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# Implementing a community-based project in an EFL rural classroom

## Implementación de un proyecto basado en la comunidad en un aula rural de inglés

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### Abstract

Educational work within a social perspective has been a matter of interest and discussion of researchers and teachers whose work is framed within a pedagogy for social justice, community pedagogies, and critical literacy (Comber & Kamler, 2004). A social perspective to education requires that teachers in rural and urban contexts become socially and culturally committed to addressing the learning needs of EFL in classrooms. This article shares the outcomes of the experience of five pre-service teachers who explored a local community of a Colombian rural school with a group of 36 ninth-grade EFL students. The pre-service teachers crafted a project-based curriculum taking the community as the content that would empower the students to explore social and cultural aspects of their community while promoting their EFL learning. Data were collected during the four-month period of the pedagogical intervention through interviews, observations and students' and teachers' written reflections. The high school students carried out a series of tasks aimed at raising their awareness about their identity, questioning their surroundings and increasing their self-confidence while using their knowledge of English. Results suggest that a curriculum that integrates the community as content empowered students to learn and reflect upon their learning process while facilitating their participation and inquiring about their own social and cultural reality.

**Keywords:** critical pedagogy, community based pedagogy, empowerment, project based learning

### Resumen

La investigación en educación con perspectiva social ha sido un tema de interés y discusión para investigadores y profesores cuyo trabajo está enmarcado en la pedagogía para justicia social, pedagogía basada en la comunidad y literacidades críticas. Una perspectiva social para la educación requiere que los profesores en contextos rurales y

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urbanos estén social y culturalmente comprometidos en abordar las necesidades de aprendizaje de inglés en las aulas. Este artículo comparte los resultados de una experiencia de cinco docentes practicantes quienes exploraron una comunidad local en un colegio rural colombiano con un grupo de 36 estudiantes de grado noveno. Las docentes implementaron un currículo basado en proyectos, con temas de la comunidad como contenido principal, para empoderar a los estudiantes y así explorar aspectos culturales y sociales de su comunidad mientras se promovía el aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los datos fueron recogidos durante un periodo de cuatro meses de implementación de la intervención pedagógica a través de entrevistas, observaciones y reflexiones de estudiantes y profesores. Los estudiantes desarrollaron una serie de actividades enfocadas a incrementar la conciencia acerca de su identidad, a cuestionar y mejorar realidades de su entorno e incrementar su confianza mientras fortalecían habilidades para incrementar su conocimientos del inglés. Los resultados demostraron que un currículo que integra conocimientos acerca de la comunidad de sus estudiantes, los empoderó al aprender y reflexionar sobre su proceso de aprendizaje, facilitó su participación e incrementó su conocimiento sobre su realidad social y cultural.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje basado en proyectos, empoderamiento pedagogía crítica, pedagogía basada en la comunidad

## Introduction

In Colombia, rural education has experienced decades of violence which has affected the country's potential to grow. According to Martínez et al. (2016) and Ruiz (2007), rural education in Colombia faces problems of low enrollment, low graduation rates in high school, low academic performance and high dropout rates, among others. However, actions have been implemented to address these problems. Currently, our country is working on achieving the aims of the Peace Agreement between FARC and Colombian government: *Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y verdadera* (2016). This agreement aims at promoting the integration of the national territory and social inclusion.

In this regard, we consider that education can promote equity and opportunities for everyone and can also allow citizens to take actions towards the improvement of their life, environment, and society. In fact, James Heckman, as cited by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012), affirms that "schools can offer learning experiences that a child may not obtain at home, particularly if he or she is living in a disadvantaged environment" (p. 14).

With this in mind, and taking into account Colombia's current post-conflict context which promotes peace as a major goal, five pre-service teachers from Universidad Industrial de Santander considered it pertinent to contribute to this aim by implementing a community-based project in a rural area in Santander, Colombia. This project consisted of a pedagogical intervention that sought to include community-related activities in the English curriculum in line with research that explores social and cultural issues through community inquiries (Rincón & Clavijo, 2016), and the demands for the improvement of conditions for the achievement of the National Bilingual Program (Cárdenas & Hernández, 2011). In addition, the intervention aimed to include the Basic Standards of Citizenship Competences which promote students' consciousness about their duties and rights as Colombian citizens, and also the Basic Standards English Competences that foster students' capacity to communicate in English.

As such, the main objective of our project was the improvement of students' cultural awareness, language skills, and sense of belonging by promoting English language learning experiences focused on their community. In line with our project's aims, this paper includes: a review of the literature, a description of the pedagogical intervention, findings, and final remarks. These sections will expose the process we and our students went through.

## Literature Review

The theoretical concepts that frame this pedagogical intervention are: critical pedagogy, community-based pedagogies, and project-based teaching. Together, these concepts supported

the creation and implementation of our project and provided us with evidence of the benefits of using them along with students' context in English language learning.

### *Critical pedagogy*

Critical pedagogy is an educational ideology proposed by different authors since the seventeenth century. Freire and Shor (1987), Giroux (1992), Paul and Elder (2005) and Moore and Stanley (2009) view critical pedagogy as a practice that encourages people to think, analyze, solve problems, and take actions towards the improvement of their society. Freire and Shor (1987) define critical pedagogy as "an active pedagogy which enables students to become truly participatory members of a community who not only belong to the society but who can create and recreate knowledge and society in and outside the classroom" (as cited in Contreras & Chapetón, 2016, p. 127). This implies that, for students to have a voice, reflect upon social issues, and provide possible solutions to them, teachers need to involve learners in a critical pedagogy that motivates them to look for an improvement of the quality of their lives as individuals and as community members.

Moreover, Javad and Mollaei (2012) affirm that critical pedagogy allows the teacher to hold critical conversations with the learners, who identify problematic issues and reflect upon them while constructing knowledge collaboratively. Thus, taking into account the social context in the English learning process serves as a way for students to explore and reflect upon their way of life. That means that when teachers open spaces of reasoning while teaching, students think for themselves and gain a better understanding of their social reality. Similarly, Ruiz (2013) asserts that learners have the potential to produce and analyze information, but it is necessary to implement strategies that engage them to think critically.

In this way, Giroux and McLaren (1992) claim that to give students opportunities to develop their critical thinking, the activities designed in the curriculum should be transformative, that is, activities that "foster students' acquisition of

the necessary strategies and skills that help them become social critics who are to make decisions which affect their social, political, and economic realities" (p. 79). Additionally, related to the role of the teachers and students in the process of critical learning, Kincheloe (2005) points out that texts and their themes should be provided by both teachers and students who bring their experiences, context and background knowledge for study.

Finally, taking into account students' context, critical pedagogy tries to promote their social analysis of life by making them learn using their own reality. That is to say, critical pedagogy is concerned with the idea of encouraging students to reflect upon what is around them and to give them tools in order to take control of their lives. Therefore, as Contreras and Chapetón (2016) affirm, it is necessary to have a student-centered classroom that encourages them to take action, while respecting their voices, and promoting their individual growth as active, cooperative, and social beings. Therefore, we considered that including community based pedagogy in our practicum project would connect the ideas of critical pedagogy with a curriculum that conceives the community as a fundamental aspect of the teaching and learning process.

### *Community Based Pedagogies*

Community based pedagogies are defined as "outside school practices, life experiences, and assets that learners and teachers bring into the classroom in order to enlighten class dynamics and curriculum constructs" (Sharkey, Clavijo, & Ramírez, 2016, p. 69). In this type of pedagogy, teachers visualize the curriculum in such a way that it can promote not only classroom, but also outside learning opportunities where students can integrate knowledge regarding various aspects of their lives such as environment and society, among others, and improve their capacities to take actions towards their social reality.

In this respect, some author suggests that the inclusion of community related topics in the EFL curriculum is a way of improving student's academic performance in their EFL classes. According to Palacios and Chapetón (2014), "when EFL class

activities are related to students real lives, they feel motivated, committed, and willing to take an active part in the class as it becomes enjoyable and meaningful” (p. 27). Also, Johnston and Davis (2008) support the idea that a community based pedagogy can guide teachers to use teaching principles that encourage students to learn best when learning is related to their communities and practices outside of the classroom.

Moreover, teachers have the possibility to implement this type of pedagogy which can give them and their students many possibilities to grow academically, personally, and socially. However, it is important to remember that if students find a mismatch between what they are supposed to do at home and what it is required at school, they are prone to fail. Therefore, within classroom activities, students should be encouraged to assume active roles guided by their cultural and community contexts.

Consequently, if we believed in critical pedagogies and wanted to follow the ideals of community-based pedagogy, we had to think about a tool that allowed us to organize all the information we could gather while analyzing and observing our students and their community. As a response to this need, the project-based learning model helped us organize our project in a coherent and practical way.

### *Project-based Learning*

Throughout our experience of learning a foreign language, we have realized that the learning process should be accompanied by meaningful activities and interesting strategies for students to accomplish their learning goals. According to Ruiz (2013), the EFL classroom needs a methodology that is more dynamic, more centered on students’ interests, and that promotes knowledge and group work. In this regard, carefully planned activities which build up a project as a result can be seen as a useful way to improve students’ learning.

As suggested by Thomas (2000), “projects are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving, and decision making, which gives them the

opportunity to work relatively autonomously and culminate in realistic products or presentations” (p. 1).

We believe that learning through projects provides the opportunity to integrate language and content, and bring into the classroom new topics students can relate to. In this sense, Grant (2011) highlights that project-based learning “affords authentic learning tasks grounded in the personal interests of learners” (p. 38). Likewise, project-based learning involves students’ active participation in the learning process by means of creative, individual activities and collaborative work to develop their EFL skills. Such group work is highly enhanced while working with projects because students have to form groups and cooperate with each other in order to come up with an outcome that represents all of them.

In sum, project-based learning emphasizes students’ context and collaborative learning while constructing knowledge. Its goal is to involve students in a language learning process that promotes interaction among students, creates connections with their reality, and provides enough opportunities to use meaningful content to carry out a final project.

## **Pedagogical Intervention**

Taking into account the previous three theoretical constructs, we designed and carried out our pedagogical intervention. This section presents a description of the context, the participants, the action plan, the implementation and the implications that build up into the experience of our project. With this, we want to provide a detailed description of it including its creation and implementation process.

### *Context*

This pedagogical intervention was carried at a public school located in a rural area of approximately 5,000 inhabitants of Santander, Colombia. A town located two hours from Santander’s capital, Bucaramanga. The town’s economy depends mostly on agriculture including products such as

yuca, pineapple, and watermelon. There are also fruit trees such as orange, mango, lemon, and a vast variety of flowers.

### Participants

The participants were a group of 36 students from ninth grade; 19 females and 17 males whose age ranged from 14 to 16 years old. The students came from families whose socio-economic income was generally very low, most of the students lived in a nuclear family (parents and siblings), and some of them in a mono-parental family (mom or dad). Most of the parents in the town worked as farmers and some of the students were asked to help with the crops when they got out of school. In order to guarantee the students' privacy and to let parents know about the process and to show information and pictures, both students and parents were asked to sign a consent form at the beginning of the course.

### Action Plan

Taking into account that this pedagogical intervention aimed to foster students' critical thinking, to include the community in the curriculum, and to follow the model of project-based learning, an action plan was designed and implemented bearing in mind those particular aspects. In addition, we wanted to create a proposal of a curriculum that

brought together the students with their community and offered meaningful learning opportunities while improving their language competence. To that end, we created a project called *Acapulco, my paradise in the world—Learning English in community*.

To begin, the action plan content for this project was divided in two units: *Who we are* and *What we have*. These units were developed in a four-month period of classes with an intensity of six hours per week. The units were organized around topics that included the students, their surroundings, and their community. As shown in Figure 1, each unit had driving questions and main goals, respectively, according to its unit name.

Also, each unit was organized by lessons with specific objectives, learning resources or input, and curricular outcomes. The language component and assessment were included; thus, the functions and patterns to be used, and the aspects to be evaluated were conceptualized and planned beforehand. Likewise, we considered it important to take into account the National English standards set by the Ministry of Education, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Citizenship Competence standards.

Then, based on the information gathered through our observations of the students, the school and the community, as well as a


	<b>Institution:</b> [Redacted]	
	<b>Teacher(s):</b> Francis Bolaños, Tatiana Gómez, Karol Flórez, Mary Ramírez, Sandra Tello.	<b>Grade level:</b> <b>Ninth Grade</b>
<b>Driving questions:</b> 1 Who am I? 2. Who and how are the people in my family, my school and my community like?		<b>Topic:</b> <b><u>WHO WE ARE</u></b>
<b>Main goals:</b> Ss are able to talk about themselves, their family, their school and their community.		
<b>USING THE COMMUNITY AS A RESOURCE IN THE ENGLISH SCHOOL CURRICULUM</b>		

Figure 1. Unit features.

questionnaire and an interview to students, and with a theoretical framework in mind, we chose the main topics that would be included in each unit. The topics were chosen following the critical and community-based pedagogies principles, with the objective that in each unit students were able to become aware of their community and think critically of their reality.

The topics in unit 1 were *me, my school, my community members*, and *my family*. In the first unit, students talked about personal features of themselves (*ourselves*; see Appendix 2) got to know their school members and their rights and responsibilities at school (*my school*; see Appendix 2) learned about their community members personal information and routines at work (*my community*);

and, described their family members, relationships and relevance in their lives (*my family*).

Additionally, one of the key moments in each unit was that each topic ended up in a curriculum outcome. As seen in Figure 2, for example, the curricular outcome, for unit 1-topic *Ourselves*, was a lapbook. For the other topics, the outcomes were: ID cards, coins, collages, portraits, and selfies. These outcomes, in which each unit topic would be developed, were designed in order to frame this pedagogical intervention around our project-based learning outcome—an art gallery. Therefore, since this implementation would be included in the presentation of a gallery, we asked students to use their creativity and enhance their group work while they presented themselves and their context during their classes.

WEEK ONE		
STAGE	OURSELVES	
ACTIVITY	Let's know each other!	
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To know each other and enhance empathy among teacher and students.</li> <li>To write and talk about themselves</li> </ul>	
LEARNING RESOURCES	<b>Primary resources:</b> Teachers' personal description  <b>Secondary resources:</b> Vocabulary worksheet: Adjectives, food, occupations, free time activities.	
CURRICULUM OUTCOMES	Lapbook	
LANGUAGE FOCUS	FUNCTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talking about oneself and other people.</li> <li>Talking about likes and dislikes</li> </ul>
	PATTERNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My name is...</li> <li>subject + am/she/he/it + object</li> <li>Subject + am/she/he/it + adjective</li> <li>Subject+ like + to + infinite verb</li> <li>Subject+ <i>auxiliar</i> (do)+not + like + infinite verb</li> <li>When I grow up I want to be</li> </ul>
ASSESSMENT / EVALUATION	Informal assessment:  Participation and presentation in class. Students' attitude in class Presentation of the lap book	
NATIONAL ENGLISH STANDARDS - CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hago presentaciones cortas y ensayadas sobre temas cotidianos y personales.</li> <li>Expreso mis opiniones, gustos y preferencias sobre temas que he trabajado en clase, utilizando estrategias para monitorear mi pronunciación.</li> <li>-Valoro la lectura como una actividad importante para todas las áreas de mi vida</li> <li>Utilizo mi conocimiento general del mundo para comprender lo que escucho</li> </ul>	

Figure 2. Unit features.

WEEK SIX-EIGHT		
STAGE	PLACES IN ACAPULCO	
ACTIVITY	Walking around. Getting to know Acapulco's places. <b>Lesson 12</b> <b>Lesson 13</b> <b>Lesson 14</b>	
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To learn about prepositions of places and directions</li> <li>To receive and understand directions about locations</li> <li>To follow directions in order to know their school community</li> <li>To give and follow directions</li> <li>To create a 3D model of Acapulco</li> <li>To visit a farm</li> </ul>	
LEARNING RESOURCES	<b>Secondary resources</b> Teachers' 3D model design of Acapulco <b>Readings:</b> Places at Acapulco <b>Visiting a farm in Acapulco</b> <b>Reflection about places</b>	
CURRICULUM OUTCOMES	3D model of Acapulco (People, places, animals,)	
LANGUAGE FOCUS	FUNCTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giving directions</li> <li>Following directions</li> <li>Asking questions about a farm</li> </ul>
	PATTERNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recycle vocabulary of Prepositions of place (behind, in front of...)</li> <li>Directions (go pass, go across, turn right/left)</li> <li>Places: school, stationary store</li> <li>To go to___ you have to _____</li> </ul>
ASSESSMENT / EVALUATION	<b>Informal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check writing of the places description</li> <li>Feedback on the oral presentation:</li> <li>Performance and pronunciation</li> <li>QUIZ</li> </ul>	
NATIONAL ENGLISH STANDARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hago descripciones sencillas sobre diversos asuntos cotidianos de mi entorno</li> <li>Identifico relaciones de significado expresadas en textos sobre temas que me son familiares</li> <li>comprendo la información implícita en textos relacionados con temas de mi interés</li> <li>Hago exposiciones ensayadas y breves sobre algún tema académico de mi interés</li> </ul>	

Figure 3. Places.

Continuing, in unit 2, the topics discussed were: *Places*, *Natural resources*, *How to plant a tree* and *How to take care of the natural resources*. In this unit, students talked about places in the community and how to get to them, natural resources, how to plant a tree, and how to take care of the environment. As shown in Figure 3, one of the curricular outcomes for unit 2 was a 3D architectural creative model of the town. The others were *squash cards*, a *garden*, and a *mural*. Within each topic, students learned about the commercial and residential places in their community and also how to get to them using directions. Moreover, they described the natural resources in their community by creating squash

cards, contributed to take care of the environment by planting a school garden and represented their reflections upon the topic by painting a mural inside the school.

Finally, by means of each planned activity, there was a language focus and a follow up. Fortunately, we understood from the beginning of the pedagogical intervention that we did not want to sacrifice in any way the language learning process, so the content was approached according to the language level of the students (A1.3). In this way, we tracked their language learning process with informal and formal assessment.



## Implementation

In order to articulate our intervention, lesson plans, worksheets, and materials were created (see Appendices A and B). Moreover, we followed a particular pattern within every topic which was: input, language focus, 'community sharings,' writing time, outcome example, creative time, and speaking time (see Figure 4). The pattern mentioned above was key to organizing ourselves and our students in a specific order that could help us to reach the language learning goals and the class objectives.

The input contained the words, structures, pronunciation, and information that the students needed to know about the topic. This input came to students with listening activities and written activities designed with the purpose of including those relevant community aspects. Then, there was a time to help students identify the language patterns they would use. We covered some grammar aspects such as: present simple use, telling time, and possessives adjectives, though students mainly received language pattern examples so they could follow them.

In order to help students interact with the community, we contacted specific community leaders and members who would help with our purpose. They accepted our invitation to participate in the activities and then we arranged a time and date to do them. Afterwards, we asked for

permission from both parents and the school for the field trips in which students had to walk to and from the places we visited, take pictures or record specific information, ask the community members questions about a given topic, and take notes. These field trips normally lasted around two hours and during that time, students used the L1 as a resource in order to facilitate communication during the activities.

Later, students had to follow the language patterns from the input, so they could transform the information gathered in Spanish to English. Commonly, they wrote short descriptive paragraphs for each outcome. In connection with this, we mentioned above that we wanted to have a final outcome per topic which needed to be as creative as possible; therefore, every time we planned an outcome for a lesson, we had to create one as example to give students the opportunity to imagine how their own outcomes would turn out. Figure 5 provides two teachers' outcome examples.

Finally, we had 'creative times' and 'speaking times' where students designed and created their outcomes either individually or in groups. Then, they presented their outcomes reading aloud or by heart when they built up confidence, and in front of their classmates or the whole class. In addition, the students occasionally presented their work in front of the community members, first in English, after with some explanation in Spanish.



Figure 4. Lessons pattern.



Figure 5. Teachers' outcomes examples.


At the end of all our pedagogical intervention, there was a three-hour session where students presented to the school members and their families all the work they had done during the process. This final presentation took place in the school auditorium and there we noticed that students felt confident while presenting their work, after having gone through a learning process that also included an improvement regarding production skills.

## Implications

As for the implications of our project, we were aware that we wanted to involve the community in our pedagogical intervention. As a result of this aim, the students experienced different situations in which they did not only learned English but also learned and reflected upon their identity, school, family, community, and natural resources. In line with this, we used these aspects as content topics in our the classes taking into account and organizing them according to the two main project units. The implications experienced during this process is explained below.

## Unit 1: Who We Are

First, while completing their ID cards, students had to interview some school members (academic coordinator, cleaning person, cafeteria worker, teachers, students, security guard, cook and principal) about their interests and routines. Also, we incorporated the school rules handbook to discuss students' rights and responsibilities and present these creatively through a coin-shaped poster. Next, when discussing community members and their relevance in society, students watched a video about an English subtitled interview with the oldest and the son of one of the town's founders as an input (see Figure 6). Students also went on two field trips: one to ask people about their likes and routines using their mother tongue, and another to present that information in a collage using English but using body language to facilitate communication. At the end, they would repeat the collage presentation in Spanish. Likewise, when we were talking about family members and their relationship with students, we invited some parents to come to the classroom and students asked them questions about the role of parents and their role as sons and daughters. This interaction was held in the community's mother tongue, Spanish.




INSTITUTO MIGUEL SANCHEZ HINESTROZA

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_


DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

WORKSHEET #10



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1. Watch the video and complete the information about Mr. Sánchez.



COMMUNITY MEMBER	
Name	Time to wake up
Age	Time to go to work
Favorite food	Activities at work
Favorite color	1. _____ at _____
Favorite sport	2. _____ at _____
Favorite animal	3. _____ at _____
Occupation	Time to leave work
	Time to go to bed

2. REFLECTION TIME!

Is Mr. Sánchez important in Acapulco, why?

Mr. Sánchez is important in our community because he \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Speaking practice. Watch the video again and follow the transcript. Then, read it aloud in pairs.

Interview with Mr. Sánchez

Int: Interviewed

Int: Hello Mr. Sánchez. How are you?  
Mr. Sánchez: Fine, thank you very much.

Int: I am going to ask you some questions?  
Mr. Sánchez: Sure!

Int: What's your name?  
Mr. Sánchez: My name is **Facundo**.

Int: How old are you?  
Mr. Sánchez: I am **seventy two** years old.

Int: What's your favorite food?  
Mr. Sánchez: My favorite food is **everything there is to eat**.

Int: What's your favorite color?  
Mr. Sánchez: My favorite color is **white**.

Int: What's your favorite sport?  
Mr. Sánchez: My favorite sport is **cycling**.

Int: What's your favorite animal?  
Mr. Sánchez: My favorite animal is **the fish**.

Int: What is your occupation?  
Mr. Sánchez: I am a **farmer**.

Int: What time do you wake up?  
Mr. Sánchez: I wake up at **five o'clock**.

Int: What time do you go to work?  
Mr. Sánchez: I go to work at **six o'clock**.

Int: What do you do at work? Name three activities with the time.  
Mr. Sánchez: I **water plants** at **six o'clock**.  
Mr. Sánchez: I **weed plants** at **seven o'clock**.  
Mr. Sánchez: I **fertilize plants** at **half past** **seven**.




Figure 6. Worksheet #10–Lesson 10.

## Unit 2: What We Have

In this unit, we constructed a 3D architectural model of the town which included most of the places it contains and students learned to move around the town by giving directions. Then, when we moved into natural resources. First, we visited a farm and students asked the owner questions about the land, the crops, and how to take care of them (see Figure 7). Second, students were asked to go to the community and take pictures of crops, fruit trees, flowers, animals, and water supplies to describe them later. Finally, to talk about how to take care of the environment, students brought a plant from their homes to create a garden at the school and represented the importance of taking care our world with a mural.



Figure 7. Visit to the farm.

## Findings

In this section, we show the results of the data gathering process, while analyzing students in

the classes and during their interactions with the community. Additionally, we explain the students' interactions within the project, and finally, the process of empowering them.

## In the Gathering of Data

At the beginning of our project, we gathered data by using tools such as: a) interviews with students, members of the community, school principals and teachers, b) notes taken by the teachers during community field trips to observe people's way of living, places, interaction, values, professions (assets), and c) a students' placement tests and questionnaires to determine students' current English level, types of learning, interests, as well as socioeconomic and family information. In this process, we took notes, made videos, took pictures, and carried out interviews and diagnostic exams. With this information, we created a group of prominent community assets that would function as themes for the curriculum and identify students characteristics.

During the project implementation, we collected data through students' written reflections every three weeks (see Figure 8), quizzes, exams, students' comments during the classes, and teachers' observations, and field notes. At the end of the project, we analyzed all of the data and came up with the following conclusions.

## Critical Students in the Classroom

As cited by Chapetón and Contreras (2016), Freire's proposal to teachers is to develop a liberating education where the students become critical thinkers and active participants. In the findings, we observed that students were able to think critically if there was room in the classroom not only to learn the language, but also to talk critically about their context. One student pointed out, "*Las teachers no solo nos enseñan inglés, también nos enseñan cómo ser buenos ciudadanos*" (*The teachers not only teach us English, they teach us how to be good citizens*); and another said "*...entre más conozca los recursos y cómo los cuidamos podemos detener la contaminación*" (*As long as we know about the resources and how to take care of them, we could stop pollution*).



### REFLEXIÓN

- Responde las siguientes preguntas con total sinceridad. Esta actividad no se calificará.

Desde que iniciaron las clases de inglés con las practicantes de la UIS....

1. ¿Sientes que el inglés es más fácil? ¿Sí, ¿no? ¿Por qué?

---

---

2. ¿Entiendes más las actividades y los temas en la clase de inglés? ¿Por qué?

---

---

3. ¿Se te facilita más escuchar, leer, escribir y pronunciar palabras en inglés? ¿Sí, ¿no? ¿Por qué?

---

---

4. ¿Sientes que has mejorado tu desempeño en el inglés? ¿Por qué?

---

---

5. ¿Te sientes más confiado y seguro con respecto al inglés? ¿Sí, ¿no? ¿Por qué?

---

---

6. ¿Te sientes más animado y con más ganas de aprender inglés?

Figure 8. Reflection card.

Equally, it was observed that the reflections carried out were powerful tools to strengthen students' critical thinking. This means that, through the discussion of certain topics, students felt valued, needed and accepted, and they felt they were able to do great things. One boy said *"que a pesar de ser una vereda hacemos cosas importantes para los demás, ya que aportamos la comida que sacamos de la naturaleza"* (Even though we are a small town, we do important things for other people, like growing food). A female student shared her thoughts about her future saying *"valoro lo que tengo y voy a luchar por mis sueños para poder cambiar mi historia de vida"* (I appreciate what I have and I'll fight for my dreams to change my life story).

### Learning with the Community

It is true that rural students do not recognize English as a priority and they see it only as another subject.

Bonilla and Cruz (2014) affirm that for rural students a foreign language is considered unimportant. One way to help students connect to the language is by using their community and context as content. For them, it will be easier to make connections if they are familiar with the information found in written texts and listening activities from the classes with their reality. One student stated *"Es fácil aprender inglés si hablamos de nuestra comunidad porque cogemos la información y la reconocemos sin dificultad"* (It is easier to learn English if we are discussing our community, because we would see the information and recognized it easily). Another affirmed *"Aprendimos más acerca de inglés relacionándolo con las cosas que hacemos y observamos diariamente"* (We learned English better by connecting it with things we do and observe daily).

Likewise, community related topics not only improved learners' knowledge and language skills, but in a way, students also improved their sense of



belonging, they sympathized with their community, appreciated it more, and found role models among them. For example, one male student said *“Aprendí a valorar los trabajos que las personas hacen en mi comunidad y lo que hacen por nosotros”* (I learned to appreciate my community members’ jobs and everything they do for us). A female student shared *“Cuando los padres asistieron a la clase, fue algo muy significativo y valioso en mi aprendizaje por sus enseñanzas y valores recomendados”* (When our parents came to the classroom, it was very meaningful for me to learn about their experiences and the values they wanted us to work on)

### Teamwork through Projects

From the initial questionnaires, we noticed that students were interested in meaningful learning experiences which could take them from theory to practice by means of different strategies and resources such as music, videos, games, creative artifacts, and speaking sharing times. For students, it was very important that, first, learning was done through dynamic and creative activities that they were not used to seeing at school, or as one student said, *‘con manualidades y actividades se nos memorizan más las cosas que clases normales’* (with handcrafts and activities we remember topics better than in the regular classes); and second, they were able to work as a team, putting their different skills into practice to show a final outcome of everything they had learned

The idea of project based learning as a way of giving students a final goal explores the feelings of fulfilment and self-realization. Students expressed how happy they were to show, in a creative way, their learning (see Figure 9). One student suggested *“Que pudimos mostrar todo lo que hicimos a los padres y a la comunidad”* (That we were able to show everything we did to our parents and community) and other said *“... de esa manera plasmamos lo aprendido de una forma creativa y activa. Mostrando la creatividad [se] hace más fácil aprender”* (In that way we put on display what we had learned in a creative and active way. Expressing our creativity, [it] is easier to learn).



Figure 9. Final session.

### Empowering the Students

Empowerment is defined as the power that students gain during the learning process that makes them feel free and able to interact within the classroom environment (Mtana & O-saki, 2017). In this sense, the students enhanced their self-confidence when making decisions and expressing points of view in front of the teachers and their classmates. This feeling represents an advantage since “empowered learners are more motivated to perform classroom tasks, [...] feel more competent and find the tasks more meaningful” (Houser & Frymier, 2009, p. 35).

Finally, in the findings it was observed that students felt empowered after our classes. Positive feedback and supportive teaching were

very important to make the lessons possible. Some students' comments included: "‘He tenido confianza al hablar, escribir y pronunciar. A veces me equivoco pero las profesoras me explican y me generan confianza’ and ‘Las teachers nos enseñan con amor y respeto y nos animan a hacer las cosas con seguridad’ (I’ve felt confident enough to speak, write and pronounce. Sometimes, I make mistakes but the teachers teach us with love and respect and they encourage us to do things with confidence).”

## Final Remarks and Implications for English Language Teaching in Rural Areas

We want to invite teachers to think about rural education as a way to contribute to equity in Colombia. Bearing in mind the education for peace that our country is seeking, this should be a way of teaching values and achieving a physical, mental, and emotional balance in the human being (Pérez, 2016). Therefore, we would like to highlight three aspects. First, community building within the classroom and school lets students establish an identity with their school and classmates. Second, when teachers include the community as content, students' perceptions about their identity and diversity grow stronger. And finally, as we've demonstrated above, teachers can use critical and community based pedagogies as a way to empower their students.

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## Appendix 1

### Lesson #1. Ourselves



**PRÁCTICA PEDAGÓGICA RURAL**  
**ACAPULCO, SANTANDER 2017**



**LESSON PLAN FORM**

**LESSON # 1**

**STUDENT-TEACHERS' NAMES**

**INSTITUTION**

**CITY**

Francis Bolaños, Karol Pérez, Tatiana Gómez, Mary Ramírez, Sandra Tello

Instituto Miguel Sánchez Hincastro

Girón

**DATE**

**GRADE**

**AGE**

Monday August 14th, 2017

NINTH GRADE

14-16

**STUDENTS' OBJECTIVE(S)**

Ss will be able to write and talk about themselves.

**TEACHERS' OBJECTIVE (S)**

Teachers will be able to know students' names and main qualities.

**SKILLS**

L		R	X	S		W	X
---	--	---	---	---	--	---	---

**VOCABULARY**

Adjectives: polite, responsible, funny, (in)tolerant, respectful, calm, brave, interesting, lazy, open-minded, talkative, stubborn, smart, active, shy.

Food: Hamburgers, pasta, hog dog, fish, grapes, rice, French fries, meat, carrot, fruits, vegetables, chicken.

Occupations: farmer, priest, singer, architect, mechanic, pilot, lawyer, chef, seller, firefighter, driver.

Free time activities: sleep, read, eat, run, sing, play sports or videogames, ride a bike or a horse, surf on facebook, watch TV, swim, selfies, go to gym, camping.

**STAGES AND INTERACTION PATTERNS**

**PROCEDURE**

**MATERIALS**

**TIME**

T ↔ S

Teachers will handle the class as one group.  
Greet the class.  
Write date, objectives, useful language and agenda on the board. Useful language:  
"What's the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_?"  
How do you say \_\_\_\_\_ in English?  
I don't understand  
Teacher, can you repeat?"

Board  
markers  
eraser

5 min  
2:05

T ↔ S ;  
S ↔ S

**Bell work:** Introduce yourself by showing Ss your name tag. Give Ss their name tags and collect the ones left out to call the roll.

Name tags  
Markers

5 min  
2:10

WARM UP Ts ↔ Ss	Guess Who game: Show Ss a sample lapbook with personal info of the 5 teachers. Read each piece of information and ask Ss who the information belongs to. Ss raise their hands to participate and have three opportunities to guess. Continue until all the information is presented.	Lapbook example	20 min 2:30
T ↔ S ; S ↔ S	Divide Ss in 5 groups by counting them from number 1 to 5. Each T takes a group.  Each T presents her lapbook. T explains the Classroom useful language. Give Ss worksheet #1 that has useful vocabulary to create their own lapbook (food, adjectives, occupations, free time activities). Ss read the worksheet individually. Ss ask about unknown words in the worksheet. Have ss use the classroom vocabulary and write unknown vocabulary. Mimics answers. T and Ss read aloud the Vocabulary from worksheet #1. T corrects pronunciation.	Worksheet # 1 pen/pencil eraser T's lapbook	10 min 2:40  15 min 2:55
T ↔ S ; S ↔ S	Hangman Game Play Hangman to check vocabulary from Worksheet #1. Each group has 10 seconds to look at two vocabulary sections from worksheet #1. Draw blank spaces and show an image of the word. Each group says a letter and if a group has a letter right, they can continue. The group that completes a word, wins a point. The group with more words guessed wins.	Flashcards markers board	15 min 3:10
T ↔ S ; S ↔ S	Give students Worksheet #2 with the conventions: • My name is _____ • I am _____ (years old) • I was born on _____ • I love _____ • My favorite food is _____ • I like _____	Worksheet #2: pen/pencil	10 min 3:20



## Appendix 2

### Worksheet #7. You have rights and responsibilities!



**TACAPULCO**  
Tercera Edad con Actitud Positiva

Instituto Miguel Sánchez Hinojosa

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**WORKSHEET #7**



### You have rights and responsibilities!

A right is something that every person is entitled to for survival and a good life. In 1989, the countries of the United Nations made an agreement called The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This convention contains over 30 rights for children.



Some of them are:

1. have a nationality
2. live with a family
3. have a safe house to live
4. receive good quality education.
5. play
6. be protected
7. have clean water and nutritious food

When we exercise our rights, it often affects other people. This is why rights and responsibilities always go hand in hand. A responsibility is something that every person has the job to do. And for each right children should have the responsibility to....

#### OH NO! BAD ZOMBIE HAS DISORGANIZED THE RESPONSIBILITIES...HELP!

1. Match the rights from the text with the responsibilities. Write the number from each right next to the responsibility that it matches.

- \_\_\_\_\_ keep my house and bedroom clean
- 1 love and respect my country
- \_\_\_\_\_ respect others
- \_\_\_\_\_ be thankful for my breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ love my parents, brothers and sisters.
- \_\_\_\_\_ go to school everyday
- \_\_\_\_\_ follow game rules.

I have the responsibility to...



2. COIN: A coin needs both sides to have value. One side complements the other. Rights and responsibilities are like two sides of the same coin. Write a responsibility in front of each right.

I have the RIGHT ...

1. to have a quiet and safe environment.
2. To have a desk.
3. To have nice teachers.
4. To have respectful classmates.
5. To have a clean classroom.

I have the RESPONSIBILITY ...

1. to follow safety rules.

2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_