

The Implementation of the PNIEB's Language Teaching Methodology in Schools in Sonora¹

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Abstract

In this article we present findings from a qualitative study on the implementation of the *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica* (PNIEB), specifically in relation to the teaching methodology used in schools in Sonora from 2010 to 2012. Data for the study was collected through open interviews with program coordinators, school principals, English teachers, parents, and 6th grade students. The state of Sonora, as other states in the country, had an English program in its public primary schools prior to the PNIEB. The teaching methodology in the state program was based on communicative language teaching and was characterized by different practices and issues. In 2010, a transition began to the national program which is based on a sociocultural perspective where social practices of the language and specific competencies have been defined as a basis for teacher's planning, teaching and evaluation. Results from the study indicate that the coexistence and transition between programs brought about new teaching scenarios and challenges. In this article we describe some of the methodological practices identified during this time and some issues surrounding the application of the PNIEB's framework and methodology in this context.

Resumen

En este artículo se presentan resultados de una investigación de corte cualitativo sobre la implementación del Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica, específicamente en relación a la metodología de enseñanza usada en las primarias públicas en Sonora del 2010 a 2012. El levantamiento de datos se realizó a través de entrevistas con preguntas abiertas a coordinadores de programa, directores, profesores de inglés, padres de familia y alumnos de 6to grado. Sonora, como otros estados del país, contaba con un programa de inglés previo al PNIEB. La metodología de enseñanza en el programa estatal se basaba en el enfoque comunicativo y se caracterizaba por una serie de prácticas y temáticas relacionadas. En el 2010 inició la transición al programa nacional, el cual se sustenta en la perspectiva sociocultural y delimita prácticas sociales del lenguaje y competencias específicas como base para la planeación, enseñanza y evaluación. Los resultados del estudio indican que la coexistencia y transición entre programas originaron nuevos escenarios y retos para la enseñanza del inglés. En este artículo describimos algunas de las prácticas metodológicas identificadas durante este tiempo, así como diversas temáticas relacionadas con la implementación del PNIEB y su enfoque metodológico en este contexto.

Introduction

English language teaching began in Sonora in 1992 when the *Secretaría de Educación y Cultura* (SEC) presented an educational model for the state that included, among other activities, one to three hours of English for all six levels of primary education. According to the program's historical information (SEC-DGAIA), the aim was to teach English classes after regular school hours, and for teachers' salaries to be jointly paid by the government and the parents. As a result of this initiative, English was first taught in pre-school and primary level to approximately two thousand children during the 1993-1994 school year. These English classes continued for ten years without a formal curriculum and with a minor increase to three thousand students in 2003.

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In 2004, the SEC launched the *Programa de Inglés en Primarias Públicas* (PIP) as an official component of primary education. From its start that year, the PIP expanded to more cities and regions in the state, reaching 29,446 students in 286 schools, which represented 10% of the total schools in the state. These classes were taught three times a week but now within the regular school schedule. As part of this development, a more structured curriculum was also designed. Under the PIP program, the teaching methodology was based on the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching and Total Physical Response. In addition, the underlying principles of Bloom's Taxonomy were taken into consideration for the program with the aim of developing critical thinking skills in students, as well as other values and attitudes such as cooperative work and ecological awareness (SEC-DGAIA). In the following years, the state program expanded to over 700 schools in Sonora. According to information provided by the program's coordinators, by 2011 over 40% of the schools in the state were using the program.

In 2009, the federal government created the National English Language Teaching Program, *Plan Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica*, or *PNIEB* for its initials in Spanish. Under this program, English is taught in three fifty-minute sessions per week, and instruction begins in third grade of pre-school and continues up until third grade of secondary level. These ten years of English language instruction are divided into four cycles with established language learning objectives from the Common European Framework of References for Language used for each given cycle. The first four years have exploratory aims such as contact and familiarization with the language, while the final six years focus on formal English language instruction. The long-term goal is for students to achieve B1 level (Threshold to Independent User) by the end of their secondary education. Since its introduction in 2009, the program has undergone several piloting stages for each cycle with the aim of reaching complete implementation in 2012 (Canalseb, 2009). In Sonora, the PNIEB was first introduced in 2010 as a pilot program in several schools. In the following years, it extended to all schools that previously had the state program, achieving its complete incorporation during the 2012-2013 academic year. During this time, the PNIEB's framework in our state was modified and classes began in third grade of primary which meant it did not cover the first three grades in the program (3rd pre-school to 2nd primary). However, with the start of the present 2013-2014 school year, the program has begun to incorporate these initial grades.

In regards to language teaching methodology, the PNIEB is based on the same sociocultural framework as the Spanish and Indigenous language strand of courses in the general curriculum. The teaching pedagogy focuses on a series of social practices of language and specific competencies that children must acquire within three social learning environments: family and community, academic and educational, and literary and ludic (PNIEB, 2010). The program provides guidelines for teacher's lesson planning, teaching methodology, and evaluation. It is relevant to mention that unlike previous methodologies which define specific activities, techniques and procedures (e.g. Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response), English language teaching under a sociocultural approach, as the PNIEB's, is not prescriptive in nature. It provides teachers with general principles and pedagogic orientations for the development of a teaching practice that is more sensitive and responsive to the different contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2009). In the PNIEB (2010), teachers plan product-based lessons taking into account the specific sociocultural characteristics of the students. The aim is to develop activities using thematic content that enable students to *do with*, *know about*, and *be through the language* keeping in mind the formal aspects and functions of language within social life (p. 74).

With this background in mind, we present a series of findings related to the implementation of the PNIEB, specifically in relation to the teaching methodology used in the state of Sonora from 2010 to 2012. During this time, both the state and the national program were in effect and while

a majority of schools were working with the state program, the gradual transition to the PNIEB had begun. This coexistence and transition between programs brought about a series of new teaching scenarios and challenges related to the English language teaching methodology and practices.

It is important to mention that this study is part of a broader qualitative study on English language teaching programs in public primary schools in Mexico. In the national research project, which was coordinated by the second author of this article, 31 researchers³ and 11 collaborators⁴ from 13 universities⁵ collected, analyzed, and reported data from nine states⁶ on the areas of curriculum, teaching methodology, teaching practices, materials and resources, teacher development, and the relation between these areas and national and state language policies. In Sonora, the study was extended to a second interpretative stage that further analyzed the teaching methodology that English teachers practiced in the classroom. For this article, we focused on schools in Sonora that had begun to work with the national program.

To meet this aim, in the following section we first briefly explain the research methodology that was used in the study at the state level. As findings, we present some methodological practices identified in the study regarding the teaching activities, language content, and the use of both languages in the classroom. Following this, a series of issues surrounding the implementation of the PNIEB and the application of its teaching methodology are presented. We conclude the article with some considerations regarding the application of the PNIEB's sociocultural framework and pedagogy in our context.

Research methodology

For the study a qualitative research design was used which included an initial exploratory descriptive stage and a second interpretive one. Traditionally this type of qualitative research design is considered an effective way to explore new areas of knowledge (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2007) and it is also useful in studies that focus on specific contexts and the persons who are part of those contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In this regard, the initial stage of the study included a review of documents and information related to the existing English programs in the state. Additional data was collected through 53 open interviews with program coordinators, and through visits to 13 schools where school principals, English teachers, parents, and 6th grade students in both morning and afternoon schools were also interviewed. The schools in the sample were located in four different regions of Sonora: south, central, border, and mountain. As we can see in the following chart, within these regions, schools from both rural and urban areas were visited.

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Schools and Groups			Interviews	
Region	Morning	Afternoon		
South	2	1	Program Administrators	3
Central	3	2	School principals	13
Border	2	1	English teachers	12
Mountain	2	0	Parents	11
			Groups of Students	14

The second stage of the study was carried out in the central region of the state with the aim of developing a more in-depth analysis of the teaching methodology. For this purpose, prolonged observations and interviews (before and after observations) were made with 11 English teachers about their methodological practices, including their understanding and application of the PNIEB. The 12 schools in this second stage were located in urban (central and peripheral sectors) and rural areas (See chart below).

Schools in Central Region of State			Interviews	
	Morning	Afternoon		
Urban (Central)	2	1	Program Administrators	2
Urban (Peripheral)	4	3	English teachers	11
Rural	1	1		

As part of the research process, all interviews were transcribed and organized along with the field notes and other visual material from each visit. Data analyses were carried out using standard procedures of coding and categorizing that are characteristic to inductive analysis in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2009). A full description of the research methodology of both stages is available in Pamplon Irigoyen (2013) and Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón & Cota (2012).

Findings

This section includes the first subsection with findings related to different elements that were analyzed with the aim of understanding the methodological practices being developed in the PNIEB lessons. These included the types of teaching activities, the structuring of content, and the use of both languages in the classroom. As a subsection, we present several issues surrounding the implementation of the PNIEB, specifically in regards to the application of the program's methodology.

Methodological practices in the classroom: teaching activities and content

The data collected during the prolonged observations and interviews provided information about the activities and content selected by teachers for the PNIEB lessons. A first finding indicates that the English teachers were carrying out their lessons using the few resources that were available, such as notebooks, the board, and photocopies from pages in the textbooks. This created a problem in their teaching methodology because a substantial amount of class time was spent on students' copying words and phrases from the board and performing other activities such as dictations. In addition to this, using discrete exercises from the textbooks affected the sequence and development of the complete lesson, especially in cases where it was not clear how these activities correspond to the overall language learning achievements or expected products. Some of the teachers and parents talked about the exercises from the textbooks:

TEACHER (1): Pues, repaso los libros y escojo unos ejercicios para llevárselos a los niños, pero no puedo estar sacando copias todos los días porque yo las tengo que pagar, así que veo y uso las que pienso les van a gustar más, casi siempre con canciones o dibujitos.

TEACHER (2): Y no es la misma. Por ejemplo, yo sí les doy muchas copias porque como el otro día estaba hablando con otros maestros, le dije a [otro maestro], "Eso de que escriban todo, que aburrido, imagínate, escribir todo, no, no, no, no. Además pierdo toda la hora ahí. Y estas, [las copias] también están en blanco y negro, igual de mal".

PARENT: El otro día mi hija me dijo lo que estaba haciendo en inglés, y están relacionando unas frases y colores en una hoja [copia del libro] que le dieron. Dijo que iba en la lección tres y que venían tres actividades en la misma hoja y, en una venían los colores y ella coloreó iluminó del color que iba y en la otra relaciono dibujos, imágenes.

In some instances, these practices made the classes very teacher-centered and reduced the opportunities for other kinds of activities that could promote a more meaningful use of language by students. These concerns were expressed by different participants in the study:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: Yo si veo que funciona con muchas limitaciones, ¿Por qué? porque aparte de la cuestión que tiene que ver con los materiales, pues los niños, la mayoría no los tienen. Entonces el maestro se dedica a sacar el programa que tiene de una forma muy tradicionalista como muy de: "¡ah! aquí les voy a poner el tema de hoy. Es el de las frutas y vamos a trabajar con frutas" y escribe en el pizarrón el nombre de las frutas, las dibuja y los niños las copian y de vez en cuando hacen algo más, algunas conjugaciones de verbos, pero yo sí, es mi apreciación personal, yo sí sé que está... que no está funcionando con los niveles que serían deseables.

Results also indicate that these non-participant activities affected student's motivation and interest. Some of the students mentioned this issue.

*¡Apuntamos todo!
Hacemos dictados.
Nos ponen vocabulario y ahí lo traducimos al español.*

Some of the parents that were interviewed also voiced these problems.

PARENT (1): Para mí es muy importante la capacitación de los docentes y creo que es muy importante que el docente sepa tratar a un niño, cómo tratar a un adolescente es muy importante: el control del grupo, actividades, técnicas, estrategias que utilicen en el aula, porque muchas veces lo que si te puedo decir es que han llegado a externar: "es que hacemos lo mismo, lo mismo, lo mismo". A un niño que le enseñas lo mismo todos los días se aburre. Entonces sí es importante, otra vez hago énfasis en la capacitación.

PARENT (2): Los profesores de inglés deberían recibir mayor capacitación en dinámicas de grupo y otras actividades para hacer la clase más interesante y motivar más a los alumnos.

In relation to the main content that was being taught in schools, the study identified basic vocabulary such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions (e.g. colors, numbers, animals, days of the week, and months of the year). In some instances function words (e.g. auxiliary words, articles) and short phrases were also being introduced in the lessons. When asked about the English they had learned in the program, most CHILDREN answered the following:

*Verbos, pasado, presente, países
Adjetivos
Palabras... legs, hair*

White, bus, school, music, dog
Banderas, nacionalidades
Partes de la casa, ceiling, door
Pues muchas cosas, vocabulario, gramática
Preguntar qué hora es, donde están las cosas, colores
Como se dicen los animales en ingles
Los números, los días de la semana, los meses

It is relevant to mention that this type of content is important and should be part of English teaching programs for young children (Cameron, 2001; Nunan, 2010; Pinter, 2006). However, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the teaching activities that should be used when teaching basic language. As we know, children are active learners and thinkers (Piaget, 1970) who learn and make sense of the world through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). Therefore, the teaching methodology must include activities that present language within context-rich environments and teachers need to provide abundant opportunities for students to engage in meaningful use of the language (Cameron, 2003; Pinter, 2006). Otherwise, children learn isolated words which are difficult to expand into language that is more communicative or purposeful. Furthermore, language and learning activities for children need to have an increasing and spiraling degree of continuity and complexity (Curtain & Dahlberg 2010). This allows language that has been learned in the earlier years to be strengthened and extended with the new language. In this sense, some of the parents mentioned the need for different types of exposure and practice of the language.

PARENT: [English language] Tiene que aplicarse, ¿no?, Aplicarse en otras actividades dentro de la escuela, donde se aplique el inglés. Para que ellos ya sepan, y no se lo memoricen. Que los colores, porque si les preguntan los números, todo el mundo los sabe hasta el 10. Pero si le pregunto al [child's name]: a ¿sabes por qué? Porque se los machetearon. Algo que vean usándolo, como si fuera el español, ¿no? Ahí eso ayudaría mucho.

Additionally, data from the classroom observations and interviews indicates that the activities and content being taught in sixth grade are similar to those in lower elementary grades. Greater sequencing and recycling of language from the initial grades and up would have helped students to develop a more complex use of language. Pinter (2006) and Cameron (2001) suggest that students in upper primary, such as the sixth grade students in the study, have the necessary cognitive and linguistic skills to cope with and benefit from activities with a higher degree of complexity. During the interviews, some CHILDREN mentioned the need for more challenging and motivating activities:

A mí me gustaría que hiciéramos exposiciones.
Que fuera más complicada la clase.
Que viéramos cosas más avanzadas.

Furthermore, teaching and structuring content needs to be developed with the PNIEB's model and objectives. As Johnson (2009) explains, from a language as social practice perspective, meaning does not reside in the grammar of the language, or in its vocabulary, or in the head of the individual, but in the everyday activities that individuals engage in. Therefore, activities and practices in the classroom need to be aimed at developing the social practices, competencies and products in the program.

Activities with song, movement and repetition

Analysis of the data also allowed us to identify many examples of good teaching practices. Teachers in most schools use many interesting and age appropriate activities to teach English to

the children. These lessons include activities with movement, song, and games. Research has shown (Drew, Oostdam & van Toorenburg, 2007) that this type of activities are very useful with young learners because they increase motivation and help to reduce anxiety, important aims in teaching English to children. Some of the participants in the study mentioned this type of activities in the interviews:

TEACHER (1): Con los que son un poquito más callados, tengo que activarlos, entonces meto canciones que busco en otra parte que no manejamos en el texto, este y materiales como, son peluches y todo eso.

TEACHER (2): O tal vez hago como un juego. Si ya vimos un tema, para la siguiente clase lo que hago es preparar un "warm up" con un juego. Por ejemplo, Simón dice y usando las acciones que vimos la clase pasada. O Simón dice y que toquen objetos que vimos la clase pasada. Juegos con canciones o pues con dibujos, con algo visual.

PARENT: Yo veo que a los niños les fascina cuando tienen que escuchar sus canciones, que uno se las aprende ¿no? porque escucha la pronunciación pues y que ellos también escuchan y ya se lo se lo aprenden y uno también ¿no? aprende a pronunciar más o menos bien ¿no? no tanto.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: Es la segunda la maestra que me toca a mí que trabaja como debe de ser, que utiliza los medios tecnológicos, que les trae material, o sea que tiene mucha interacción entre los alumnos y ella y el maestro de grupo.

During the visits to the classrooms, children expressed their preference for activities that included games. Some of the CHILDREN'S comments were:

Porque es muy buena onda la teacher, nos hace muchos juegos. ¡Siempre ha sido buena onda!

Porque aprendemos jugando con la teacher.

Happy Dollars, language dollars! Si participamos nos dan premios por los happy dollars!

Nos gusta cuando la teacher nos lee cuentos del librito del Reader.

As several authors explain, these types of games are commonly found in the classrooms because children naturally enjoy competition and being rewarded. Pinter (2006) explains that these activities are a good alternative to present language to children, especially to younger children. Teachers can adjust the speed rate and use body language to assure comprehension depending on the language level of the students. Furthermore, these kinds of resources are useful when teaching different content to children since they contain elements of emotion, relevance, context and repetitive patterns (Curtain y Dalhberg, 2010). In the case of songs, rhymes and chants, children can easily learn them because of their repetitive nature. However, it is important to remember that although children may be singing the lyrics this does not mean that they understand the language they are producing (Cameron, 2001). This is also true of other types of repetition techniques that are useful in teaching vocabulary or new language structures to children, but are not interactive or communicative in themselves (Cameron, 2001; Moon, 2005). It is important to keep in mind that these are all tools that require a purpose within the lesson, so teachers must be aware of their benefits and the kind of language learning that is being supported with their use (Cameron, 2001; Ur, 1996).

The use of English in the classroom

The use of both languages, Spanish and English, in the classroom was another methodological feature that was analyzed in the study. Findings indicate that many English teachers in the program possessed an adequate to high level of English language proficiency. This confirms information provided by the program coordination regarding the language proficiency of teachers

hired for the program. This represents a great asset to the program if we consider the importance of providing students with as much exposure to English as possible in foreign language contexts such as ours. As Cameron (2001) mentions, the aim of teaching should be for "children to be able to use the foreign language with real people for real purposes" (p.37). To achieve this, the students need to be exposed to real language use.

In the case of the study, despite teachers' language proficiency, results indicate that Spanish was frequently used in the classroom for different reasons. The most common ones were for compensation purposes (Cameron, 2001), such as explaining the meaning of a word, giving instructions, or addressing misbehavior. That is, teachers use the first language to compensate for problems they perceive with their student's level or ability. In the case of the teachers in Sonora, this finding supports Pennington (1995) who indicates that the amount of L1 that the teacher uses in the classroom does not necessarily depend on their linguistic competence. The decision to use the student's first language may depend on their perception of the students' ability and other sociocultural factors like the location of the school. Many teachers believed that if they spoke English the students would not understand. Others also believed that students in the public schools were at a disadvantage because of the little access they had had to English at home.

TEACHER (1): Porque no me entienden, porque les digo y se quedan "ahhh" y se los digo en español lo que es, pero ellos se quedan. Les digo "aprendan, fíjense, pongan atención en lo que yo les digo porque son palabras que vamos a estar usando y son con las que les voy a hablar". Trato de todo el rato estarles hablando, hablarles en inglés pero les digo la palabra, y se preguntan "¿qué nos dijo?" Ellos mismos se la van pasando ahí, pero si les hablo mucho en español.

TEACHER (2): Antes trabajaba en una escuela particular aquí en [name of city] y puedo comparar, y los niños en estas escuelas [Public schools] no tienen mucho acceso al inglés en sus casas o apoyo de sus papás. Si les hablo en inglés, y digo por ejemplo, mmm no sé, algo en inglés, no me entienden. Es necesario hablarles en español para que pongan atención y sobre todo para que se pongan a trabajar.

Despite the different reasons that prompt teachers to use Spanish, it is important for them to reflect on their use of this language, and to use as much English as possible in the classroom. As Cameron (2001) mentions, this awareness will allow teachers to develop a realistic and strategic use of both languages that supports the children's language learning. This does not mean that Spanish should completely be banned from the classroom because this would be unrealistic. As some authors (Cook, 2001; Stern, 1992) indicate, it is inevitable for the first language to emerge in the classroom because it is an integral part of the students, of the context, and of the learning process. So, there are some instances when Spanish may be the necessary, but in most cases students need to make an effort to understand the English language. This is crucial because when translation is used, students become accustomed to waiting for Spanish and stop trying to understand and internalize the language (Cameron, 2001). So the first language should never be used to save time or to simplify the teachers' or students' lives (Harbord, 1992).

In addition to the previous methodological practices, different issues were expressed by the participants in the study in relation to the implementation of the PNIEB and the application of its sociocultural framework and methodology.

Implementation of the PNIEB's social practices framework and methodology

The introduction of the PNIEB to schools brought about a series of situations that were reported by the participants in the study. A first issue was the need for more information and preparation on the program's sociocultural perspective and methodology. From its beginning the PNIEB has produced different resources and materials as academic support for its teachers. Among these

we find the program's curricular foundations, a syllabus for each cycle, and detailed working guidelines for each grade level. Despite this fact, results from the study showed that English teachers did not have a complete conceptual or functioning knowledge of the program's sociocultural perspective. Some teachers mentioned that they had participated in workshops about the PNIEB but these had focused primarily on presenting general information about the program and the new lesson plan formats. However, further explanations about ways to implement the new approach in the classroom were not covered.

TEACHER (1): En unas dos sesiones nos explicaron a largos rasgos lo que teníamos que hacer. Y ya conforme la práctica pues le vas regando o le vas componiendo. Lo vas tratando de hacer mejor cada vez, ¿no? Porque pues son formatos nuevos, todo nuevo. Entonces sí es difícil de digerir.

TEACHER (2): Yo no aprendí nada en la capacitación. Yo me sentía así, como algo, no le entendía a nada, y levantábamos la mano y les preguntábamos a ellos, "es que es todo lo que sabemos", y "esto es lo que sabemos" y no, no, no y no.

TEACHER (3): En los cursos, este como le digo, siempre lo mismo, siempre nos explican lo mismo. Hasta ahorita lo que he visto, nos explican el nuevo formato de planeación, los tipo de, el contenidos que tenemos que ver y todo eso. Pero es muy general y nada así a fondo.

TEACHER (4): Lo que se necesita es conocer más sobre el PNIEB, sobre sus lineamientos, los contenidos, por ejemplo. Pero ahora no hay capacitaciones así, la capacitación la están dando aquí mismo [programa estatal], y ellos mismos no conocen bien el programa.

In addition to the need for more preparation on the PNIEB, teachers expressed the need for textbooks that could serve as a methodological guide in their practice. Program authorities explained that different publishers were developing several textbooks for the PNIEB. However, in 2010 during the initial stage of the study these were not available for all the schools in Sonora. This created a challenge for teachers; especially for those who were accustomed to working with the state program where the commercial textbooks played a determining role in the way they planned and taught their lessons.

TEACHER (1): La manera de trabajar anteriormente en el programa de inglés era en base a un programa, una guía didáctica combinada con los contenidos de los libros por lo tanto era más sencillo el trabajar. Era más sencillo hacer lo que eran las planeaciones, porque ya había algo establecido en los libros y teníamos el Teacher's Guide.

TEACHER (2): Ahorita no tengo libro, como estaba con el [state program], el año pasado ni los conocí. Cuando estaba con el programa estatal bien a gusto porque aunque no todos los compraban, yo si los podía usar de base y que compartieran entre ellos los que había. Ahorita ni eso puedo hacer.

TEACHER (3): No está como muy claro, está muy raro. Antes [with state program] teníamos más claridad de lo que enseñábamos y teníamos los libros de guía para planear las clases. Ahora solamente nos dicen, "pues ahí están las guías y tú adapta a tu criterio lo que consideras para tus alumnos". Y yo me pregunto, "¿qué vocabulario debo de enseñar?". Pero sí, con el libro de texto estaba mejor.

Teacher's dependence on textbooks as a main methodological resource in ELT primary level programs has been previously reported in Mexico (Castañedo y Davis, 2004; Ramírez-Romero, Pamplon & Cota, 2012) and in other countries around the world (Drew, Oostdam & van Toorenborg, 2007; Hoa & Tuan, 2007; Kirkgoz, 2007; Li, 2007). During the second stage of the study in 2012, the textbooks had started to arrive; however, they were not being distributed to the schools in a timely or complete manner. In most cases, the textbooks were not available

until the second half of the school year. In addition to this, a single school could receive books from up to three different editorials. This became even more difficult for teachers who taught in several schools to complete their work schedule. Some explained this situation and how it affected their teaching.

TEACHER (1): O sea, para empezar los libros no llegaron a tiempo. Sí, llegaron ya que había empezado el ciclo. Este ciclo también no tenemos libros. Yo no sé si llegaron. Yo me estoy basando en éstos [books from previous year], pero no sé si me van a mandar los mismos.

TEACHER (2): Pues por ejemplo, los libros todavía no nos llegan, nos llegan muy tarde, en diciembre. Pero que falta contarlos, y que la coordinación, pida que se entreguen. Entonces como que sí afecta mucho.

TEACHER (3): Ahorita estoy en dos escuelas con los mismos grados y pues tengo que planear dos clases diferentes porque en una escuela usan el [editorial] y en la otra [editorial] y nada que ver, un libro empieza de una manera y el otro con otras actividades, uno tiene un nivel más elevado y los niños no entienden nada. La verdad, es un problema usarlos, pero luego, no los usa uno, y los papás se enojan.

Other issues came up in relation to the PNIEB textbooks during the interviews. As we mentioned previously, at the time of the study English classes began in third grade of primary so they did not cover the first cycle in the PNIEB framework (3rd pre-school to 2nd primary). Regardless of this, textbooks were assigned to the schools according to the Grade level of the students and not their language level. As we can see from the comments, this represented a problem for teachers:

TEACHER (1): Los de tercero de primaria a pesar de que es la primera vez que estaban llevando inglés, yo pensé que íbamos a ver el del nivel uno de del PNIEB, del programa y noooo, empezaron con el tres.

TEACHER (2): No, entraron con tercero, pero al principio no les podía dar nivel tres pues no sabían nada [por lo que] yo más bien le combinaba. Agarraba de primero, de segundo, y de tercero, y le iba combinando, combinando ya hasta lo último ya. TEACHER (3): Siempre tengo que adaptar, especialmente con los de 6to que hay un grupo que no entiende nada. Estoy usando el libro de tercero casi en todos los grupos, porque el lenguaje está muy elevado.

These problems related to inadequate distribution and language level of the textbooks did not allow the teachers to use them as a main resource, but more as optional material for activities. The PNIEB guidelines seemed to be the main source of information for the teacher's lesson plan (e.g. achievement and product). However, for the selection of activities and content, they depended on other sources such as the state program's textbooks and material, the Internet, or their own repertoire of material from previous teaching experiences.

TEACHER (1): De las guías, veo los achievements, tomo material y actividades de todos lados. Donde encuentre algo que pueda darles, aunque casi siempre del Internet, de páginas de enseñanza de inglés.

TEACHER (2): Los tomo [materials and activities] de otros libros. Por ejemplo, yo traigo otros libros aquí. Por ejemplo, para los de tercero, que a mí se me hace muy elevado. Este, pues yo hago ciertas actividades y tengo cantidad de fotos que quisiera que vieras, lo que hago en el pizarrón, lo que tengo que hacer, porque en la escuela hay copiadora pero [solo] los maestros [de español] tienen su clave; los de inglés no.

TEACHER (3): Así que para hacer la planeación y planear las actividades de mi clase, pues me baso en los productos que vienen en las guías que están más o menos sencillos. Y las actividades de donde se

me ocurren. De mis ideas o de mis experiencias, algunas la tomo de los libros que usábamos con el [Programa Estatal].

Furthermore, most of the PNIEB lessons that were observed followed the methodological sequence called Present Practice Produce (Willis, 1996) which is commonly found in textbooks (Harmer, 1996). It is relevant to mention that these activities and procedures support a more linear type of instruction, which is dissimilar to the competency, and "product or outcome" approach of the PNIEB. This type of instructional sequence was also identified in a preliminary review of some of the PNIEB books, which mention the social practices framework but follow a more skill-based model and not the competencies one promoted by the sociocultural approach.

Finally, there were other issues related to the program's operation in the schools that were mentioned by the participants as affecting their teaching methodology. One of these was the insufficient hours of English that the program offers, time which is also frequently interrupted or cancelled because of other school activities. This issue has been reported in different contexts as a limiting factor in the programs in primary education (Cano, 2005; Drew, Oostdam & van Toorenburg, 2007; Kirkgoz, 2007; Marsh, 2008; Ramírez-Romero, 2010). Some of the comments that were made support this:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: Las maestras de inglés me han llegado a comentar que media hora es muy poco tiempo. Además, por ejemplo en este caso, son muchos grupos, al acabar con uno hay que correr a cambiar de materiales y luego a recibir al otro grupo. Entonces parece que no, pero, a veces son cinco o diez minutos, y no pueden dejar cortada una clase si están, vaya, si están haciendo algo relevante algo importante y ya se quedaron en este salón 5 minutos más y para el otro grupo ya se recortaron 10. Entonces yo veo que a las maestras que sienten que no les alcanza, que no han explicado totalmente. Tal vez pedagógicamente sea un buen método, pero la verdad lo que han comentado con los maestros y lo que yo he visto, la verdad no creo que sea una buena idea media hora.

TEACHER: Me gustaría que fuera más veces en la semana porque dos sesiones se me hacen, en realidad, se me hace poco. Los niños necesitan reafirmar. Cada vez que van aprendiendo algo y a veces no hay tiempo para reafirmar o a veces los contenidos no se adaptan para poder reafirmar algo. Entonces si hubiera otra sesión, como en el principio, sería mejor.

PARENT: Entonces sí: que le pudieran dar un poquito más de horas a la semana de inglés para que ellos vayan reforzando la pronunciación, la lectura, la escritura. Que ellos vayan aprendiendo más, y a mí en lo personal, me encantaría que fuera desde preescolar.

Another significant issue that was mentioned by English teachers as affecting their practice is the need for their own classroom space and materials to create more contextualized learning environments for the children. The PNIEB's underlying principles base foreign language learning aims on the development of children's competencies within different social environments, all of which require great contextualization and exposure to the language. Many of the teachers expressed the problems they faced with acquiring and placing material in their classrooms:

TEACHER (1): Yo sé que los niños necesitan mucho material, pero como ando de salón en salón es difícil estar llevándolos de aquí para allá. Aparte no tengo tantos y para todos los grupos y si los dejo, los profesores de la tarde o los niños mismos los quitan. La verdad tampoco nos pagan tanto ni yo tengo dinero como para todos los días.

TEACHER (2): No puedo dar las clases como yo quisiera, así más dinámicas porque no están las condiciones. Primero no tengo mi propio espacio, un aula. No pueden mover mucho los escritorios por el poco tiempo. Difícilmente se puede hacer muchas cosas.

TEACHER (3): Siempre he ido a las distintas aulas con el horario de tal a tal, tal salón, de tal a tal, tal salón, tal a tal, tal salón ando ahí por toda la escuela con todos mis cachibachis, grabadora, mochila, libros, recortes, la caja de tijeritas de colores porque se les da a ellos su paquete y a las dos tres meses ya no tenga nada. ¡Cómo batallamos nosotros!

In the case of young learners, as Curtain and Dahlberg (2010) point out, clear, meaningful, and interesting contexts provide the settings in which new language is understandable for them. This need becomes even more essential in foreign language contexts, where the main and sometimes only exposure that the children have to English is in the classroom (Pinter, 2006; Cameron, 2003; Harmer, 2007). In the case of the PNIEB, teachers require spaces, materials and teaching resources to provide students with environments that promote language learning.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to present some findings regarding the implementation of the PNIEB's sociocultural framework, specifically in relation to its language teaching methodology. Based on the analysis of data collected from the participants and the classroom observations, we can conclude that at the time of the study (2010-2012) teachers were making an effort to use the PNIEB's guidelines and to apply the new sociocultural perspective but had not significantly changed their methodological practices. Some teachers had certain knowledge about the program's characteristics, but few in relation to its pedagogical applications. This could be explained by the recent implementation of the program, and the need for a more extensive dissemination of its pedagogical orientations among teachers, coordinators, school principals, parents, and all those involved in its implementation and application.

Secondly, results show that teachers' positive attitude and willingness to learn and implement new methodologies is a valuable asset to the program. However, teachers need to receive and participate in an in-depth professional development program on the PNIEB, and on methods for teaching English to young learners under this sociocultural approach. This is especially important because professional development of teachers to a sociocultural perspective represents a shift in epistemological stance (Johnson, 2009) that requires teachers in-depth reflection regarding their notions about what language is, how it is learned, and how it should be taught (Freeman, 2002).

Finally, the PNIEB's sociocultural approach is appropriate and in alignment with the current methodological trends. The connection of the English program with the national curriculum can be of great advantage if this relation is explored in more systematic and integral ways. There is great potential for English teachers to work alongside the Spanish curriculum and benefit from the content and learning that students are experiencing in those courses. With the PNIEB, social practices and competencies have already been defined for both languages. As the document specifies, "the relationship between contents and their transversal reading is guaranteed" (SEP, *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica*, 2010, p. 61). This could be done through the use of specific L1 language, not for translation purposes, but more as a scaffolding device to connect or expand meanings from the first language to English. This would support an essential principle in teaching English to children which indicates that it is crucial to present content or language that they have already acquired in their mother tongue (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2006). To foster this type of English instruction, resources and materials are needed to create richer learning environments in the schools for students to be exposed to the language in more meaningful ways. English teachers also need to have a greater presence, not only in the schools, but in the general basic education structure and system (e.g. professional development and appropriate working conditions). These are crucial issues that need to be addressed in order to

have a more successful implementation of the PNIEB as well as an effective application of its teaching methodology.

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