

THE INFLEXIBILITY OF FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF *ACELERACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE*

by

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ABSTRACT

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum was adopted by the Ministry of National Education as part of its educational policy to serve vulnerable populations, which include indigenous and minority groups, people with special needs, children and adolescents at social risk (e.g. working children, children/adolescents out of the educational system), groups affected by violence (children in armed groups, displaced people), and rural populations (MEN, 2005).

In this study, I investigate the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum by using critical discourse analysis (CDA). I offer a discussion on how “flexibility” is discursively constructed within the curriculum, what policy rationalities and assumptions underlie the learning materials, and how *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*’s students and teachers are constructed and situated as subjects with and through the discourse on flexible programs.

Major study findings consist of three schemes –script-based curriculum, project-based curriculum, and flexibility– that act as ideological markers in the discourses that inform how flexibility is represented as a feature of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. The scripted curriculum, the project-based curriculum, and the flexibility of this curriculum are oriented towards the goal of ensuring students enrollment. Other significant findings consist of an institutional analysis which explains that this curriculum was not originally developed from a demand of the Colombian constitutional and legal framework. This program became a solution to expand access and promote enrollment derived from international influence. This CDA poses questions regarding how the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum removes barriers to access, and the

compatibility of overemphasizing enrollment to ensuring quality education. Finally, propose recommendations for policy-makers and future research directions.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Emilia and Manuela, my sisters, Nayivi and Germán, my parents, and Daniel, my partner. Your love and support are forever a source of strength and inspiration

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

DANE National Administrative Department of Statistics

IBRD International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

IMF International Monetary Fund

MEN Colombian Ministry of National Education

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

PEI Institutional Educational Project

PER Proyecto Educativo Rural

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

General Introduction to the Topic

Just as school reform is a long-standing issue in the US, so it is also in Colombia. Some key similarities and differences are that both Colombia and the US education reform acknowledge and encourage public education as the primary source of K to 12 education. However, each country has a different set of goals for strengthening education. The US emphasizes tracking and reducing drop-out rates through an input-output system, in which accountability creates high-stakes from curriculum standards tied to standardized tests (Koretz, 2008). On the other hand, Colombia emphasizes increasing school enrollment to ensure access to basic education for all (a solution to a different problem). Since 2004, Colombia has oriented its efforts to add resources for providing school access to vulnerable populations, here described as indigenous and minority groups, people with special needs, children and adolescents at social risk (e.g. working children, children/adolescents out of the educational system), groups affected by violence (children in armed groups, displaced people), and rural populations (MEN, 2005; Tomaševski, 2004).

Despite this goal, access to education and education quality differed significantly across regions and social classes. Student enrollment is still a challenge for both the education local offices and the Ministry of National Education (MEN for its acronym in Spanish). This is particularly present in rural and marginal areas where forced displacement, migration, dispersion

difficulties such as geographical isolation and poverty contributed to the school-age population being outside of the educational system. The low enrollment and high student dropout rate in rural areas has been generally associated with geographical isolation, armed conflict, and possibly the high percentage of child labor influenced by the need of families to increase their income (González Lara & Pulido Chaves, 2014; IBRD, 2014, Trujillo, 2006; Zuluaga, 2007). In addition, the low educational level of the parents, together with the high repetition rates, resulted in a higher risk of student dropout in these areas (Trujillo, 2006).

MEN has launched new initiatives in the past two decades to increase enrollment. In 2002, it launched *Revolución Educativa* a reform that called for a complete transformation of the education system with an emphasis on increasing student enrollment¹. Also, in 2010, a mandate by the Colombian Constitutional Court made all public elementary schools free of charge. In 2012 the mandate was extended to public secondary schools. As part of this effort to increase student enrollment and in addition to traditional education, MEN has included a portfolio of what they call flexible educational models (*modelos educativos flexibles*), which combine traditional instructional strategies, part-time school programs, conventional and non-conventional learning processes, flexible methodologies, and articulation of pedagogical resources.

These flexible programs use teacher training and community commitment to increase access and strengthen retention of school populations in the system (MEN, 2010). MEN points out that these flexible programs have been adapted pedagogically and curricularly for

¹ *Revolución Educativa* is the first Colombian policy in which education is defined as an essential tool for human, economic, and social development aims to achieve a true transformation of the Colombian school system (Atehortúa Cruz, 2012).

marginalized and vulnerable populations, such as children in situations of displacement, child workers, and rural students, among others. Many of these flexible e models were designed some years ago; therefore, in 2014, MEN was given the task of updating, especially, the physical materials (guides, booklets, modules) for both students and teachers. Although there are some assessments focusing on the implementation of some of those flexible curricular programs, they do not focus on curriculum or critical analysis.

Purpose of the Research

Curriculum is a central part of the discourse that unfolds across schools and educational systems. Apple (1990) holds that the analysis of curriculum can expose how school reproduces and distributes knowledge according to particular class interests. According to Ball (2006), curriculum functions to “construct meaning and truth and to regulate behavior;” curricula are part of the discursive thrust of education (p. 49). In this sense, curriculum and its regulatory nature provide a useful framework for understanding how curriculum functions as discourse (Pillay, 2016). As Pillay (2016) points out, “curriculum decision making is a complex undertaking, as it involves a multiplicity of aspects in society such as epistemology, politics, economics, ideology, technique, aesthetics, ethics, and history” (p. 528). Therefore, a discursive conception of a curriculum offers a useful approach for educational researchers interested in analyzing curriculum as “a dynamic and very political set of outcomes” (Pillay, 2016, p. 530).

Curriculum studies are crucial to challenging curricula relevance (Paraskeva, 2016). It is a dynamic field which has centered its efforts on questions about the sociopolitical function of schooling and whose knowledge is the most worth (Apple, 1990, Paraskeva, 2011, 2016). According to Paraskeva (2016), by studying curriculum, researchers and teachers must ask whose vision curriculum represents and who benefits (p. 14). Curriculum research offers the

possibility of critically examining the proposed outcomes and aims of education, the relationships between school and society, and the pedagogical approaches adopted.

This study looks into the learning materials of one flexible program -- *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* -- and is limited to document analysis. This program targets children and youth ages 10 to 15 years who have difficulties participating in the traditional educational system and have not been able to complete elementary school (MEN, 2010a). *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was designed in the Latin American context as a strategy that seeks to reintegrate out-of-school children into the educational system (MEN, 2010a). This program has a curricular component, an administrative organization, and a didactic component (i.e. booklets with units and guides) that allows students to advance several grades in one year and overcome their age-grade gap (MEN, 2010).

MEN has adopted, compiled, and updated the learning materials of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. This dissertation applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) to the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s learning materials. Through CDA, I explore what is involved in this flexible curriculum and who this curriculum was designed to serve.

Research Questions

The central research question of this study is *what discourses inform the Colombian flexible curricular movement?* Following Creswell's model by which the entire study can be reduced to an overarching question and several sub-questions, in this research, the following three sub-questions helped me to direct research attention to needed information for the description of the case (Stake, 1995, Creswell, 1998).

1. What is the institutional and sociopolitical context of Colombia's flexible programs?
 - What is Colombia's national policy for flexible curricular programs?

- How have major policy documents identified policy rationales, goals, and problems that flexible programs solve?
2. What are the characteristics of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*?
- Who created *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*?
 - How does *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* work?
3. What discourses inform the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* learning materials?
- How is flexibility represented as a feature of this program?
 - How does this program position teachers?
 - How does this program position students?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant chiefly in three dimensions. First, the existing research in Colombian curricula studies shows that researchers have paid little attention to the concept of curriculum. Curriculum studies in Colombia have not flourished as an alternative to critically examine educational experiences (Montoya-Vargas, 2014). This study would be pioneering research which serves as an operational framework and a theoretical grounding to open the path of curricula studies about flexible curricular reform in the Colombian context.

Secondly, Lim (2014) argues that CDA applied to curriculum is able to identify the ideological and political presuppositions “hidden” in curricular formulations, and show the connections between ideology, language, power and “social institutions such as schools and constructions of the curriculum,” and vice versa (Lim, 2014, p. 61- 62). Understanding the interconnections between curriculum and ideology enables stakeholders “to delve into the place of schools in the cultural, as well as economic, reproduction of [primarily] class relations” (Apple, 1990, p. 15). CDA moves beyond the descriptive to offer an explanatory analysis to

understand how discourse serves the production of curriculum. From this perspective, a critical discourse analysis of a flexible curricular program is able to function as an instrument to identify and connect circulating discourses, revealing what Fairclough (2015) describes as the “power behind” discourse, or the unseen ideological forces governing discourses in the public domain.

Thirdly, this study may help to explore the extent to which knowledge production and its dissemination contribute to the marginalization of vulnerable populations. In Colombia, flexible curricular programs seek to increase students' enrollment; however, it presents itself falsely as a neutral educational policy. One of the major tasks for this CDA study is to discover whether the flexible curricular reform plays a role in reinforcing the marginalization of historically vulnerable populations. The findings and critical reflections draw from the Colombian case may shed light on the questions of who benefits from flexible programs.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation begins with a background on the history of the educational system in Colombia. It then describes in detail the program selected by my study. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), i.e. the methodological framework is examined to look into the discourses grounded on flexible programs. The final section focuses on the analysis of the program and the implications drawn from the curriculum.

Chapter Two is divided into two sections that describe different components of my literature review. The first part presents a historical review of political, economic, and social changes of the Colombian educational system. It introduces the context in which the right to education operates and it aims to discuss the highlights of the elementary education system in Colombia, as well as to present the highlight aspects that have determined the current education system and its effect on vulnerable populations. The second part of this chapter reviews literature

from two major areas that are pertinent to this study: curriculum theory and the field of curriculum studies in Colombia. Finally, existing studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* are reviewed.

Chapter Three introduces *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* and its connections to the educational policy. This chapter aims to show how the program is connected to Colombian educational policy and to identify how its implementation structure responds to the specificities of strengthening enrollment. It outlines the major policy documents that describe the need for flexible programs. This chapter also describes how and why *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* became an alternative for serving marginalized students. Finally, the chapter provides key information for understanding how the program works.

Chapter Four explores critical discourse analysis (CDA): the methodological framework that this study adopts as the guidance for inquiry. This chapter introduces 1) the key theoretical elements of CDA; 2) Fairclough's three interacting levels as the analytic design for data analysis (Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2015); and 3) my application of CDA, my research rationale, and how the curriculum will be analyzed.

Chapters Five and Six present my findings and analysis. Chapter Five aims to explain the ways in which students are portrayed and how the teachers are represented. In addition to providing a picture of who this curriculum was designed to serve, this chapter provides an entry point to the materials that were analyzed. Chapter Six, the second part of my analysis, begins by exploring how "flexibility" was discursively constructed within the curriculum of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, including an examination of how flexibility is defined and represented as a major feature of the curriculum. It also lays out two more discourses that were identified in the texts: the scripted curriculum and a project-based curriculum. This chapter ends with a

discussion on the limitations regarding enrollment policies on education and it provides my analysis on the implications of this flexible program.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter, reflects upon the findings and contributions of this study and. I end this chapter with my concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, my study is framed by a larger educational picture. In the first part, I describe the history of the educational system in Colombia, including a discussion of some of the key educational reforms undertaken. This historical review of political, economic, and social changes of the Colombian' educational system serves as the context in which flexible programs operate, and it aims to discuss the highlights of the elementary education system in Colombia with special attention to the rural and urban differences. Additionally, this first part provides a presentation of how education for vulnerable populations is conceptualized in the Colombian educational discourse. The overarching objective is to highlight aspects that have determined the current education system in Colombia and its effect on marginalized populations. Thus, I focus on the right to education in Colombia specifically with regard to vulnerable populations, the targeted population of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program.

In the second part of the chapter, I review literature from two major areas pertinent to this study, with the first being curriculum theory and the second providing readers with insight into the field of curriculum studies in Colombia. The first section discusses my use of curriculum theory, which provides the theoretical underpinning for the structure and approach of this study. The subsequent section explains that curriculum studies are relatively new in Colombia and introduces the most recent studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* in order to locate my research both in the Colombian context and in a larger geographical context, given that other Latin

American countries use this program. Through this section, I introduce how education scholars have studied this program in order to better locate my research interest.

Part I. Historical Review of Colombia's Education System

Colombia's education system's history has been closely related to the country's political agenda. According to Helg (1987), it is a history of the disastrous relationship between the elite, which advances to the pace of the United States and Europe, and the majority of the Colombian population who lives isolated from the international transformation processes. While the elite advances ambitious educational reforms that are not materialized, the urban poor population adjusts to the marginal changes in the school system, but the rural population is not convinced of the benefits of education.

In the course of the colonial period, the Catholic Church assumed a big role in education with the purpose of evangelizing indigenous population. García Sánchez (2005) explains that education, granted to the Catholic Church through the Royal Patronage of the Indies, was the regulatory mechanism between the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown. The first institutions of basic education had two objectives: evangelism to save the souls of the indigenous population; and consolidation of the patron – slave relationship to secure a free workforce. Schools served as a tool for preserving the social order in which Spaniards held political and socioeconomic control of the colonies. As García Sánchez (2005) argues, the indigenous population provided the enslaved labor for the economic exploitation of the colonies under the Spanish mercantile regime.

Two changes in the population composition led to reforms of the educational system: *Criollos*² required education beyond evangelism and the fading indigenous population due to slavery exploitation. Around 1600, according to García Sánchez (2005), the Spanish Crown promoted the creation of schools in the main cities (i.e. Santa Fe, Popayan, and Mompo) of the Viceroyalty. Jesuits and Dominicans founded schools to teach Spanish, religion, and crafts. The first private schools established in the main cities during the colonial period belonged to religious orders and to some wealthy families ³(García Sánchez, 2005).

In 1767, the Catholic Church's control of education was removed from the religious sphere (García Sánchez, 2005). This was followed by a Royal Decree in 1768 that stated that education could not be under the dominion of either religious orders or the family. This educational reform gave the state responsibility for public education, which led to the opening of the first public schools whose responsibility was to admit all students and teach them to read, write, and count.

During the first half of the 19th century, the independence from Spain brought the education reform to a pause primarily because all fiscal resources were invested in the wars of

² Children of Spanish descent born in the colonies.

³ These schools admitted *Criollos* who came from a legitimate union (Catholic marriage) which made the system socially excluding.

independence and the dissolution of the *Gran Colombia*⁴. This process left an impoverished Colombian state with differences among the ruling elite that was divided between ideas of a centralized versus a federal state (Arrubla, 1991). Political instability was caused by the oscillation between federalism and centralism at the beginning of the 19th; this instability also permeated the education system.

According to Ramírez and Salazar (2007), some of the main reasons for the failure to provide universal access to education were the different views among the elite, who were not able to reach a consensus on how to educate the population, and the tensions between the Catholic Church and the state. Additionally, the weak financial conditions of the country, its geographical complexity, and the precarious transportation infrastructure were also negative factors (Ramírez & Salazar, 2007).

When the government decreed the creation of public schools in cities or towns with more than 100 families, it also set the learning goals of elementary school. Helg (1987) explains that students ought to be taught how to become honest citizens, good Catholics, and skillful workers through knowledge of reading, writing, math, grammar, and religion. The decree introduced elementary school, but it did not guarantee its gratuity or how it was to be financed. The creation of a new education system gave the cities and towns the responsibility of funding schools and teachers.

⁴ Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela during colonial times was the Viceroyalty of New Granada. During the independence, it was named the Gran Colombia and after the independence, it separated into three countries.

Arrubla (1991) argues that towns did not have the financial resources to fund schools, and teacher availability was scarce. Therefore, economically disadvantaged areas did not have sufficient resources to fund schools, which in terms of equity had serious effects on the access to and quality of education. Rural provinces were negatively affected by the reform as they were not able to afford the infrastructure and could not pay teachers' salaries (Arrubla, 1991; Patiño Millán, 2005; Ramírez & Salazar, 2007).

The funding for elementary schools depended on the local governments; consequently, education was not homogeneously offered across the country (Ramírez & Salazar, 2007). Ramírez and Salazar argue that the rural population did not recognize the benefits of schooling. They saw a high cost when sending their children to a school because they needed their children's help to work on family farms. In addition, most schools were concentrated in urban areas and the poor transportation system hindered the access of rural children to schools. As Ramírez and Salazar (2007) mentions, rural students had to travel to cities to go to school and attain an equivalent degree as urban students.

In their historical account, Ramírez and Salazar (2007) describe how in 1870 the national government presented a radical reform to the educational system establishing that public elementary schools should be nonclerical, free, and compulsory. However, this reform met the strong opposition of the Catholic Church that declared that families sending their children to those schools would be excommunicated because they were against Catholicism (Patiño Millán, 2005). The civil war between liberals and conservatives revoked the reform and public schools were closed (Ramírez & Salazar, 2007).

Finally, the Constitution of 1886 established that public elementary schools were free but not compulsory, and regulated by the Catholic Church. Since then, public education financing

has been divided between the national, departmental, and municipal levels. According to Helg (1987), during the beginning of the twentieth century, rural schools were marginally funded by the national government which preferred the schools located in the more inhabited places. Urban public schools served low-income students and children of working-class parents. These schools were located in cities; therefore, were supervised on a regular basis by the school inspectors so the quality and the curriculum improved significantly. The majority of private schools belonged to religious congregations. There were also some laic private schools which varied in quality, and there were some bilingual schools in the main capital cities. As Ramírez and Salazar (2007) argue, schools' quality was determined by tuition costs; private schools had better infrastructure while public schools had buildings and teachers below the quality standards.

When the liberal party assumed the presidency of Colombia from 1930 to 1946, it introduced the *Educación Popular* reform (i.e. education for low-income people), in which students' good physical conditions should be guaranteed as part as providing students' right to education (Herrera C, 1993). This reform never went through because during a period called *La Violencia*⁵ political differences among the conservatives and the liberals grew until the conflict ended with a military coup in 1953. *La Violencia* and changes in the economic structure of the country during the 1950s boosted the rural to urban migration process, which impacted the education sector.

⁵ La Violencia (1948-1958) was the expression of the confrontation between liberals and conservatives, as well as the origin of guerrilla warfare and the armed conflict between guerrilla groups and the Colombian state.

When Colombia entered its most accelerated phase of urbanization, occupational diversification, and industrial expansion in 1950, the educational system still had ten students in elementary schooling for each student who reached high school (Palacios, 2006). Only one elementary student in one hundred reached college, and over 70 % of students did not make it to third grade. According to Cajiao (2004), unexpectedly after 1950, the country started rapidly leaping in its demographic and productive structures. Between 1940 and 1965, Colombia's population went from 8,600,000 to 17,000,000 inhabitants, the rural population increased by 35% while the urban one increased by 500% (Cajiao, 2004). This had a direct effect on education since the number of enrolled students in elementary and high school, and the number of teachers and schools increased in a considerable way (Cajiao, 2004).

This rapid increase in demand for education drained a fragile system. Public schools had to respond rapidly to cope with the increasing demand, and this lowered the quality of education since less qualified teachers had to be hired and schools had to increase the numbers of students per grade (Cajiao, 2004). In addition, the migrants arriving from rural areas came from low-income backgrounds, and the relocation disruptions made it a challenge for children to succeed in school. As Cajiao explains, the system reproduced the social fragmentation present in the country with a public education model for the poor and isolated communities and a private education parallel system for the elite. While the public education sector had to adjust to provide basic skills, the private sector consolidated and prepared its students for their secondary and tertiary education. The private education sector increased its resources and raised the supply of schools for the emerging middle class while also expanded its presence in more cities; therefore, being able to maintain quality. On the other hand, public schools had to provide education for those willing to enroll in school with reduced spending per student.

Throughout the decade of the sixties the government continued introducing some reforms intended to improve students' enrollment and quality of education (Cajiao, 2004). On the political context, the bipartisan differences in Colombia diluted after *La Violencia* due to an arrangement between the liberals and conservatives to alternate the country's presidency⁶. Thus, the political scene moved from a bipartisan confrontation to the state against violence. In 1960, a law that centralized elementary education expenses on the central government was passed, while the administration of the resources to cover teacher expenses remained in the different states.

However, the rural-urban educational gap did not diminish during the 1960s, as the government planned. The lack of teachers still played against public schools expansion. In public schools, teachers had to teach multi-grade classes which made it very difficult for students to advance to higher grades (Cajiao, 2004). Elementary education continued to be held for three years in rural areas. Cajiao (2004) argues that the government evaluations of rural public primary schooling showed problems in quality coverage and resources, which enlarged the gap between rural and urban schools.

Colombia's next development in education was in 1991 when a new constitution established the decentralization of public administration and it established education as a right and as a public service. In fact, the story of education in Colombia reached a crucial moment with the Political Constitution of 1991, which advances education as a fundamental right; therefore, an inherent responsibility of the state (Cajiao, 2004).

⁶ The two parties united in facing the civil war against the guerrilla insurgencies (FARC, ELN, and M-19), drug dealers, and paramilitaries. These illegal groups established in rural areas where the state authority had little or no presence.

The Right to Education and Vulnerable Populations in Colombia

The 1991's Constitution marked a new direction for education in Colombia because it brought to the forefront the idea of marginalization and the needs of vulnerable populations. The constitution is rooted in ideas of diversity and provides an acknowledgment of multiculturalism, ethnic pluralism, gender, and vulnerability. From Restrepo's (2009) perspective, the Constitution of 1991 is an acknowledgment of and a response to Colombia's asymmetry and the marginalization of vast segments of its population⁷.

In addition to the Constitution, Law 115 is a major educational policy that has promoted the right to education in all its components, especially for vulnerable populations. In 1994, this General Law of Education was approved by Congress, and it establishes the principles for management, administration, and financing of the education system, assigns local states a more important role in resource administration and creates schemes for the quality of education evaluation. Additionally, it establishes that through the leadership of the National Ministry of Education (MEN) a decennial plan of education has to be prepared in order to set the objectives of the country in education matters (Law 115, 1994).

⁷ One of the most important accomplishments of the new constitution was the *Acción de Tutela*, which is an instrument to demand the restoration of fundamental rights in cases of violation (Art. 86). This article has become a legally empowering tool for vulnerable populations regarding the right to education. Thus, in the past decades, Colombia has made important progress towards the right to education because of educational reforms framed by the Constitution of 1991.

This law sets different goals for different populations and identifies vulnerable populations as those people who are at greater risk of exclusion, poverty, the effects of inequality, and violence of all kinds because of their personal conditions or the context in which they live (Law 115, 1994). Vulnerable populations include indigenous and minority groups, people with special needs, children and adolescents at social risk (e.g. working children, children/adolescents out of the educational system), groups affected by violence (children in armed groups, displaced people), and rural populations (MEN, 2005).

In 1996, the first decennial plan was prepared, but it went overlooked by the 1998 and 2002 president administrations (Cajiao, 2004). The 2006 decennial plan included as the concerns of all those interested, but, once again, the decennial plan was not considered for the administration's development plan. The Decennial Plans are regulated by Law 115 and have a double purpose: first, to serve as an instrument of educational development planning at different levels (national, regional, institutional), and second, to serve as a tool for mobilizing public opinion and civil society about educational issues (Lerma, 2007). These plans are not only a strategy to maintain continuity across government institutions, but they also comprise, as Lerma (2007) states, the "most ambitious educational project" in Colombia's history:

To educate whole human beings, socially engaged in building a country that favors coexistence and tolerance, human beings with the ability to disagree and argue without using force, human beings prepared to incorporate scientific and technological knowledge for their own development and the country. (Lerma, 2007, p. 19)

The objectives of the 1996-2005 Decennial Plan included overcoming all forms of discrimination in order to amend inequities that affect the education system and to provide quality education to all Colombians regardless of their background or social location. With those

aims, the Plan defined the Program for Special Populations as a major strategy, which included indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other ethnic groups, people with special needs, rural populations and marginalized urban groups (MEN, 1996). The 2006-2016 Plan rephrases the same objective and also frames it within the need for peace and citizenship education. In addition, the 2006-2016 Plan emphasizes the need to improve pedagogical strategies, in terms of developing flexible and pertinent educational models that use technologies in the classroom, and declares the human rights approach as the required framework for education (MEN, 2007).

Within this context, during the past twenty years, there have been several important programs whose influence on education for marginalized populations is evident even today. All of them acknowledge that children who attend public education institutions have no viable alternatives compared to children who can afford private education institutions.

According to Palacios (2006), Colombia's complex education system is comprised of a public sector that provides elementary and high school education of low quality and private schools that offer something better. Private education is not affordable for many, but it is the preferred choice of parents that can afford it. Public education is therefore attended by children coming from low-income families that have little chances of ascending social mobility (Palacios, 2006).

Despite its weakness, in recent years there has been a drastic change in the educational situation in Colombia, a change that has produced important improvements in the conditions of vulnerable populations (Cajiao, 2004; Restrepo, 2009). According to MEN's reports, between 2005 and 2012, around twenty-three million children and young people who could not attend a traditional school received an education due to flexible models (MEN, 2013). Nevertheless, the

situation is still far from ideal; for instance, Lerma (2007) states these efforts have been insufficient to meet all children's right to education.

One of the major challenges obstructing the educational system's fulfillment of the right to education is the emphasis on efficiency in all its policies⁸. For example, the decentralization of educational systems has been one of the central arguments that the World Bank has repeatedly put forward in order to achieve improvements in efficiency and quality in education (Psacharopoulos, 2006). Decentralization "improves the technical efficiency of educational provision because it reduces administration costs at the same time as improving results" (Psacharopoulos, 2006, p. 336). The World Bank's emphasis on social efficiency includes an effort towards decentralization. By decentralizing the management of public resources, it is assumed that services (e.g. education and health) are closer to the people who can directly express their requirements and preferences.

From this view, the local community can ensure that public resources are being used properly and in accordance with local needs. The World Bank argues that decentralization should positively impact the allocation and management of resources. However, decentralization also represents a potential danger of an unequal territorial distribution of public spending and

⁸ In 1999, the Colombian state appealed to the IMF for a loan of about \$2.7 billion for the first time in its history and since then has been compelled to IMF's customary mandate: a structural reform agenda of austere fiscal policies that includes measures to streamline the revenue sharing system, reform the public pension systems, and downsize the public sector. Most damaging to Colombians are the severe cutbacks in public investment in basic social services, such as health care, education, and social security (CCJ, 2004).

significant inequities in schooling conditions. In Colombia, Ramírez and Salazar (2007) argue that the process of decentralization is still incomplete and it does not work well without an outstanding flow of information, which in turn implies high levels of coordination between levels, clear accountability processes, and strong participation of civil society.

The decentralization process also has posed efficiency problems in providing education and conditions have not been met (Calvo, 2007; Ramírez & Salazar, 2007). For example, the capacity of the Colombian regional administrations has not been built and regions only follow MEN's guidelines without identifying and implementing the necessary adaptations. Additionally, as Ramírez and Salazar (2007) have documented, the levels of corruption are high since most of the money that regions handle is the education budget.

Additionally, per-student expenditure following decentralization has also been falling. According to Roman (2009), the decentralization model used for Bogotá and Medellín contributed to “a reduction in the municipal school sector in favor of the private sector and to social polarization between the public and private systems” (p. 8). This polarization is demonstrated by the enrollment rates of different social groups and the extreme disparities of academic performance between the private and public educational sectors. Therefore, decentralization has intensified the inequality between private and public schools (Roman, 2009, p. 6).

Since 1991, Colombia's story of the right of education and the very conception of education in the country has imagined education as an essential element of human dignity and inherent responsibility of the state (Cajiao, 2004). This turn, as Restrepo (2009) explains, brought to the front the idea of marginalization and the needs of vulnerable populations. However, education for vulnerable populations involves many challenges, beginning with the

vagueness in the definitions of vulnerable populations and identifying what their particular needs are. This study aims to expand the understanding of education for vulnerable populations by looking in detail at the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* case. This CDA study looks at a particular program designed to meet the need of marginalized populations, and in doing so it contributes to the existing literature and poses a discussion on the conceptualization of vulnerable populations in the field of education.

Part II. Curriculum Theory

Curriculum theory is situated within the broader field of curriculum studies. As such, scholars within this field seek to study the interdisciplinary relationships among curriculum, individual, and place (Pinar, 2004). This particular area of curriculum studies gained dominance throughout the 1970s to 1990s, during which a number of scholars worked to “reconceptualize” the field of curriculum studies. They shifted the conversations within the field toward understanding curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995).

Before this period of reconceptualization, scholarly work within the field was predominantly focused on curriculum development and improvement (Marshall et al., 2002). Johnson (1967) succinctly distinguishes “the difference between these two areas: [individuals] in curriculum development - while interested in curriculum, are not particularly concerned with curriculum theory” (p. 127). Scholars within curriculum development were concerned with improving the curriculum, not studying it. Theorists must not, Johnson (1967) continues, base their work solely on immediate utility for curriculum improvement. Rather, Johnson maintains there is a need to study the curricular phenomena to ensure the field of curriculum studies is grounded in theory.

Pinar et al. (1995) explain that curriculum theory gained dominance when the traditional field of curriculum studies ceased to provide the tools to address rapidly changing social and cultural landscapes. Furthermore, as tension increased between the West and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War, a new focus on the technical aspects of curriculum developed. As a result, curricula increasingly became the work role of specialists in the respective disciplines, threatening the very existence of the field of curriculum studies. In response, curriculum scholars realized a need to develop and firmly ground their field in theory (Marshall et al., 2002).

Consequently, curriculum theory can be described as the inquiry into the complex relationships among race, gender, multiculturalism, ecology, popular culture, and all other varying aspects of society (Pinar et al., 1995). I draw upon the scholarship of curriculum theorists as I understand the complexities of how flexibility is represented as a feature of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. I focus on curriculum theory and theorists whose work addresses curriculum as a political text, which in turn reproduces and challenges dominant ideologies (Apple, 1990; Pinar et al., 1995). Viewing curriculum and curricular policy through this lens shows they are neither culturally nor politically neutral.

Theorists such as Apple have written about the complex relationship between education systems, curriculum, and the production of knowledge. Curriculum, Apple (1990) explains, reproduces dominant ideologies through hidden mechanisms. The term ideology denotes “the theory of ideas;” however, the term has remained fluid, evolving over the years (Althusser, 1971, p. 106). Pinar et al. (1995) refer to ideology in relation to curriculum theory as the production of meaning. Referring to Peter McLaren, these authors explain: “ideology can be described as a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals and

representation that we tend to accept as natural and as common sense” (Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 245).

I suggest that by examining the discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, this study indicates the ideologies that are embedded in flexible curricular education. Ideology is a concept that extends beyond the theoretical. It is a set of symbols and actions which are shaped by, and shape, the relationships between people and the material world in a society (Pinar et al., 1995). As a result, ideologies provide direction for decision-making and often involve constraining prescriptive elements (Huebner, 1999). Dominant ideologies emerge and are constructed through social discourse (Gee, 2004). This includes the discursive trends of curricular policies and programs (Apple, 1990).

As ideologies are perpetuated through dominant discourses, they have great reproductive force. To understand the ideological functioning of dominant discourse and “no longer regard it as natural or inevitable product of common sense necessity,” it is necessary to see its historical links and gaps with other discourses (Foucault, 1969, as cited in Lemke, 1995, p. 29). For the purpose of this study, I am interested in the ways in which curriculum as a text is itself part of a overarching discursive formation built over historical time. Simply put, this study aims to see how curriculum functions to co-construct meaning and position its recipients.

Curriculum policies, being a widely accepted discourse, are thus socializing channels for reproducing and re-inscribing dominant ideologies and complex relationships within society (Pillay, 2016; Pinar et al., 1995). Curriculum theorists suggest schools have become an increasingly important site for studying the reproduction of ideologies. In turn, teachers become technocrats who are accountable for reproducing and delivering a pre-packaged curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). Furthermore, an examination of this discussion can lead to a deeper

understanding of how the re-inscription and/or subversion of flexible education within the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum reproduce or resist dominant ideologies.

In addition to reproduction, curriculum theorists have shown that curriculum plays a central role in the resistance against dominant ideologies. In the 1980s, for example, the discussion of reproduction became intrinsically related to the concept of resistance. The work by Paul Willis in the 1980s showed that the "lads," who were males from working-class communities, challenged and resisted the ideologies embedded within the school curriculum. The root of the resistance was in the "shop floor" working-class counterculture, which was established over generations (Willis, 2003). As I seek to understand the ways in which the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum reproduces, ignores, or directly challenges dominant ideologies on flexible education, it is relevant to understand how reproduction and resistance are intertwined with the notion of ideology and curriculum as a political text.

To clarify how educational research is situated within curriculum studies, Pinar (2007) proposes two disciplinary structures important for curriculum theorizing, "verticality" and "horizontality" of the field of curriculum studies. "Verticality[...]is the intellectual history of a discipline;[...] horizontality, refers to analyses of present circumstances, both in terms of internal intellectual trends as well as the external social and political milieus influencing the field" (Pinar, 2007, p. 12).

I apply curriculum theory to study Colombia's flexible curriculum, as well as the relationship between this discourse and the discursive trends within the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum, in order to consider the verticality of the flexible curriculum. Then, I turn to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to understand what discourses inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. This affords an opportunity to advance my understanding of the complex

relationship between enrollment and flexible curriculum. As Apple (1990) suggests, “the curriculum researcher must think structurally and relationally. He or she must link [...] back to the question of power and control outside the school” (p. 17). I draw on curriculum theory as I attempt to understand what ideologies in flexible education’s discourse are reproduced and/or challenged in the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum. I then utilize curriculum theory to reread the discursive trends identified within the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum.

A History of the Field of Curriculum in Colombia

As there are no theoretical studies that analyze the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum according to its political, economic, historical, or social consequences, this research review includes a history of the field of curriculum in Colombia. To critically examine the development of curriculum studies, Montoya-Vargas (2014) traces the history and current state of this field in Colombia. As she argues, "the concept of curriculum has not played an important role in educational research in Colombia" (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 134). As in other Latin American countries, educators and researchers do not use the term curriculum but used study plan or program.

Agencies under the American Development Agenda for Latin America and the third World introduced curriculum as a concept in Latin America fifty years ago (Martínez Boom et al., 2003). Curriculum has since been understood as curriculum planning and management. Thus, “the introduction of the curriculum [in Colombia] is regarded as overshadowing pedagogy” (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 135).

In her effort to approach Colombia's history of education from a curricular perspective, Montoya-Vargas (2014) presents four curricular approaches (the traditional school, the active or new school, the technical curriculum, and the critical curriculum) to organize the main

educational ideas within Colombian society. The "traditional school," as Montoya-Vargas describes, refers to Roman Catholic public instruction. In 1903, the government made Catholic pedagogy as the official pedagogy for public instruction. As Quiceno (2003) argues, this pedagogical approach, based on encyclopedic, teacher-centered, and hierarchical teaching methods has prevailed within Colombian schools.

Quiceno (2003) states that the traditional school is "a pedagogy based on the imposition of positive laws, a systematic plan aimed to drive life through the practical paths of obedience to rules and authority, and the sacrifice of whim and egoism" (p.81). The control and inspection exercised over teachers and students through the manuals, attendance list, classroom organization, and emphasis on moral education are still considered to prevail in the practices of many Colombian schools that still are based on these Catholic values.

An exception to the traditional school was "the active or new school," which opposed the traditional Catholic rationale. The active school in Colombia emerged "as the result of different foreign educational influences and from our own ideas [...] and adaptations to our needs and context" (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 136). The influence of progressive ideas and curriculum was experienced by privileged students. In 1914, the Gimnasio Moderno (GM), a private school, was founded as the first active school in Latin America (Quiceno, 2003). The active school was the expression of pedagogy based on the knowledge of human sciences and was applied as an instrument to resist the traditional authoritarian model of education.

In Colombia, the active school was resisted not only by the Catholic Church and conservatives but also by parents from rural areas who were educated within the authoritarian model and did not understand the emphasis on the children's interest (Quinceno, 2003; Montoya-

Vargas, 2014). Therefore, the active school movement lacked the cultural and material resources to prevail as a model for public education.

After 1948, during the beginning of *La Violencia*, Colombia adopted “the technical curriculum” provided by international missions to address its major social and educational shortcomings (Helg, 2001). According to Montoya-Vargas (2014), “between 1948 and 1968, instructional design and planning and programmed instruction were introduced in non-formal education scenarios outside the schools and oriented towards segregated populations” (p. 136). The Third German education mission, in cooperation with the Colombian government, gathered a group of Colombian and German teachers to introduce the concept of instructional planning along with new teaching practices (Helg, 2001; Martínez Boom et al., 2003). As a result, instructional planning was embedded within the pedagogical guides developed by mission members. These guides, produced between 1968 and 1978, “contained the curriculum along with the teaching and learning activities that enable teachers to deliver it” (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p.137). The guides were used to train teachers throughout the country and, for the first time in the history of Colombian education, provided materials for curriculum development.

Montoya-Vargas (2014) argues that between 1960 and 1975 planning was emphasized as the solution to all the educational issues in underdeveloped countries, such as Colombia. It is within this context that curriculum planning was recommended by the international missions and adopted by the Colombian government. Therefore, the concept of curriculum “was not present in our schools until the 70s. [Since then] its meaning has not emphasized ‘educational experiences’ but ‘planning’ instead” (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 137). However, if we define curriculum as the educational experiences planned for students within the context of the school, there has been curriculum in Colombia, as in any other country, since Colombia has had a school system.

Montoya-Vargas's major argument is that Colombian educational culture has been opposed to the concept of curriculum, and both researchers and educators define pedagogy in opposition to it. Consequently, the Colombian pedagogical movement (*Movimiento Pedagógico Colombiano*) and the field of pedagogy have resisted the notion of curriculum in order to "resist the technocratic control of schools and vindicate the role of pedagogy, embodying the wisdom of teachers about what to teach, how to teach, and what for" (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 137). This fourth approach to curriculum is what Montoya-Vargas calls "critical curriculum."

According to Aristizábal (2008), Colombian researchers have limited their understanding of curriculum to the prevalence of technical approach. Therefore, curriculum has been defined as a utilitarian, market-oriented control and power device imposed by international agencies, dominated by the United States through MEN to control education ideologically and to disempower teachers.

In *Educational technology and the curriculum model in Colombia*, Martínez Boom et al. (2003) argue that curriculum is part of the concepts introduced through the action of international cooperation agencies. The curriculum field is defined as:

a knowledge space formed by discourses (theories, models, procedures and techniques of organization, design, programming, planning, and instructional management) on one hand oriented by the previous specification of learning objectives formulated in terms of behaviors and skills and, on the other hand, aimed mainly at ensuring effective learning (Martinez Boom et al., 2003, p. 27).

According to this, the notion of curriculum carries an ideological burden; therefore, this term does not belong to the field of education. The work of educational researchers from the Universidad Nacional was devoted to opposing research that uses curriculum technology in

education. Likewise, the Colombian pedagogical movement was opposed to the behaviorist idea of curriculum. This opposition reflects the official discourse about curricular autonomy and the Institutional Educational Project (PEI). When the student and teacher participation was included in the Colombian Constitution, Law 115 of 1994 implanted curriculum autonomy for institutions at all educational levels. As a result, each school has the autonomy to define its own Institutional Educational Project (PEI). The law states that MEN dictates standards and guidelines to direct the actions and decisions of local offices and their schools, but these orientations do not replace the teachers' decisions about content and teaching methods (Law 115 of 1994).

However, the idea of PEI did not transform schools by means of having educational communities building their own curricular and pedagogical projects (Aldana & Caballero, 1997, Montoya-Vargas, 2014). According to Montoya-Vargas (2014), "the lack of practical and theoretical curriculum understanding, along with the weakness of democratic dialogue and deliberation within institutions made this ideal almost utopian" (p. 141). Most Colombian schools have adopted curricula from publishers and other institutions or continued to utilize whatever they did before having the power to define their own curricula (Aldana & Caballero, 1997).

As an academic field, curriculum studies are relatively new in Colombia. "Before 1975 there was no research on curriculum;" therefore, it has been little interest in curriculum as a field (Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 141). To situate my study and establish the current state of this field in my country, I examined Colombian journals and articles and found very few references devoted to the study of the curriculum. This situation can be explained by Montoya-Vargas's argument about the little attention paid to curriculum.

Equating curriculum to a purely technical view of education has favored a tradition of resisting government attempts to introduce a teacher-proof curriculum. In Colombia, educational researchers traditionally understood curriculum from only one curricular approach, the rational planning model. Consequently, it has been little interest in curriculum as a field of study.

This anti-curriculum discourse has also reduced the possibilities of critically examining what is important to teach, for what purposes, and by what means. By ignoring other curriculum approaches, such as the practical approach or the critical approach, Colombian educational researchers have missed an opportunity to explore and experiment with research that could improve, modify, and adapt curricular ideas. By doing so, educators and researchers are potentially failing to use curriculum as a tool for social change.

In her historical analysis, Montoya-Vargas (2014) includes recent initiatives that could make curriculum studies a promising line of work. Colombia has two research groups that include curriculum design, development, and evaluation as their area of interest. The group *Pedagogía y currículo* at the Universidad del Cauca is devoted to studying the relationship between pedagogy and curriculum, developing a book on the subject entitled “The overlapping of pedagogy by curriculum.” Another major contribution to the field has been made by Universidad de Cartagena. Under the leadership of Diana Lago, this group is devoted to the study of the evolution of the curriculum in Colombia, particularly in the Caribbean region. Both contributions show how the introduction of the notion of curriculum had the effect of hiding pedagogy, resulting in its instrumental use and impoverishment by losing the possibility to examine the relationships between teacher, school, and society.

In sum, the concept of curriculum in Colombia has been attached to “the instrumental and technocratic control of education by a government subordinated to imperialist interests”

(Montoya-Vargas, 2014, p. 143). This has led to an anti-curriculum discourse for research in curriculum; as a result, most researchers and educators have ignored humanistic, hermeneutical, and critical curriculum traditions and by doing so, curriculum studies have been undermined. This incomplete understanding of the meaning and scope of curriculum explains the limited role that curriculum studies have had in Colombia.

Recent Studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*

Research studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* are mostly oriented to delineate the components of this program. These ethnographic and mostly descriptive studies acknowledge that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* offers an important opportunity of basic learning for populations unable to access elementary school. Many of the studies are framed as case studies in which researchers chose a school or educational centers where *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* had been implemented.

For example, Gutiérrez and Puentes (2009) selected four schools in Bogotá to identify the differences and similarities in the process of implementation of this program. They devoted most of their analysis to describe the differences between traditional classroom experience and the classroom experience of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. In doing so, Gutiérrez and Puentes suggested that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* students are not fully prepared to transition to sixth grade. In particular, they argued that the differences between regular classroom experience and *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment could be an obstacle to ensure students' academic success in high school. They also found key differences among teachers' approaches to the class routine and learning materials. Through interviews and ethnographic observation, Gutiérrez and Puentes identified that some teachers choose to use the

learning materials provided by *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* as a script, while others choose to design their own class.

Bolívar Sánchez's (2015) research is another case study involving four schools in Bogotá where *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was implemented. In her research, Bolívar Sánchez observed the heterogeneity of the student population that had been placed into *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s classrooms. Among the students, she found displaced families, indigenous children, students wounded by anti-personnel mines, and former child soldiers. Interestingly, Bolívar Sánchez acknowledged that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s emphasis on self-esteem and resilience could negatively impact students' academic performance. In her analysis of class experiences, she observed that this program prioritizes students' process of school adaptation over academic achievement. Bolívar Sánchez suggested the incorporation of a psychosocial approach that allows teachers and educational psychologists to understand how to deal with such diverse populations, as well the need for strengthening the academic component of the model.

Between 2010 and 2012, Romero (2012) developed a qualitative study in an effort to systematize one school's experience with *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Through an ethnographic approach, Romero documented the support, or lack thereof, of Cali's local education office, teachers, parents, and students for implementing this program. By recounting two years of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s experience, Romero noted its setbacks and accomplishments. She described the financial challenges that school administrations should overcome to provide learning materials for students, as well as the limited role that the local office played in providing resources to the school. She also described the contributions of the school community, particularly parents, in supporting the development of the program.

Álvarez et al. (2016) conducted another study that traced the process of implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* in one Colombian school. They focused their ethnographic study on teacher-student interactions. Aiming to understand how teachers promote students' autonomy, they recorded in-class activities. This study asked questions about students' performance in self-regulated activities that were selected from the learning materials. Researchers explored the intersection of teacher, learner, text, and context in order to capture the complexity of the teaching and learning situation. As a result, this study examined some of the content of the written curriculum of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Unfortunately, Álvarez et al. did not explain the analytical approach applied to the text analysis or include the fragments of this text.

This group of studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* has implications for my own research. The research indicated that in-class experience varies. For example, Gutiérrez and Puentes (2009) found differences between the teaching styles; one teacher may choose to use the script provide by the written materials or go off-script. I am interested in investigating the curriculum that students do receive when the teacher is loyal to the teacher's guide. Bolívar Sánchez (2015) noted the differences between regular elementary school and *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Since I am studying only de *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s curriculum through CDA, I do not analyze differences between this curriculum and others. Moreover, different issues may arise than those in the ethnographic studies I reviewed. Romero (2012) included in her analysis the role of the larger context in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Since I am applying CDA, I connect the larger context that shapes the curriculum, though my study is based upon the learning materials and not on ethnographic records. Álvarez et al. (2016) explored written materials in order to understand teacher-student interactions. My study also looks at the learning materials to understand how *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* positions teachers and students, and

since my study will only analyze the written curriculum, not teacher-student interactions, I provide fragments and examples of my analysis.

To locate my literature review in a larger context, I reviewed two studies on *Acelera Brasil*, which is the Brazilian program from which the Colombian version was adapted and one study on *Educación Acelerada*, which is the Salvadorian adaptation. In the case of Brazil, Prado De Sousa (1999) describes the potential of *Acelera Brasil* to promote school integration. She analyzes two Brazilian non-formal programs using the results of an evaluation of these programs done by the *Núcleo de Avaliação Educacional da Fundação Carlos Chagas*, a private foundation, with the financial support of the Brazilian Ministry of Education. In regards to *Acelera Brasil*, Prado De Sousa argues that a project-based approach, which frames the learning materials, favors students' process of reintegration into a classroom setting. In addition, she claims that *Acelera Brasil* understands the processes of exclusion, from the perspective of the excluded student, in doing so it favors students' processes of unveiling their feelings and emotions, as well as their cognitive abilities; therefore, students can better perform in this learning environment. This article concludes with some theoretical and methodological reflections on the important difference between school integration and inclusion and a brief mention to a couple of possible actions that educational programs would have to undertake to really reach full students inclusion into the school system.

Another study on the Brazilian context is Hanum's (2010) research on the 2006/2007 implementation of *Acelera Brasil* in a public school in the city of Rio Verde, Brazil. The goal of this research was to verify the effectiveness of the objectives set out in the documents and the results achieved. Hanum examines the differences between the ideal conditions that the program describes (in relation to content, methodology, assessment, organization, materials, and faculty

formation) and the conditions that were available during one year of implementation. Using the available documents and the accounts of 11 students, 2 school leaders, and 5 teachers, Hanum (2010) finds a significant distance between the proclaimed goals and the achieved ones. For instance, the classes were implemented with many limitations, such as the restrictions imposed for a poor physical structure, rooms full of students, and lack of material. In addition, teachers did not welcome the promotion of students to High School after only two years of education, and students (and even some of their relatives) did not believe possible to learn in two years what regular students learned in four. Interestingly, Hanum finds a significant discrepancy between the expected pedagogical approach and the ways in which classes were taught. It was anticipated in the guidelines of the program that the teachers would design lessons plans in which they would present content relevant to students' reality, but according to the interviews, the content was already defined in the teacher's guide.

In El Salvador, Picardo João and Victoria Libreros (2009) study the implementation of *Educación Acelerada*. In their analysis, the authors describe that this program operates in urban school settings, but targets students who have not completed elementary school and have been out of school for two or more years. The authors explain that *Educación Acelerada* was introduced to El Salvador in 1996 by Brazilian agencies funded by the World Bank. Since then *Educación Acelerada* has functioned in regular schools targeted by the Ministry of Education. In their analysis, they identify that, between 2000 and 2015, 37,239 students have been served through this program. In addition, they argue that after the 2001's earthquakes the government shifted its priorities to rebuilding infrastructure and *Educación Acelerada*, as well as other programs, was reduced in their size and funds. In relation to the pedagogical component, Picardo João and Victoria Libreros (2009) only mention that the classroom experiences seem very close

to the traditional practices. From interviewing teachers and students, they conclude that assessment and lesson plans are usually delivered in a traditional fashion; teachers did not follow the program recommendations for planning classes, but they did use the content and activities provide by the learning materials.

As with the Colombian studies, the review of studies on the Brazilian and the Salvadorian version of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* indicated that most of the research on this program is being framed as a case study. Picardo João and Victoria Libreros (2009) and Hanum's (2010) qualitative studies provide a comparison between the program and the traditional classroom experience. Only Hanum's (2010) research explores the relationship between learning materials and teachers' practices. Interestingly, her findings show a major contradiction in the ways in which teachers are instructed to present relevant content to students' interests and the restrictions that they confront when also instructed to implement the content given in the same guide. I also look at the learning materials in order to identify the prominent and potentially contradictory schemes that work as indicators of ideologically specific representations about education.

Additionally, from reviewing international studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, I notice two major differences between them and the Colombian curriculum. Instead of a one year program, Brazil and El Salvador have a two-year program; the first year is for completing second to fourth grade and the second year for completing fifth to sixth grade. As well, Brazil and El Salvador include a module for literacy that Colombia does not use because in Colombia, the only students admitted are already able to read and write. These differences lead me to question the reasons behind the Colombian rationale to reduce the program to one year and to exclude the literacy module. These questions help guide my analysis on the larger social structures that shape the curriculum materials of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, particularly I ask about the assumptions

about the user/reader and discourses that inform the text producers' decision to reduce the program to a one year.

Summary of the Chapter

This literature review shows that education has been, until the twentieth century, only accessible to the Colombian elite. During the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the political divide between political parties swung from a centralized country with education administered by the Catholic Church to a federal country that gave provinces the administration of education for all. Since the mid-twentieth century industrialization, demographic growth, and urban migration have helped consolidate a unified position regarding education, but implementation has not been as expected. This pendulum has prevented Colombia from consolidating an education system, thus leaving a gap in the quality and in the coverage of education. Additionally, lower-income people mainly access the public education system, while private schools still represent a high entry barrier for the less advantaged. The schooling system during colonial times was the basis of republican education; followed by education after the 1863 Constitution, characterized by its liberal thought imprint. The 1886 Constitution had a conservative perspective that remained until 1991. This literature is highly relevant to the understanding of how the right to education in Colombia specifically with regard to vulnerable populations is a crucial part of the broader discourse that informs the design and implementation of flexible programs, such as *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

In the second section of the literature, I introduced how different scholars within this field address the concepts of ideology, reproduction, and resistance. This theoretical frame helped me to formulate my research questions. Exploring the field of curriculum studies led me to understand the limited role that the concept of curriculum has played in educational research in

Colombia. I approached this subsection of the literature review as the history and the current state of the field of curriculum studies in Colombia. In addition, the review of recent studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* shows that the emphasis has been placed on ethnographic studies. It also reveals differences between Colombia, El Salvador, and Brazil and provides my study with insights into how educational researchers have assessed this program

CHAPTER III

THE *ACELERACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE* PROGRAM

Introduction

Aceleración del Aprendizaje has been conceived as a strategy that seeks to reintegrate out-of-school children into the educational system. MEN (2010) describes it as a flexible program that adjusts itself to students' circumstances instead of demanding that students adjust to the program's conditions. The program offers one academic year. When the academic year finishes, students are supposed to continue their studies at a regular or conventional high school. It is a program that focuses on elementary education and has been adopted as part of the Colombian educational system. Consequently, as part of its efforts to meet the right to education and to respond to constitutional demands, the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program is promoted and funded by MEN.

With the goal of understanding how *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is connected to the Colombian educational policy and to explore how its implementation responds to the characteristics of the educational system, this chapter delves into the policy framework in which the program is embedded. It also describes the history of Colombia's flexible curriculum reform in order to comprehend the various stages of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Overall, this chapter offers detailed insight into the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program, which not only provides key information for understanding the program itself and its place within the Colombian educational system but also becomes a key referent to understand the sociohistorical discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

Current Picture of the Educational System in Colombia

The Colombian educational system consists of six levels: initial education, pre-school education, elementary school (comprises 5 years of formal education), basic secondary (comprises 4 years), mid-secondary education (comprises 2 years), and higher education. As mentioned before, the fundamental nature of the educational service is written in the Colombian Political Constitution. It is indicated, for example, that education is a right of the individual. Education is also a public service that has a social function, and the quality of the educational service is a responsibility of the State. The constitution also establishes that minors must be guaranteed the necessary conditions for school access (Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991).

The education sector consists of three entities: at the national level, the Ministry of National Education (MEN); at the territorial level, decentralized local education offices and other affiliated and linked entities; and separate from the State are autonomous organizations, such as colleges and universities. As mentioned in chapter two, the organization of the school system in Colombia has a decentralized scheme as laid out in Law 715 of 2001 (preschool, basic, and middle). Decentralization has been defined as the mechanism that facilitates accountability to users and efficiency in the provision of services while also improving the leadership that local governments have over the variables that affect the provision of educational services (Law 715, 2001). Thus, the law demands that local governments address the needs of the school population.

The decentralized scheme in pre-school, basic, middle, and higher education establishes competing and complementary responsibilities within education at each level of government (national, state/departmental, district, and municipal). Decentralization is one of the five key strategies defined by the World Bank in its 1999 document, *Educational change in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Atehortúa Cruz (2012) argues that Law 715 of 2001 was born as the

Colombian response to the World Bank's recommendations to improve the educational system through decentralization. Thus, it is intended as a means to ensure that the authorities of each territorial entity exercise their functions in a coordinated manner with other levels of government. In addition, a decentralized structure aims to grant direct responsibility for the provision of the educational service to the certified territorial entities, including directing, organizing, and planning the educational service at the preschool, basic, and middle levels (Law 715, 2001).

At the national level is the National Ministry of National Education (MEN), which, as the governing entity of educational policies, formulates the general guidelines for the provision of educational services. At the territorial levels are the state, district, and municipal education offices that exercise the management of schools, including inspection and surveillance in the territory of their jurisdiction. Simultaneously, the local offices are responsible for the provision of educational service to any uncertified municipalities.

The efforts of local education offices for achieving their goals in enrollment, quality, and educational efficiency are directed to schools or educational establishments. Additionally, at the local level, there are other organizations, such as education boards, which, as consultative bodies, support educational policy planning and design. They also evaluate and control policies and programs. These organizations are named differently in order to emphasize the level in which they operate (i.e. National Board of Education, Departmental Education Boards, District Boards of Education, and Municipal Boards of Education).

Law 715 of 2001 defines the duties and responsibilities at different levels of government. MEN defines policies and objectives, dictates norms, regulates the provision of educational services, and conducts monitoring and evaluation. It also distributes resources and provides

technical and administrative assistance to territorial entities to strengthen their management capacity. Conversely, local education offices (also called certified municipalities, districts, and departments) are responsible for the provision of educational services. They direct, plan, and administer the physical, human, and financial resources to provide the educational service.

They are also responsible for the results in enrollment and quality, both to the central government and the community. They must provide technical and administrative assistance to schools and to educational centers in uncertified municipalities. In addition, local education offices are responsible for co-financing infrastructure and subsidizing projects for improvement in education quality. Law 715 of 2001 establishes that education, as a public service, is a state obligation. Educational service can be provided directly by the State or by individuals, with prior state authorization, so that schools can be public or private. They can be operated by public officials or by contracted private administrators.

Despite the free public schooling available, some families choose to send their children to private schools instead, some of which come with a substantial annual tuition bill. In 2016 for example, nearly 22 % of all students (2,265,193 children) who attended school were matriculated at private schools (DANE, 2018). While some of the most exclusive private schools in the country are the fiercely competitive private schools in the major cities of Colombia, private schools can be found all across the country. These schools range from the religious to the secular, to schools for gifted children to those aimed at helping students with learning disabilities.

Private school curricula are set by the individual school, unlike public schools, which are subject to the national curriculum guidelines developed by MEN. Though the majority of private schools are free to teach the curriculum of their choosing, they are still subject to basic

educational requirements determined by both MEN and their local education office (Law 715, 2001). These requirements include health and safety measures to protect the well-being of students, such as regulations on transportation, employee conduct, and record-keeping.

This curriculum flexibility allows private schools to focus their teachings on areas they deem important, or on subjects that meet the school's basic philosophy. For example, religious schools are permitted to teach faith-based classes. In addition, many private schools offer students the opportunity to participate in programs not found in most public schools. For instance, some curriculum focuses on English a second language, arts, athletics, honors disciplines, or even special-needs programs. At the majority of public schools, these types of special programs are often under-funded or nonexistent.

Private (particularly middle and upper-class) schools offer students the opportunity to thrive under alternative teaching philosophies and learning opportunities. Bilingual schools, for instance, employ a curriculum where all classes are taught in a foreign language. In schools that follow the Montessori program, children are not graded on performance and do not study in a formal, structured classroom, particularly in the early years.

These types of teaching methodologies are vastly different from those implemented in public schools. As Delgado (2014) explains, although information about the private sector in education is scarce, it is possible to establish inequalities within education. As the history of Colombia's education system shows, private schools are for the most part an education for the wealthy, whose quality seems to be directly proportional to the educational costs (tuition, bonuses, etc.), and public schools are for the poor. According to Núñez et al. (2002), the contrast between private and public schools can be simply explained as good quality education for rich and poor quality for the poor. This also highlights situations such as inequality in school

enrollment and grade retention, inequalities in curricular content, in the quality of teachers, and discrimination of the poorest and most vulnerable populations such as the displaced, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian.

Flexible Programs and National Policy

This section outlines the normative frame by which these programs became an option for strengthening enrollment. According to the Colombian Political Constitution, education will be free in State institutions, even for those who can afford it (Constitución, 1991 - Art.67). At present, public school, both elementary and high school, is offered completely free of charge. MEN's policy offers all Colombian children, youth, and adults in extreme vulnerability access to public schools. MEN states that the system has the capability to provide free and compulsory education through its seventy-eight local education offices.

Reaching full student enrollment in public schools has been a challenge for both the education offices at the territorial level and MEN at the national level. In 2002, the dropout rate in elementary and secondary education averaged 8% and approximately 15% of the school-age population was not included in the system (Trujillo, 2006). This situation was particularly present in rural areas. Forced displacement and geographic difficulties contributed to nearly half of the school-age population being left out of the educational system. As the Quality of Life Survey of 1997 and National Administrative Department of Statistics' (DANE) records point out, the lack of school attendance affected more vulnerable populations, such as the displaced population, indigenous groups, and child farmworkers located in both rural and marginalized urban areas (Trujillo, 2006).

As mentioned before, at the end of the 1990s, the main problems facing the education sector were the low and unequal enrollment of geographically dispersed rural populations, low

quality of education, institutional and governmental weakness at the local level, and a lack of programs focused on the rural sector. The low enrollment of students in rural areas has been generally associated with geographical isolation, armed conflict and, possibly, the high percentage of child labor needed by families to increase their income (González Lara, & Pulido Chaves, 2014; IBDR, 2014; Zuluaga, 2007;). In addition, the low educational level of parents, as well as the high-grade retention rates, resulted in a greater risk of student dropout in rural areas (Trujillo, 2006).

In 2000, the national government, through MEN, signed an agreement with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to implement the Rural Education Program (PER), which was implemented in three phases. The PER described the precarious conditions of rural education at that time (e.g. low and unequal enrollment and students' high repetition rates). This project was designed based on a flexible structure. The flexibility allowed adjusting the program at the end of each phase, thus incorporating the lessons learned in the preparation and execution of the following ones.

Two years later, MEN introduced a new policy with the name of *Revolución Educativa*. *Revolución Educativa*, according to MEN (2002), aims to achieve a true transformation of the Colombian school system. Atehortúa Cruz (2012) argues that *Revolución Educativa* is the first Colombian policy in which education is defined as an essential tool for human, economic, and social development. This policy articulates its actions to PER in order to meet the needs of education in four areas: enrollment, quality, relevance, and efficiency. It stresses that access to education (i.e. without distinction of creed, race, origin, or socioeconomic status) is the most expeditious way of achieving peace in Colombia, as well as contributing to the economic development of the country.

By 2002, MEN estimated that 25.4% of rural children were left out of the school, and only 12.1% of children in the urban areas were left out of the school. Goals were set for 100% student enrollment in elementary education. Therefore, MEN counteracted school dropout through more comprehensive programs and strategies, which is how MEN determined that flexible and relevant educational models would be part of its portfolio.

Flexible Programs

According to MEN (2010), flexible programs are a vehicle to ensure a pertinent and quality education for the urban and rural sector. These models are intended to serve two different kinds of populations, students who need to overcome age-grade gap and students who have not been able to complete elementary school. Likewise, they are one of the main alternatives to ensure that students in rural areas complete preschool, elementary, and secondary school. In 2002, flexible programs became part of the overall school system because they provide a means to improve enrollment.

Consequently, MEN and its Directorate of Inter-sectorial Populations and Projects updated five flexible educational models as part of their actions to promote the access and permanence of vulnerable populations into the educational system. These flexible educational programs, according to MEN (2010), consist of five innovative models (MEN, 2010). Each model has epistemological, psychological, methodological, and pedagogical principles that support and guide schools or institutions in their application. They also combine traditional learning approaches, such as meaningful learning, cognitivism, humanism, and constructivism, among others.

Simply put, while the majority of students have access to the traditional school system, students who need to overcome age-grade gap and/or have not been able to attend school are

enrolled in these flexible curricular programs. In fact, these flexible programs were adopted as an alternative to attending to the school-age population being left out of the educational system. Therefore, these flexible programs have their own curricula, which aim to promote grade retention for the rural and urban-marginal population (i.e. forced displaced students, child workers, and rural students).

These programs also have specific management and administration processes, which guarantee its articulation with the school system (i.e. preschool, elementary, and secondary education) (Manual Operativo, 2010). As MEN (2010) states, the models have undergone a process of research, testing, validation, and evaluation. Likewise, the models have training processes for teachers, administrators, and officials of the education local offices. They also establish a protocol for follow-up visits and offer guidelines for schools and educational establishments where the programs are implemented. MEN (2010) emphasizes that these models offer “extra support” to reach full student enrollment. Each model includes mechanisms, such as the active search for children and youth outside the school system, psychosocial guidance, school meals, and school kits with pedagogical materials.

Implementing flexible models has required the structuring of an articulated network of human resources. The network includes MEN, educational offices, schools, and other educational institutions (i.e. the whole educational system). It also includes specialized NGOs at the national and local level who work as contractors for operating the flexible curricular models (MEN (2010)).

To identify the population out of the school system, MEN relies on statistical data. Particularly, MEN uses DANE’s population projections, the Information System for the

Displaced Population (SIPOD), Constitutional Court records, and the annual age-grade gap report, which describes the number of students whose ages do not match their grade level.

In 2006, when MEN began national expansion of flexible curricular programs, it gathered a team of specialized professionals in these models. This team analyzed databases, contracted external operators (i.e. NGOs), and adapted the pedagogical materials to meet the minimum requirements of formal education. Simultaneously, MEN invited education offices to become involved in the process of selecting teaching staff, rural education professionals, and vulnerable populations. Currently, each local education office is responsible for choosing both the teachers and the community in which the model is implemented. Local offices and MEN select the NGO or specialized firm that operates the program.

MEN's website presents a summary of the five flexible curricular models that are in operation, ranging from preschool to middle, including adult education. The pedagogical materials that have been approved and evaluated by MEN are also available online. For the purposes of this study, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, that is designed to serve elementary students, is analyzed.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje

This program presents a pedagogical proposal, a methodological proposal (has a curricular component, an administrative organization, a community interaction) and a didactic proposal (booklets with units and guides, which develop a didactic sequence). This program responds to the 100% student enrollment goal set in 2002, and it has been updated and implemented for the past eight years as part of MEN's educational policy. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was designed in a Latin American context to serve diverse vulnerable populations (MEN, 2010a). Thus, this study contributes to the Latin American literature about flexible

curricular reform, particularly it adds to the insufficient literature on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje is a flexible curricular program that serves a population of ages 10 to 15 years that have not been able to complete elementary school. Therefore, it allows students to advance several grades in a year and overcome their age-grade gap (MEN, 2010a). It is implemented through interdisciplinary projects that place the student as the center of the learning process, achieving the development of basic skills while regaining confidence in their ability to learn, so that they can continue in the educational system (Manual Operativo, 2010).

History

The educational program *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* emerged in Brazil in 1995. It appeared as an initiative of the Ministry of Education and the Technological Teaching Center of Brasilia to eradicate the phenomenon of age-grade gap. It also tackles problems such as school repetition and high rates of school dropout, in addition to serving as a means to allow the entry or re-entry into the education system of children and youth (Manual Operativo, 2010).

In 1998, the Colombian government decided to implement *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* in the country. The following year, experts translated and adapted it to the Colombian context. In 2000, a pilot test was conducted with rural populations outside the departments of Boyacá, Cauca, Caldas, Cundinamarca, Huila, Risaralda, Santander and the urban-marginal population in Bogotá. Between 2000 and 2009, an average of 113,000 students attended the program (MEN, 2009). *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* has since been implemented throughout the national territory and has spread to similar processes in countries such as El Salvador (1999), Venezuela (2000), and the Dominican Republic (2004).

Between 2009 and the beginning of 2010, MEN worked in a qualification process of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* (MEN, 2014). As a result, all of the pedagogical materials were updated, taking into account the quality references (i.e. curricular guidelines, basic competency standards, and pedagogical and general guidelines). In addition, teaching guides and one operational manual in which the foundations, objectives, and structure of the model are presented.

According to MEN, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* responds to the State's responsibility of providing new resources and methodologies that enable school enrollment while improving the quality of education. It provides conditions for any population who needs to overcome age-grade gap, regardless of its origin or social, economic and cultural situations, to have opportunities to acquire knowledge, and develop the skills and values necessary to live (Manual Operativo, 2010).

MEN (2010, 2014) points out that this program responds to the pronouncements of the Colombian Constitutional Court. In particular, it responds to Auto 251 of 2008, in which the Colombian state is ordered to design and implement the program for the differential protection of children and adolescents against forced displacement. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was selected by MEN as a means to promote policies and projects focused on reducing the impact of barriers to access, permanence, and adaptability to the education system (MEN, 2014). Its main objectives are providing relevant education to children and youth who need to overcome the age-grade gap, in addition to developing the basic competencies of the students at the performance levels necessary to be able to continue with their formative process in a school grade according to age (Manual Operativo, 2010). Therefore, this program was developed to counteract school

failure and the dropping out of those 10 to 15 years of age older who have not completed elementary school.

Decree 1860 of 1994 states that the Colombian government must guarantee access to children and youth who were left out of the educational system. It also states that MEN must offer schools a curriculum for leveling students that present learning difficulties or students who begin later in the school year (Decree 1860 of 1994). Thus, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* has become one of MEN's alternatives to counteract these problems because it gives schools a curriculum specially oriented towards students who are delayed.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje's Cornerstones

The sustainable and articulated implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* should contribute to students' development in at least three aspects: politically, economically, and socially. Politically, MEN will fulfill constitutional duties by attending vulnerable populations. Economically, the academic promotion of students to secondary education will contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for students and their families. Socially, school enrollment facilitates students' access to other fundamental rights, such as health care and recreation or leisure activities (Manual Operativo, 2010).

Aceleración del Aprendizaje's program lasts one school year, during which students develop a leveling module that allows them to reinforce their performance in reading, writing, and basic mathematical knowledge while familiarizing themselves with the model's methodology and six interdisciplinary projects (López, 2010). At the end of the year, all students are expected to be promoted to sixth grade. However, cases of students who do not reach the expected levels of performance can be presented. Those cases, the operational manual states,

must be resolved in accordance with the established guidelines of students' evaluation.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje does not encourage grade retention. Students, who are trained through this curriculum, at the end of the school year, must be academically promoted (Manual Operativo, 2010).

Aceleración del Aprendizaje differs from regular elementary schooling because it is a project-based curriculum designed to complete elementary school in one year. This accelerated program aims to eradicate the phenomenon of age-grade gap and it also tackles school repetition. As MEN (2014) stresses, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* facilitates student enrollment. Enrollment increases because children and youth, who have already given up on the idea of continuing to study, are offered an opportunity to complete elementary school.

Students who are enrolled in this program require a basic level of reading comprehension and textual competency to be able to complete the activities of the booklets. They must also possess basic knowledge of mathematics in relation to the handling of basic addition and subtraction operations. Thus, the manual of operation recommends making an initial assessment to identify the student's level of literacy. The manual also explains that this curriculum does not serve disabled populations. This is due to the fact that the teacher needs to provide personalized attention to age-grade gap students, and properly manage time since the teaching-learning process is carried out in a shorter period than regular classes (Manual Operativo, 2010, p. 14).

The student must have the willingness to participate in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. As López (2010) argues, it is important that students and their families know what the program requires: commitment, daily attendance at classes throughout one year, the preparation of daily

homework, as well as participation in all the program activities. Each student receives a set of seven booklets, mentioned in Table 1 below. Teachers of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* receive a teacher's guide, which contains a detailed presentation of the program, its background, characteristics, and requirements, as well as pedagogical and methodological guidelines for the development of each project. They also receive the operational manual, which includes a presentation of the program and a detailed description of the role and functions of each participant, and the general guidelines and instructions for a correct implementation.

Table 1 *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*

Population	A population that has not been able to complete elementary school
Age	Between 10 and 15 years of age
Grades	First grade to fifth grade
Description	This program seeks to support children and young people from elementary school who are out of school, in order to expand their learning potential, stay in school and level themselves to successfully continue their studies. Strengthening self-esteem, resilience, focusing them to build their life project.
Curriculum materials	One teacher's guide and one operational manual
	Six booklets from level 1 to 6, one booklet for leveling students and one booklet for learning English.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I built a context for the analysis of the programs in terms of its connections to the broader context of flexible curricular programs in Colombia. Thus, this chapter has provided a more explicit explanation of how flexible curricular programs differ from regular schooling. In doing, I addressed two questions: What is the institutional and sociopolitical context of Colombia's flexible curricular reform and what are the characteristics of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

As this chapter has described, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is connected to *Revolución Educativa*, an educational policy that seeks to increase enrollment of vulnerable populations. In general, Colombian policy acknowledges the need for guaranteeing and restoring of the right to education; of offering an education that meets its transformational purpose and allowing marginalized children to overcome poverty and social exclusion. In fact, the purposes and strategies of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* reflect that there exists a commitment to translate the educational policy into specific actions that benefit extremely vulnerable children.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into three sections: an introduction to critical discourse analysis (CDA), CDA as a methodological framework, and my application of it. First, I consider the key theoretical facets of CDA and I situate my utilization of this term. Second, I explain the methodological potential of CDA, as well as the major underpinnings of Fairclough's approach to CDA which frames this study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a detailed description of my application of CDA, the analytical procedures for my study, my research rationale, and my positionality as the analyst.

An Introduction to CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) arises from a critical theory of language which emphasizes that language is a form of social practice, “imbricated in social relations and processes [and] invested by ideology” (Fairclough, 1995a, p.73). It is the role of CDA to analyze “language as it is used to enact activities, perspectives, and identities” (Gee, 1999, p. 4-5). CDA is “a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts” (van Dijk, 2004, p. 352). It seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in power, and how ideological assumptions are embedded within the surface structures of language choices in the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Erickson (2004) argues that “discourse analysis can show how flows of power in society are related to the social institutions of ideological discourse formations, orders of discourse” (Erickson, 2004, p. 131). Therefore, CDA is an approach that connects globally located social processes with locally produced experiences. CDA acknowledges that discourses are influenced by both local discursive practices, as well as social and cultural changes. Thus, it is the role of CDA to understand discourse involvement in society. Fairclough (2015) argues that CDA:

combines critique of discourse and explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for action to change that existing reality in particular respects [...] This is the essence of CDA [...] and what distinguishes it from other forms of (critical) analysis [...] It is not just a critique of discourse, but also an explanation of how it relates to other elements of the existing reality (p.6).

CDA is one of a number of approaches to discourse analysis, and it is a recognized area of scholarship. There are many ways of applying CDA; however, all scholars working under the umbrella of CDA “are bound by a concern for the investigation of the reproduction of ideology in language” (Sriwimon & Zilli, 2017, p. 137). CDA questions how particular populations may be positioned in various types of discourse (e.g. institutional, political, gender, and media discourses). Moreover, CDA’s interdisciplinary offers diverse understandings of discourse.

Definition of Discourse

Given CDA’s variability, it is vital to review what is meant by discourse. According to Erickson (2004):

Discourse had come to mean the general workings of society by which persons themselves were uttered, through recurrent processes of the exercise of power over individual subjects through surveillance (Foucault), through socialization and social reproduction (Bourdieu), and through hegemonic reproduction of false consciousness among the oppressed (Gramsci and Althusser) (p. 128).

At the core of this notion of discourse is an examination of how power operates. Erickson mentions three elements (i.e. surveillance, social reproduction, and hegemonic reproduction) through which power is exercised over individual subjects. Thus, discourse is never value-free. It is influential in the shaping of worldviews and enables and constrains what can be said, done, known, and valued. Discourse is the language which reflects and produces the social world and social realities, including social norms and ideologies (Foucault, 1969 as cited in Lemke, 2015).

Erickson's (2004) project demonstrates this central paradox: local talk is unique and contingent while at the same time depending upon wider socio-historical contexts and discourses that inform its everyday practice. Erickson emphasizes the two-way relationship between the local and the global processes that enable everyday life encounters. Talk, as all other forms of discourse, is local in its production (e.g. a classroom). It has a particular place and it is produced within a particular span of time. But talk is also part of a broader social context (e.g. schooling is part of a bigger social and cultural system). It involves mastery of language and interactional and communicative competences. Thus, talk is both "a matter of local social action" and part of "global social processes" (Erickson, 2004, p. 102). In this view, discourse "reflects and constructs" the social world and is not only a product, but "a set of consumptive, productive, and reproductive processes" that exist in relation to the world (Rogers, 2004, p. 5).

Within CDA, Erickson (2004) explains that “if all aspects of social life could be considered as meaningful texts, then they could also be considered as Discourses” (p. 127-128). Therefore, discourse includes “not only speech but writing texts, habits of dress, uses of social space, and large scale institutions” (Erickson, 2004, p. 127). It can take many forms, such as conversations, textbooks, visual images, multimedia, and is composed of “talk, text, and media that express ways of knowing, experiences, and valuing the world” (Mullet, 2018, p.119).

The CDA I undertake understands discourse as a “socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of ‘the social’” (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Discourse implies “a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution (s) and social structure(s), which frame it” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Thus, discourse is both social and political, and it is saturated by power relations. CDA acknowledges that locally produced social processes are influenced by global structures. It also recognizes that social change is possible and that the relations between general social processes and local discourse practices are not simply one-way or top-down.

Definition of Ideology⁹

⁹ The notion of ideology is aligned with the Marxist philosophy. Fairclough uses the Marxist formulation of ideology from Althusser and argues that ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse. Additionally, Fairclough uses Foucault’s notion of the discursive formation to argue that it is through discourse that many ideologies are formulated, reinforced, and reproduced.

Ideology is a complex social process that produces a shared idea of reality. Ideology refers to a system of ideas, values, beliefs, representations, and perceptions that persuades people "to see their specific place in a historically peculiar social formation as inevitable, natural, a necessary function of the real itself" (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 310). Through ideology, individuals have been raised to think a certain way about the institutions that legitimize the existing socio-economic order.

Ideologies are essential to sustain the existing power relations in which they are embedded. Fairclough (2015) argues that "the ideological effect of one's subjecthood is perceived as commonsensically given, rather than socially produced, [this] is an effect that comes about pre-eminently in language and in meaning" (p. 122). Through socialization, individuals learn to operate within various types of discourses, and in doing so they are placed in a diverse range of subject positions.

Althusser (1971) names this process 'interpellation' or 'calling into being'. Interpellation explains how all individuals are called in "a subject position" when they are born, when they are assigned a name, a specific gender, a religion, a race, and a specific class status. These conditions are accepted without resistance from individuals and call every individual into a specific social position. Interpellation, the elementary ideological effect, is what constitutes concrete individuals into social subjects.

According to Fairclough, Althusser's elementary ideological effect also applies to discourse. Fairclough (2015) argues that "both the subject positions and the situation types of dominant discourse types are liable to be naturalized" (p. 124). Through naturalization, the dominant discourse appears to be disconnected from particular ideologies, in doing so it becomes "the common-sense practice of the institution" (Fairclough, 2015, p.126). Discourse then relates

to ideology, explicitly or implicitly, serving particular agendas and the construction of particular social actors.

CDA interprets discourse as ideological because discourses both enact and deploy systems of thought, manifested in language that people use to identify themselves and interpret meaning. As Rogers (2004) points out, “discourse does ideological work” because it tends to reproduce itself along with the conditions necessary to sustain it (Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Therefore, discourses can “involve a set of values and viewpoints [which embody common sense assumptions] about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods,” which contribute to upholding existing power relations (Rogers, 2004, p. 5).

Discourses play a crucial role in materially and discursively shaping subjectivities, which is why CD analysts work to discover the specific ideological assumptions “in the service of power” that frame individuals’ subjectivities (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 14). When ideology becomes common sense, both subject and situations of discourse seem independent of the dominant discourse. This illusory effect is produced by the naturalization. Fairclough’s view of ideological functioning explains CDA’s emphasis on understanding, explaining, and unveiling the operations of power (Rogers et al., 2005). CDA deals “primarily with discourses of power abuse, injustice, and inequality” (Mullet, 2018, p. 119). Simply put, CDA extends the analysis of discourse to include explanations of how ideologies and discourse practices attain the status of common sense and become difficult to identify and resist (Rogers, 2004). Therefore, CDA looks at the often hidden ideological assumptions which sustain dominant discourses.

CDA: Methodological Approach

There are several approaches to CDA, with “no such thing as a uniform, common theory formation determining CDA” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, CDA has been

developed through the contributions of cultural studies, media studies, and critical linguistics, among other disciplines (Rogers, 2004). As a result, there is a diverse set of approaches for CDA analytic procedures (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Methods vary on the focus on the context of the discourse, linguistic emphasis, and interest in the historical emergence of policies or concepts. A widely used approach to CDA applied by educational researchers is Fairclough's textually oriented approach.

Fairclough (1993) argues,

Discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

According to Fairclough (2015), CDA is a critique of discourse and an explanation of the existing social world. CDA offers a methodology to critically examine the relations between discourse and the wider socio-cultural structures while also provides an explanation of how discourse related to such other elements. Fairclough's analytic procedures provide "multiple points of analytic entry," including description, interpretation, and explanation of social and discursive practices (Hinks, 2005, p. 100).

Fairclough's (2015) method involves exploring the three dimensions of discourse. These dimensions are the object of analysis (including verbal, visual, or verbal and visual texts), the processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/ speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects, and the socio-historical conditions which

govern these processes. Each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough, 2015).

Fairclough's method, applied in this study, offers a triadic structure to guide research. This approach allows researchers to "focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout and so on" (Hinks, 2005, p. 100). From this approach, it is also indispensable "to recognize the historical determination of these selections and to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility of that utterance" (Hinks, 2005, p. 100). Texts are enactments of socially regulated discourses, and the processes of production and reception of texts are also socially constrained. Thus, CDA assumes that discourse is both constrained and enabled by social structures and culture.

CDA proceeds by examining relations between i) texts: analyzing the linguistic constructions, forms, and meanings of the text itself, ii) discursive practices around a text: analyzing the production processes involved with the creation of the text in a social group, and iii) the sociocultural context in which these practices occur and within which resulting texts circulate and regulate: analyzing the use of the text in its wider social, political, and cultural context (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2015).

i) Text

Fairclough (1995a) emphasizes, "texts in contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic" (p. 4). Fairclough's "text dimension" refers to texts in a broad sense "including spoken as well as written language and combinations of language with other forms of semiosis including gesture and visual images" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 440). Fairclough views texts as

speech acts because they affect how language is used and how meaning is made. Thus, text is primarily a work of discourse that is “constituted from other already produced texts and from potentially diverse text types” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 2).

Texts are simultaneously works and producers of discourse. Therefore, CDA views texts as products and producers of discourse communities. Texts operate in ways that are used to discuss desired realities into being. In doing so, texts set and develop the norms and conditions for who can talk, what can be said, how it is said, and what is valued (Fairclough, 2015).

Fairclough’s emphasis on linguistic analysis relies on Halliday’s Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). Fairclough borrows Halliday’s multifunctional view of language and defines texts as social spaces, which function “ideationally in the representation of experience and the world, interpersonally in constructing social interaction between participants in discourse, and textually in tying parts of a text together into a coherent whole and tying texts to situational contexts” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 6). When CDA analyzes texts interdiscursively, it acknowledges that relations between the ideas embedded in discourse and material elements of social life “can only be elucidated through linguistic analysis of speech or writing (and other semiotic forms)” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 45).

Since text production, distribution, and consumption happen within a social structure, text analysis should not be isolated from institutional and other social practices. The relation between text and institutional and societal properties finally restructure the order of discourses. Texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in close connection with the social structure and the ideological assumptions that prevail in a community. As Fairclough (1995a, 2015) explains, the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption are ideologically invested to the extent that they serve the function of exclusion and inclusion of whatever is being naturalized.

Since texts are resources for understanding macro-social phenomena, they are major sources of evidence. Text analysis "includes grammatical semantic and pragmatic analysis, interactional and conversational analysis, analysis of arguments, narratives, and explanations, and so forth" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 50). Texts are considered effective indicators of social change, offering evidence of current social processes. Therefore, textual analysis can enhance and establish critical language awareness (Fairclough, 2015). This research follows Fairclough's belief that CD analysts should commit to text analysis paying close attention to descriptions of language or the context in which the language used unfolds.

ii) Discursive Practices

Fairclough's discursive practice dimension identifies the processes of text production, distribution, consumption, and interpretation. Discursive practice contributes to the reproduction of social relations, identities, and beliefs. However, it also contributes to the transformation of systems of knowledge and social factors depending on the conditions. Fairclough (2015) emphasizes that text production is a complex process. Texts are hybrid, made from the combination of other texts, and it is almost impossible to locate a text's originality. In addition, text distribution can or cannot be anticipated. Therefore, the producers might not know who they are addressing.

Fairclough also explains that the processes of text production are constrained by the available members' resources (MR). Text production operates within social practices, which shape the choices of words, the grammatical form of sentences, the structure of a narrative, and the expected sequence of events, among other collections of things (Fairclough, 2015). CDA explores the constraints of text production in order to explain the connections between social practices and the nature of the discourse processes.

Given that discourse is “itself a sphere of cultural hegemony,” discursive practices can operate as hegemonic practices (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 95). CDA is interested in identifying which orders of discourse are drawn upon and how, and in doing so CDA identifies those discursive practices that are also a form of hegemonic struggle. Thus, CDA’s major concern is to identify the degree to which discourse reproduces or transforms orders of discourse. As Fairclough (2015) stresses, discursive change and its relation to both ideological and social transformations is precisely where CDA should focus its analysis.

iii) Social Practice

The dimension of social practice deals with the institutional level of analysis. At this level, CDA is oriented to explore how discursive practices are shaped in relation to circumstances of the discursive event. This "allows analysis of social structure to be brought into connection with analysis of social interactions" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 439). CDA's interest in social practices is justified by its desire to link meaning to a broader context. Social practice refers to the interconnected networks or fields (e.g. economic, political, cultural, family, etc.) in which social interaction is performed.

Fairclough explains, "the social relations of fields are relations of power and struggle, in which the external boundaries and internal structure of the field are stakes" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 441). Fairclough highlights that it is through the study of social practices that CDA explains social processes. For understanding socio-cultural practices through discursive events, Fairclough (1995a) applies Gramsci's theory of hegemony. In doing so, CDA "highlights both how power relations constrain and control productivity and creativity in discourse practices, and how a particular relatively stabilized configuration of discourse practices ("order of discourse")

constitutes one domain of hegemony"(Fairclough, 1995a, p.2). Ideological apparatuses are fairly stable especially when hegemony operates in the form of "technologization of discourse¹⁰."

Social practice is a form of social activity that is fairly stable in its nature. One of the central features of CDA is its emphasis on the social origins of background knowledge (i.e. members' resources). Background knowledge is "socially generated, and [its] nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which [it was] generated (Fairclough, 2015, p. 57). This emphasis on social practice points out that its articulation appears in a diverse form of social elements including activities, objects, values, and subjects, among which discourse is one.

CDA aims to analyze the dialectical relation between discourse and other elements of social practices, and between structure and agent. Social practices are driven, by the dominant forces to preserve or renew their hegemony in the sphere of discourse, towards various types of orientations, namely political, economic, cultural, and ideological (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 95). Nevertheless, Fairclough insists on the need to prioritize the analysis of the political and ideological facets of discourse.

iv) Interdiscursivity and Intertextuality

Fairclough's theory highlights that discourse is both constitutive and constituted. Discourse is a form of social practice and is used within a particular field where meaning

¹⁰ When dominant forces struggle to renew their hegemony, they go through a process of "technologization of discourse." Fairclough (1995b) defines this process as "an attempt by dominant social forces to direct and control the course of the major social and cultural changes" (p. 91).

emerges from a specific perspective. According to Fairclough, interdiscursive texts lead to re-articulations of discourses. CD analysts can trace the presence of discourse within another. Fairclough (2015) describes this phenomenon as interdiscursivity. He explains that interdiscursivity refers to "the occurrence and combination of types rather than particular instances of 'tokens'- discourses, genres, and styles" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 38). Interdiscursivity is often present because language rearticulates existing discourses.

Intertextuality denotes the dynamic nature of discursive formation. It refers to "the occurrence and combination of parts of concrete actual texts in the texts which we are analyzing" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 38). Texts share meaning with all the other texts. As Fairclough (1995b) explains, intertextual analysis shows "the homogeneity/heterogeneities of texts" (p.98). In intertextual analysis "the objective is to describe its 'intertextual configurations,' showing for instance how several text types may be simultaneously drawn upon and combined" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 14 - 15). Intertextual analysis reveals how texts selectively extract from genres, discourses, and narratives that are available to the producers of the text, as well as the interpreters.

v) Multimodality

The multimodal analysis responds to the awareness that texts are always in dialogue with other semiotic forms, and intertextuality describes a dialogue of a text with other texts. The implicit idea is that the meanings of images are obvious. However, images are products built culturally and socially by a community; therefore, the visual has a specific grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), in Western countries, visual communication is deeply influenced by the conventions of the writing from left to right, but different cultures place images and audiences into different positions. Moreover, human societies

use several modes of representation that possess potentials of representation and different potentials to construct meanings. Those modes are used in an interrelated way in daily interactions, and each semiotic mode is evaluated differently depending on the context in which it is used.

Multimodality offers a semiotic approach to analyze images and sound by extending the use of tools of functional systemic grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) quote the theoretical concept of ‘metafunction’ from Halliday and present Halliday’s three metafunctions in visual grammar (i.e. representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, the textual, ideational, and interpersonal metafunction can be applied to other semiotic media because they are not specific in any particular mode, but rather respond to three large areas of meaning production in general. When applied to visual systems, the ideational metafunction organizes the way that “represented participants” connect to each other to represent their environment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The interpersonal metafunction controls the interaction between the represented participants and viewers, and the textual metafunction makes the image form a whole by connecting the pieces as a complete work.

Why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)?

While student enrollment in Colombia has increased at unprecedented rates, a divide grows between the educational opportunities for marginalized populations and the quality of education available for more affluent students (Tomaševski, 2004). Social theory and educational sociology explain that the gap between educational opportunities between the affluent and vulnerable is significantly determined by class and race (Anyon, 2011, Bowles &

Gintis, 2002; Lipman, 2011). Students who are offered the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum tend to be part of marginalized communities.

CDA is an approach to language analysis that considers texts/discourses as parts of specific social practices, which carry “political implications about matters of status, solidarity, and of distribution of social goods and power” (Gee, 1999, p. 33). Through CDA, it becomes important for curriculum analysts to uncover the political implications of curricular programs designed to serve particular populations. In addition, CDA emphasizes the need to understand how curriculum discourses are situated within larger meta-institutional discourses that enable and constrain students’ learning opportunities. It is not enough to understand the role of discourse in social reproduction. Curriculum studies should produce spaces for intervening in and challenging oppressive discourse structures.

This CDA study explores how a flexible curriculum designed to ensure the enrollment of vulnerable populations hurts the ability of students to grow through education. This study is specifically focused on examining the social, historical and political discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, as well as showing how teachers and students are positioned throughout this curriculum. Additionally, this CDA study analyzes the institutional discourses about the right to education of vulnerable populations in order to understand whose vision this curriculum represents and who benefits. Thus, as introduced in Chapter One, this study addresses the following research questions:

- What discourses inform the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* learning materials?
- How is flexibility represented as a feature of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*?
 - How does *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* position teachers?
 - How does *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* position students?

Research Rationale

The written curriculum analyzed in this study include *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s learning materials, this is a flexible program which was updated by MEN. The materials were designed to be used for beginner level instruction and each program includes a teacher's guide. This study will be limited to this range of curricula for many reasons.

This study will focus on elementary level curricula. This decision is also supported by Rogers et al. (2005), who found that only 15 percent of all educational CDA studies have been completed with elementary level discourses. All ideologies are "reproduced and transformed at very young ages. Therefore, descriptions and explanations of how this occurs and, more importantly, how the acquisition of counterproductive ideologies is interrupted, are necessary" (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 385).

Since the study is designed to analyze the discourse of flexibility, any level of instruction and pedagogical material from *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* qualified as appropriate text for the study. The learning materials I am focusing on include the teacher's guide and the operational manual.

The curricula are available on MEN's website because MEN decided to include these programs as part of its official educational policy. Therefore, it is appropriate to analyze the existing materials in order to analyze the Colombian flexible curricula.

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program has not been studied as much as the other flexible programs. As stated in the literature review, there is a lack of curriculum studies on flexible programs.

Those who read research must have confidence that studies will be carried out methodically and ethically. To enhance the credibility of this study, the Spanish language texts

were analyzed in Spanish, my native tongue and are represented in English. I provide examples of my processes in both Spanish and English so readers who are able can assess my fidelity to the original. When translating, I attempted to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

Analytical Procedures

In this study, the written materials of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* have been selected as the texts for analysis. Therefore, the claim that flexible curriculum can have effects on the reality of the students who are served by these materials can only be moved from being an abstract claim to a practical one, showing the discourses grounded in these learning materials and how this curriculum can have such effects on students and teachers.

This multimodal discourse analysis responds to the critique that CDA has overemphasized written words (Rogers, 2004). For CDA, it is not possible to limit oneself to a linguistic analysis of pedagogical texts in themselves. The analysis of dialogue with other texts (intertextuality) and its own multimodal composition (analysis of images) is a key component to account for the ideological view of curriculum materials.

Furthermore, in an educational context, students need to acquire the ability to read and access specific cultural meanings inherent in both written and visual texts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize the falsehood of the belief that the meaning of images is transparent, and accessible to all students. Rather, visual communication always responds to code, and what makes us believe that the 'we' understand is that we passively learn such a code (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this study, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) tool-kit for understanding visuals and breaking down the images into observable pieces to explain their meanings is used.

I used Fairclough’s method of CDA. Fairclough’s framework for CDA is committed to analyzing not only texts themselves, but the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2002, 2015). Fairclough’s three-stage process is organized around sets of questions situated in each stage (i.e. description, interpretation, and explanation). To explore *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, I adapted eight of Fairclough’s (2015) questions in order to explore the teacher’s guide and the manual of operation.

Given that Fairclough’s analytical framework aims to pay equal attention to social theory and language through his textually oriented approach to CDA, I began my analysis with text analysis, which is one of the three points of departure for exploring the linkages to the other two dimensions. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the questions included in each stage of the analysis; these questions were selected based on relevance to this research study after working with all Fairclough’s (2015) questions in a smaller part of the material.

Table 2 Analytical procedures Stage 1

Stage	Purpose	Questions
1. Description	This stage of analysis involves examining formal characteristics of text within its verbal (e.g. organizing schemes, markers of modalization, and metaphors) and visual components (framing, salience, and type of representational structure).	1. What classification schemes are drawn upon?
		1.1. What metaphors are used in each scheme?
		1.2. What/how visual components are used in each scheme?

Into all the texts, I looked for the most prominent schemes, examining each of the texts for indicators of an ideologically specific and dominant scheme for classifying the discourse

type(s)¹¹. In examining the formal characteristics of each text, I looked for the metaphors that are presented in each scheme because different metaphors have different “ideological attachments” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 137). For example, in a technological approach of teaching and instruction, teachers are often seen as responsible only for the efficiency with which they implement the curriculum. Using words like efficiency and effectiveness construct a technician metaphor applied to the teacher’s role, associating teaching and instruction with effectively applying a set of steps. In addition, to analyze the visual elements included in the texts, I looked for the visual resources that are used to reinforce particular ideological representations of each classification scheme. For example, photos of students and teachers presented in the texts that illustrate how teachers and students are represented in the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum.

Table 3 Analytical procedures Stage 2

2. Interpretation	This stage of analysis focuses on the relationship between text and interaction by using textual data analyzed in Stage 1 to clarify the construction, reproduction, and transformation of social practices. Interpretations are produced by combining "what is in the text and what is 'in' the interpreter"(Fairclough, 2015, p. 155)	2. What is the student-teacher relationship?
		2.1. What pedagogical practices does the teacher’s guide privilege?
		2.2. How each scheme positions teachers and students?

¹¹ According to Fairclough (2015), “the classification scheme constitutes a particular way of dividing up some aspect of reality which is built upon a particular ideological representation of that reality” (p.133).

Through stage 2, I analyzed the schemes regarding the subjects who are involved in them. Thus, the questions are oriented to understand who is this curriculum targeting, what relations, as well as pedagogical practices, are shaped by it. The goal is to use textual data from stage one to specify which subject positions are set up. In addition, to understand the nature of the relationship between teacher and student as afforded and contained by the textual materials, I looked at what relationships of power, social distance, and so forth are set up in each scheme.

Table 4 Analytical procedures Stage 3

3. Explanation	This stage aimed to show the interaction between discourse and relations of power, as well as discourse and processes of struggle	3.1. What power relations at the situational (classroom), the institutional (local), and/or the societal (state/national) level help shape each scheme?
		3.2. How do schemes position MEN, teachers, students, and the country?

Within the third stage of analysis, I looked at the power relationships that determine the dominant ideological representation within each scheme. I asked for the social and historical structures in order to situate each scheme as a part of the larger context which both changes and sustains structures. This stage puts the emphasis on the social determinants of discourse, and both social effects of discourse and social determinants of it can be investigated at three levels (i.e. .societal, institutional, situational). Thus, I looked for different ways of seeing the same discourse according to the social, institutional or situational perspective.

Positionality

My philosophical and theoretical orientation as a researcher shaped this study. One of the reasons I entered a doctoral program in social and cultural foundations was because I was frustrated with the educational interventions targeting vulnerable populations that came into (and went out of) fashion during my time as an education policy advisor. One year, teacher training would be the preferred way to prepare schools to deal with forced displacement; the next year, it would be strategic planning to include the United Nations' program in education in emergencies. These initiatives were imposed on classroom teachers, students, families, and local offices often with little explanation or justification. I knew that there had to be a rationale behind it, and I wanted to be in a better position to understand what that rationale was. Through my doctoral studies, I have come to recognize that my desire to investigate that which is taken for granted aligns with a commitment to social justice.

As a researcher, I positioned myself within the critical research paradigm, which is guided by the ontological premise of historical realism. In historical realism, there is a “virtual reality” that has been “shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). As such, I believe that knowledge is subjective and relational. Furthermore, I believe that knowledge and power are inextricably linked. Thus, knowledge is value-laden and produced through interaction between the researcher and the object, person, or group of interest within systems of power. As a researcher, I have adopted the onto-epistemological position that knowledge and reality must be understood together.

In the context of this study, my critical orientation toward research shapes my understanding of flexible curricular programs as a curriculum that is a product of educational reform discourse that could hurt or restrict students' educational experience. As a critical

discourse analyst, I am called to question normative discourses by drawing attention to the power structures that inform the discourse of a flexible curriculum. I will also seek to understand how flexibility in the curriculum is defined, and specifically, I will be concerned with how students and teachers are produced by the discourse of a flexible curriculum.

While much critical work is geared toward “conscientization” — that is, “critical reflection and its articulation with social action to enact individual and collective emancipation” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 37) — that is not the goal of my study. Instead, I aim for “defamiliarization” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, p. 57), meaning that my goal is to take that which is familiar and taken for granted and trace how it is produced through power in order to illuminate possibilities for resistance. Thus, the goal of this study was not to change the discourse of flexibility, but rather to unpack it in order to understand its effects, how it operates, and how it holds. I want to do this to provide an entry point for critiquing the discourse — to trouble its “common sense.”

Summary of the Chapter

This study is guided by theoretical and methodological facets of Fairclough’s approach to CDA. CDA offers both the means and the frame to look at flexible curriculum as a way to make sense of the kind of curriculum that is created for vulnerable populations. This study made use of CDA to explore the social, political, cultural, and historical discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Therefore, CDA has informed my research questions as well as my research design. In this chapter, I presented a more in-depth discussion of this methodology, including the rationale for using it, and I have described how I organized the study using Fairclough’s three-dimensions of discourse analysis to provide textual analysis, as well as a contextual analysis. Given the centrality of the researcher reflexivity in CDA, I provided insights as to my

positionality as a researcher, and ways I am aware that my perspectives and experiences affect my research process. The subsequent chapters interpret the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* materials and offer my thoughts regarding what this curriculum potentially does and its implications.

CHAPTER V FINDINGS & ANALYSIS PART I.

SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE CURRICULUM

This chapter, the first part of my findings, explains who the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum was designed to serve and how teachers are represented, in addition to providing an entry point to the analyzed materials. I briefly describe the contents of the teacher's guide and the manual of operation in discursive terms—describing how they represent the content and teaching of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program. The chapter begins with a descriptive summary of each text. I extensively describe the ways in which social actors are portrayed in this curriculum, focusing on teachers and students.

What do the Manual of Operation and the Teacher's Guide say?

The purposes of each text are stated in the presentation of both the Manual and Teacher's Guide. In addition, in both texts, the pedagogical principles and the goals of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* are outlined. Following are summaries of the manual and the teacher's guide based on a synthesis of the chapters numbered in the content list of each text. By providing these summaries, my intention is to represent the basic themes articulated by the text producer. I also introduce the major elements of the analyzed texts.

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's Manual Operativo* may be summarized as follows. Chapter One offers an overview of the model: the objectives, major features, targeted population, and the history of the model. In addition, it summarizes the central features and the criteria of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* students. Chapter Two describes the administrative, pedagogical,

and operative dimensions of the model. This chapter describes the role that local offices, NGOs, and schools play in the process of implementation of this program. Chapter Three introduces the objectives, structure, and a brief example of the training process that this program should include preparing teachers. Additionally, the operation manual presents four protocols for follow-up visits that local officers and observers should use when monitoring the program. □

According to the text's producer, the teacher's guide to *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was designed to accompany teachers in their pedagogical process of implementing this program.

The teacher's guide consists of sixteen chapters. The first three chapters describe what the program is, what population it serves, and how the program contributes to overcoming school failure. The fourth chapter introduces the idea of meaningful learning as applied to the model. It also describes the ideal conditions to reach meaningful learning in terms of students' attitudes and how the materials are designed to promote it. Chapters Five and Six, discuss the project-based approach that shapes the learning materials. Additionally, these chapters define interdisciplinary as part of the methodological approach that allows students to complete five grades of elementary school in one academic year.

Chapters Seven and Eight describe how this program integrates the national guidelines for math, language, science, and civic education. In two pages, chapter nine describes how assessment and social promotion are framed in this program. Chapters Ten, Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen introduce the learning materials, the class routine, and structure of the modules. These chapters emphasize planning as a key aspect for successfully implementing the program and introduce the criteria to use the teacher's guide as a tool for planning lessons. Chapter Fourteen and Fifteen describe the curricular structure, the order in which the materials should be used, and the timeline for the one academic year that this program covers. Finally, chapter Sixteen devotes

298 pages to present in great detail pedagogical orientations, learning goals, activities, readings, and tasks for developing each one of the six projects. □

Who is in the Curriculum?

It is necessary to establish the players in the curriculum. By demonstrating the ways in which social actors are portrayed in the curriculum, it is possible to draw conclusions about who has the right to speak and act, and both when and where they have the right to do so. These, in turn, can help to demonstrate the power relations at play in the curriculum's discourse. In this section, I sketch the roles and presences of teachers and students, the two significant groups in the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum.

Teachers in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*

Figure 1. One teacher



Guía docente, 2010, p.27

Figure 2. Four teachers



Manual Operativo, 2010, p.34.

In both the manual and the guide, Images 1 and 2 are the only two photos portraying exclusively teachers. The other three pictures in which teachers are portrayed also included students. Looking at the representational structure, which refers to those visual processes that fulfill narrative and conceptual functions in the picture, both photos illustrate the potential *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* teachers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, Image 1,

which portrays a young black male who reads from a text in a classroom, represents not only the process of teaching through the action of reading but also communicates that young teachers from minority groups can be teachers in this program. Similarly, Image 2, which portrays four women working on a desk full of texts, represents the work that accompanies teaching and instruction (e.g. lesson planning), but also communicates that women work as teachers. Images 1 and 2 accompany portions of written text that talk about lesson planning. Thus, both photos illustrate who the teachers in this program are and what they do. □

In addition to representations of who teachers *are* in the curriculum, there are numerous representations of what teachers *do*. These representations allow me to describe how the curriculum represents the activity of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* teaching. Judging by the 235 references analyzed for this study, teachers are *the* central referent of the guide. In contrast, the operation manual only devotes a brief subsection of its first chapter to describe what characterizes the teacher of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

The tendency is to represent them as agents who are under obligation to act in certain ways. The majority of statements about teachers in this text articulate what the teachers "should do/know," "must do/understand," or "need to be able to do" in order to effectively implement this curriculum. They are rarely represented as independent agents; instead, they are agents whose activities are determined by this curriculum that they have to teach. One of the most frequent structure statements concerning teachers can be represented by the following pattern, which appears throughout the teacher's guide:

SUBJECT [Teachers] + AUXILIARY VERB [should, have to] + MAIN VERB [e.g., consider, identify, create, evaluate, make, etc.] + OBJECT [attitude phrase, content phrase, pedagogical phrase].

Example 1

El docente de Aceleración del Aprendizaje debe tener las siguientes características: (...) debe comprometerse a participar activamente en los procesos de formación y seguimiento que se requieran para su adecuada implementación (...) El modelo requiere de un compromiso firme, disponibilidad de tiempo y organización, ya que exige un proceso de planeación para cada día de clases y el seguimiento detallado y permanente a cada uno de los estudiantes. Por esto, el docente deberá estar dedicado de manera exclusiva al Modelo Aceleración del Aprendizaje (Manual operativo, 2010, p. 13-14).

The teacher of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* must have the following characteristics: The teacher must commit to actively participate in the training and monitoring processes required for its proper implementation (...) The model requires a strong commitment, availability of time and organization because it requires that teachers plan daily lessons, as well as follow and monitor each one of their students. For this reason, the teacher must be dedicated exclusively to the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* model¹².

Example 2

(...) el docente debe observar a sus estudiantes y evaluar su proceso de aprendizaje (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 50).

¹² *Debe* is translated as "must" when used with an infinitive because in those case *debe* is being used to express obligation. Thus fragments, such as *debe tener*, *debe observar*, *debe detectar* have been translated as "must have," "must observe," and "must detect," respectively.

(...) the teacher must observe their students and evaluate their learning process

El docente debe acompañar y monitorear constantemente el trabajo (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 184).

The teacher must follow and constantly monitor the work

Example 3

Ahora usted deberá tener en cuenta estos criterios para guiar a cada estudiante (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 114).

Now you should keep these criteria in mind to guide each student

Example 4

Usted debe detectar las habilidades de cada estudiante (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p.115).

You must identify each student's skills.

Example 5

Recuerde que en todo momento, usted debe generar espacios para los estudiantes, donde ellos puedan manifestar sus habilidades (...) (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p.115).

Remember that at all times, you should create opportunities in which students can manifest their skills.

In the main body of the guide, teachers are represented as obligated to do a range of things to guarantee the correct implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. As the previous excerpts show, teachers are expected to identify students' needs and serve students by providing classes while tailoring instruction and engaging activities that foster their interests in the learning process.

In the teacher's guide, the text's producer asserts that teachers should take a student-centered approach to the development of the curriculum, which fundamentally affects the roles a teacher will play in the classroom; here, the teacher is expected to be able to create a learning environment in which students can be immersed in learning. They are expected to promote classroom environments and seek opportunities for communication, valuing both individual and collaborative activities. To create such classrooms, teachers are expected to carefully follow the planning, assessment criteria, and instruction given through the written materials, both the teacher's guide and the modules. They are expected to be able to understand and articulate the instructions, suggestions, and orientations in ways in which they also demonstrate their understanding of what each student needs.

With regard to class preparation, teachers are particularly expected to be familiar with all the learning materials, including readings, discussions, and activities. The following example shows that the operation manual states that teachers should be knowledgeable of the foundations of the program while also be able to follow the given curricular structure.

Example 6

El modelo requiere un docente con sensibilidad social, que apropie sus fundamentos y los ponga en práctica de acuerdo con el contexto, sin dejar de lado la estructura planteada para su implementación en el aula (Manual Operativo, 2010, p.14).

The model requires a teacher with social sensitivity, a teacher who appropriates its foundations and puts them into practice according to context, without putting the proposed structure aside for its implementation in the classroom.

The teacher's guide, for example, devotes over 300 pages to introducing pedagogical instructions to implement each stage of the curriculum. The following excerpt reveals that the

guide explicitly provides pedagogical orientations, suggestions for teachers, recommendations, and routines that teachers need to follow.

Example 7

Es importante que el o la docente de *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* esté familiarizado con la estructura de los proyectos del Modelo, por lo que debe leer toda la obra antes del inicio de la implementación de la misma. Cada módulo está conformado por varios subproyectos (de tres a cinco) que funcionan como partes de un gran proyecto; cada subproyecto tiene unos aprendizajes previstos, una secuencia didáctica y un producto final (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p. 25-26).

It is important that the teacher of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is familiar with the structure of the model; therefore, teachers should read all of the materials before beginning to implement the model. Each module consists of several subprojects (from three to five) that function as parts of a large project. Each subproject has expected learning outcomes, a didactic sequence, and a final product.

In the guide, course plans are included, as well as lessons, in-class activities, tasks, assignments, and assessment tools. Teachers are expected to follow instructions and prepare their course plans by using all the materials that the guide and the modules provide. In the next section, I will discuss some of the issues that can be identified across these representations. Next, however, it is useful to describe the representations of students.

Students in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*

It makes sense that the teacher's guide spends a significant amount of time discussing the activities of students in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s classrooms in conjunction with the obligations of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* teachers. Similarly to teachers, students are

represented according to their obligations for learning in the classroom—what they are expected to know and do, and what they need from their teachers that contributes to the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s understanding of curricular requirements for elementary education. Across the guide and the manual, students are represented in the following ways.

Figure 3. One student



Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 34.

Students are referred to 230 times in the first 69 pages of the guide in connection with statements regarding their obligations to do, think, believe, and value in the context of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum. Students, like teachers, are present in the texts, but referred to impersonally, generically, and categorically according to the demands of the curriculum. In the guide and the manual, three of the four photos of children and youth are located in classroom school settings. Image 3 is an example of the impersonal ways of representing students. This photo depicts a student who appears to be in a classroom while writing at his desk. This black and white picture is located at the bottom of the page and it does not include any commentary or text connected to it. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the symbolic process of the photography is not narrative in content, but symbolizes something related to the cultural context. In this case, Image 3 functions both to provide an illustration of how students of this program work and to break the text. As the photo portrays,

Aceleración del Aprendizaje provides students with learning materials and a classroom setting in which students can work.

The following excerpts show how students are referred to in relation to concepts, dispositions, and content that they "need to," "should," or "must" know, and often appear as the direct objects of teachers actions in auxiliary constructions.

Example 8

El objetivo de la siguiente actividad es que sus estudiantes se relacionen con figuras tridimensionales desde las cuales identifiquen sus características generales (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p. 172)

The objective of the following activity is for students to relate to three-dimensional figures from which they identify their general characteristics.

Example 9

En esta fase del proyecto, los y las estudiantes continuarán observando la escuela, deteniéndose en su aspecto físico (...) (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p. 139)

In this phase of the project, the students will continue to observe the school, focusing on the physical structure (...)

In addition, students are referred to in relation to what is necessary for instructors to teach effectively. Students variously receive instruction and opportunities so that they are led to explore, engage, and become familiar with the content. Teachers are expected to make sure that students learn, achieve, grow, and acquire knowledge by reading, writing, using their home literacies, drawing conclusions, expressing ideas, and demonstrating their learning for others. □

Example 10

Los principales conceptos que deben repasar con sus estudiantes son: alimentación, digestión, sistema digestivo. Es muy importante que repase con sus estudiantes... (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 129)

The main concepts that should be reviewed with your students are food, digestion, digestive system. It is very important that you review with your students... □

Example 11

En esta actividad, los estudiantes deben identificar en su comunidad las formas de producción de riqueza y deben analizar la situación del empleo (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 192)

In this activity, students must identify in their community the forms of wealth production and must analyze the employment situation

According to the teacher's guide, students need help from teachers to find their motivation and engage with the learning process. As the following excerpt describes, students of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* need the teacher to help them both recover their confidence and learn. When chapter three of the guide discusses how students can overcome school failure through this program, students are represented in terms of their condition of age-grade gap. The following excerpts describe how students are expected to go through this program to catch up to their elementary school peers. □

Example 12

Este propósito es posible de alcanzar con Aceleración del Aprendizaje, pues el Modelo fue creado precisamente para responder a la difícil situación de los estudiantes en extraedad. Cuando él o la docente a partir de la metodología, los materiales propios del

Modelo y el planteamiento de situaciones significativas motiva a sus estudiantes, es posible devolverles la confianza y seguridad en su capacidad de aprendizaje, logrando con ello acelerar su proceso educativo para nivelar la primaria en un año lectivo (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 9).

This purpose is possible to achieve with *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* because the model was created precisely to respond to the difficult situation of students whose ages do not match their grade. When the teacher applies the methodology, materials, and meaningful learning situations, the teacher motivates his/her students, and it is possible to restore students' confidence and security in their learning capacity, and in doing so, accelerate their educational process to catch up their elementary grades in one school year.

In addition, in both the manual and the teacher's guide, when defining who is served by this program, students are described as vulnerable populations. As the following excerpt shows they are described as children and youth affected by violence (i.e. forcibly displaced population and children in armed groups), and/or rural populations from marginalized areas. □

Example 13

Dentro de la población atendida por el Modelo se encuentran niños, niñas y jóvenes que han sido víctimas del desplazamiento forzado, pertenecientes a zonas rurales dispersas o a zonas urbano-marginales con altos índices de pobreza, algunos son menores desvinculados del conflicto armado, varios de ellos se encontraban desescolarizados o bien al interior del sistema educativo con experiencias de fracaso escolar y repitencia (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 7).

Within the population served by the model, there are children and young people who have been victims of forced displacement who belong to rural areas or urban-marginal

areas with high poverty levels. Some are children soldiers, and several were left out of the school system or they had experiences of school failure and repetition.

In the same page of the guide, a photo of eight children in a classroom setting accompanies Example 13.

Figure 4. Eight students



Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 7.

In the Image 4, the participants could be identified as students who are wearing white t-shirts and jeans, which look like "the uniform" used in the Colombian public schools; some of them also hold a notebook or book. The eight students are looking at the camera while posing for the photo. All of them are brown-skinned children, likely from afro Colombian or indigenous descent. In terms of their ages, the group seems diverse. This black and white photo, located at the right side of the excerpt 13, functions to reinforce the description given in the written text about who the students of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* are. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), visual images can perform as representations. In this case, the text producer uses a photo that conveys the meaning of evidence and represents a more naturalistic orientation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By analyzing elements of the photo, such as the public school uniform, the diverse ages, and the skin tone of the students, it appears that the photo was chosen to reinforce the text producer's idea that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* serves

historically marginalized population (e.g. afro Colombian), such as children from low socio-economic classes who have been not able to complete elementary school.

In the next chapter, I discuss the three ideological markers that can be identified across these representations. I also expand on my analysis of the discursive and material implications of targeting marginalized students.

Other Social Actors in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*

Social actors such as local offices and non-governmental organizations (NGO) are referred to in the manual of operation. They appear as generic actors in the context of implementing the program at the local level. References to local offices in the manual are located in the manual's section about monitoring and evaluation of the program, while NGOs are briefly mentioned as potential actors in the process of implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

Example 14

Los representantes de las Secretarías de Educación y docentes involucrados en el proceso de implementación del Modelo Aceleración del Aprendizaje deben garantizar el seguimiento al proceso no sólo en relación con el estudiante y su estadía en el Modelo sino que también es imprescindible prestar atención a la manera como la implementación viene incidiendo (Manual Operativo p. 31)

Educational officers and administrators of the local offices and teachers involved in the implementation process of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* model must guarantee the follow-up of the process, not only in relation to the student and their stay in the model but also in the need to pay attention to how the implementation has been evolving.

Although local offices are institutions, they are represented in the text as people/individuals. They are represented in Example 14 as social agents, doing things in the program such as monitoring teachers. While local offices appear to be relevant actors in the implementation, their role is reduced by a constant reminder that teachers and students are the central actors. Given this, it is possible to argue that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* does not provide an in-depth description of the role and responsibilities of both the NGOs and education offices.

Summary of the Chapter

The summaries of the teacher's guide and the manual of operation in this chapter demonstrate the scope and the emphasis of the educational project of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. The summary also helps readers to become familiar with the analyzed materials. The second part of this chapter communicates who this curriculum was designed for. Students are represented according to what they are expected to know and do, and what they need from their teachers. In *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, students' condition of being out of school and their need to level up elementary grades have them as lacking the motivation to engage with learning processes. Thus, in both the manual and the teacher's guide, when explaining which students *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* serves, students are described as children and youth affected by violence (i.e. forcibly displaced population and children in armed groups), and rural populations from historically marginalized areas.

Similarly to students, teachers are mostly represented according to their obligations to act in certain ways, in terms of what they should do/know/be able to do. The scripted curriculum provided in the teacher's guide shows that teachers are facilitators, guides who rely on the given learning materials (readings, instructions, and activities) rather than "teachers" in a more

autonomous mode of leading while designing their instruction plans and using their expertise to teach. Next, in Chapter six, I outline a number of discourses that may be identified in the texts by identifying schemes, including discourse on flexibility, scripted curriculum, and project-based curriculum.

CHAPTER VI FINDINGS & ANALYSIS PART II.

CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES

In this chapter, I offer several examples from an analysis of the three classification schemes (i.e. script-based curriculum, project-based curriculum, and flexibility) that act as ideological markers in the discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. Through an examination of these schemes, I discuss how flexibility is represented as a feature of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. I look at how words in the text are potentially organized into the three schemes and how those schemes can be explained in the larger context in which power relationships determine the dominant ideological representation within each scheme.

Defining Flexibility

A key interest of this study is to explore how "flexibility" was discursively produced within the curriculum of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, including how it is defined and represented as a major feature. This exploration showed that the text producer's understanding of flexibility is represented through the opportunity for accelerated learning that this program offers. The following excerpt is the first section of the teacher's guide, in which the author explicitly describes what *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is. In this instance, the flexibility of the curriculum is defined as the methodology oriented to overcome age-grade gap.

Example 15

Es un conjunto de estrategias educativas sustentado en teorías pedagógicas, que se desarrolla a partir de una metodología orientada a que niños, niñas y jóvenes en extraedad

logren desarrollar las competencias que les permitan nivelar la básica primaria en un año lectivo, superando el desfase edad-grado (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 7).

It is a set of educational strategies based on pedagogical theories, which is developed from a methodology that aims to serve children and youth who need to overcome the age-grade gap by completing elementary school in a school year¹³.

This is an example of the curriculum's goal to provide educational materials to teachers who serve age-grade gap students.

Through a review of the scholarship regarding curriculum in Latin America, flexibility has been frequently identified as a feature of non-formal education models. Non-formal models are defined as “any organized and systemic educational activity outside the framework of the formal school system” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 829). Consistent with the goal of non-formal models, in the case of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* the MEN's definition of flexibility reinforces the understanding of it as a feature of non-formal educational programs. These non-formal programs are designed to provide selected educational opportunities to specific population groups, those who because of circumstances, such as civil war, need to work, lack of schools or transportation, are behind in school by two or three years.

This treatment of flexibility reflects a Latin American trend of using non-formal education for responding to social problems and extending opportunities for basic learning to populations unable to access formal education systems (Pinar et al., 1995). In the case of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, its roots and origins are situated outside of the traditional school

¹³ All the original Spanish texts have been translated by me.

system. Brazil originally developed this program as a space outside the school system, which would eradicate the phenomenon of age-grade gap. In 2002, this program was adopted by MEN because it represented a complementary effort to improve enrollment of students who have not been able to complete elementary school through the formal education system. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* differs from formal schooling because it is a project-based curriculum designed to complete elementary school in one year. This curriculum provides learning materials (six booklets, one teacher's guide, and one operational manual) to enable the teaching-learning process in a shorter period than regular classes (Manual Operativo, 2010).

In addition, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* provides a different approach from the formal educational system to grade promotion. Flexibility is linked to the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* approach to assessment and grade promotion. For example, the following two excerpts from the teacher's guide explicitly state that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* seeks students' promotion to the sixth grade.

Example 16

Recuerde:

Aceleración del aprendizaje no se “pierde” ni se repite, pues el objetivo del modelo es ofrecer educación pertinente a niños y jóvenes en extraedad, favoreciendo que superen el desfase edad-grado y sus experiencias de fracaso escolar (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 34).

Remember:

Aceleración del Aprendizaje cannot be repeated, because the objective of this model is to offer relevant education to children and youth who need help to overcome the age-grade gap, as well as students' experiences of school failure.

Interestingly, the following excerpt uses a passive construction to talk about social promotion. Fairclough (2015) suggests that a text producer's use of active or passive sentences may be used to create ambiguity and mask agency. The following excerpt demonstrates the use of a passive, agentless sentence construction:

Example 17

En cuanto a la promoción, es importante anotar que en *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* se espera que al final del año lectivo todo el grupo sea promovido a sexto grado (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p. 34).

Regarding grade to grade promotion, it is important to note that in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* it is expected that at the end of the school year the entire group will be promoted to the sixth grade.

The meaning of flexibility varies depending on, among other things, the context and the text producer's intention. To ensure the objective of accelerating the learning process, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* relies on social promotion with no corresponding discussion of what was learned. In example 16, the headline "remember" works as a command for teachers, indicating that grade repetition is forbidden. This represents the major curricular difference between *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* and regular school.

In example 17, the teacher's guide explicitly mentions that students' social promotion is expected. On the same page the guide also mentions that given the particular goal of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, both assessment and grade promotion are defined accordingly to the needs of the program. The guide briefly mentions that the emphasis of the program is on students' learning processes, such as teamwork, self-esteem, communication, and empathy.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje's emphasis on social promotion is aligned with the major goal of the program. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is a non-formal model that seeks to enroll students who have not completed elementary school. Therefore, flexibility functions in relation to its curricular structure, which practically ensures students to go from first to fifth grade in 185 days. The following excerpt from the section about the curricular structure explicitly mentions the length of the whole model, its projects, and sub-projects:

Example 18

Aceleración del Aprendizaje se desarrolla a partir de siete proyectos interdisciplinarios y un módulo específico de inglés, que se trabajan a lo largo del año lectivo. El Modelo tiene una duración de 185 días para el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas en los módulos. [...] La duración de los proyectos es de 25 a 28 días; por su parte cada subproyecto se desarrolla entre 3 y 11 días (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 61).

Aceleración del Aprendizaje is developed through seven interdisciplinary projects and one module specifically for English, all of which are completed throughout the school year. The proposed activities were designed to last 185 days [...]each project with a duration of 25 to 28 days, and each sub-project with a duration of 3 to 11 days.□

This flexible curricular structure was reflective of Pinar et al. (1995), Sáenz Obregón et al. (1997), and Herrera's (1999) notation that non-formal models of education are designed as an alternative to traditional education that has not been capable to serve historically marginalized rural populations. Non-formal education has demonstrated utility in extending educational opportunities to children and youth who are either underserved or poorly served by formal school systems. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* model offers a concrete example of the Latin

American trend of interpreting and adapting different foreign educational influences to students' needs and contexts. After *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was created in Brazil, some Latin American countries including Colombia translated its materials to Spanish.

The curricular flexibility relies on planning and programmed instruction. In *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, flexibility operates through a script-based curricular structure comprised of 381 pages, divided into 16 sub-sections. 320 pages of the teacher's guide are devoted to teachers' orientations for each stage, activity, and step of the curriculum. For instance, the text producer provides a table to present *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s structure, which not only presents each of the sub-projects of the model, but also the number of days in which each sub-project should be developed.

Figure 5. Projects

MÓDULO NIVELATORIO Todos hacia el éxito (25 días)	PROYECTO 1 ¿Quién soy Yo? (26 días)	PROYECTO 2 Mi escuela: Espacio de Convivencia (27 días)	PROYECTO 3 El lugar donde vivo (27 días)	PROYECTO 4 Mi Municipio (27 días)	PROYECTO 5 La Colombia de todos nosotros (28 días)	PROYECTO 6 Operación: salvar la Tierra (25 días)
Subproyecto I Conociéndonos (3 días)	Subproyecto I Descubrir la identidad (6 días)	Subproyecto I Mi escuela ayer (6 días)	Subproyecto I La dirección de mi casa (5 días)	Subproyecto I Promocionar mi municipio (10 días)	Subproyecto I Colombia en mapas (6 días)	Subproyecto I Naturaleza frente al desarrollo ¿Equilibrio o desequilibrio? (5 días)
Subproyecto II Creando mi universo (5 días)	Subproyecto II Mi familia y Yo (4 días)	Subproyecto II La escuela que tengo hoy (5 días)	Subproyecto II El trabajo y la producción de riqueza (6 días)	Subproyecto II La construcción del bienestar del municipio (10 días)	Subproyecto II Colombia cultural (5 días)	Subproyecto II Si no existieran los árboles y los bosques ¿no existirías? (5 días)
Subproyecto III ¿Quién vive en mi mundo y cómo está organizado? (6 días)	Subproyecto III Alimentación y calidad de vida (11 días)	Subproyecto III La escuela que deseo: un espacio de convivencia (6 días)	Subproyecto III Juegos al aire libre (5 días)	Subproyecto III Comprometido con mi municipio (7 días)	Subproyecto III Colombia regional (11 días)	Subproyecto III El agua: ¿cómo preservarla? (5 días)
Subproyecto IV ¿Qué quiero contar? (6 días)	Subproyecto IV Construyendo mi propia identidad, a partir de la relación con los demás (5 días)	Subproyecto IV La escuela que deseo: un lugar bonito y agradable (5 días)	Subproyecto IV ¡Salud es vida! (6 días)		Subproyecto IV Construyendo identidad nacional. ¡Yo soy Colombia! (6 días)	Subproyecto IV Protegiendo el planeta. ¡Soy parte de la solución! (10 días)
Subproyecto V ¿Qué quiero comunicar? (5 días)		Subproyecto V La escuela: un espacio de construcción colectiva ¡La escuela de todos! (5 días)	Subproyecto V Mi responsabilidad como miembro de la comunidad (5 días)			

The “flexibility” that allows students to complete five grades in one academic year requires careful planning. Thus, as the table illustrates, the text’s producer defines a precise time period for each stage of the curriculum. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* calls for a rigorous planning process and provides a detailed sequence of orientations for each stage in the curriculum, suggesting that this is the sequence and the time period in which those pedagogical orientations should be implemented. In the following excerpt, for example, teachers are reminded to carefully follow the given order.

Example 19

Es importante que los docentes sigan la secuencia establecida, empezando con el Módulo Nivelatorio y continuando con el desarrollo de cada uno de los proyectos desde el 1 hasta el 6, sin alterar dicho orden (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p.63)

It is important that teachers follow the established sequence, beginning with the Leveling Module and continuing with the development of each of the projects from 1 to 6, without altering that order.

Figure 5 and examples 19 show *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*’s emphasis on sequentiality and planning. Both the structure and the materials define a precise order in terms of the sequence and the timeline that teachers have to follow.

Further examination of the curriculum in terms of the metaphors used brought to light the connection between the model’s name (i.e. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*) and how flexibility is defined. As Fairclough (2015) explains, the use of metaphor in texts is often another way to present one’s ideology or belief systems. For example, the program’s central feature is supported by its name, Accelerated Learning. The text producer’s deliberate use and repetition of the words

"accelerated learning" emphasize the curriculum's goal of providing an opportunity for students to progress from grade to grade more rapidly than usual. □

According to CDA, the terminology can reveal the text's producer emphasis. Notice that *Aceleración* works as a metaphor for going faster, as the central feature of this curriculum is that allows students to "catch up." In this program, teachers are instructed to promote students (Example 17) in order to achieve *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s goal to complete five years of elementary school in one academic year.

The Scripted Curriculum

An examination of classification schemes involves considering how words in the text are potentially organized into categories (Fairclough, 2015). When looking at the teacher's guide, a major theme was prevalent: a script-based curriculum. This theme is presented through the use of words such as *orientaciones pedagógicas*, *sugerencias para el docente*, *recomendaciones*, *rutina*, *planeación* (i.e. pedagogical orientations, suggestions for teachers, recommendations, routine, planning). The text producer's deliberate use and repetition of these keywords emphasize a fundamental, script-based instruction, a particular category or classification. □

As the contents list shows (figure 6), chapter sixteen, the longest in the guide, offers "orientations" and additional guidelines for developing each one of the six projects.

Figure 6.Contents

14. ¿Cuál es la estructura curricular del Modelo?	61
15. ¿Cómo están estructurados los proyectos?	64
16. Orientaciones para el desarrollo de los proyectos: Guías complementarias	66
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 1 ¿Quién soy yo?	70
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 2 La escuela: espacio de convivencia	137
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 3 El lugar donde vivo	191
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 4 Mi municipio	243
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 5 La Colombia de todos nosotros	283
Orientaciones para el desarrollo del Proyecto 6 Operación salvar la Tierra	320
Anexos	365

Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 3-4.

Fairclough (2015) argues that word choice and juxtaposition are often used to support, promote, or naturalize an author's ideology. Therefore, an examination of key vocabulary (i.e. pedagogical orientations, suggestions for teachers, recommendations, routine, planning) used in the text illustrates the significance of the author's deliberate emphasis on suggestions, which promotes and reinforces a view of teaching as a technology, in which "teacher's role is one of passive conformity to the practical recommendations of educational researchers [and experts]" (Carr & Kemmis, 2004, p. 70). For example, the following excerpt from Project 1's pedagogical orientations places the student herself in the subject position, giving verbatim direct instructions to students that teachers might ideally read.

Example 20

En este mismo día, después de que los estudiantes hagan el dibujo de sí mismos, puede desarrollar el siguiente ejercicio:

Vas a **escribir** una carta... **tú** aún no sabes a quién se las vas a dirigir.

Escríbela transmitiendo un mensaje al destinatario sobre el valor de su vida, que lo motive a vivir con alegría, esforzándose cada día por ser mejor, amando la vida, su familia, su estudio, su escuela, sus compañeros y profesores.

Firma la carta y **escribe** al lado la fecha.

Con ayuda de tu docente **pon tu** carta en una bolsa junto con las cartas de tus compañeros¹⁴” (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 112).

On this same day, after the students make a drawing of themselves, you can develop the following exercise:

You are going to write a letter ... you do not know who you are going to address it to.

Write it in a way that you remind the recipient about the value of his life. The message should motivate the recipient to live with joy, striving every day to be better, loving his life, his family, his study, his school, his classmates and teachers.

Sign the letter and write the date next to it.

With the help of your teacher, put your letter in a bag along with the letters of your classmates.

This is an example of the script that the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum provides to teachers. In the excerpt the student, as a subject, is instructed to: write, sign, and place. This type of deliberate sentence construction clearly shifts the agency from the teacher to the student.

¹⁴ This fragment was taken from Project 1 (Who am I?), sub-project IV (Building my identity through relationships with others).

When instructions shift from being directed towards teacher to student, the teacher's agency seems unclear and restricted to comply with the given script.

Scripted curricula have been part of non-formal educational programs oriented towards marginalized populations (Montoya-Vargas, 2014). *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s origin is situated outside of the traditional school. *Acelera Brasil*, the initial version, was introduced to other Latin American countries by Brazilian agencies funded by the World Bank (Picardo João & Victoria Libreros, 2009). In 1999, one year after the second Summit of the Americas, Colombia joined the list of countries committed with the World Bank's educative agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (Atehortúa Cruz, 2012). Atehortúa Cruz (2012) argues that the 2002's *Revolución Educativa* policy, by which MEN officially adopts flexible programs, corresponds with Colombia's effort to expand enrollment and comply with the World Bank's mandate of reducing social inequality and poverty through the optimization of financial resources.

Consistent with the review of the scholarship regarding curriculum studies in Colombia, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s script-based approach to curriculum is representative of the kind of technical curriculum provided by international missions to address major social and educational deficiencies (Helg, 2001, Montoya-Vargas, 2014). As in the 1950s when Colombian educational researchers first resisted the imposition of script oriented curricula, today it is still relevant to question the effects of a flexible program that promotes programmed instruction (Martínez Boom et al., 2003; Montoya-Vargas, 2014). In *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, the teacher's guide functions as a large script that frames what to teach, how to teach, and what for. As the following excerpt describes, the guide offers all pedagogical resources for each project.

Example 21

La Guía Docente incluye recursos didácticos (lecturas, gráficos, ejemplos de planeación de clases, evaluaciones sugeridas, insumos para la elaboración del plan de estudios, etc.) para cada uno de los proyectos de Aceleración del Aprendizaje (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 35).

The teacher's guide includes didactic resources (readings, graphs, examples of lesson planning, suggested assessments, inputs for the development of the curriculum, etc.) for each of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s projects.

The following excerpt illustrates that the text producer defines the guidelines that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* offers to teachers as pedagogical and didactic orientations and include a description of each project structure.

Example 22

En estas orientaciones se hace una presentación de la estructura de cada proyecto, un cuadro con los aportes de las áreas al cumplimiento del objetivo del proyecto, los ejes conceptuales y conceptos que desarrolla cada área (...) Posteriormente se brindan recomendaciones generales para profundizar conceptos o dinamizar algunos momentos desde la didáctica propia de cada una de las áreas y recursos para la planeación de días considerados clave para el desarrollo de competencias (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 66).

In these orientations, a presentation of the structure of each project is included, as well as a table that describes the contributions of the subject-areas to the fulfillment of the objective of the project, and concepts developed by each area (...) Later, general

recommendations and resources for lessons plans are given in order to provide teachers with tools to reinforce concepts and plan key days for developing competence. □

Additionally, the orientations include texts (i.e. readings), activities (e.g. tasks, experiments, games, mathematical exercises, etc.), and suggestions for teachers. They also include instructions that students should comply with as well as questions for the assessment. For example, in the following excerpt, the guide offers a detailed script in which teachers can find not only the activity but also the instructions and suggestions for the evaluation. □

Figure 7. Food train

Procedimiento

Pídale a los estudiantes que:

Elaboren una lista de los alimentos que consumen diariamente, al desayuno, al almuerzo y a la comida.

De acuerdo con el tren de la alimentación, indiquen cuáles alimentos son los que más consumen durante el día.

Hagan un menú saludable y viable de conseguir según los alimentos que se obtienen fácilmente en su región. Para esto se sugiere que:

- Hagan una lista de las frutas, las verduras, los cereales, las carnes, los lácteos y otros alimentos que se consiguen fácilmente en su región. Incluyan en la lista otros alimentos que consideren importantes en su dieta.
- Diseñen una tabla, organizando por grupos de alimentos los productos que incluyeron en la lista.
- Observen la tabla y escriban todo lo que podrían incluir en su desayuno, almuerzo y comida, teniendo en cuenta el tren de la alimentación.

Puede incluir en el salón de clase el tren de la alimentación, con el fin de repasar los contenidos y de fortalecer los conocimientos de los estudiantes.

► **Sugerencia para el momento de la evaluación**

Selecciona una respuesta:

- Los alimentos para una dieta alimenticia se representan en un tren porque:
 - Muestran en los primeros vagones los de mayor consumo y en los últimos vagones los de menor consumo.
 - Ayuda a analizar cuáles alimentos son los más abundantes en las regiones.
 - En ella se pueden observar los alimentos más importantes para una dieta balanceada.
- En el último vagón del tren aparecen azúcares y dulces, ¿qué sucedería si sólo te alimentaras de dulces diariamente?
- Dibuja un tren alimenticio en el que aparezcan, en los primeros vagones, los alimentos que más consumes de cada grupo, y en los últimos vagones los que menos consumes. Compáralo con el mostrado en el dibujo.
- Explica si tu dieta es una dieta balanceada.

(Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 89-90¹⁵).

Instructions

Ask the students to:

Make a list of the food that they eat daily, at breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

According to the food wagons, indicate which foods are the most consumed during the day.

Make a healthy and viable menu to collect foods that are easily obtained from their region. For this, it is suggested that student:

a. Make a list of fruits, vegetables, cereals, meats, dairy, and other foods that are easily available in your region. Include other foods that you consider important for your diet with your list.

b. Design a table, organizing the products included in the list by food groups.

c. Look at the table and write everything you could include in your breakfast, lunch, and dinner, taking into account the food train.

You can include the food train in the classroom, in order to review the contents and strengthen the knowledge of the students.

Suggestion for the time of evaluation

Select an answer:

1. Foods for a diet are represented in a train because:

a. They show in the first wagons those of greater consumption and in the last wagons those of less consumption.

b. Help to analyze which foods are the most abundant in the regions.

c. You can observe the most important foods for a balanced diet.

¹⁵ This fragment was also taken from Project 1, sub-project III (Nutrition and quality of life). The activity from which this fragment was taken initiates with the description of the ideal food train and includes both text and images to describe it.

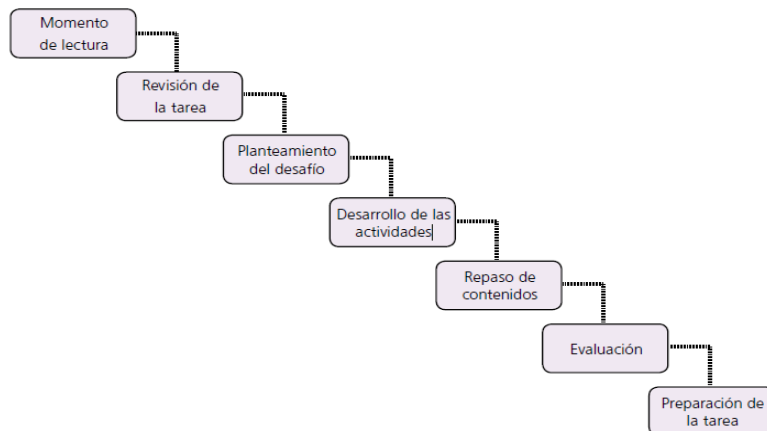
2. In the last car of the train appear sugars and sweets, what would happen if you only eat sweets daily?
3. Draw a food train in which in the first wagons you show the foods that you eat the most, and in the last wagons, you show those that you eat less. Compare it with the one shown in the drawing. □
4. Explain if your diet is a balanced diet.

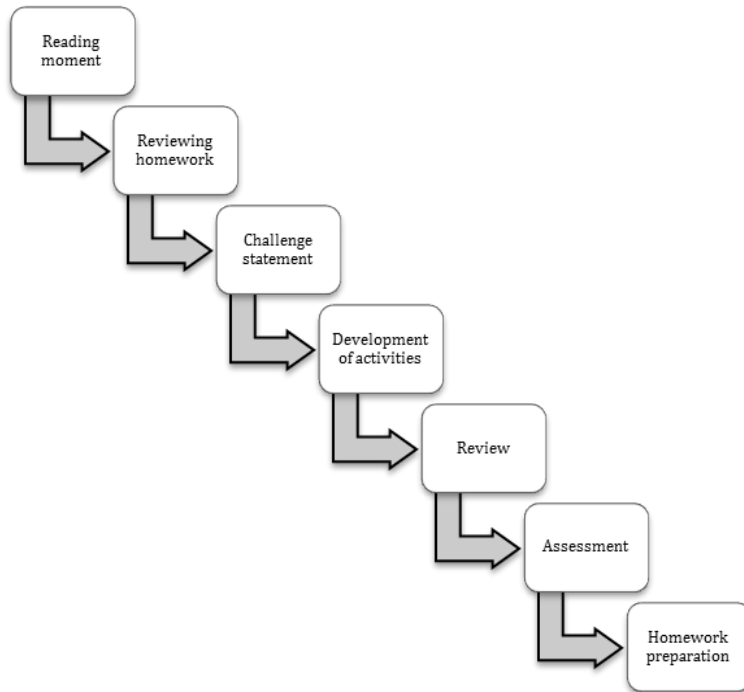
As Figure 7 illustrates, the text producers include precise instructions to complete the sub-projects, activities, in addition to the criteria and questions to assess students in both the guide and modules of the curriculum.

Therefore, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s curriculum is comprised of procedures and techniques that reinforce planning and programmed instruction. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* offers a script-based curriculum that devotes 320 pages of detailed orientations, suggestions, and routines. For instance, when explaining what the components of a day in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* are, the guide provides a diagram of the routine that teachers should follow in everyday classes.

Figure 8. Routine

11.1. ¿Cuáles son los momentos de una clase de Aceleración del Aprendizaje?





The boxes in the diagram represent the components/steps of the class routine and the lines represent the order and sequentially that constitute the routine. Thus, as this diagram shows, the text producer not only describes the components of a class but also introduces a routine that teachers should follow. □

In this script-based curriculum, teachers, as the following example illustrates, are agentless while follow instructions in order to effectively implement the curriculum.

Example 23

El docente debe lograr que los módulos, material elaborado de forma lógica y secuencial, se relacionen adecuadamente con la estructura cognitiva del estudiante; para esto es indispensable conocer el material y haber planeado las clases con anterioridad (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 44).

The teacher must ensure that the modules, material elaborated in a logical and sequential way, relate adequately with the cognitive structure of the student; for achieving this is essential to know the material and have planned the classes beforehand.

This script-wise approach to curriculum is perhaps meant to scaffold teachers who are not familiar with *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*. However, in the case of this curriculum, the insistence, repetition, and abundance of scripted orientations correspond with a particular vision of teaching as a technology. By overemphasizing the role of the instructions, routines, sequences, and activities given through the teacher's guide, teachers are portrayed as unskilled. These assumptions about the teachers provide evidence of the text's producer deliberate intention of reinforcing a view of teachers' role as passive conformity to the practical recommendations of educational experts. □

Through a scripted curriculum, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* denies teachers professional competence in continually deliberating and critically defining class content. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* scripted curriculum reduces teachers to technocrats who are accountable for reproducing and delivering a pre-packaged curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995).

A Project-based Curriculum¹⁶

One of the most intriguing aspects of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum is the promise of compressing five grades of elementary school in only one year. Examination of the

¹⁶ Project-based learning is not explicitly defined in the Manual or the teacher's guide. In this section, I describe how it is implicitly defined in relation to the learning materials.

framework provided throughout the curriculum showed that this accelerated learning, according to the text producer, can be accomplished through a project-based methodological approach. The following excerpt describes the connection between the methodological framework and the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* goal.

Example 24

Así a través del desarrollo de los proyectos, los estudiantes reconocen sus capacidades para aprender y actuar en diferentes contextos: en el hogar, en la escuela y en la comunidad. De entrada puede resultar difícil concebir que sea posible nivelar cinco grados de la primaria en un año lectivo (...) No obstante, este propósito es posible de alcanzar con *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, pues el Modelo fue creado precisamente para responder a la difícil situación de los estudiantes en extra-edad (Guía docente - *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, 2010, p. 9).

Thus, through the development of projects students recognize their capacity to learn and act in different contexts: at home, at school, and in their community. It may be difficult to conceive that it is possible to level five grades of elementary school in one year (...) however, this purpose is possible to achieve with *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* because this model was created precisely to respond to the difficult situation of age-grade gap students. □

The learning materials of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* involve eight books, which are called projects¹⁷. Thus, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* provides a methodological approach based

on the development of seven projects. This approach is aligned with the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s goal of providing students whose ages do not match their grade level with an educative experience oriented to overcome their age- grade gap.

Example 25

Si bien los y las estudiantes del Modelo se encuentran nivelando su primaria, su ciclo vital no corresponde con la edad esperada para estos grados. La mayoría de ellos ya se encuentran en la adolescencia y conviene que desde el trabajo de aula, se oriente la construcción del proyecto de vida (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 14).

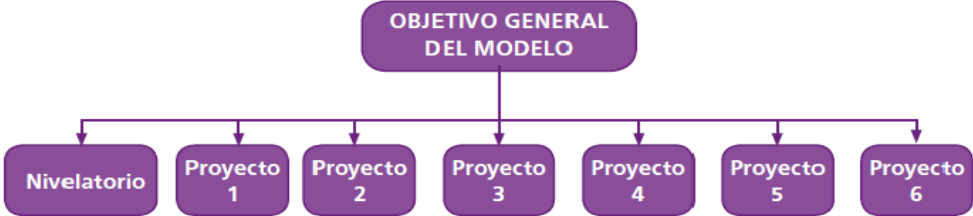
The students in the model need to catch up elementary grades because their ages (life cycle) do not correspond with the expected age for these grades. Most of the students are already in adolescence, thus, it is advisable that classroom work is oriented towards the construction of their life projects. □

The former excerpt is another example of the text producer's effort of explaining the methodological approach as oriented towards overcoming age-grade gap. An exploration of the theoretical basis of this curriculum showed that both the manual of operation and the teacher's guide introduce meaningful learning as part of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s framework. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum indicates that ensuring a student-centered approach

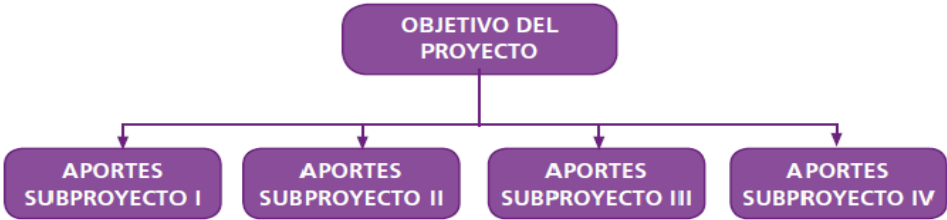
¹⁷ Each student receives eight books. They are: One leveling project (All towards success), project one (Who am I?), project two (School: A coexistence space), project three (The place where I live), project four (My municipality), project five (The Colombia of all), project six (Operation: Saving planet earth), and one module for learning English.

can be reached through six projects which work as the means for organizing the learning materials while favoring interdisciplinary approach.

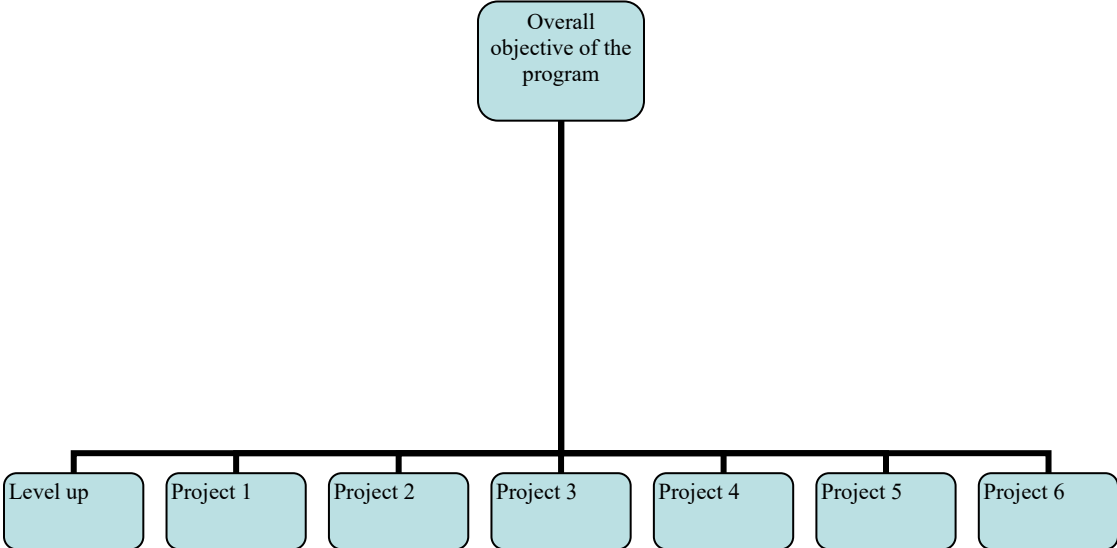
Figure 9. Diagram of the program.



Cada uno de los proyectos está organizado en subproyectos que presentan contextos que favorecen el análisis de aspectos formales del conocimiento de manera interdisciplinaria y aportan al objetivo propuesto para el proyecto.



Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 65



Each one of the projects is organized in subprojects that present contexts that favor the analysis of formal aspects of knowledge in an interdisciplinary way and contribute the proposed objective for the project.

As the Figure 9 illustrates, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is described and organized around one introductory module and six projects. Each project and subprojects contribute to reaching *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s general outcome. This project-based approach refers to the way in which the learning materials are organized (through projects instead of subjects areas). For example, when describing the foundations of the program, the manual of operation explicitly mentions a project based methodology as the approach to reach meaningful learning.

Example 26

El modelo se basa en la **Teoría del Aprendizaje Significativo** y orienta sus prácticas de aula a partir de la **estrategia metodológica de desarrollo de proyectos de aula (...)** Los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje en el Modelo están fundamentados en la Teoría del Aprendizaje Significativo (...) la rutina de clases se estructura siguiendo los principios de esta teoría psicológica (Manual Operativo, 2010, p. 19).

The model is based on the theory of meaningful learning and guides its classroom practices based on the methodological strategy of developing classroom projects. The teaching-learning processes in the model are based on the theory of meaningful learning (...) the routine of classes is structured following the principles of this psychological theory.

The text producer explicitly connects the project-based curriculum to fostering meaningful learning; thus, the manual states that lesson plans and class routines were designed to reach it. As the following examples show, the text producer explicitly links the structured learning materials to meaningful learning.

Example 27

Aceleración del Aprendizaje se fundamenta en el Aprendizaje Significativo, por ello se debe seguir la rutina del Modelo de acuerdo con las intenciones de cada uno de sus momentos, encadenándolos de forma fluida, desde la planeación (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 15).

Aceleración del Aprendizaje is based on meaningful learning; thus, the routine of the model must be followed as it was intentionally designed, ensuring a fluid process in each step of the process, which begins with the planning.

Example 28

En Aceleración del Aprendizaje la asimilación de los nuevos conocimientos se favorece gracias a que los módulos están representados de forma lógica y se desarrollan las temáticas secuencialmente (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 16).

In *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* the assimilation of new knowledge is favored due to the fact that the modules are represented in a logical way and the themes are developed sequentially.

Both excerpts emphasize the importance of the structured routine that *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* provides. According to the text producer, planning and sequentiality are central features for reaching meaningful learning. Thus, in the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s project-based curriculum, all educational experiences should be planned for students. Once again, consistent with a review of the literature regarding curriculum studies in Latin America and Colombia, this program's curricular design, planning, and programmed instruction are elements of non-formal educational programs, which are educational scenarios outside the regular school system oriented towards marginalized populations, such as indigenous and minority groups,

working children, children/adolescents out of the educational system, children in armed groups, displaced people, and rural populations(Montoya Vargas, 2014; Pinar et al., 1995).

Meaningful learning is also connected to the way in which students in the program are described. When describing the project-based approach of the program, in section four of the teacher's guide, students are represented in ways that convey a particular perspective on the nature of teaching and learning. □

Example 29

Del mismo modo, el estudiante que se vincula al Modelo, se concibe como un ser capaz de generar interrogantes frente a la vida, a la forma en que se organiza el mundo y de plantear posible respuestas a partir de las observaciones realizadas por él (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 64)

In the same way, the student who is linked to the model is conceived as a being capable of generating questions about life and the way in which the world is organized. He also is capable of proposing possible answers based on the observations made by him.

Example 30

Para lograr un aprendizaje significativo en el aula, es necesario que los estudiantes desarrollen su autonomía y se conciban a sí mismos como el centro del proceso de aprendizaje. De su entrega y dedicación depende en gran medida el éxito del Modelo. Esto se logra a partir de la motivación que propicia el docente, de las estrategias que diseña para presentar el nuevo material de forma atractiva y de los espacios de reflexión que genera para que sus estudiantes se cuestionen sobre su propio proceso de aprendizaje, sus logros, las dificultades que han tenido y los diferentes modos que están encontrando

para aplicar lo aprendido en otros escenarios (Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 22).

To achieve meaningful learning in the classroom, it is necessary for students to develop their autonomy and conceive themselves as the center of the learning process. The success of the model depends to a large extent on students' engagement and dedication. This is achieved through the motivation that the teacher fosters, as well as the strategies that he designs to introduce new content in an attractive way and the spaces for reflection, in which students question their own learning process, their achievements, their difficulties, and the different ways they are finding to apply in other scenarios what they have learned.

As examples 29 and 30 describe, meaningful learning functions as the theoretical framework by which this curriculum locates students at the center of the learning process. Students are described in ways that communicate a constructivist orientation to pedagogy that emphasizes cognitive and social orientations to learning and particularly emphasizes meaningful learning. Therefore, students are described as already knowledgeable when they enter the program; they are not empty vessels. Rather, students should use their prior experiences to make new meaning. As they learn, they should transform knowledge through constant practice and active engagement to construct personal and shared social meanings. □

However, when exploring the learning materials, meaningful learning remains as part of the brief theoretical foundations include in both the manual of operation and the guide.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje does not refocus education on the student, instead of the curriculum.

The learning materials are presented in a textbook manner, and the project-based curriculum is strictly oriented towards activities and educational outcomes defined by the text producers.

Moreover, viewing the six projects given by the curriculum, it is seen that they are all set in a way that teachers and students are given questions and answers for each stage of the process. The pedagogical orientations that the teacher's guide include not only the outcome set for each project but also the final product expected for each sub-project. The following table describes a fragment of the structure given for the fifth project □

Figure 10. Table sub-projects

Subproyecto I Colombia en mapas	Subproyecto II Colombia cultural	Subproyecto III Colombia regional	Subproyecto IV Construyendo identidad nacional, ¿yo soy Colombial!
<i>Productos finales: Un programa deportivo de televisión sobre la selección colombiana de fútbol y cartilla de mapas de Colombia.</i>	<i>Producto final: Organización de un evento cultural.</i>	<i>Producto final: Feria de las regiones de Colombia.</i>	<i>Producto final: Una comparsa de la cultura colombiana.</i>
<p>En este subproyecto para realizar un programa deportivo de televisión sobre la selección colombiana de fútbol, se trabaja la cancha de fútbol, en donde los y las estudiantes tendrán que identificar figuras geométricas y ángulos. Se estudian las características de los triángulos, cuadriláteros según la medida de sus ángulos. Se estudia el círculo y sus sectores para el manejo y construcción de gráficos circulares que representan la distribución de la población colombiana. Estas actividades de matemáticas favorecen el desarrollo del estándar:</p> <p><i>Comparo y clasifico figuras bidimensionales de acuerdo con sus componentes (ángulos, vértices) y características.</i></p> <p>Las actividades planteadas son de clasificación y representación de figuras bidimensionales. Se favorece que el estudiante pueda <u>comunicarse</u> reconociendo las figuras geométricas según sus características y comprenda su representación.</p>	<p>En este subproyecto, sus estudiantes van a preparar algunos postres, pasabocas y golosinas para compartir y vender durante el evento cultural. Con estas actividades, se promueve el desarrollo del proceso de pensamiento <u>resolución de problemas</u>, pues los estudiantes se ven enfrentados a plantear y representar la información presentada en el problema, hallando la solución y justificando sus respuestas.</p> <p>De esta manera, se proponen situaciones aditivas diversas en las que los estudiantes identifican, seleccionan y usan estrategias pertinentes y adecuadas para obtener soluciones válidas en el contexto matemático; esto permite dar cuenta de procesos significativos en la construcción de pensamiento matemático, en tanto que para solucionar problemas el estudiante debe <u>modelar</u>, representar y enfrentarse a situaciones que le amplían y posibilitan la construcción de distintos sentidos de un concepto.</p>	<p>En este subproyecto, se aborda el uso de medidas de tendencia central como la media o promedio para comprender la medida de la temperatura en las distintas regiones de Colombia, lo cual permite abordar el estándar: <i>Uso e interpreto la media (o promedio) y la mediana y comparo lo que indican.</i></p> <p>Las actividades planteadas son de interpretación y análisis de datos. En este subproyecto, se trabaja en el análisis de situaciones donde se deben interpretar datos, bien sean provenientes de una tabla, un problema o un gráfico. También se lleva al estudiante a reflexionar sobre el significado de los datos presentados en gráficos.</p>	<p>En este subproyecto se analiza la influencia de diversos inventos en nuestro país, para esto, se reconocen los inventos más importantes de la humanidad y el momento en que llegaron a Colombia, en este proceso el estudiante se enfrenta a situaciones de <u>razonamiento y solución de problemas</u> para representar en una línea de tiempo los distintos inventos y el tiempo que llevan beneficiando a los colombianos. De este modo se trabajan los estándares: <i>Resuelvo y formulo problemas cuya estrategia de solución requiera de las relaciones y propiedades de los números naturales y sus operaciones. Describo e interpreto variaciones representadas en gráficos.</i></p>

Guía docente - Aceleración del Aprendizaje, 2010, p. 286.

Subproject I Colombia on maps	Subproject II Cultural Colombia	Subproject III Regional Colombia	Subproject IV Building identity I am Colombia!
Final products: A sports program of television on the Colombian national soccer team, and a map book of Colombia	Final product: Organization of a cultural event.	Final product: Fair of the regions of Colombia.	Final product: A <i>comparsa</i> of the Colombian culture.
In this subproject, students	In this subproject, your	In this subproject, it is	In this subproject we analyze

<p>should produce a sports television program about the Colombian national soccer team. In doing so students have to identify geometric figures within the soccer court. For example, they study the characteristics of the triangles and quadrilaterals according to the measure of its angles. Also, they can study the circle as well as its characteristics (e.g. pie charts that represent the distribution of Colombian population). These math activities favor the development of the standard: I compare and classify figures two-dimensional according to their components (angles, vertices) and characteristics.</p>	<p>students are going to prepare some desserts, snacks, and goodies to share and sell during the cultural event. With these activities, it is promoted the development of the problem-solving. The students are faced with posing and finding the solution. They proposed mathematical problems (additions) allow students to account for processes that are significant for developing mathematical thought. While solving problems, students must model, represent and face to situations that expand and enable the construction of different senses of a concept.</p>	<p>addressed the use of measures such as the mean and the average to understand the extent of the temperature in different regions of Colombia. The activities proposed are of interpretation and analysis of data. In this subproject, we work in the analysis of situations where data must be interpreted from a table, a problem or a graph.</p>	<p>the influence of various inventions in our country, for this, it they recognize inventions more important of humanity and the moment they arrived to Colombia, in this process the student faces reasoning situations and solving problems for representing in a timeline the different inventions. In this way the standards are worked: I solve and formulate problems which solution requires relationships and properties of natural numbers.</p>
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In the figure, the first row consists of the names of the four sub-projects that comprise the fifth project called The Colombia of All of Us (*La Colombia de todos nosotros*), the second row describes the final products of each sub-project (products finales), and the third row gives a general review of the activities that comprise each sub-project and describes the main actions that students should engage with.

This view of a project-based approach to curriculum is congruous with the scripted curriculum provided by *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* text producer. According to them,

knowing the structure (Example 36) is the first step for lesson planning. Thus, the project-based curriculum provides structure to students' activities by asking them to engage with specific projects and subprojects rather than relying on students to come up with their own project, questions, and problems in the course of the learning process.

On the Limitations of Flexibility

In this section, I explore the implications of this particular view of flexibility. Thus when thinking about the limitations of guaranteeing students' promotion to the sixth grade regardless of whether they meet grade level expectation, I would like to think about what the function of schooling is. If the function of the school is, as the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* believes, to furnish an elementary education to the maximum number of students, then this program perfectly fits with the Colombian educational policy which emphasizes enrollment.

Enrollment, as a major policy focus, determines *Aceleración de Aprendizaje*'s goal. In doing so, flexibility is defined as the mechanism that ensures students access to schooling. Therefore, this program responds to MEN's efforts to reduce barriers to the educational system. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* works as means for expanding access to educational opportunity for students who have not been able to complete elementary school. Despite the notable efforts to guarantee enrollment that this program offers, the educational opportunity that this program offers is limited and likely contributes to sustaining inequality. □

As it was initially conceived, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* promotes the access of students to the school system. Thus, it could represent a first step towards ensuring the educational right to historically marginalized students. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, as was conceived during the *Revolución Educativa*, contributes to MEN's enrollment policy. *Revolución Educativa* is a policy that provides guarantees for the social and economic development of any

human being; it is a duty of the state to provide these measures for the educational system for the reintegration of children into society (MEN, 2007).

Nevertheless, *Revolución Educativa* is both committed to guaranteeing the right to excluded populations by combining strategies that expand coverage and provide a quality education relevant to the particularities of these populations, under the parameters of administrative decentralization and the autonomy of the school.

By overemphasizing enrollment, MEN and its educational policy have failed to address, and at times actively undermined, new ways for improving opportunity for Colombia's most vulnerable children. The last two decades of educational policy have sought to address educational inequality by increasing enrollment. However, social inequalities have remained in spite of the increase in the number of pupils across different levels from elementary to high school. □

Calvo (2007) argues that “promoting coverage, without paying attention to quality, has been one of the stronger weaknesses of the national government (...) the progress in education has been slow and insufficient” (p. 31). Calvo also mentions that even the flexible programs, designed to fit the needs of particular groups, have resulted from the eagerness for coverage and access. This result could be read as the right thing to do in the sense that more vulnerable children have seen increased opportunities to go to school, but the limitation is that these flexible programs could lose their capacity to serve communities and reconstruct their social fabric.

Even though Colombia has a demonstrated history of educational innovation and evaluation especially targeted to disadvantaged students, education in Colombia remains highly discriminatory. Katarina Tomaševski, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

states, in her 2004 report of her mission to Colombia, that education discriminates in terms of quality, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

For example, in 2014, the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN) claimed that 11,016,635 students were at elementary and high school level, reaching almost 90 percent of the national coverage rate. However, that same year, MEN claimed that 30 percent of the students in rural areas and 14 percent of the students in urban areas dropped out from public schools (MEN, 2015). Therefore, despite the fact that enrollment has dramatically improved, student retention has not. Even in the best cases (i.e. urban areas in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali), the number of students abandoning elementary school reached 14% of the total of the student population (González Lara & Pulido Chaves, 2014). Dropout levels change across the different socio-economic groups in Colombia: “the probability that the children of families in the lowest income groups will leave school early is 2.64 times greater than it is for the children of the highest income groups, a probability that increases in respect of very early dropout” (i.e. prior to completing elementary school) (González Lara & Pulido Chaves, 2014, p. 3).

This emphasis on students’ enrollment shows that the expansion of the Colombian public education system has not been accompanied by sufficient measures capable of keeping students at school. I suggest that Colombia’s goal of universal enrollment has created another challenge for the right to education in terms of the corresponding emphasis on coverage and access to education. Regardless of the fact that virtually all of the education policy documents mention quality of education; the government’s concept of quality education constitutes a major challenge for the Colombian educational system (CCJ, 2004; Lerma, 2007). As the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program illustrates, educational efforts are mostly focused on enrollment rates.

Consequently, social inequalities have remained in spite of the increase in the number of pupils across different levels from elementary to high school. An example of this is that pronounced disparities persist with poorer rural regions exhibiting lower student achievement levels than wealthier urban regions, particularly at the high school level. For instance, these disparities impact the performance of the education system as a whole. In the most recent results from *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015*, "Colombia scored significantly below the averages for both the OECD and similar middle-income countries in Latin America' (OECD, 2017, xxxvii)" Given its GDP per capita levels, Colombia performs subpar on international student assessments. According to OECD (2015), the percentage of students in Colombia who had repeated a grade (43% of students) is the second largest among all countries and economies participating in PISA 2015; only Algeria has a larger proportion of these students. Students in disadvantaged schools are more likely to have repeated a grade almost everywhere, including in Colombia, where 48% of students enrolled in disadvantaged schools had repeated a grade, compared to 32% of students in advantaged schools. □

As the OECD (2015) argues, grade repetition is more prevalent in school systems where students score lower on the PISA science assessment and where students' socio-economic status is most strongly associated with science performance. Students might have been kept back to repeat course content that they had not fully mastered. The OECD (2015) reports that across OECD countries, the percentage of students who reported that they had repeated a grade at least once decreased by almost three percentage points between 2009 and 2015. However, in Colombia, the percentage of students who reported that they had repeated a grade at least once increased by five percentage points between 2009 and 2015, the largest increase among all PISA-participating countries and economies (OECD, 2015).

On Analyzing Ideological Hegemony

In this final section, I argue that there has not been a high level of criticality and awareness at the time of adapting educational solutions for vulnerable populations. Moreover, as *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* illustrates, educational policies and programs have been highly shaped by a relation of power between the international context and the Colombian policymakers (Vanegas, 2003).

Vanegas (2003) claims that international influence—particularly the World Bank—has shaped the Colombian education reform of the 1990s. The 1991 Constitution introduced the idea of the right to education that in turn triggered a major educational shift towards inclusion of historically marginalized populations. Since the 1990s, Colombia has developed the legislation and the constitutional support for pursuing the right to education for vulnerable populations. Simultaneously, these reforms “reproduced many policies that can be identified as elements of the global education paradigm” (Vanegas, 2003, p. 234).

For instance, Colombia borrowed the World Bank’s idea of investment in human capital and translated into Law 115 of 1994’s premise of education for economic development and for better human beings. Additionally, Law 115 introduced decentralizing and modernizing the educational sector in an effort to comply with the World Bank’s model of decentralizing management for public education (Vanegas, 2003). □

The World Bank’s narrative has pervaded the Colombian education policy through the promotion of development models for the Latin American region (Jones, 1997; Vargas, 2003). *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, for instance, was initially conceived in Brazil and later introduced to other countries by Brazilian agencies funded by the World Bank (Picardo João & Victoria Libreros, 2009). The global educational paradigm strongly promotes that development and

economic opening up requires the strengthening of education (Vanegas, 2003). The financial support of initiatives such as *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* matches the trend “of following what internationally was acclaimed as the right way” (p. 244). This implies that the international influence in the Colombian decision to adopt *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* provides an example of how the reproduction of the hegemonic global educational paradigm operates.

Aceleración del Aprendizaje exemplifies an international trend of overemphasizing enrollment. In this case, flexible programs such as *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* constitute “the right way” to target school failure and promote enrollment of marginalized students. In *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, flexibility is defined as the mechanism that ensures students’ access to schooling. This is justified not only on the premise that education is a human right, but through the official discourse on education for integration into the labor force, social mobility, technical training, or economic development (Calvo, 2007; CCJ, 2004; Lerma, 2007).

This CDA of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum shows that the inflexibility of this curriculum has a strong ideological connection to the human capital theory that multilateral organizations—the World Bank—have promoted through financial and political operations undertaken in the name of poverty alleviation (Jones, 1997). For example, the World’s Bank most recent report on education argues that:

Delivered well, education—and the human capital it creates—has many benefits for economies and for societies as a whole. For individuals, education promotes employment, earnings, and health. It raises pride and opens new horizons. For societies, it drives long-term economic growth, reduces poverty, spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion. (World Bank, 2018, p. xi)

By taking a human capital approach to its work, the World Bank is interested in education's impacts on individuals, societies, and the countries' economies in which people live. The World Bank plays a significant role in legitimizing the ideologies of neoliberalism through its education policies in the Global South (Anwaruddin, 2014; Jones, 1997; Regmi, 2015). The Bank views education as "a basic human right, central to unlocking human capabilities [that] also has tremendous instrumental value. Education raises human capital, productivity, incomes, employability, and economic growth"(World Bank, 2018, p. 38). This approach to education as the central factor in economic development is based on the Bank's definition of development and human capital (Regmi, 2015).

From this knowledge-centric development approach, loans or educational aid can be seen as investments to prepare workers with similar knowledge and skills. The policies shaped by the World Bank influence "or borrowed by the developing countries in the name of development" direct educational policies into the neoliberal direction (Regmi, 2015, p.154).Anwaruddin (2014) highlights that the amount of loans and grants from the World Bank to developing countries has increased since 1990. Vanegas (2013) argues that since the 1990s Colombia's education reform has shifted towards reaching vulnerable populations □

The World Bank's focus on economic growth as the aim of education demonstrates faithfulness to the neoliberal ideology. Thus, the Bank promotes programmed planning instruction and funds educational programs that prescribe a technical curriculum. This market-oriented view of education hurts students' opportunities because it reduces them to skillful workers.

Colombia, for example, has used this economistic approach to shape its educational policy discourse. As I have established throughout the analysis of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*,

the international influence has been appropriated by Colombian policymakers and educational experts. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum was accepted and reproduced by the National Ministry of Education. I propose that this process of appropriation can be explained as part the neoliberal's hegemonic discourse on education that reinforces inequality. When analyzing the limitations of this highly scripted curriculum, it seems clear that in reality, an exclusive emphasis on enrollment reveals a means for educating the poor, based on an ideology intended to legitimate a social structure, particularly to perpetuate inequality and slow aspirations for transformative educational reform. □

Aceleración del Aprendizaje's noble effort for reaching marginalized students is also aligned with a human capital perspective in which students are trained to follow instructions. The World Bank's discourse that conceives education as input and conceptualizes learning opportunities as a means to become individuals to be effective contributors to the industrial society is also the discourse that enables this curriculum.

Summary of the Chapter

The findings in this chapter assessed the discourses across *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* to offer not only a descriptive analysis regarding the discourses within the curriculum but also an examination of the significance of the discursive construction of flexibility. The main body of the chapter offers the descriptive outcomes of the CDA applied analysis. It also offers the results of the three-level analysis outlined in the methodology section. The data described how "flexibility" was discursively constructed within the texts, as well as what assumptions about the curriculum served as underlying supports, and how the teachers and students were constructed and situated as educational subjects with and throughout the flexibility discourse. □

In this chapter, I presented an examination of three ideological standpoints and their implicit assumptions about the aims of this program. By placing the textual and contextual features of the learning materials in conversation, the descriptive results revealed that scripted curriculum and the project-based curriculum are oriented towards the goal of ensuring students enrollment.

In the final section, I presented the contextual analysis, including a discussion to consider the limitations regarding enrollment policies on education. I discussed the findings through an explanatory and interpretive lens and offered an analysis of the implications of this flexible program. In this section, I argue that the flexibility provided throughout the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum is not neutral. It has powerful effects and operates ideologically to reinforce hegemonic conditions in ways that reproduce education inequality.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This venture began with a desire to understand the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program by exploring its learning materials. My goal was to examine the discourses involved in this curriculum and who it was designed to serve. This opened up questions regarding its macrostructure, which is rooted in Colombian educational policies and the laws that address enrollment. Simultaneously, the emphasis on enrollment introduced questions about how flexibility is defined and represented in the curriculum and its implications for the targeted population. In this final chapter, I offer an overview of the findings of my research; discuss its contributions and limitations, and present suggestions for further research.

Overview of Findings

This case study was designed to offer an analysis of the Colombian flexible curricular reform. Thus, the research included an analysis of the institutional and sociopolitical context of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* as part of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) applied to the curriculum. It also included a CDA of the curriculum to understand how students and teachers are represented through the learning materials and to examine the discourses that inform *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*.

Policy/Institutional Analysis

Aceleración de Aprendizaje appears to be strongly rooted in Colombian educational policy, specifically in concern to restoring the right to education to vulnerable populations. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program is a response to the constitutional demands of historically

marginalized populations. The institutional and sociopolitical context from which flexible programs derived is in synchrony with the 1991 Political Constitution and the educational laws derived from it. However, it took more than a decade after this was released, along with the national educational law (Law 115) of 1994, for *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* began to be implemented at the national level.

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program was promoted by the National Ministry of Education (MEN) as part of the *Revolución Educativa* reform, which was the first Colombian policy that defines education as an essential tool for human, economic, and social development (Atehortúa Cruz, 2012). This global educational narrative, which promotes that development and economic development requires the strengthening of education, is reflected in the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s goal of strengthening enrollment (Vanegas, 2003).

Moreover, before *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* was first implemented in Colombia, the original version, *Acelera Brasil*, was funded by the World Bank (Picardo João & Victoria Libreros, 2009). Since then, the program has been adopted by El Salvador, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. Thus, the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum was not originally developed from a demand of the Colombian constitutional and legal framework. It became a solution to expand coverage and promote enrollment derived from international influence.

Critical Discourse Analysis of the Curriculum

It is not my intention to argue that calling *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* a flexible program is false or misguided. Rather, a term such as flexibility is not neutral. As I highlighted in this study, curriculum is ideological (Apple, 1990; Paraskva, 2016; Pinar et al., 1995). The flexibility within the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum has powerful effects and operates

ideologically. Without clear articulation of its meaning in context, the application of such a term can reinforce hegemonic conditions in ways that may be inequitable.

Flexibility, as the central feature of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program, functions in relation to its curricular structure, which ensures students to go from first to fifth grade in 185 days. The flexibility of this program is also its central feature. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is a non-formal model that seeks to enroll students who have not completed elementary school. Its curricular flexibility requires careful planning and programmed instruction. Therefore, flexibility operates through a script-based curricular structure, which provides teachers not only with orientations for each stage, activity, and step of the curriculum but also a specific calendar with the number of days in which each sub-project should be developed.

To understand what flexibility means, this CDA locates the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum in relation to the neoliberal discourse that informs Colombia's effort for reaching marginalized students. This CDA analysis explicitly challenges the neoliberal purposes of education. Neoliberalism works as the dominant discourse because it "represents something taken for granted, as well as a form of commonsense that is thus beyond question as it works to shape and reshape identities in powerful ways" (Crowley, 2016, p. 133).

Neoliberalism proposes "that human well-being can be best advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms with an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2007, p. 22). In these practices, flexibility enables neoliberal discourses to resolve irreconcilable differences and contradictions in discourses on human capital and human development (Harvey, 2007). The neoliberal logic uses flexibility as one of the mechanisms that allow market forces to

operate in a free and unregulated environment. Thus, to create new markets for the profit of the wealthy, the neoliberal project has to worsen conditions for the poor (Harvey, 2007).

Flexibility operates as a mechanism that enables economic and financial deregulation. Deregulation increases flexibility and in doing so it brings a restructuring of labor, training, and education. Workers expect a number of periods of de- and re-skilling in their lifetimes (Harvey, 2007). Flexible specialization in labor processes and flexible time arrangements are part of the neoliberal project. Flexibility also has been applied to create the political and ideological conditions to dismantle public education (Lipman, 2011). The neoliberal solution to the failure of the regular education system in guaranteeing access to marginalized students is the conversion of education to non-formal/flexible curricula. The neoliberal dominant discourse contributes to the reproduction of non-formal models of education (i.e. flexible programs) that operate under the logic of global competition.

Moreover, the neoliberal solution to address the failure of the welfare state model represents the perfect excuse to “regenerate” schools, housing, and neighborhoods (Lipman, 2011, p.64). As Au and Ferrare (2015) argue “the neoliberal public education marketplace reconfigures key aspects of education policy and practices” (p. 6). Under the neoliberal logic, it is assumed that low-income students who are most likely to demonstrate poor academic performance could benefit from a “better than nothing” approach to education. In Colombia, for example, teachers, students, and schools become part of an educational market in which accountability relies on students enrollment. This neoliberal public education market has been built over the denial of injustices caused by historic discrimination against marginalized populations (e.g. indigenous, afro-descendants), as well as inequitable resources and advantages of the upper class to justify a drastic economic transformation (Lipman, 2011, p. 83).

Contributions of the Study

Aceleración del Aprendizaje, as it was originally designed, appeared to address a wide range of challenges related to education for marginalized populations. It was intended to meet children's academic needs through a program that allows them to complete five elementary grades in one academic year to improve their current and future situations. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* program targets vulnerable populations; thus, the results of this study make contributions on the theoretical level concerning education for these populations, based on a critical discourse analysis of this curriculum.

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* case study becomes an illustrative example of a flexible program that aims to restore the right to education of vulnerable children. It demonstrates the complexity of not only addressing historically marginalized populations' needs but also sheds light on the implications of overemphasizing enrollment when reaching these populations.

Vulnerable Populations

Aceleración del Aprendizaje offers information that can feed discussion of the conceptualization of education for vulnerable children. The notion of vulnerable children becomes ambiguous in terms of the wide range of situations it encompasses (Lugaz, 2009). This notion also implies a tension between acknowledgment of the severity of these populations' situation and the risk of disempowering children from already marginalized sectors of society (Reyes, 2009). Representations of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s students reflected this tension. To some extent, they are portrayed as already knowledgeable when they enter the program, but they were also considered to be lacking in the sense they are not able to complete elementary school in the way that students do in the regular schools.

As *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* illustrates, education for vulnerable populations implies a major challenge, which is addressing the fact that when talking about marginalized populations, we are talking about a systemic problem in which students' specific needs go beyond themselves and their families and it involves the social, economic, and educational context at large. Therefore, to conceptualize vulnerable populations and to identify their needs is to conceptualize a long history of exclusion and inequality. When considering education, it becomes necessary to take into account structural situations that produce and reinforce inequality. It is not only a matter of marginalized children's social, emotional, and academic needs but also the type of society Colombia is aiming to build.

The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum raises questions about the purpose of education for these children. What is truly important for these children - to catch up five grade levels as designed in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, or to offer access to schooling and safe space? Education for vulnerable populations should not undervalue the potential benefits of educational programs. The importance of aiming to transform students' lives in the long term throughout education, which means accessing and succeeding in the educational system. Thus, when thinking of education for vulnerable populations, it is necessary to go beyond student enrollment and aim to restore children's dignity, to address issues of social justice, and restore the right to education (Restrepo, 2009; Tomaševski, 2004).

Enrollment and the Right to Education

This study contributes to the understanding of conceptual obstacles that hold back the advance of the right to education. This critical discourse analysis of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* highlights the centrality of designing educational solutions to move beyond enrollment. By differentiating enrollment from the right to education (i.e. education involves much more than

getting children into a classroom), researchers, teachers, and policymakers should acknowledge that flexible programs are not inherently good and issues of coverage and provision are not the only concerns.

Corresponding coverage and access to education is one of the major weaknesses of Colombia's education policy (Calvo, 2007; CCJ, 2004; Lerma, 2007). Calvo (2007) argues that, despite the fact that virtually all the educational plans in Colombia mention the quality of education as one of their main objectives, educational efforts and indicators are mostly focused on enrollment rates. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* shows that MEN's national policy on strengthening enrollment, which looks good in terms of impact indicators, actually hurts students' learning opportunities.

The eagerness for coverage and access explains *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* emphasis on social promotion, which not only disguises the progress that teachers could achieve through this initiative but also denies the transformational purpose implicit in education. Despite *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* claims that its methodological approach aims to promote meaningful learning, the learning materials do not necessarily facilitate a student-centered learning process. As it was designed, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* operates through a script-based curriculum that reinforces planning and programmed instruction. Thus, the flexibility provided throughout the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum emphasizes enrollment and may suggest that there is a program to attend to the educational needs of vulnerable children.

When thinking of the difficult living conditions of marginalized children and the significance of having a space for them in the educational system, it is also vital to recognize the complexity of their situation. These children are victims of a wide range of violence and injustices and lack a social support network or the necessary resources to transform their

realities. Thus, these students' needs demand an overarching strategy that not only tackles the challenges related to the situation of marginalized populations but also the challenges related to inequality.

A reductionist approach to education is particularly complicated when considering marginalized children who have systematically been victims of rights violations. Thus, educational policy needs to be part of a process of accountability based on the right to education (Calvo, 2007). At first glance, *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* appears to meet the demands of free elementary education, no discrimination, and easy access. However, this analysis shows the limitations in the curriculum that undermine the program's intention to restore and protect the right to education of vulnerable populations.

The Technical Curriculum

Aceleración del Aprendizaje illustrates the difficulties and risks regarding the translation of educational programs and policies into complex local issues. MEN's insistence on flexible programs as an educative solution is linked to a broader international trend of using non-formal programs to reach children who are poorly served by formal school systems (Herrera, 1999; Pinar et al., 1995; Sáenz Obregón et al., 1997). *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is both a non-formal solution and a foreign program promoted in Latin America by the World Bank (Picardo João & Victoria Libreros, 2009).

Aceleración del Aprendizaje can be described as part of the technical curricula introduced in Colombia because it follows "what internationally was acclaimed as the right way" (Vanegas, 2003, p. 244). As explained by Montoya-Vargas (2014), the technical curriculum met strong resistance from Colombian educators and researchers who opposed to instructional design and planning. Nevertheless, a review of recent studies on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* showed little

or no criticism of this program (Álvarez et al., 2016; Bolívar Sánchez, 2015; Gutiérrez & Puentes, 2009; Romero, 2012). International and local studies, mostly ethnographic case studies, emphasize the variations on the implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, but they do not analyze the written curriculum nor do they explain its potential shortcomings.

This study shows the importance of critically assessing imported educational solutions. One of the major weaknesses of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum is its emphasis on accelerated learning, which seems aligned with an instrumental perspective in which education is conceived as an input and is conceptualized as a means to enable students to become contributors to society. The *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum represents one example among many others of the foreign influence of aid institutions (i.e. the World Bank) in Colombia's educational policies (Lerma, 2007; Vanegas 2003).

CDA and Curriculum Studies.

This CDA of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* offers a methodological framework that shows how applying CDA to curriculum studies can contribute to challenging curriculum relevance (Paraskeva, 2016). CDA offers a methodology and theoretical framework to make the familiar strange. This enables educational researchers to closely review the discourses embedded within curricula. This study, relevant to education research in Colombia, shows the explanatory power that inquiries on the curriculum have. Moreover, this research shows that CDA offers a framework to explore, describe, explain, and interpret the discourses that inform curricula (Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2015).

It is possible that the criticisms about the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum from this CDA study might appear severe, especially to educational researchers who have engaged in the challenge of building solutions for underserved communities. However, as Paraskeva (2016)

argues, curriculum studies should attempt to understand how power relations influence educational solutions' ability to achieve desired goals. This research on the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum is a call for Colombian researchers to question curriculum design in order to avoid reproducing a negative or inequitable status quo.

Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This research was designed as a critical discourse analysis of the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*'s learning materials; this represents both the central feature and the major limitation of this study, which did not include consideration of the varying implementation of the program. Consequently, the research's results are focused on the analysis of the curriculum and the major policy documents, which frame this program as an alternative to regular school. I did not analyze the process of implementation of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, but I examined the composition of its materials, meaning if the curriculum's approach and learning materials may, or may not, meet vulnerable populations' needs.

Future research could apply CDA to compare cases in which *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* is faithfully implemented against those in which the program is not. A case-based sample would illustrate what makes the curriculum a "good" or "bad" alternative to marginalized populations, as well as how the implementation process might overcome the scripted curriculum. This study focused on *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* and a specific body of data, the teacher's guide and the manual of operation and on one program. In the future, researchers are urged to expand the texts under examination. For example, conducting a comparative analysis among programs by expanding the body of data to include learning materials from other flexible programs.

Researchers are also encouraged to consider integrating CDA into curricular decision-making at the national level. For example, policy advisors could adapt the research

methodology (e.g. questions for each stage of CDA) employed in this study to develop a more critical, inquisitive, and informed approach to the examination and selection of educative solutions. By bringing together curriculum and educational policy discourse and critically analyzing language within a sociocultural context, my research was able to point to ideological assumptions embedded in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* along with the institutional and societal power structures that maintained and reproduced them. I encourage any policy researcher interested in investigating curriculum to consider employing CDA as a means of textual analysis

Future research would also be beneficial that would examine the role and relevance of the World Bank in Colombian major educational projects in the last twenty years. Understanding how Colombian educational reform has been strongly influenced by the World Bank offers a valuable opportunity to analyze how the reproduction of the hegemonic global educational paradigm operates.

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

It is not a trivial matter that the Ministry of National Education (MEN) promotes a program such as *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*; it offers a solution for children who have been victims of violence and neglect, who live in conditions of extreme poverty, and who would not be able to return to school if not for these kinds of programs. However, the curriculum's limitations raise questions about interventions that may harm already marginalized communities.

The first recommendation for MEN, as the actor in charge of guaranteeing the program's quality and integrity, is to reevaluate its policies' emphasis on enrollment. Colombia has moved forward in terms of policy and educational alternatives which seek to address vulnerable children's needs, but it steps back when overlooking its responsibilities from a wider and long-

term perspective. A commitment to protect vulnerable children and to guarantee their right to education involves much more than flexible programs to facilitate students' transition from the streets to the school; it requires actually giving them the necessary academic skills as well as offering them subsequent support.

The second recommendation is to re-think the program's learning materials. It is necessary to enrich and restructure the content of the teacher's guide in order to ensure that teachers understand the broader methodological approach, but are also able to define learning outcomes according to students' needs. It is evident that the program offers a teacher-proof curriculum, which implies that the materials do not give room for teachers' autonomous selection of appropriate teaching methods coherent with the intended program's learner-centered approach.

As this study has shown the *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* curriculum is defined as a project-based methodological approach oriented to overcome the age-grade gap. Accelerated learning could be accomplished through this approach, which provides teachers with learning materials organized into six modules, called projects. This particular view of a project-based approach to curriculum is congruous with the scripted curriculum provided by *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* text producer. Thus, in the case of *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, the curriculum provides structure to students' activities by asking them to engage with specific projects and subprojects rather than relying on students to come up with their own project, questions, and problems in the course of the learning process.

Both students and teachers are represented according to what they are expected to know and do. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* scripted curriculum portrays teachers as facilitators who rely on the learning materials (i.e. readings, instructions, and activities) rather than skilled

teachers able to use their expertise to teach. Indeed, treating teachers in this way undermines the project method on which the program is ostensibly built. The project method requires unscripted and creative responses. Thus, if it is assumed that teachers require such coercion, then more teacher training/education should be required instead.

Additionally, in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, students are described as children affected by violence (i.e. forcibly displaced populations and children in armed groups) and rural populations from historically marginalized groups. Consequently, students are portrayed as lacking the motivation to engage with the learning process due to being unable to attend school and their need to complete elementary levels.

When re-designing the learning materials, the text producer could challenge the assumption of students' lack of motivation, as well as make room for connecting students and their families to their learning experience. For example, using Moll's funds of knowledge framework, the text producer could shift the curriculum emphasis on students' deficiency to students' knowledge and expertise based in their unique cultural practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). By integrating the skills and knowledge that are a part of students' inner culture, the curriculum could offer teachers an opportunity to become researchers of their students' lives.

Additionally, teachers could connect with their students' home cultures and ultimately this creates a deeper connection to learning materials and classroom activities for their students (Moll et al. 1992). Funds of knowledge can include helping students find meaning in class activities, rather than learning facts. It also includes group discussions around race and class as means to promote trust and encourage dialogue. By using the funds of knowledge approach, curriculum could create culturally relevant experiences for students, and transform classroom

practices that sometimes constrain children intellectually into a more diverse classroom for students that do not relate culturally.

As with evaluation and follow-up processes, the resources offered in *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* should make room for teachers' prerogative. Instead of emphasizing social promotion, the program's curricular structure could reinforce teachers' training to offer intensive preparation about *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* pedagogical approach and its resources; teachers should receive not only theoretical but also practical instruction to develop the necessary skills to face daily challenges in the classroom.

A final recommendation is to assess the implementation of this program within the past eight years. Such an effort could offer rich information on the program's current structure and resources, students' circumstances and academic conditions, and implementation difficulties. *Aceleración del Aprendizaje's* students are expected to theoretically complete five grades in one year, be promoted to the sixth grade, and perform well in a traditional school. An assessment of the implementation of this program could open the possibility of modifying the program's scope. Considerations to adjust and improve *Aceleración del Aprendizaje*, and other flexible programs should take students' futures into account as the main reference for decisions. In the program's current framework, all efforts concerning *Aceleración del Aprendizaje* have students as the main concern; however, in the curriculum students' needs become a rhetorical argument rather than an actual priority.

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