

## EMPOWERMENT IN PROCESSES OF BILINGUAL CURRICULAR CONSTRUCTION: REALITY OR ILLUSION?

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### 1. Introduction

In the fields of linguistics, sociology, public administration and teaching, the term ‘empowerment’ is often referred to as if its meaning were self-evident. However, as Cameron *et al* (1992: 17) point out, this is very often not the case. This notion is subject to multiple interpretations, depending on the particular frame of reference within which it is used. Researchers from a positivist tradition are likely to reject empowering research as “biased and invalid”, whereas those who agree with collaborative research projects maintain that this type of approach leads not only to enriched data (Ivanic, 1994) but also to the development of deeper awareness and autonomy among participants.

In this article we will present preliminary results from an ongoing collaborative research project in the area of bilingual curriculum design in Cali, Colombia, which is aimed at promoting a process of empowerment among those involved. We will show that this is a complex process which cannot be determined by pre-established parameters and which does not follow a linear development. However, we will argue that there is evidence to suggest that the constant fluctuations noted between resistance, consent and asymmetry facilitate processes of empowerment, which, in turn, help to weaken established hierarchies of power, based on knowledge and institutional status.

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## 2. Considerations on the notions of power and empowerment

In Foucault's (1980) view, power is a multiple relation, intimately connected with knowledge. As power is not monolithic but 'net-like', "individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (Foucault, 1980: 98). Fairclough (1989: 28) maintains that power relationships determine the way in which orders of discourse ("the sets of networks of underlying conventions of discourse") and the ideologies they embody are structured. He argues that discourse is "a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted" (op. cit.: 43).

Another important characteristic of modern power, recognised by both Foucault (1981) and Fairclough (1989) is its invisibility. As Foucault (1981: 86) acknowledges, "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms". This ensures the naturalisation of established power relations and hierarchies as "*the* common-sense way of doing things" (Fairclough, 1989: 99).

This does not mean, however, that change is impossible. Foucault (1980: 142) himself recognised that "There are no power relations without resistance", and Martin-Jones & Heller (1996: 7) in their discussion on practices of resistance contend that "no matter how tightly articulated the structure of society, there are always interstices; that is, spaces where structures fail to seal hermetically, and which provide sites... where different practices of resistance... can be developed and where different world views can be articulated". It is within these "interstices" that processes of empowerment may be situated.

According to León (1997) the term "empowerment" dates from the second half of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, it is only in the last 15-20 years that its use has become widespread in the fields of sociology, education and business administration. This author considers that processes of empowerment are essentially differential. She maintains that "there is no unique recipe or prescriptive model. Empowerment is not a linear process with a beginning and an end defined in equal fashion... it is different for each individual or group" (León, 1997: 6; authors' translation).

Just as power is not monolithic but ‘net-like’, empowerment does not simply mean transferring power from ‘the powerful’ to ‘the powerless’, but getting to grips with “the complex positionings of real individuals” (Cameron *et al.*, 1992: 21). Giroux (1992: 11) characterises empowerment as “the ability to think and act critically”. In a similar vein, Gieve & Magalhaes (1994: 131) following Bhavnani (1990) propose a general definition of empowerment as “the ability to value one’s knowledge and meanings through a process of critical reflection on the meanings and knowledge of others”, thus acknowledging that empowerment involves a process of critical consciousness raising and foregrounding the active role of each individual in his/her own process of empowerment.

Within the field of language studies, empowering research has been characterised as research “on, for and with” the participants (Cameron *et al.*, 1992: 22) and the use of interactive or dialogic research methodologies which take into account the agendas of all the participants in the research project, as well as the importance of sharing the knowledge generated with the community. This conception implies the redistribution of knowledge from academia to the community and vice versa. These researchers suggest certain provisional guidelines to help those interested in carrying out empowering research projects, which may be summarised in the following manner:

(a) Persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects; (b) Subject have their own agendas and research should try to address them; (and) (c) If knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing. (Cameron *et al.*, 1992: 23-24)

In the project which forms the basis of this article, it was considered important to create a working definition of empowerment which would reflect the approach adopted in the light of Cameron *et al.*’s (1992) work. The following formulation was therefore proposed:

Empowerment is the process through which the participants in the research become conscious of their capacities, potential, knowledge and experiences in the area, so that they can assume responsibilities in the development of autonomy and full participation in decision-making, not only during the research process, but also in the following phases of assessment and modification of the proposals in the light of the changes and new advances in national educational policies.

(de Mejía & Tejada, 2001: 3-4)

As can be seen, the emphasis in this definition is on *process* rather than product and therefore implies a longer time scale than is often considered in consultancies. The process of consciousness-raising was seen as leading to a greater degree of

responsibility and participation in decision-making both during the research and afterwards. Furthermore, everyone taking part in the project was to be considered a participant. There was to be no division into researchers, on one hand, and their subjects, on the other in the process of curricular construction.

### **3. The study**

In this ongoing study, our main research question is concerned with establishing whether it is possible to bring about an effective transformation not only of institutional policies and practices, but also of the ideas of the participants taking part in the project, in the light of current theory and practice in the field of bilingualism, by means of a collaborative research project aimed facilitating the empowerment of all those involved.

The research site chosen was El Colegio Sagrado Corazón del Valle de Lili, a private school situated in the south of the city of Cali, the third largest city in Colombia. The school was founded in 1946 as a Catholic School for Girls, run initially by the nuns from the Sacred Heart Congregation, but now in the hands of lay staff. The school had a total of 1,000 students at the time of the study, divided into three levels: preschool, primary and secondary.

The school is concerned to promote Christian values in its students, emphasising values and the development of a strong sense of cultural identity. Furthermore, conscious of the need for students to reach a good level of English, the school has recently intensified the use of this language, with a view to developing a full bilingual programme.

A micro-ethnographic methodological perspective was adopted and various data sources used to ensure appropriate triangulation. In order to document the processes of curricular construction reports of the meetings of the Bilingualism Committee (consisting of members of the academic and administrative staff of the school and the university researchers which were held on a weekly basis throughout the school year) were analysed to ascertain the topics discussed and the decisions taken.

In order to document the process of empowerment, three different types of data were collected. First of all, the interactive sessions of the Bilingualism Committee were again examined, this time with a view to carrying out an analysis of how the process developed over time. Particular emphasis was paid to the relative contributions of the

university researchers and the school participants, and the ways in which different areas of expertise were socialised and used in the taking of curricular decisions. In addition, all participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in the project every three or four months, by means of a diary in which they registered how they felt about the process and mode of working as well as how they felt they were contributing to the ongoing process of curricular construction. Interviews with selected participants, to find out about their views on the process of empowerment as developed in the project, were also carried out.

The analysis presented in this paper refers to the process of empowerment as documented during the first sixth months of the project<sup>2</sup>, which was largely devoted to the presentation and discussion of key texts in the area of bilingualism and bilingual education by different members of the Bilingualism Committee, and considerations of how far these ideas reflected the reality of the school community and its aspirations.

We will discuss the development of empowerment in relation to three key macro-categories of analysis: resistance, consent and asymmetry, which provide linkages across the micro-analytic categories generated during the process of data analysis of the weekly discussion carried out in the Bilingualism Committee. In this article we will present these three macro categories in relation to three of the micro categories established in the study: the use of ‘we and you’ as markers of group membership; the use of directive speech acts by the participants; and movements from theory to practice and vice versa, based on the study of texts. We will present the analysis using key extracts from the data to support the point under discussion. Translations into English will be provided after each extract.

### **3.1. The use of ‘we and you’ as markers of group membership**

In the interaction among the participants, ‘we and you’ were found to have different referents. One of these is related to the two general groups making up the Bilingualism Committee: The academic and administrative staff of the school (the insiders) and the university researchers (the outsiders)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The second part of the project (January – June 2001) was concerned with consideration of alternatives and decision-taking in relation to the development of the bilingual curricular proposal for the school.

<sup>3</sup> The use of these terms refers to Cummins (2000).

During the discussion sessions, the first group used 'we' to refer to their shared pedagogical experiences, such as the teaching of some subjects in English or in Spanish or other experiences related to curriculum design in their school. Their previous experience gave rise to different subgroups in the school and these subgroups used 'we' accordingly. Furthermore, these experiences revealed not only different background knowledge but also asymmetry among all the participants, as illustrated in the following examples:

The headteacher, referring to a subgroup who had been participating in the school from the beginning of the bilingual process, stated:

*Cuando empezamos el proceso hicimos un estudio y elegimos las ciencias naturales como la asignatura... ahí consideramos que era importante... tratar de analizar, pero sin que significara un atropello... (01-10-01)*

"When we began the (Bilingual Programme) process we carried out a study and chose Natural Science as a subject to be taught in English... We thought it was important... to try to analyse... but without leading to negative consequences..."

One of the preschool teachers, alluding to her particular experiences as a member of the preschool teachers subgroup emphasised the experiences and intuitions of this subgroup in the following fashion:

*Esto ha sido un proceso de que nosotros arrancamos con el bilingüismo y nos metimos con las intuiciones de nosotras, el aprendizaje de nosotras y la experiencia de nosotras, pero en lengua materna y desde el año pasado vimos los favores y los contras que había de empezar con las matemáticas (13-10-01)*

"We began this bilingual process based on our intuition, our learning and our experiences, but using the mother tongue, and from the last year we became aware of the pros and cons of beginning with Maths"

This preschool teachers subgroup used 'we' to express their consent to being observed by the university researchers ('you'), on the basis of their previous experiences. This consent implies an agreement among the research participants with regard to the development of their mutual empowerment. In other words, the preschool teachers are aware of their strength, their preschool pedagogical experience, and at the same time they are conscious of the theoretical expertise of the university researchers. The following assertion from the pre-school coordinator is one example of this.

*Nos gustaría que Ustedes participaran ¿no?... nos observarían... nos hicieran como un análisis... nosotros tenemos mucho terreno ya ganado [...] (24-09-01)*

"We would like you to participate... observe us... carry out an analysis... we have made a lot of progress"

Another use of ‘we’ covered all the research participants except the pre-school teachers. The intention in this particular event was to recognise the pre-school teachers’ expertise and, at the same time, to value the theory found in the readings selected for the development of participant empowerment in the research project. The statement below, made by the head of English Department is evidence of this particular situation:

*Yo pienso que nosotros no podemos tomar decisiones... para eso está este grupo... las personas que están teniendo esos grados básicos nos pueden decir tratando de unir lo que es teoría con práctica que es lo que más nos conviene... después de eso si decidir aquí con la teoría y con la experiencia de ellas, que es lo que más nos conviene... (01-10-01)*

“I don’t think that we can make decisions... we have to take into account the pre-school teachers who are at the basic level... they can tell us, trying to bridge theory and practice, what is more convenient for our purposes. After that, we may decide on the basis of the theory and their experience what is the best for our needs...”

The school teachers used ‘we’ to show their interpretations and use of some of the bilingual education concepts discussed. This was the result of their analysis and comparisons between theory and their real situation in the school. The following statement from the head of English Department is an instance of this particular use of ‘we’.

*Bueno entonces nosotros no estamos enseñando una segunda lengua sino una lengua extranjera (19-11-01)*

“Okay... Then... We are not teaching a second language but a foreign language”

The university researchers, in their turn, used ‘we’ to refer to their proposals to be negotiated with the school teachers (you), and to allude to their previous research experiences and to their own publications. In this case, the main purpose was to share the research document and the corresponding bibliography, the results of previous research carried out in other school and their publications on bilingual education with the school participants, in order to facilitate the empowerment of the all research participants. The following assertion from one of the members of this group is an example of this particular situation:

*Como varios de Ustedes han preguntado qué hay sobre educación bilingüe aquí... entonces estuvimos pensando en compartir con Ustedes unas publicaciones que hemos tenido... nosotros tenemos una tradición... (08-10-01)*

“As many of you have asked for information on bilingual education here (in Colombia). We want to share with you some publications we have... We have a tradition...” (of bilingual education)

Another use of ‘we’ on the part of this group was associated with the whole group of participants. The ‘we’ in this particular case means the total members of the Bilingualism Committee. In this specific situation, the participants were asked to reflect on pedagogical practice from a theoretical point of view and vice versa. They were also asked to take into account principles and criteria from theory to design the bilingual curriculum programme based on the educational philosophy of the school. The extract below from one of the university researchers is an illustration of this case:

*Me parece que la reflexión a la que hemos llegado nosotros ha ido mostrando que hay unos elementos, unos criterios que nos permiten pensar en lo que sería la modalidad de educación bilingüe que nosotros queremos aquí... (16-10-01)*

“It seems to me that the reflections we have made show us some elements and some criteria that let us think in terms of the type of bilingual program we want here...” (in the school)

The above fluctuations in the referents of ‘we’ and ‘you’ reveal the different expertise among the research participants. In the case of the school teachers, who constitute the majority of the group, there was evidence of different subgroups with various degrees of pedagogical practice and academic and administrative experience. The university researchers shared their research and theoretical background with the school teachers and simultaneously were open to find out about, value and discuss their own teaching experience. This reciprocity allowed all the participants to develop their empowerment to some extent.

### **3.2. The use of directive speech acts<sup>4</sup>**

During the first phase of the project (September-December, 2001), the university researchers openly acknowledge the collaborative nature of the project and promote the notion of empowerment, as can be seen in the following statement made by one of the university researchers during the first meeting of the Bilingualism Committee:

*Nosotros entendemos muy bien lo que es asesoría y lo que venimos a hacer no es esto precisamente. Nosotros tenemos en construcción el concepto de empowerment, el trabajo conjunto, mutuo, de una parte y de otra, el intercambio saludable y crítico... experiencias de uno y otro lado (10-9-01)*

“We understand what consultancy means and what we have come to do is not that exactly. We are in the process of developing the concept of

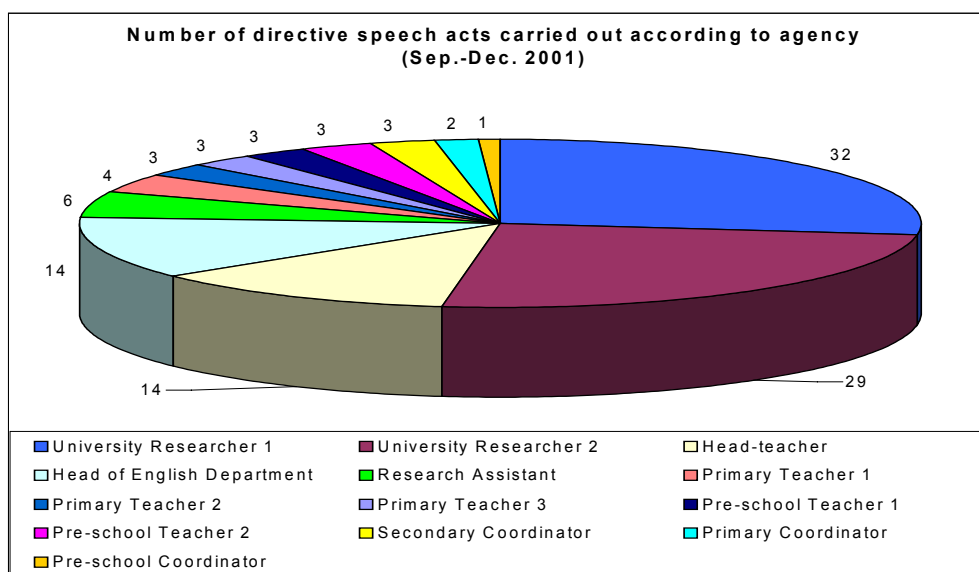
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<sup>4</sup> For purposes of analysis, it was decided that directive speech acts could take the following forms: recommendation, suggestion, clarification, evaluation, proposal, summary, direct question, setting agendas, etc.



empowerment, working together, a healthy, critical exchange, experiences from both sides”

However, it is interesting to note that analysis of the transcripts of the meetings of the Bilingualism Committee reveal that it is in fact the university researchers who carry out most directive speech acts during this period, as can be seen in the table below:



**Graph 1**

It may also be observed from this quantitative analysis that both the Headteacher and the Head of the English Department (a senior teacher who had been in the school for more that 20 years) carried out far more directive speech acts than the rest of the school participants, though considerable fewer than the university researchers.

In analyzing the type of functions realised through these directive acts, interesting differences were found. In the case of the two university researchers, the most common types of act registered were: evaluations (19), clarifications (8), and recommendations (5), as exemplified in the following three excerpts.

The extract below refers to an evaluative comment made by one of the university researchers in relation to a recent visit made to the preschool section of the school and the designation of a separate classroom for work in the first language (Spanish).

*Me parece que ustedes han logrado muy bien pues apreciar esto, y la presencia, como dije, simbólica... del salón de español (29-10-01)*

“I think that you have been able to understand this very well and, as I said, the symbolic presence of the Spanish classroom”

In the excerpt below, one of the university researchers is trying to clarify distinctions between the use of the terms ‘English as a Second Language’ and ‘English as a Foreign Language’ in relation to the school context.

*Pero yo creo que hay que hacer una distinción... o sea nosotros vamos a considerar inglés como segunda lengua... como lengua extranjera por estas razones (24-9-01)*

“But I think that we have to make a distinction... in other words, we will consider English as a Second Language... as a foreign language for these reasons”

Here one of the university researchers is recommending that the group should take into account other factors which he considers important to include in the discussion.

*No perdamos de vista también cómo hay otros factores sociolingüísticos como la actitud, lo que tiene que ver con el estilo educativo de la familia (1-10-01)*

“Let’s not forget that there are other sociolinguistic factors, such as attitude, which are connected with family educational style

For their part, in their directive acts both the Headteacher and the Head of the English Department in the School tended to emphasise the importance and the need to carry out certain actions related to the project, as can be seen in the following excerpt. The Head of the English Department is emphasising the need to realise the importance of an adequate preparation among all those concerned with the development of the Bilingual Education Programme.

*Nosotros estamos realizando en este momento un experimento, pero al mismo tiempo también esto nos exige a todos, a todos los profesores, a las directivas, a todo el mundo a tener una preparación muy seria muy fuerte (8-10-01)*

“At the moment we are carrying out an experiment, but at the same time, this demands from all of us: teachers, those in charge, everyone, that we should have a serious and solid training”

The other participants in the Bilingualism Committee, on the other hand, tended to frame their directive acts in the form of opinions and/or evaluations of current practices or proposals based on personal experience, with reference to other ‘powerful’ participants or sources such as the texts discussed in the group, to legitimate their interventions, as can be seen in the excerpt below. Here, the pre-school co-ordinator is

referring to how mathematics is conceived in the pre-school programme and how she feels this development should be viewed.

*[...] hace como... dos años vivimos este proceso, entonces yo pienso que se debe como revisar finalmente cómo está construido esa parte, yo me uno mucho a lo de Amalia (13-11-01)*

“[...] two years ago we experienced this process, so I think that we should look at this to see how we went about it; I agree strongly with what Amalia says”

In the following extract, one of the pre-school teachers is indicating her views on the teaching of Maths in English and in Spanish, with reference to the readings which have been discussed in the Bilingualism Committee about the ‘one person one language’ theory.

*Pero yo pienso que... no sería más bien que las home room teachers fueran las que tuvieran... una formación en la parte de las matemáticas para que ellas lo den en inglés, porque es que yo lo he leído, es bueno que el niño identifique a esta persona con el inglés y a esta con el español (1-10-01)*

“But I think that... it might be better that the home room teachers had training in teaching Maths, because this is what I have read; it is good that the child identifies this person with English and this person with Spanish”

In relation to the use of directive speech acts by members of the Bilingualism Committee it may be seen that there are marked asymmetries in the group, established with regard to knowledge and institutional position. While on one level, there exist indications of consent to the need for change and acceptance of the notion of group and personal empowerment, there is also evidence of a counter-current of resistance, aimed at maintaining the traditional directive role of the university researchers, based on their status as ‘experts’ in the field.

An interesting finding in this respect is that the public discourse of the university researchers with respect to the need to value the contributions of a collaborative research approach seem at odds to the high number of directive speech acts carried out by these participants in relation to those carried out by the rest of the group. The speech acts of clarification and recommendation (Excerpts 3 and 4) reinforce the role of expert knowledge, associated with the university researchers. Furthermore, the high incidence of evaluations of the actions or contributions of other participants by the university researchers points to what Fairclough (1992) sees as the asymmetrical exercising of interactional control. To some extent, this type of evaluation is similar to the feedback turn carried out by teachers in the ‘initiation-response-feedback’ exchange structure

characteristic of classroom discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and demonstrates “a powerful way of policing agendas” (Fairclough, 1992: 157).

As we have noted, there is also evidence in the excerpts cited in this section of consent for changing relationships. This is particularly evident in Excerpt 5, where the speaker is clearly in agreement with the assuming of responsibility by all the different actors in the school for the changes introduced by this “experiment”.

Excerpts 6 and 7 show two different ways in which participants (the pre-school co-ordinator and a pre-school teacher) support their views about actions which should be carried out in relation to a bilingual curriculum at pre-school level. Both give indications of their perception of relative powerlessness in relation to other participants by referring in the first case to the previous contribution of another powerful participant, Amalia, the headteacher to legitimate her intervention; while the second speaker refers to what she had learnt from the readings, lending support to the role of knowledge in the development of empowerment.

There is also evidence in the data which illustrates the masking of power management using the strategy of mitigation, through the use of modal verbs and linguistic minimisers (diminutives, framing interventions as questions rather than assertions, etc.) to reduce the impact that a directive speech act might otherwise produce. In this way, powerful participants, such as the university researchers, the head-teachers, and the head of the English department try to establish a more equal relationship with the other participants.

### **3.3. Movements from theory to practice and vice versa, based on the study of texts**

Participants involved in the project establish different relationships with the texts they read. These relations are related to the power each participant has within the group either because of the position he has in the institutional hierarchy or to due to the knowledge and experience the other members of the group recognise as belonging to him. Some positions illustrate processes of resistance, others, reciprocity and many are determined by the asymmetry existing in the relations among the members of the group.

One hundred and fifteen observations made by the participants during the first phase of the project (September-December 2001) have been analysed in the light of two

questions: (1) What do participants do with the texts they read? and (2) What kind of actions do participants attribute to the readings?

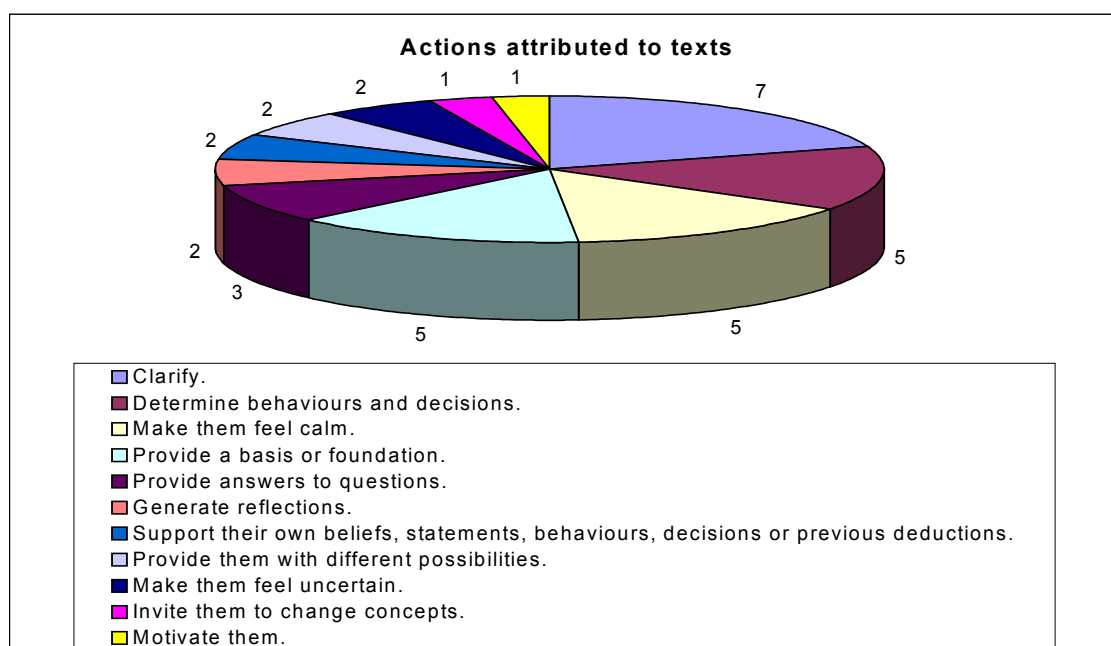
The graphics below illustrate the answers given to those questions:

1. What do participants do with the texts they read?
2. What kind of actions do participants attribute to the readings?

**Graph 2**



**Graph 3**



Data reveal that there exists a strong tendency among participants to establish relationships between what is proposed in the readings and what happens at school. However, it is the participants who work at the school who refer the most to this (20 observations out of the 22 made in this sense belonged to school participants vs. 2 made by the university researchers). School participants take out of the texts what they consider useful, what worries them, what they like, what they are touched by and exemplify what is proposed theoretically with experiences they have had in their classroom practices. We consider that it is in these relationships that empowering developments can be most clearly seen. Here, school participants display the knowledge they possess which is derived from their teaching practice and they initiate a dialogue with the knowledge that is recognised as coming from the authors of the texts they read.

This can be seen in the excerpt below, in which one of the primary teachers relates an experience that is being carried out in the school to a principle of bilingual education that she takes one of the texts she read:

*[...] la educación bilingüe no entiende la lengua como un objeto de aprendizaje en sí misma sino como un vehículo que permite incorporar y organizar el conocimiento de modo que aprendiendo cosas... a través de ella se aprende a su vez eh aquí la... semana pasada me parece que mencionábamos las clases que dábamos en inglés entre ellas y la más nueva la clase de (world studies) mencionábamos el entusiasmo y el éxito que ha tenido esta clase donde no estamos eh estamos es eh aprendiendo por medio del idioma no estamos separando ni gramática ni vocabulario ni fonética ni nada estamos enseñando y entonces los niños están entusiasmados con eso (16-10-01)*

“[...] bilingual education does not understand language as an object of learning but as a vehicle that allows for the incorporation and organization of knowledge so that you learn through it... here... last week we mentioned the classes we are giving in English and we talked about how successful they have been and how excited the children are about it”

Sometimes, relations between theory and practice seem to be more “tense”. This can be noticed when school participants maintain that while theoretical considerations are important, these must not be allowed to diminish the importance of the discussion of classroom practices in day to day pedagogical interventions. This tension can be interpreted as a sample of resistance towards theory, which is seen as coming from outside. In the following excerpt, one of the pre-school teachers explains why she thinks it is important to link practice to the process of curriculum design:

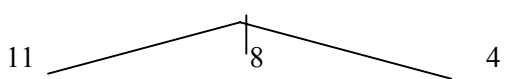
*[...] yo decía hace dos lunes pasados que a mí me preocupaba que hay problemas que hay que hay que resolver ya ya ya a mí me parece muy importante muy interesante la parte de teoría y me gusta... todo esto pero me*

*preocupa que se vaya todo en teoría y nosotros necesitamos resolver cosas inmediatas que no se han resuelto [...] (1-10-01)*

“[...] I said some days ago that I was worried about the problems we have to solve right now. I think that theory is very important and I like it but we have to solve immediate problems [...]”

Another outstanding aspect with regard to what participants do with the texts they read, is the reporting of what it is said in the readings. In an earlier approach to the analysis, we considered that this illustrated a passive attitude towards the text. Currently, we feel that even if a participant reports what it is said in a text, there is an active position involved in this process since it implies selecting what is worth reporting. However, when expressing interpretations, doubts or when they contextualise the readings, participants demonstrate a more active position. These relationships have been set out in the table below:

Table 1. Different positions assumed by participants towards the readings.

<p>Observations where a more active position is assumed</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>23</p>  </div> <p>11 expressing interpretations      8 expressing doubts      4 making reference to local context</p>	<p>Observations in which participants reported what the texts said without expressing something about them beyond selecting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">15</p>
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The difference between these two positions in relation to written texts is illustrated in the following excerpts. In the extract, one of the pre-school teachers expresses a doubt she has about something said in one of the readings. In the second, the same pre-school teacher refers to the position of the author towards the distribution of languages in bilingual curricula. The fact that the same person behaves differently towards texts at different moments in the process illustrates the non-linear development of empowerment. It is interesting to note in this respect, that the more active position was expressed on an earlier occasion (September 24) while the report data comes from the session of November 11.

*[...] dice que el niño empieza a adquirir una segunda lengua después de haber desarrollado unas habilidades básicas en su primera lengua yo ante eso tengo una inquietud hasta qué punto el niño que no ha adquirido su primera lengua muchas veces aprenda la segunda lengua [...] (24-09-01)*

“[...] it says that a child starts to acquire a second language after having developed some basic skills in his first language... I have a question about

this... how far does a child who has not acquired his first language, learn a second language...”

*“[...] el autor en sus estudios recientes ha dicho de que la manera como se distribuye la lengua eh la me mejor dicho el método depende de la forma como se presenta la lengua o que se presenta el programa él propone describir una serie como de opciones y la viabilidad de ese tipo de opciones bueno él habla primero de amplias categorías para la distribución y sus razones dice que [...]” (19-11-01)*

“[...] the author, in his recent studies, has said that methodology depends on how language is presented... he talks about wide categories for language distribution [...]”

In the following excerpt, the Secondary Coordinator points out the need to take into account the role of parents when making decisions in the school. We consider that this position together with the previous one shows a deeper awareness and a sense of autonomy in these individuals.

*[...] específicamente situándonos en Cali... no podemos pensar en que los padres van a tener el desempeño como lo tiene el padre francés o el padre inglés [...] (16-10-01)*

“If we think specifically, of Cali, we can not expect parents to behave the same as French parents or English parents...”

The data also reveals a tendency towards valuing texts in a positive way. However, six, out of the thirteen observations in this category, were carried out by the university researchers. This is particularly interesting if we take into account that the group is made up of twelve school participants and only two university researchers. This type of difference clearly illustrates the asymmetrical relationships within the group. University researchers tend to talk more from theory than school participants do.

*[...] en el texto se plantea digamos uno de los problemas o los retos que tienen estos planteamientos y creo que eso pues me parece muy muy ético y muy honesto de parte de los investigadores [...] (13-11-01)*

“[...] the text includes the problems these proposals have and I think that it is very ethical, very honest of the researchers to include this...”

It is also significant that it is the university researchers who give the texts the status of hypotheses or object of discussion. This contrasts with the position of most school participants who see texts as sources of reassurance, clarity, support for their beliefs, etc. (This will be discussed in more detail below). The following excerpt exemplifies the university researchers’ position described above:

*[...] cualquier modelo puede ser objeto de discusión puede ser objeto de debate y yo creo que lo que realmente suscitan estos planteamientos es eso debates discusiones, etc. (13-11-01)*



“[...] any model can be an object of discussion, can be debatable and I think that that is what these proposals create: debates, discussions, etc.”

Only once did one of the school participants position herself as a direct interlocutor of the text. This may be taken as one of those interstices that Martin-Jones & Heller talk about (1996: 7). When a person positions him or herself as interlocutor, there is, to some extent, a relationship of equality postulated with the author, which provides the possibility of “talking” to him, agreeing or showing a different point of view. In this case it was a primary school teacher talking about one of the texts she had read:

*[...] él explica muy bien que a veces como planificadores nosotros pensamos mucho en los objetivos que nosotros tenemos y eh olvidamos un poco a qué comunidad va dirigida [...] (22-10-01)*

“[...] he explains that when planning, we think a lot about the objectives we have and we forget about the community the proposal is addressed to...”

It is only the university researchers who assign the texts the quality of confirming what is experiential, of valuing their length, and who explicitly propose that there exists a dialogic relationship between theory and practice. The following excerpt exemplifies this tendency:

*[...] me parece que hay una relación allí dialéctica entre lo que es la teoría y la práctica... la conclusión a la que hemos llegado es que efectivamente... hay una interdependencia entre lo teórico y lo práctico [...] (10-12-01)*

“I consider that there exists a dialectic relationship between theory and practice... we have concluded that there is an interdependence between theory and practice...”

With regard to the second question, “What kind of actions do participants attribute to the readings?” it can be seen that most participants attribute “positive” actions to the readings. Texts represent authority; it is assumed that the information they provide is truthful. As exemplified in the following excerpts, readings clarify, determine behaviour and decisions, work as a basis or foundation, provide answers to questions, generate reflections, reassure participants, support their own beliefs, statements, behaviours, decisions or previous deductions, provide them with different possibilities, invite them to change concepts and motivate them.

*[...] yo quedé muy contenta después de leer, me aclaró muchas dudas me dió muchas seguridades me mostró que vamos por el buen camino y que naturalmente como dice allí al final vamos... a encontrar problemas y todo pero pues en eso estamos para tratar de solucionarlos lo mejor posible (8-10-01)*

“[...] I felt very happy after reading, my doubts were clarified, it gave me a lot of confidence, it showed me that we are on the right track and that although we will find problems we will try to solve them”

There were two moments when participants claimed that the readings made them feel uncertain. However, this was seen as a positive in as far as it encouraged them to look for possibilities taking into account their own context:

*[...] yo insisto en que estas últimas conferencias de manera clara y definitiva pues nos llenan más de incertidumbre y nos eh nos estimulan a que miremos qué vamos a hacer desde nuestros factores particulares [...] (16-10-01)*

“[...] I insist, these readings clearly fill us with uncertainty and encourage us to decide what to do in our particular situation...”

It is remarkable how participants move from one position to another, now they feel calm, then, they feel uncertain. They assume different attitudes towards texts and behave in diverse ways. Participants show resistance or consent and it is through these movements that power is exercised with different purposes, masks and relations.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In the theoretical framework of this paper it was pointed out that it is within the “interstices”, the spaces where structures fail to seal hermetically, that processes of empowerment may be situated. Resistance and consent, in processes of bilingual curriculum construction, are practices that take place in the interstices and suggest how participants are involved in a process of empowerment while attempting to reshape their mental schemata in order to give new meanings to their own perceptions and those of others, in a reflective, critical and non-linear fashion which reflects the net-like quality of the nature of power, referred to by Foucault (1980).

It is thus evident that empowerment is not about transferring power from the powerful to the powerless but about valuing each person's expertise and in so doing, participants become conscious of their capacities, potential, knowledge and experiences in the area. We may therefore conclude that empowerment in processes of bilingual curricular construction, is a reality, not an illusion, albeit of a complex nature. Achieving the weakening of established hierarchies of power, based on knowledge and institutional status is likely to come about if participants get involved in the dynamics of marketing their own orders of discourse in an interactive situation where knowledge is redistributed taking into account the agendas of all the participants. A further possible

development contemplated on the basis of the analysis carried out so far, is that empowerment is an individual process, intimately bound up with the construction of the self.

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