt a situated approach to the design and implementation of their policies. As has been widely shown, inequality only leads to more inequality and if governments, especially in the Third World, want to overcome poverty, they need to guarantee all of their citizens the opportunity to receive a decent education. (p. 176).

Table 3 (Adapted from the Revista Enfoque, 2018) lists the sixteen schools in Bogotà which follow the *Modelo Educativo Bilingue*-MEB (Bilingual Educational Model), which is collaborative effort of the British Council and the SED. From my point of view, this project unjustly excludes the teaching of another foreign language. There is not enough information about the criteria for choosing these schools, but at least two are charter schools, and there are districts that do not have BEM. Why weren´t schools from nine other districts chosen?

Table 3. Public Schools in Bogotá with the Bilingual Educational Model

Name of the Public School	Name of the District
Saludcoop Norte	Usaquén
Venecia	Tunjuelito

Bosanova and Debora Arango Pérez	Bosa
San José de Castilla	Kennedy
La Felicidad, Antonio Van Uden, and Carlo Federici	Fontibón
Instituto Técnico Industrial Francisco José de Caldas and San José Norte	Engativá
Veintiún Ángeles and Aníbal Fernández de Soto	Suba
Escuela Normal Superior Distrital María Montessori	Antonio Nariño
Integrada La Candelaria	La Candelaria
República EE.UU de América	Rafael Uribe Uribe
Cundinamarca	Ciudad Bolívar

Establishing language centers in public schools is another SED strategy: they cater to students who want to learn English or French in their spare time. The teachers are mostly Colombians who belong to the official staff and have a B2 certification but there are also native English speakers who must have an A2 level of Spanish, and teaching experience. There are two kinds of centers: one operates during weekdays and the other, only on Saturdays. Each course lasts four semesters. Students who attend weekday classes have to complete 200 hours of classes, while the ones who take classes on Saturday have to complete 240 hours. Each group has a maximum of 25 students. Some classes are taught by native speakers and the activities include games, songs and dances.

Some Colombian teachers complain that the MEN regards native-English speakers as "a matter of quality which guarantees students access to the original or best source of the English language and culture; and it is a response to the alleged insufficient proficiency of non-native speakers of English" (Gonzalez & Llurda, 2016, p.98). Table 4 lists the schools in Bogotá which have language centers.

Table 4. Language Centers in Bogotá Public Schools

Name of the School	Name of the District
Aquileo Parra	Usaquén
Manuelita Sáenz	San Cristóbal
Paulo Freire	Usme
Venecia	Tunjuelito
Luis López de Mesa	Bosa
Nicolás Esguerra Nuevo Kennedy	Kennedy
Néstor Forero Alcalá Jorge Gaitán Cortés Nidia Quintero de Turbay	Engativá
Álvaro Gómez Hurtado Nueva Colombia	Suba
República de Panamá	Barrios Unidos
Liceo Nacional Antonia Santos	Los Mártires
Antonio José de Sucre José Manuel Restrepo José Joaquín Casas	Puente Aranda
Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño Clemencia de Caicedo	Rafael Uribe Uribe
Rodrigo Lara Bonilla El paraíso Manuela Beltrán	Ciudad Bolívar

Source: Adapted from the magazine Palabra Maestra 2014

Again, four districts do not have schools with language centers. In addition, all public primary schools can have '*profesores de apoyo*'[20], support teachers; some choose English language teachers for that role and most teach two hours a week per group. However, as I am writing during the transition from

20 Support teachers are employed by the SED and they teach English, technology, arts or physical education.

one administration to another, this policy may change. Finally, although the above situation has been widely discussed for several decades by now, little has been said so far about how ELT policies affect schools on a daily basis. We might liken ELT in public primary schools in Bogotá to a broken bridge. On one side, we find the State, with its illusions and impositions, and on the other, the people who struggle to implement ELT policies in their own way and try not to fall into the water.

This Agenda

I am convinced that schools should be places where children are happy to learn every day. This is what Giroux & Simon (1988) call popular culture. To conclude: this study may help us (both teachers and myself) to understand what is happening in our school when we teach English; and throw light on certain feelings, values and acts which will contribute to the well-being of our community. It has been based on the school where I work and our experiences there, a subject which intrigues me and brings up the following questions:

- What do teachers' stories reveal about ELT in a public primary school where there is not a specialized English teacher?
- What do teachers think about the ELT policies in our school? / What power do teachers have to decide on the handling of ELT policies?
- What have we learned while implementing ELT policies?

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