

## Revising a Foreign Language Curriculum: A Challenging and Enhancing Experience at a Public School in Bogotá

### Revisión del currículo de lengua extranjera: Un reto y una experiencia motivante en un colegio público en Bogotá

**Aurora Ortiz C.**, auroraortiz@hotmail.com, **Martha Camelo G.**, mantistarantis@hotmail.com, **Maria Nelly Martín D.**, marianellymartin@hotmail.com, **Marisol Sarmiento S.**, marisol\_sarmiento@hotmail.com, **Maritza Ruiz M.**, mruizm0@yahoo.com\*  
Instituto Técnico Industrial Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia

Curriculum design essentially improves education standards; however, for teachers it remains a taboo kept for academics. Nevertheless, curriculum design begins with teacher's reflections. It goes from examining situations to piloting and adjusting proposals. This project involved teachers interested in improving the English learning process at a technical public school. The objective was designing a curriculum that conveyed community interests. First, documents describing existing curricular guidelines were analyzed, then surveys were applied, they evidenced strengths and weaknesses of the current program. Data interpretation showed mixed perceptions regarding the English programme among community members. Even teachers had different perceptions about curricular elements presented in school documents. This phenomenon leads us to consider the implications of a project regarding curriculum design.

**Key words:** Curriculum, curriculum design, community interests, data analysis

El diseño curricular es esencial para el mejoramiento educativo, pero los docentes lo creen exclusivo de académicos. Éste parte de la reflexión docente, implica entre otras cosas el diagnóstico de una situación y la implementación de una propuesta. El proyecto fue realizado por docentes interesados en mejorar los procesos de aprendizaje del inglés en un colegio técnico. Se pretendió diseñar un currículo acorde con los intereses de la comunidad. Inicialmente se analizaron los documentos escolares existentes, se aplicaron encuestas que evidenciaron fortalezas y debilidades del programa. La interpretación de datos mostró las diferentes percepciones de la comunidad respecto al programa de inglés; incluso los profesores concebían de manera diferente los elementos curriculares. Esto impulsó la reflexión sobre el diseño curricular.

**Palabras claves:** Currículo, diseño curricular, intereses de la comunidad, análisis de datos

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\***Aurora Ortiz C.** holds a B.A. in English and Spanish from the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Her studies have dealt with foreign language teaching, including the current "Red PROFILE" in-service programme. She teaches English on the primary level at I.T.I. Francisco José de Caldas in Bogotá.

**Martha Camelo G.** holds a B.A. in Modern Languages from the Universidad La Gran Colombia. Her studies have dealt with foreign language teaching, including "Red PROFILE" in-service programme in 2005. She works at I.T.I. Francisco José de Caldas School in Bogotá.

**Maria Nelly Martín D.** holds a B.A. in Philology and Languages from the Universidad Libre. Then she got her specialization in Educational Management. She participated in the "Red PROFILE" in-service programme. She is working at I.T.I. Francisco José de Caldas.

**Marisol Sarmiento S.** holds a B.A. in Spanish and Languages (English, French) from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia. Then she got her specialization in Higher Education Teaching and enrolled in the "Red PROFILE" in-service programme in 2005. She works at I.E.D. Campestre Monteverde.

**Maritza Ruiz M.** holds a B.A. in Philology and Languages from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Then she got her specialization in Applied Linguistics in the Teaching of English. She works at I.T.I. Francisco José de Caldas and as a professor of the Universidad de la Sabana.

## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum conceived as a systematic plan for instruction that can provide the educational community with meaningful learning experiences in both in-school and out-of-school activities (Moore, 2001), proves to be essential since it can give English its place as a subject which allows students to communicate in another language rather than merely obtaining a set of grammar structures. In our case, we decided to study our curriculum because we realized schools are facing rapid changes and learning English plays an important role in students' educational and future life.

Designing a curriculum is a time-consuming task since it implies analyzing the needs of a community, revising existing curriculum, reviewing sources of information related to similar endeavors, conveying community contributions, putting together experiences and expectations and, finally, building a new curricular platform proposal. Every year teachers write documents which contain the guidelines for the school year, but we wonder to what extent we really are doing something other than fulfilling a requirement, and to what extent is what we plan adequate, effective, practical and contextualized. Now we know no matter how serious these efforts have been, they have also ignored many participants and contributions which could have made our teaching programmes better. We expect that the road we have traveled so far and which we will describe in this document, will become a real and tangible contribution to our school curricular platform and will inspire other teachers, even from other subjects, to look at their practice with a critical eye. We also hope that the process we have followed can help other teachers to start processes that can respond to their specific concerns.

The ultimate result of these efforts should be a curricular proposal able to take into account state policies, current authors, publications and models, community member contributions, students' background and our experience as teachers. A curriculum with the former characteristics can

produce positive changes in students' beliefs, attitudes, values and behavior. Needless to say, a curriculum that succeeds in developing students whose beliefs, attitudes and behavior are guided both by values and critical thinking can make a difference in Colombian society. This document reveals a challenge which involves a group of English teachers who want to innovate their daily practice, improve the students' performance and design a plan that include specific aspects of the curriculum.

Along the following pages, we will describe what motivated us to turn to curriculum design and the process we followed once we made the decision to propose a new curriculum for English as a Foreign Language at Instituto Técnico Industrial Francisco José de Caldas. Furthermore, we include the theoretical principles behind our study, the results of the analysis we made of our curriculum and the conclusion to take into account what we plan to do in the future.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Designing a suitable curriculum for our context means not only making contributions based on our experiences or opinions as teachers, but also developing a researcher profile. This profile requires certain actions regarding the exploration of our area of interest -curriculum planning and design. Among these research actions, the next lines summarize the core concepts of our project. Each of them has provided us with information concerning the development of a relevant proposal.

### Curriculum Design

The core of the present project has been curriculum design. Our main concern has been building a practical and accurate curricular proposal for the school, but to be able to do that we have had to walk a long path and to work hard just to see the first shapes of a possible proposal. Let's begin with what a practical curriculum means for the team. A practical curriculum is the application

of a coherent theoretical and methodological framework built in order to guide learning and teaching processes according to a specific context. This is why a needs analysis and the contributions of the members in our community were –and are, in any case- fundamental.

According to the previous panorama, we found Moore's curriculum definition suitable for our project. He defines curriculum as a systematic plan of instruction that should provide our educational community with meaningful learning experiences in both in-school and out-of-school activities (Moore, 2001). We consider the development of a curriculum essential since it can give English its place as a very important subject which will allow students to obtain knowledge about the world, other cultures and the latest advances, which respond to the modern world requirements and education policies that exist in our country. According to them, students should be able to use technology to build their knowledge of the world (M.E.N., 2003). Thus, a curriculum based on a community's contributions produces a sense of ownership and probably makes a plan of instruction more practical, easy to understand and follow since it should be understandable to everybody. These characteristics can encourage teachers to follow and apply a new curriculum by means of which teaching-learning processes can be enhanced with innovative proposals and strategies. Participation can also encourage pupils to take a more active role in their learning processes (Santos, 2001).

The most suitable curriculum definition for our purposes is the following: An operative curriculum means making decisions about the elements it may include and which are relevant according to the situation at school. It also implies suggesting courses of action rather than criticizing existing proposals. A curriculum becomes suitable as it takes into account students' needs, human resources, critical viewpoints about existing conditions and the need for adjustment and innovation.

Regarding curriculum design and models, we have found data-based literature that confirmed

what we can call "our beliefs and assumptions". In other cases, information obtained about this area provided us with understanding platform elements and design processes. Authors like Nunan (1992) offer an insight in to the design of a curriculum according to necessities of the students, whereas authors like Moore (2001) consider the components of a curriculum to include a needs analysis, syllabus design, task selection and materials design, methodology, assessment and evaluation, ongoing program support such as teacher instruction. We also looked for curricular proposals in the Colombian context and feel that Colombian experiences might be worth reviewing or replicating. We considered a model proposed by Iafrancesco (1998) which seemed to be a source of enrichment for our project.

Let's review briefly the model this Colombian author developed based on his concerns on how to make the General Law of Education more practical and down-to-earth. His model has been put into action in different universities, high schools, primary and pre-school institutes, which shows its potential. According to Iafrancesco's model, it is necessary to create a curricular proposal that responds to the quality education requirements demanded by Colombia in the XXI century. Iafrancesco's model shows some characteristics that correspond to the guidelines we want for guiding our proposal. In the first place, Iafrancesco's curriculum focuses on the person, not on the contents: It is student-centered. This implies students' participation in decision making about topics and tasks, among others. In consequence, participative and appealing learning experiences are brought to light. It also means contents are organized and developed according to students' needs and interests. Another important contribution of his work is his invitation to engage in critical evaluation, adjustment and redesign of curriculum to fulfill Colombian context needs.

Having read his proposal, we decided to look carefully at some of the key concepts Iafrancesco

(1998) discusses since these ideas could enlighten our understanding and the revision plan for our curriculum:

- **Anthropological and Axiologic Inspiration:** Values are the axis of the human being “as a whole”. Knowledge and skills need to be directed by consistent beliefs.

- **Democratic Participation:** Democracy allows community members to participate and creates a sense of “ownership” and commitment so people are willing to assume responsibilities.

- **Cross Curricular Nature:** Respectful, open and consistent attitudes take an important role here, since a cross curricular proposal embodies various communities’ group expectations and also affects everybody’s actions.

- **Flexibility:** The curriculum can be modified without losing its axis and should always be guided by a serious, conscientious plan of action.

- **Coherence:** It is given by the community’s needs. A coherent curriculum provides settings and experiences that foster development and that guides a process with, hopefully, a minimum of traumas.

- **Realism:** Decisions should respond to the reality of the community. Realism goes from the conception of an idea to the actions which reveal it.

- **Project for the Future:** The course of a process should be respected and evaluated. Evaluation provides information that can enhance future processes, since it allows determining what was successful, or what was not successful. Keeping an eye on process helps us to change the future.

- **Projection:** No process can be conceived without the awareness of its future impact, even if the manifestations are not immediate.

- **Personalization:** Support with new ideas and concepts that can be integrated with the context.

These principles respond to many of our concerns since they focused on some of the weaknesses of the English programme we had experienced along our practice. Let’s take cross curricular nature, for example. To many teachers,

this concept has to do with only a coherent dynamic of contents among the various subjects taught at school. Bearing in mind that the school’s PEI (Institutional Education Project) is “Education of Industrial Leaders”, going beyond the academic connections seems more than relevant. Negotiation, tolerance and acceptance become core concepts and practice which permeate all community members from every group at school. Cross curricular nature becomes, then, a positive practice which is enhanced and promoted from every in-school and out-of-school scenario.

A curricular platform for language learning involves reflection and coherence regarding the views of language, language learning, and the general educational philosophy we hold. The previous elements would result in a model to put the curriculum into operation. That is the reason we also have to establish some guidelines on aspects like second language acquisition, teaching methodology and teaching processes. We will review these aspects in the following paragraphs.

### **Second Language Acquisition**

Next, we focused our attention on the Second Language Acquisition process. It is a long process which involves several essential social and cultural components in order to develop communicative competence in the specific context.

To Brown (1994), the following are aspects of a theory of second language acquisition:

- A theory of second language acquisition includes understanding, in general, of what language is, what learning is, and for the classroom context, what teaching is.

- Knowledge of children’s learning of their first language provides essential insights to an understanding of L2 acquisition.

- Second language learning is a part of and adheres to general principles of human learning and intelligence.

- Inevitable aspects of this process are errors, from which learners and teachers can gain further insight.

These aspects are central to our proposal since they will shape decisions about teaching-learning approaches and methodology and permit choices regarding guidelines of a curricular platform.

### **Teaching Methodology and Teaching Processes**

Reflecting on what language is and how it is learnt, let us find common ground, reach agreements and make decisions on how a foreign language is taught and how it will be taught at our school. Taking into account the schools' population and the context of the school, we looked for approaches to guide learning processes successfully and flexible enough to let students and teachers work freely according to their needs and skills. Teachers at school work with the communicative approach, but we believe that using elements from other approaches will enhance teaching and learning processes.

Just as important as raising awareness on learning processes is raising awareness on teaching processes. Teaching is more than a practice: It is a process that requires preparation and commitment because the way teaching goes affects the way people learn. In consequence, teaching must be contextualized, adjusted to pupils' needs and to resources available, so advantages can be taken from every possible situation (Katz & Chard, 1989). In the end, the purpose of teaching is guiding learning processes and making them easier and more effective.

The following section deals with the instruments and procedures we used in order to establish the community's needs regarding the existing English programme. The sources of data will be presented briefly along with the results and discussion.

### **OUR NEEDS ANALYSIS**

Defining the focus of this project was a process which took us from realizing our interests to proposing a preliminary study for further innovation (see Appendix 4). The needs analysis we carried out had as its main purpose designing a curricular platform based on the community's contributions.

We took two different sources of data for the needs analysis. The first one was the analysis of the state of the existing curriculum and the second one was a set of surveys applied to different community members.

### **The Existing Curriculum**

Teachers' experience is always a good source of information and questions. When we gathered to take part in a Profile in-service programme, we realized how similar our concerns were as well as how rich and varied our backgrounds were. One of the activities within that programme was analyzing the existing curriculum at school. We had to present its elements to other colleagues. We believe this was our first experience as a team since we could share our opinions on strengths and weaknesses of the English programme. Then we were asked to write a document to report on the state of the existing curriculum. This was the starting point since we got interested in the ideas that came up when writing this document. The next step was engaging in a project in order to improve the existing curriculum at our school. At this point we realized how important it was to explore other community member's beliefs about the school's English curriculum. We decided then to design a set of surveys to carry out that exploration. The following paragraphs show this process in more detail.

First of all, we focused on the current situation at school such as strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the Area Plan submitted by the Humanities Department, which is in charge of Spanish and English. This document embodies both subjects within a single framework. Therefore, there are no different objectives for the subjects, no difference between the processes of learning the mother tongue and a foreign language. Also, both subjects had the same methodology. Although both subjects have a communicative purpose, we think each of them deserve to have an identity given by suitable strategies for developing students' competences according to the requirements their natures entail.

## Surveys

Regarding the surveys, we mainly focused on the student's performance, strengths, weaknesses and needs. Nevertheless, we also submitted the survey to parents, teachers and managing staff. As mentioned previously, we wanted to explore the community's beliefs. The surveys also had the objective of creating an inclusive environment where different viewpoints and contributions could enhance a future curriculum.

Questions in the surveys varied from 10 to 18 depending on the population they were given to (see Appendixes 1, 2, 3). There were three types of questions. In the first type people were asked to rank various possibilities from 1 to 5, where 1 was the minimum score and 5 was the maximum. In the second type people were asked to assign number 1 or 2, where 1 represented a strength and 2 a weakness. Finally, there were yes/no questions which required people to justify their answers. At the end of the survey, there was a space where participants could write any contribution they considered relevant.

The topics of the questions were oriented mainly to methodology, perceptions about regular English lessons, efficiency of the existing programme, evaluation, objectives, students' role and profile and, finally, resources.

After applying the surveys, each member of the team had to codify a set of them (see Appendix 4). When codifying, we began noticing some relevant facts at the same time we were interpreting data. In the next stage we gathered and discussed our findings. At this point, we noticed that some information appeared to be contradictory. This fact made us look for an explanation to such results in order to identify possible causes and solutions in order to avoid drawbacks in a curricular platform.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Existing Curriculum

An analysis of the state of the existing EFL curriculum permitted us to identify interesting information regarding aspects like goals, objectives,

time, methodology, programmes, materials, evaluation and so on. We analyzed the sections of the document and, as we did so, perceived a lack of connection among them; the reader will probably experience it too as he/she reads the findings in each section.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the Humanities Department are expressed with modern pedagogical terminology, but there is no clear evidence of the impact of all this modernity in students' learning process. The next elements presented are the Mission and Vision of the Department. Although the contents of these items are coherent with the school's Mission and Vision, there is not a key contribution from the Language Department to the school's PEI. Implementation of activities which are intended to facilitate pupils' integrated development is mentioned, yet there are no clear strategies related to language skills development which contributes to school Mission and Vision. It seems more than fair to ask if the intentions expressed are realistic, bearing in mind what realism is for lafrancesco (1998).

**Justification:** It shows the relation between communicative competences development and the promotion of social processes, but there are no tangible examples or any results from that relation. Another aspect that called our attention was that both processes, learning a mother tongue and learning a foreign language, are embodied under the same justification. Moreover, a list of five communicative competences appears unified under the heading of "competences development" in both of the processes mentioned above. These facts show that the two languages are seen and treated as one issue. It is problematic since communicative competences are directly related to mental processes and thinking structure. Nevertheless, "thinking" in a foreign language does not seem as easy, fast or effective as "thinking" in our mother tongue. The previous also applies to communication skills. Clearly, listing a set of competences to develop (in both the explicit or in the hidden curriculum) is not enough. There also

should be included suitable strategies which allow pupils and teachers to begin developing competences to a certain extent according to age, grade, strengths, weaknesses, needs, etc. Ideally, teachers and students should revise and discharge useless or unsuccessful strategies and replace them with new ones. There is no clear projection in the sense expressed by lafrancesco (1998). There is no evidence of awareness of these learning processes' impact on future learners.

**Diagnosis:** Here it is stated that pupils experience difficulties in both oral and written levels. There is a possible cause suggested, however, there is no evidence to support either the difficulties or the causes. The instruments to conduct the diagnosis are not mentioned. The results of a diagnosis point out weaknesses rather than strengths or needs.

**Methodology:** Constructivism is shown as the leading approach. Action research is also mentioned here, but there is not a clear link between them. In spite of these facts, it is worth pointing out that approaches which give a central role to students' awareness are mentioned here. Cross-curricular connections among subjects are also mentioned in this section. The next item deals with strategies derived from these approaches mentioned. The cross-curricular connections and strategies are used as a cohesive element that will be employed in academic and technical subjects to contribute to pupils' academic and personal development. Nevertheless, there is not a single reference as to how teachers came to choose these methods and strategies. Topics and methods unification is also mentioned as a way to integrate subjects and unify knowledge.

**Articulation between the EFL curriculum and the school PEI:** The first concept presented is that effective communication is a distinctive feature of leaders. After that, some extra curricular activities which promote values are shown as another contribution to the main goal of the PEI. Finally, some key constructivist principles are brought to light as another commonality with the PEI. Although

the former concepts and principles are core concepts to the PEI, it seems there is something lacking, probably some coherence. There is not a clear path that shows how this curriculum provides settings and experiences that foster pupils' development and that guide a learning process.

**Curriculum:** This part contains a brief reference to three different ways of evaluation but it does not give any consideration to assessment, neither does it mention instruments for evaluating. Moreover, evaluation is used only for making judgments on what is good, acceptable or desirable as regards pupils' performance. It is never considered a process for providing feedback to improve instructional activities, programmes or courses of action (Bailey, 1998). This fact is a big loss since evaluation is never considered a tool for adjusting a course of action or the curriculum itself. In lafrancesco's words (1998), we could say that there does not seem to be a clear project for the future which, based on serious evaluation, allows determining what can be replicated and what should be modified.

### Surveys

Surveys analysis implied a process that required our ability to observe and explain our ability to generate theory and, more relevant, the ability to implement practical actions such as interventions, program designs, action models, social and organizational policies, and change initiatives. Practical solutions would be derived from a critical, empirically-grounded, action-oriented research.

Regarding surveys, we also conducted a detailed analysis of their results. Reading, coding and interpreting the answers was a challenge. Since we had three groups of participants –because the managing staff did not participate- we divided ourselves into three teams. Each had a set of surveys and each member of the team had to codify a group of them in a format we designed to keep a record of the findings. While we were codifying, we began noticing some relevant facts as we were also interpreting data. Next, we met and began talking

about the experience and asked others for help with the tricky questions, since action research focuses on understanding the research situation rather than on proving or disproving a theory. A format which allowed us to keep a record of the answers was designed. Initially, it permitted us to read information horizontally but suddenly we realized we could also read information vertically (see Appendix 4). Thus, we read data collected in more than one way. In qualitative research, researchers are to examine each component of a study, constantly framing questions and theories as they progress in the research process. Grounded theory does not attempt to prove a hypothesis. A theory "grounded" in the data emerges from observation and constant comparison (Simmons & Gregory, 2003).

This let us realize facts which were rather contradictory at first glance. For example, although teachers subscribe their practice to the communicative approach, students perceive classes as grammar lessons rather than functional-based lessons. We put results under the categories we designed bearing in mind the aspects we wanted to have an insight. These headings allowed us to have a clear reference on the topics they conveyed. The next lines summarize our findings. Each heading corresponds to an aspect explored in the surveys.

### **Methodologies Used**

The perception parents had about the most used methodology in English classes strongly differed from the methodology teachers in general assert they use. Parents see teaching based on academic contents as the generalized methodology, while teachers assert they use Communicative Approach methodology. On the other hand, they agreed on the fact that the Natural method and Whole Language Approach are less used.

Regarding students, sixth grade students said they enjoyed methodologies that include interest centers and clubs, ninth grade students said they liked methodologies that include reading activities, eleventh grade students, curiously, said they liked playing games. The three groups of students liked

methodologies which include activities regarding translation and videocassettes. Writing was the least-mentioned aspect regarding activities or methodologies.

In general, students are keen on the concept of a methodology based on teaching language as a tool for knowledge acquisition, which corresponds to Whole Language principles as understood by authors like Butler (1987) and Weaver (1984). When it comes to teachers and parents, they do not share the same opinion. It also became clear that neither group is keen on methodologies based on teaching focused on academic contents.

Regarding preferences about modes of work, this varies with the age group. This could mean that a wide variety of activities combining different modes of work can be used in English classes. Its success and students' involvements will depend on teachers' planning and skills for managing the classroom.

### **Communicative Skills Priority in English Classes**

Concerning this aspect, parents pointed to speaking skills as the most important, maybe because they see it as the least developed skill in their children. Teachers and most students give equal importance to all skills. Some students marked the box indicating that the four skills are equally important, but at the same time marked reading and writing skills as the least relevant. This is a phenomenon worth exploring.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the English Programme**

This item conveyed various topics like teaching effectiveness, contents relevance, real impact of the programme in students' daily life, evaluation, methodologies, community participation in programme design, among others (see Appendix 1). The purpose of these items was, in the first place, to determine the aspects perceived as successful in the existing English programme so we could keep them in a new proposal. Secondly,

determining the ones seen as weaknesses so they could be improved.

We obtained varied, even opposite, answers to the items. For instance, parents and teachers' opinions regarding weaknesses and strengths were contradictory. Teachers believe pupils' role in their own learning process is a weakness because, apparently, students do not do anything more than what they are instructed. On the contrary, parents see pupils' learning as a strength. This viewpoint is supported by the observation of their children doing homework. On the other hand, regarding community participation, both groups agreed on the fact that educational community participation in programme designing is a weakness. Regarding participation, most students said they contribute to the elaboration of English programmes and teachers accept their contributions.

While most students believe the effectiveness of English teaching is a strength, there is still a group that believes it is a weakness. The perception as regards the effectiveness of English teaching as a weakness could possibly be caused by the lack of a sense of achievement, among some students. Despite the fact that no markers were established to indicate effectiveness, the answers show how students have a different perception vis-à-vis the effectiveness of English teaching. This is also true for students' role in their own learning process. Some of them see it as a strength, while others consider it a weakness. There are also mixed opinions about evaluation processes and contents sequencing.

Another not evident aspect that can be considered a strength of the English programme is the variety of strategies and activities used in class. This contributes to promoting a positive attitude among students towards the subject since some of them are able to say they have had "positive experiences" regarding English. This can also increase self-confidence and motivation regarding performance in a foreign language.

The aspect mentioned above can be the explanation for students' preference concerning

English. This works both ways. Successful experiences foster motivation and commitment, while negative experiences result in students' dislike of English.

### **Formal Evaluation of Students' Performance**

Results regarding evaluation were also varied. Parents think teachers give a lot of relevance to behavior in the classroom, followed by attitude and creativity as criteria to assess their children's performance/skill, while tasks and extra class activities are not that relevant. Teachers also give relevance to creativity, but do not consciously accept the importance they give to extra class activities and homework.

Most pupils differ with both perceptions; they think values, contents and teamwork are central to evaluation done by teachers. Students' individual attitudes and learning processes are poorly mentioned in the evaluation processes.

It is possible that the different perceptions identified show that evaluation is still seen as an accumulative process rather than a formative one. This could also be why students' individual attitudes, learning processes and, in many cases, values appear to be neglected.

Highly related with evaluation is the students' profile for each grade. Most parents agreed that they did not know what the students' profile was for each grade. On the contrary, teachers and students say they have a clear picture of the profile each grade requires. These opposing answers can be explained by the lack of socialization of this aspect with parents.

Although this aspect seems perfectly clear, there still remains the weak relation between evaluation processes and students' profile. A formative process should contribute to profile students according to the level they are on. Since evaluation appears to be an accumulative process, questions such as the following emerged: Is there really such clarity regarding students' profile? Is the profile grounded on grammar topics rather than on skills management?

### **English Programme**

Regarding programmes and objectives for English as a subject, parents manifested they do not know them; they do not know of the resources that can support the learning processes at school either.

Teachers pointed out the main objective of English to be the development of communicative skills and competences. According to them, English should serve as support for learning other subjects.

This can be explained by the fact that teachers agree on the general objective of English, but they have not established a clear set of objectives according to grades. Although teachers said it was important to make English a cross-curricular subject, there is not an objective in the programme towards this aim.

The lack of a formal set of objectives, rather than a hidden one, explains parents' lack of knowledge about the objective and the programme itself.

When asked about the need for a new and specific curriculum for English, many teachers said it was not pertinent, while others said it was necessary. These apparent contradictions can be a consequence of the various views regarding curriculum and its components. Those teachers who want a separate programme for English support their claim on the need of better instructional programmes. Teachers who do not want a separate programme support their claims on the argument that the unified English-Spanish curriculum benefits the learning process, since both entail languages linguistic skills.

Another aspect that must be taken into account for the accomplishment of programmes is the resources available at school. Based on teachers' answers, it can be said that there are resources at school, but they are probably not used as they should be. Teachers also mention the need of training for using different resources and support for those resources. These elements can be linked as follows: Although the school has resources such as the language laboratory, not every teacher uses it because they are not trained or because it is not properly functioning, resulting in a waste of time.

### **Learning Attitudes and Strategies**

Parents were asked if they considered that their children had independent learning attitudes according to their age. Most of them said yes. Only a small group of parents said they did not believe their children were independent learners.

Parents mentioned the use of audiovisual aids, repeated reading and asking older people for help as some of the learning strategies of their children.

According to the contradiction shown in the teachers' answers regarding learning strategies, it is possible to say that there is not a clear idea of what learning strategies are, how to use them or in which skills they may be more successful. It is also possible that teachers do not have a clear distinction among learning and teaching strategies.

Keeping in mind these results, it is also possible to contradict parents' belief regarding their children's independent learning attitude. Parents may have a misconception about what learning strategies are and what independent study is, or, at least, they have no total clarity about these processes.

If the objective of schools' P.E.I. is fostering industrial leadership, it is clear that a process and attitude which promote students' ownership of their learning processes should be enhanced. This is why teachers, parents and students should be encouraged to direct attention to learning attitudes and strategies that will eventually promote independent learning.

### **Further Suggestions**

There was a space left for participants to write further suggestions or contributions. Information submitted in the space dealt mainly with time devoted to English lessons, technical English regarding schools' context, innovation in programmes and methodology, and, finally, the implementation of "bilingualism" in public schools.

All these suggestions appear to be more demand-oriented than commitment-oriented. Teachers and parents asked for improvement, but did not contribute with ideas for achieving what they proposed.

Regarding time devoted to English lessons, some parents and teachers commented on the need for more lessons per week. The fact that it was not a generalized suggestion may be interpreted in many forms. Anyway, we think this aspect requires further exploration.

Other comments alluded to the need of a serious and qualified Technical English programme regarding the school's context. However, no one expressed a clear definition or purpose for such programme, neither what "qualified" meant to them.

Innovation in programmes and methodology was also mentioned in this section, but there was no further development on this topic.

Finally, some participants referred to the implementation of bilingualism at public schools, focusing on how important it could be for pupils, but there were not any proposals or contributions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When analyzing the existing curriculum, we wondered why it did not seem successful. The answer relied on the fact that, according to our findings, a successful curriculum requires that community members become active participants, researchers and authors and not only "evaluators" or "performers". A curriculum is meaningful to the people who have helped design it.

The next concern was why it did not seem to be operative. This could be a result of the multiplicity of beliefs and attitudes towards English as a subject. Even among teachers, who are supposed to agree on the instructional programme, there are various interpretations of the same item. We do not try to omit the importance of multiplicity, but we think the lack of agreement and commitment causes teachers to follow different and improvised instructional programmes.

Regarding the results of the surveys, we can begin with the mixed reactions among students, parents and teachers. This phenomenon can be caused by the lack of unified criteria regarding English as a subject which relates with the lack of

communication among different groups of the community. It can also be caused by the different experiences towards English learning. For example, students' preferences regarding English can be based on successful experiences that foster motivation and commitment, or negative experiences that result in students' dislike of English. Consequently, the different reactions and perceptions that community members had about some aspects of the English programme showed the need of providing scenarios for discussing curriculum and curricular proposals, where teachers, parents, students and even managing staff can get unified criteria for English teaching.

The different opinions regarding evaluation processes can be the result of the lack of a unified evaluation process, the lack of unified criteria when evaluating and the lack of a new vision on evaluation. Then, clear evaluation guidelines become a central element when designing a curricular platform.

Regarding the correlation between the English programme and the school's P.E.I., it is clear that if the objective of schools' P.E.I. is fostering industrial leadership, processes and attitudes which promote students' ownership of their learning processes should be enhanced.

The fact that students see reading and writing skills as the least relevant and that parents see speaking as the least developed could be explained by a lack of confidence in pupils' performance regarding speaking. It could also be related to a lack of practice in listening. Whatever the cause may be, the implementation of an English programme whose contents and methodology favor the equal development of the four skills can contribute to defeat the idea that one skill is more important than the other.

The varied preferences shown by community members made us think that it is imperative to look for methodologies which can satisfy the wide range of needs and likes. The methodologies chosen should be able to encompass teachers' different practices, students' backgrounds and parents' quests and policies demands. They should be also

coherent enough to guide processes successfully. Moreover, these methodologies should also be flexible enough to allow participants' contributions.

Bearing in mind the multiplicity of teachers' backgrounds and interests, we decided to use an Eclectic Methodology based mainly on the Project Work approach, Task-based approach and Whole Language approach. They become a suitable complement for a Communicative approach. Project work gives pupils a "set of steps" they can follow at their own pace in order to accomplish an objective. These steps provide them with a learning path and permit them to see the results of their learning process in artifacts. This approach responds to the understanding of classroom context and human learning and intelligence mentioned by Brown. The Task-based approach helps teachers to guide intellectual development through suitable learning experiences which can promote the development and refining of communicative competences. This approach takes advantage of successful experiences and skills used when learning a first language in order to learn a second one, as shown in one of the principles mentioned above. The Whole Language approach answers questions about the role of English. English as a language and subject is now conceived as a source of information about any topic and whose mastery is achieved by practicing with communicative purposes. This means errors and correction build language. This concept agrees with the place errors are given in Brown's work (1994). Finally, the Communicative approach can be successfully combined with contributions from the other approaches, enhancing the understanding of second language acquisition.

Changes that will allow for improvement in the teaching and learning processes at I.T.I Francisco José de Caldas School are urgently needed. All community members should take part in it, but teachers are the ones that should lead the process.

Bearing in mind the need of an operative curriculum, we should begin decisions about the elements it may include and which are relevant

according to the situation at school. We should also suggest courses of action rather than criticize the existing programmes. All community members should take an active role in the design of instructional programmes. The school should provide scenarios for parents' and students' contributions in order to foster a sense of ownership.

The methodology presented in the project provides a relevant role to pupils in their learning process and their responsibility towards knowledge acquisition. Learning can no longer be only teachers' responsibility. Pupils should be instructed not only on contents but also on how they can learn better. Independent learning should be part of the pedagogical model at I.T.I Francisco José de Caldas School. Teachers should also begin with this process by implementing independent learning strategies and a learning environment in their teaching practice.

In order to improve teaching practice, teachers need to find the opportunities for continuous training. This will provide innovation and success to both learning and teaching processes. This can furnish teachers with more information, knowledge and tools to change their contexts, taking into account that English learning is relevant in our environment.

This project has been a huge task to accomplish. We are not finished yet, but we do believe change is possible by having the community participate, using what we have, setting clear goals, simplifying processes to make them more effective, evaluating actions taken, etc. This assertion can be interpreted as dreaming about better perspectives, if you wish, but the only way to make this dream come true is taking action, taking the first steps towards improvement. Teachers tend to be dreamers. The task is now to become executors.

## LIMITATIONS

When analyzing results from the surveys, it was clear that some concepts had various interpretations according to the group that was

answering it. This represented a problem since it did not let us clearly establish facts as opposed to beliefs. Management staff was not involved enough in the process of this project. Only two coordinators answered the survey.

Teamwork is interesting but sometimes it is not easy since getting an agreement can be complex and time-consuming, especially when such complex topics are tackled along the whole process.

It was not possible to gather information from students and parents of primary school because of time restrictions. Something similar happened with parents of eleventh grade students who did not send back the surveys. As a consequence, it was impossible to include their opinions and contributions.

At writing this article, we had just begun considering the contents for each grade, since doing this implies an active participation of all teaching staff at school in order to define a pertinent and satisfactory sequence of contents from pre-school to eleventh grade.

### FURTHER RESEARCH

Hopefully, we will be able to continue with the present project with the participation and support from the community. That is why we plan to socialize the project at school and invite the community to continue with us in the effort to establish cross-curricular relationships and achieve English being combined with other subjects.

We would also like to continue receiving support from the SED with programmes like English Teachers Networks, PFPD programmes and proficiency programmes.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank fellow teachers John Jairo Viáfara, Melba Libia Cárdenas and other

members of PROFILE PFPD programme for kindly helping to foster our project development as well as the students, parents and teachers who willingly participated in the project.

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## APPENDIX I: ENCUESTA PARA ESTUDIANTES

En la actualidad un grupo representativo de maestros del Departamento de Humanidades está llevando a cabo un proyecto de investigación-innovación en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera con el fin de reestructurar la plataforma curricular de esta asignatura. En este proceso la participación de los estudiantes es garantía de validez y confiabilidad, por este motivo lo invitamos a diligenciar de la manera más completa y con el máximo de objetividad posible la siguiente encuesta. Agradecemos su colaboración.

FECHA \_\_\_\_\_ JORNADA: MAÑANA \_\_\_ TARDE \_\_\_  
 NIVEL: BÁSICA PRIMARIA \_\_\_ BÁSICA SECUNDARIA \_\_\_ MEDIA \_\_\_

1. Asigne un puntaje a cada una de las siguientes actividades de acuerdo a su gusto por ellas, el número 5 representa el mayor puntaje, mientras el número 1 representa el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Presentaciones orales.					
b. Lectura de textos.					
c. Producción escrita.					
d. Traducciones.					
e. Actividades con casetes y videos.					
f. Actividades que involucran trabajo manual.					
g. Juegos.					

2. Marque con una X la forma en que más le gusta realizar las actividades propuestas en clase.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Individual.					
b. En pareja.					
c. En grupo.					

3. Asigne un puntaje a cada una de las siguientes metodologías de acuerdo a la efectividad que usted le atribuye, el número 5 representa el mayor puntaje, mientras el número 1 representa el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Aprendizaje basado en actividades con una finalidad comunicativa.					
b. Aprendizaje basado en actividades físicas.					
c. Aprendizaje basado en clubes y centros de interés.					
d. Aprendizaje basado en tareas y proyectos.					
e. Enseñanza enfocada en los contenidos académicos.					
f. Enseñanza del idioma como instrumento de adquisición de conocimiento.					

4. Asigne un puntaje a cada una de las siguientes habilidades comunicativas de acuerdo a la prioridad que usted le otorga, número 5 otorga el mayor valor y el número 1 el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Hablar					
b. Leer					
c. Escribir					
d. Escuchar					
e. Todas las anteriores					

5. ¿Sus sugerencias son tenidas en cuenta por el docente en la programación de la asignatura?

SI \_\_ NO \_\_

6. Califique los siguientes aspectos del programa de inglés vigente como fortaleza o debilidad. El número 1 representa una fortaleza mientras que el número 2 representa una debilidad.

ITEM	1	2
a. Efectividad de la enseñanza del inglés		
b. Pertinencia de los contenidos		
c. Rol de los estudiantes en su formación.		
d. Sistema de evaluación.		

7. Marque con una X los aspectos que son tenidos en cuenta por el docente en el momento de la evaluación.

ITEM	
a. Contenidos de la asignatura	
b. Tareas y trabajo extraescolar	
c. Trabajo en equipo	
d. Procesos de aprendizaje	
e. Aptitudes individuales	
f. Comportamiento dentro de la clase	
g. Actitud disciplinaria	
h. Creatividad	
i. Valores	
j. Otro __ ¿Cuál?	

8. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes modalidades de evaluación se aplican en su clase de inglés?

ITEM	
a. Autoevaluación.	
b. Coevaluación.	
c. Heteroevaluación.	

9. ¿Cree usted que el aprendizaje del inglés es importante para su vida? SI \_\_ NO \_\_

10. Escoja la opción que representa el nivel de preferencia que ocupa el inglés entre las asignaturas que cursa en el instituto.

ITEM	
a. Está entre las primeras.	
b. Está en la mitad de mis preferencias.	
c. Está en el último lugar de mis preferencias.	

11. ¿Ha trabajado en actividades variadas y nuevas en la clase de inglés? SI \_\_ NO \_\_

GRACIAS POR SU VALIOSA COLABORACIÓN.

## APPENDIX 2: ENCUESTA PARA DOCENTES

En la actualidad un grupo representativo de maestros del Departamento de Humanidades está llevando a cabo un proyecto de investigación-innovación en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera con el fin de reestructurar la plataforma curricular de esta asignatura. En este proceso la participación de los docentes es garantía de validez y confiabilidad, por este motivo lo invitamos a diligenciar de la manera más completa y con el máximo de objetividad posible la siguiente encuesta. Agradecemos su colaboración.

FECHA \_\_\_\_\_ JORNADA: MAÑANA \_\_\_ TARDE \_\_\_  
 NIVEL: BÁSICA PRIMARIA \_\_\_ BÁSICA SECUNDARIA \_\_\_ MEDIA \_\_\_

1. Asigne un puntaje a cada una de las metodologías, dando prioridad a la(s) que más utiliza en su práctica. Marque con una X la casilla de su elección, recuerde que el número 5 otorga el mayor valor, mientras que el número 1 otorga el menor valor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Enseñanza comunicativa					
b. Respuesta física total					
c. Método natural					
d. Aprendizaje basado en tareas y proyectos					
e. Enseñanza enfocada en el contenido académico					
f. Lenguaje integral					
h. ¿Otro? ¿Cuál?					

2. ¿A cuál de las habilidades comunicativas le da prioridad en su clase? Asigne un puntaje teniendo en cuenta que el número 5 otorga el mayor valor y el número 1 el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Hablar					
b. Leer					
c. Escribir					
d. Escuchar					
e. Todas las anteriores					

3. Califique los siguientes aspectos del programa de inglés vigente como fortaleza o debilidad. El número 1 representa una fortaleza mientras que el número 2 representa una debilidad.

ITEM	1	2
a. Efectividad de la enseñanza del inglés		
b. Pertinencia de los contenidos		
c. Secuencia de los contenidos		
d. Rol de los estudiantes en su formación		
e. Metodologías utilizadas		
f. Sistemas de evaluación		
g. Participación de la comunidad educativa en la programación		
h. Otro__ ¿Cuál?		

4. ¿Ha notado motivación en su hijo para el aprendizaje del inglés?

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5. Asigne un valor a cada uno de las siguientes opciones de acuerdo a la que usted otorga mayor importancia o énfasis en su evaluación del estudiante. El número 5 otorga el mayor valor y el número 1 el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Contenidos de la asignatura					
b. Tareas y trabajo extraescolar					
c. Trabajo en equipo					
d. Procesos de aprendizaje					
e. Aptitudes individuales					
f. Comportamiento dentro de la clase					
g. Actitud disciplinaria					
h. Creatividad					
i. Valores					
j. Otro __ ¿Cuál?					

6. ¿Conoce usted el perfil que debe tener el estudiante al finalizar cada grado? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

7. ¿Conoce usted la programación y los objetivos de la asignatura? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

8. ¿Sabe usted si la programación anual se cumple? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

9. ¿Conoce usted los recursos con los que cuenta la comunidad educativa para apoyar la enseñanza del inglés? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

10. ¿Está usted de acuerdo con la intensidad horaria de inglés (dos horas semanales)? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

11. ¿Considera usted que su(s) hijo(s) puede(n) definirse como estudiante que, de acuerdo a su grado y edad, ejerce(n) un aprendizaje independiente? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

12. ¿Considera usted que los estudiantes a su cargo pueden definirse como estudiantes que, de acuerdo a su grado y edad, ejercen un aprendizaje independiente? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

13. ¿Qué estrategias de aprendizaje ha visto que sus hijos empleen? Mencione dos.

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14. Organice jerárquicamente las habilidades de acuerdo a la importancia que usted le otorga en el mundo actual. El número 5 otorga el mayor valor, mientras que el número 1 representa el menor valor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Conversación					
b. Escritura					
c. Escucha					
d. Lectura					

15. Si usted tiene un aporte relevante que no se haya tenido en cuenta, por favor regístrelo en este espacio.

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GRACIAS POR SU VALIOSA COLABORACIÓN.

### APPENDIX 3: ENCUESTA PARA PADRES

En la actualidad un grupo representativo de maestros del Departamento de Humanidades está llevando a cabo un proyecto de investigación-innovación en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera con el fin de reestructurar la plataforma curricular de esta asignatura. En este proceso la participación de los padres de familia es garantía de validez y confiabilidad, por este motivo lo invitamos a diligenciar de la manera más completa y con el máximo de objetividad posible la siguiente encuesta. Agradecemos su colaboración.

FECHA \_\_\_\_\_ JORNADA: MAÑANA \_\_\_ TARDE \_\_\_  
 NIVEL AL CUAL PERTENECE SU HIJO: BÁSICA PRIMARIA \_\_\_ BÁSICA SECUNDARIA \_\_\_  
 MEDIA \_\_\_

1. Marque con una X las metodologías que usted está enterado los docentes emplean en las clases de inglés con sus hijos.

ITEM	
a. Enseñanza comunicativa	
b. Respuesta física total	
c. Método natural	
d. Aprendizaje basado en tareas y proyectos	
e. Enseñanza enfocada en el contenido académico	
f. Lenguaje integral	
g. ¿Otro? ¿Cuál?	

2. ¿A cuál de las siguientes habilidades se le da prioridad en las clases de inglés de su(s) hijo(s)? Asigne un puntaje teniendo en cuenta que el número 5 otorga el mayor valor y el número 1 el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Hablar					
b. Leer					
c. Escribir					
d. Escuchar					
e. Todas las anteriores					

3. Califique los siguientes aspectos del programa de inglés vigente como fortaleza o debilidad. El número 1 representa una fortaleza mientras que el número 2 representa una debilidad.

ITEM	1	2
a. Efectividad de la enseñanza del inglés		
b. Pertinencia de los contenidos		
c. Secuencia de los contenidos		
d. Rol de los estudiantes en su formación		
e. Metodologías utilizadas		
f. Sistemas de evaluación		
g. Participación de la comunidad educativa en la programación		
h. Otro ___ ¿Cuál?		

4. ¿Ha notado motivación en su hijo para el aprendizaje del inglés? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

5. Asigne un valor a cada uno de las siguientes opciones de acuerdo con su percepción de lo que prima al momento de evaluar al estudiante. El número 5 otorga el mayor valor y el número 1 el menor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Contenidos de la asignatura					
b. Tareas y trabajo extraescolar					
c. Trabajo en equipo					
d. Procesos de aprendizaje					
e. Aptitudes individuales					
f. Comportamiento dentro de la clase					
g. Actitud disciplinaria					
h. Creatividad					
i. Valores					
j. Otro ___ ¿Cuál?					

6. ¿Conoce usted el perfil que debe tener el estudiante al finalizar cada grado? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

7. ¿Conoce usted la programación y los objetivos de la asignatura? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

8. ¿Sabe usted si la programación anual de la asignatura se cumple? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

9. ¿Conoce usted los recursos con los que cuenta la comunidad educativa para apoyar la enseñanza del inglés? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

10. ¿Está usted de acuerdo con la intensidad horaria de inglés (2 horas semanales)? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_  
 ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

11. ¿Qué estrategias propone para optimizar el uso de la sala de bilingüismo?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

12. ¿Considera usted que sus hijos pueden definirse como estudiantes que, de acuerdo a su grado y edad, ejercen un aprendizaje independiente? SI \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

13. ¿Qué estrategias de aprendizaje ha visto que sus hijos empleen? Mencione 2

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

14. Organice jerárquicamente las habilidades en las que cree que puede emplear mayor número de estrategias de aprendizaje. El número 5 otorga el mayor valor, mientras que el número 1 representa el menor valor.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Conversación					
b. Escritura					
c. Escucha					
d. Lectura					

15. Organice las estrategias de acuerdo a la aplicación en sus clases, comience por la de mayor aplicación. El número 5 otorga el mayor valor, mientras que el número 1 representa el menor valor. Si hay algunas que no emplee deje la casilla en blanco.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
a. Toma de apuntes					
b. Mapas semánticos					
c. Mapas mentales					
d. Categorización					
e. Nemotécnica					
f. Elaboración					
g. Auto-evaluación					

16. Si usted tiene un aporte relevante que no se haya tenido en cuenta, por favor regístrelo en este espacio.

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GRACIAS POR SU VALIOSA COLABORACIÓN.

APPENDIX 4: WAYS TO READ THE INFORMATION COLLECTED IN THE STUDY

