
Editorial

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In 2016, the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) launched the English as Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum for secondary schools (grades 6 through 11). This curriculum suggests using task-based language teaching (TBLT), Project-Based Instruction (PBI), and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) for teaching EFL at secondary schools in Colombia (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016a). In 2016, the Ministry also launched an EFL primary school curriculum (grades pre-K through 5), including content and language integrated learning (CLIL) within the suggested teaching approaches (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016b). The suggested curricula for primary and secondary schools are the latest effort within the National Bilingualism Program, which started in 2004, to improve EFL instruction in Colombia. The program's goal was that Colombian 11 graders reached B1 proficiency level (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005) by 2019. A learner at this level is expected to be able to achieve a variety of language functions, such as understanding and producing texts on familiar topics, asking for directions, asking and giving personal information, describing personal experiences, giving opinions or describing future plans.

As seems clear from the latest results in Saber 11 test, the national high-stakes test for Colombian high schools, 11-grade students seem far from reaching the B1 proficiency level that the Ministry set as policy goal. Indeed, 55% of students tested in 2013 (ICFES, 2016) scored below level A and 37% scored at level A1. Only 2% of them achieved level B1, the target level set by the bilingualism policy. Similarly, between 2014 and 2017 (ICFES, 2018), no students from low SES schools, usually state schools, reached level B1. In contrast, 29% students from high SES schools, mostly private schools, reached this level and 53% scored even higher. These results clearly disclose an achievement gap between poor and well-provided schools (ICFES, 2016).

Aware of this reality, the Foreign Languages Department from Universidad de Córdoba held the 2nd International Conference on Innovative Research and Teaching Practices in EFL on November 2017, a time and place for equipping teachers from the region with knowledge and practices to face the challenges posed by the methodological demands of the Suggested English Curriculum and Colombian bilingualism goals. The conference was also an opportunity for teachers and researchers from the region to showcase their research and teaching experiences, which are all enriching to colleagues and to student-teachers who attended the event.

This issue of *AVANCES en Educación y Humanidades* presents in more detail the work from three of the keynote speakers and two of the presenters at the Conference. For instance, Rosa Guilleumas' research with PBI at the BA in Bilingualism at her university is described in a detailed research report. She does not only show insightful results but remarks the need for developing 21st century skills in Colombian student-teachers. She makes the case for how PBI can be an opportunity for developing these skills.

Kenneth Steenhuisen reports results of an action research study in which he merged characteristics of TBL and problem solving to design instruction for preparing students to present the KPT test. He describes in detail the characteristics and development of the TOP10INSPECTORS boardgame in his teaching practice. Findings from the study reveal students were able to achieve the required levels as shown in their KPT scores.

Professors Royer Redondo and Iranys Urbina, report initial findings from a study on Learning objects and their effects in learners' listening skills at Universidad Popular del Cesar. Findings

revealed the importance of teacher mediation for students to benefit from the learning objects. Rafael Zaccaron's paper on the impact of planning in the performance of an oral task confirms the beneficial effect of strategic planning to support the oral tasks performed by young L2 learners at a public school context in Florianapolis, Brasil.

Last but not least, renowned author and TBLT expert Rod Ellis presents a detailed research review on Corrective feedback. Corrective feedback is still a matter of research and discussion in the field of Second language acquisition and teaching. Dr. Ellis' review provides teachers with enough theoretical background to inform their decisions regarding corrective feedback in their teaching practice.

We encourage you to delve into these articles which have resulted from the hard work that ESL teachers and professors do every day in their classrooms and which certainly contribute greatly to our field. We hope you find them interesting, motivating, and inspiring enough to continue facing the challenges that we encounter every single day in our classrooms, thus meeting the challenges and goals posed by the Colombian EFL teaching policy.

Reference

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