

# **A Pedagogical Experience to Delve Into Students' Sense of Cultural Belonging and Intercultural Understanding in a Rural School**

**Una experiencia pedagógica para ahondar en la propia cultura y en el conocimiento intercultural en un colegio rural**

**Bertha Ramos Holguín**

ramos.bertha@gmail.com

**Jahir Aguirre Morales**

jahiraguirre@gmail.com

**Carmen Matilde Hernández**

matty8274@gmail.com

Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia

Rural education has been the focus for several research studies which reveal a tendency to include students' home context in the curriculum. Considering the aforementioned statement, this article aims to share a pedagogical experience which was carried out in a rural school in Guavatá, Santander, Colombia. The main purpose of this experience was to integrate eleventh graders' rural context through the design of curricular units. After implementing the curricular units, information was collected through a journal, a semi-structured interview, and students' surveys. The outcomes of the experience showed that aspects such as students' sense of cultural belonging and intercultural understanding were enhanced.

**Key words:** Culture, curricular units, interculturality, rural education

Diversas investigaciones relacionadas con la educación rural han mostrado una tendencia a incluir dentro del currículo de dicha educación el contexto propio de los estudiantes. Teniendo en cuenta la premisa anterior, este artículo pretende compartir una experiencia pedagógica llevada a cabo en un colegio rural en el municipio de Guavatá, Santander, Colombia. El objetivo principal de esta experiencia fue integrar el contexto rural de los estudiantes de undécimo grado a través del diseño de unidades curriculares. Después de desarrollar las unidades, se recolectó información a través de un diario de campo, una entrevista semi-estructurada y encuestas a los estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron que aspectos tales

como el sentido de pertenencia cultural y el entendimiento intercultural de los estudiantes se promovieron.

*Palabras clave:* cultura, educación rural, interculturalidad, unidades curriculares

## Introduction

According to Serrano (2007), the history of rural education in Colombia reveals that there is still a big gap between city and rural schooling. The main difference, according to Moulton (2001), relates to the fact that a school model developed in an urban context is not always relevant to a rural setting. The same author further asserts that teachers in rural schools should analyze the rural space, both the physical and socio-cultural environment, so that rural education projects take their particular environment into account. What these authors assert is not far from the characteristics of the population to which this pedagogical experience was applied.

Eleventh graders from this rural school in Guavatá, Santander, where this pedagogical experience was carried out, are enrolled in a weekly, three-hour English course as part of the syllabus they have to fulfill at their institution. For the English class, the teacher uses English textbooks designed for students who belong to the main departmental cities in Colombia. The main components of the class are grammar, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Through informal conversations, students expressed that it was challenging for them to learn in the English class. This was due to the fact that the English textbook was difficult to understand as it did not reflect students' own contexts. For instance, students mentioned that the textbook included exercises in which people commuted by Transmilenio. Nevertheless, traveling by Transmilenio was a remote possibility for students in rural areas. This kind of learning was neither useful nor meaningful for them. However, a whole unit of the instructional material was based on the Transmilenio transportation system.

Heath (1982) suggests that school failure may be partly explained by the mismatch between what students have learned in their home cultures and what is required of them at school. Daily life routines can either be reinforced or ignored in schools, and they can produce different responses from teachers.

Then, our intention with this pedagogical experience was to design more friendly curricular units. These may eventually close the gap between rural school students and the instructional materials they use to learn English. We tried to follow what Patiño-Bernal, Bernal-Vera, and Castaño (2011) mention in terms of including the specificities of the rural population in the curriculum. For this reason, we incorporated in the content of the units topics such as guava production, entertainment, professional life, and family roles in rural

areas. All of them were closely related to eleventh graders' context in this rural school in Guavatá, Santander.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Taking into account that this proposal was related to the integration of students' context through the design of curricular units, we are going to consider three main constructs for this theoretical framework: Rural Education, Interculturality, and Materials Development.

### ***Rural Education***

In the "Guide for Rural Development Specialists" designed by the World Bank, Moulton (2001) mentions some generalities related to rural education around the world. The author points out that people in rural regions live dispersed over large areas, and they are of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The author further asserts "that the rural/urban distribution of the population does not correlate exactly with enrollment rates in primary school. Besides, while rural schools should not look like urban schools, they must offer the same opportunities as urban schools for children to advance through the school system to higher levels" (p. 25-29). However, as stated by López (2005), in order for rural schools to improve their quality, the educational system needs to include the interests of the community. According to this, people in rural areas should be offered the possibility of having a contextualized and meaningful education with high educational standards.

Moulton (2001) also points out that,

because rural areas are less densely populated than urban areas, rural schools are farther apart, requiring many children to walk long distances or pay for transportation, which causes them to lose valuable time in walking that could otherwise be spent helping at home. Some families are unwilling to send their small children down long roads alone. Long distances, poor quality roads, and inadequate shipping vehicles make it difficult to get building materials, furniture, equipment, and textbooks to remote rural schools. Stores that sell textbooks and other school supplies are few and far between in rural areas. (p. 10).

Moulton (2001) concludes by saying that, "while in many cases building materials and furniture can be locally supplied, instructional materials are not available. These resources include not only textbooks but also the visual materials that decorate classrooms and stimulate learning, as well as simple scientific lab equipment, radios, and other audio-visual equipment" (p. 10) that have become standard parts of many classrooms.

In the same sense, Patiño-Bernal et al. (2011) argue that rural schools not only lack proper materials with which to teach, but also materials that account for students' characteristics and needs. These authors further assert that most teachers who work in rural areas do not design

materials for their students because they are not motivated. The explanation of this unwillingness may be due to the fact that professional development courses or any kind of promotion is scarce for the teachers. Besides that, rural teachers are overwhelmed with the amount of tasks they are required to fulfill. Many rural teachers are homeroom teachers; they teach different grades in the same classroom and even some of them, cook meals for students, for instance.

What these authors describe as the main characteristics and barriers for rural education is not far from what is illustrated in our Colombian rural education. In fact, the Guavatá school where this experience was carried out has some, if not all, of the deficiencies that the aforementioned authors suggest.

### *Interculturality*

For the purpose for this pedagogical experience we understand interculturality as the relationship among two or more cultures; or the relationship individuals in a society experience when they are in contact with people who belong to diverse backgrounds. Zimmermann (1997) argues that interculturality can be understood from a critical and descriptive perspective as the contact between two or more cultures. In the same way, Fernández (2003) maintains that being intercultural implies being respectful towards other cultures.

Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) mention that efficient intercultural communication takes place when learners are open-minded individuals. They respect and follow their own values and rules and those of the other cultures.

As teachers we are called to promote interculturality in education. Kramsch (2001) says that the main goal of second language learning should not only be based on effective communication, but on a search for the understanding of cultural boundaries and an attempt to come to terms with those boundaries. In the same way, Byram (1997) advocates for the responsibility educators have to build intercultural individuals. The author further mentions that this responsibility is on the shoulders of today's educators.

One way to do it is by incorporating in our daily teaching practices students' values and backgrounds. Another way for teachers to stimulate intercultural knowledge among students is by recognizing the diversity of cultures they may find in their own context as well as in foreign settings. For this reason, the curricular units we designed accounted for students' context, e.g., trying to acknowledge their own and other cultures.

### *Materials Development*

In this part, we are going to address the following aspects: teachers as material designers, definition of materials design, and the components in the process of creating didactic learning

materials. We have selected these three constituents because they are pretty much related to the job of a teacher as a material designer.

**Teachers as material designers.** A challenge rural schools face, at least in Colombia, relates to the lack of financial and material resources for teaching effectively. Teachers who face the challenge of teaching English in rural areas usually select a textbook that in most cases was not created for rural schools. Wyatt (2011, p. 2) explains that “there is anecdotal evidence that teachers and learners in different contexts can be frustrated by the teaching materials they are asked to use, many of which are mass-produced in the West and used worldwide.”

Nevertheless, we do not mean that a textbook used in capital cities cannot be used successfully in a foreign language classroom in rural areas, but it would probably require some adjustments and adaptations, which imply a large effort on the part of the teacher. We think that that effort of teachers could just as easily be invested in creating and designing materials for a specific population. In this way, two gains can be found: On the one hand, the materials may meet the needs of the students, and, on the other hand, the teacher will end up being the author of his or her own material and so grow professionally.

In this sense, Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos, and Ramos (2009) suggest that teachers often have trouble finding the appropriate supporting materials to help students reinforce a specific topic in class. To solve this problem, many teachers search for, adapt, and compile books, internet exercises, and other materials.

They further assert that “most EFL/ESL teachers are creative professionals who have the potential to explore their creativity and embark upon the fascinating task of developing their own didactic materials based not only on their teaching experience, but also on their expertise in the cognitive and learning processes needed by EFL/ESL learners” (Núñez et al., 2009, p. 16). Núñez, Pineda, and Téllez (2004) conclude that the task of designing materials should not be exclusively confined to text developers, since there is no complete textbook that fulfills both learners' and teachers' expectations. In this sense, Tomlinson (2010) argues that there is currently a noticeable trend in which teachers produce local material because they are in touch with the needs and wants of the learners.

**Definition of materials design.** As a first step to becoming materials designers, teachers should get acquainted with what materials development is and the steps that should be followed. Tomlinson (1998, p. 2) assures that “materials development is anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake.” The author defines the concept of “materials” as the use of various resources to teach language learners. He also conceptualizes materials adaptation as adjustments made in order to improve them or to make them more suitable for a particular type of learner.

In the same way, Ramírez (2004) defines materials as anything used by teachers to facilitate the learning of a language. Tomlinson (1998, p. 2) specifies that materials are “cassettes, videos, CD-ROMs, DVDs, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks, photocopied exercises, all kinds of realia, lectures and talks by guest speakers, and Internet sources.”

Although Tomlinson (1998) does not account for curricular units as part of the materials used in the classroom, we do think they fall into a category that is immersed in the term materials development. Curricular units may be understood as a source of input that is produced by teachers to better students' learning.

After carrying out a case study related to the use and the effectiveness in the application of materials by pre-service teachers at Universidad de Antioquia, González (2006) mentions that materials such as textbooks, computer software, and visual aids are cited by EFL teachers as the basic devices used to teach an effective English lesson. Although there are diverse kinds of realia that can be designed by English teachers, we agree with González in the sense that one of the most used devices for teaching English is the textbook.

In the context where this experience was carried out, the textbook was almost the only tool for students to have contact with the foreign language. That is why we concentrated our efforts on designing curricular units that could tackle a problem related to English language teaching in a rural area.

**The components in the process of creating didactic learning materials.** The steps that we followed to design the curricular units were the ones suggested by Núñez and Téllez (2009, p. 176): “Carrying Out a Needs Assessment, Setting Goals and Objectives, Conceptualizing Content/Designing a Syllabus, Selecting and Developing Materials and Activities, Organizing Content and Activities and Evaluating the Material.”

These curricular units were designed considering what Cárdenas (2000) calls a local audience, which, in this case, is a particular rural school in Guavatá, Santander. The author further suggests that when we design materials for a local audience, we should be familiar with the needs of the learners, their ages, level of proficiency, degrees of motivation, cultural learning styles, and the place the foreign language occupies in the educational system. Cárdenas (2008) further emphasizes that English teachers are called to select, design, and adapt materials for students since they are the ones in touch with the realities of the schools.

In Colombia, teachers have become aware of the fact that they can adopt a critical position towards the materials they use in their classrooms. This trend has generated interesting dynamics and we may find that there are several researchers who have focused their attention on three main areas: analyzing what the information in the textbooks conveys, finding practical ways to adapt material, and designing teaching materials that meet Colombian realities.

On the one hand, Castañeda-Peña (2008) focused his attention on finding out about gender identity and teacher talk around language textbooks of preschool EFL students. Álvarez (2008), Bonilla (2008), Delgado (2008), and Guerrero (2008) invite English teachers to critically evaluate culture and ideologies in the textbooks that they may eventually use.

On the other hand, Nieto (2008) calls EFL teachers' attention in regard to the adaptation of materials found on the internet. The author suggests that teachers should look for appropriate sources and adapt them to suit students' and teachers' interests. In the same line of thought, Duarte and Escobar (2008) and Núñez and Téllez (2009) inform EFL teachers about the principles for adapting didactic materials.

Finally, Ariza and Viáfara (2008) comment on the principles that should guide the design of independent work material. Aguirre and Ramos (2008), Bailey and Rey (2008), Castañeda-Peña and Campo (2010), Muñoz and Pineda (2008), Núñez and Téllez (2008), and Vera (2008), among others, all share the experience of designing English teaching materials for Colombian students and teachers.

In terms of the design of curricular units, they have proved to be beneficial. Ariza (2004) analyzed a syllabus in a Basic English course in an undergraduate program at a public university in Bogotá. Based on the syllabus and the program, she designed and implemented a curricular unit. She found out that the curricular unit was beneficial, since she could match what the curriculum stated and what students needed both in terms of language and cultural knowledge.

Zuluaga, López, and Quintero (2009) accounted for the results of a research project developed at a public university in Caldas. Pre-service teachers and their advisors integrated the coffee culture into the English program in a rural area through content-based tasks. The authors reported that this project was useful since students in rural areas could learn in a meaningful way. Muñoz (2010) describes the results of an action research project at a private school in Bogotá. The author designed instructional materials based on the Structural Cognitive Modifiability Model. The findings revealed that the students became creative writers.

Parada and Espitia (2008) accounted for the design of a curricular unit aimed at combining The English Discoveries Software and the eclectic approach. This unit was based on the socio-constructivism philosophy of education. It also considered collaborative learning. Findings suggest that this unit was meaningful for students in a rural school since they were able to be the main constructors of their knowledge.

Thus, it is clear from the above discussion that Colombian teachers have not only been concerned about the content of the English textbooks used in Colombia, but have also made big efforts to consider students' needs and realities when designing instructional materials. As a result, Colombian English teachers have been able to apply successful strategies to address their concerns.

## **The Pedagogical Proposal**

### *Context of the Experience*

The school where this experience took place is located in Guavatá, Santander, a town located four hours from Colombia's capital Bogotá. The school is located on the Pavachoque rural settlement. This institution has a big farm for the students' practices. The town borders Puente Nacional, Vélez, and Barbosa. This town is known as the "guava capital of the world," because it has approximately nine guava loaf factories.

Guavatá's economy depends mostly on agriculture as its rural economy is dominated by an agricultural region. The product that is mostly grown is guava, but other products, such as sugar cane, corn, beans, avocado, and coffee are also harvested.

This rural school is a public one, the only institution in the town, and it serves students from first to eleventh grades. The school's pedagogical project focuses on agriculture and cattle. Students attend three forty-five-minute sessions of English class per week, and each course has on average thirty students.

### *The Students*

There are thirty-four students in the eleventh grade class. They range in age from fifteen to eighteen years old. There are seventeen boys and seventeen girls. They all come from families whose socio-economical status belongs to either level one or two on a scale of one to six, with one being the lowest and six (students who have more access to economic resources) being the highest on this scale. Most students live with their families (mother, father, and siblings). Some of the students live in a single-parent situation (five students with their mom, two with their dad). All of the students signed a consent form and, in order to guarantee anonymity, participants' names were changed.

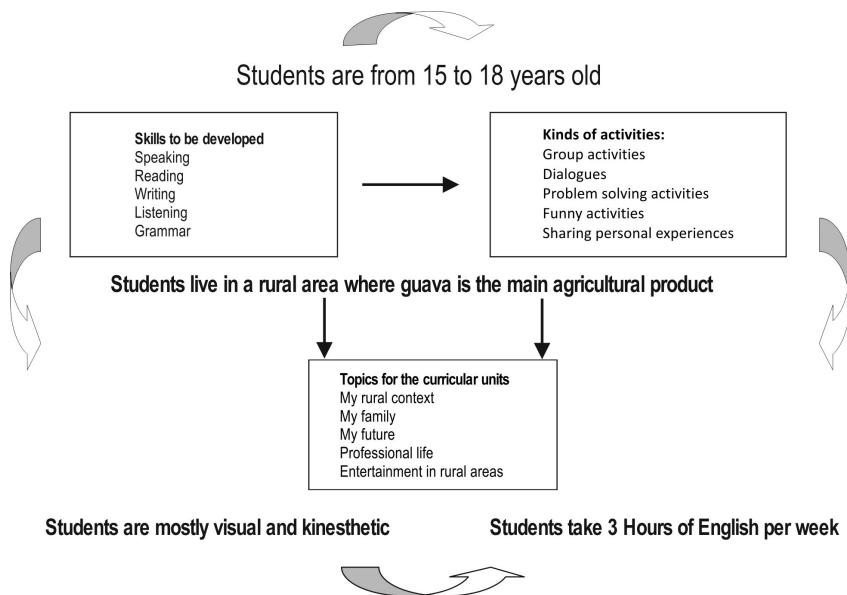
The vast majority of the families base their income on the farming of guava, coffee, sugar cane, corn, and some fruits like oranges and bananas. Most of the students are required by their parents to help with the farming labor activity and chores. These families are usually unable to afford the costs of school, including basic tools such as pencils and notebooks. Some families have difficulty buying school uniforms and school meals.

### *Conditions of the Implementation*

The pedagogical proposal consisted of a series of curricular units that integrated students' context. The first step to design the curricular units was to carry out a needs analysis. The needs analysis was done in order to identify the current and future needs of eleventh graders



in order to design the curricular units. The information for the needs analysis was initially taken from a survey that was applied to eleventh graders (Appendix 1). Figure 1 reports the main needs found after the survey was analyzed.



**Figure 1.** Main Needs Found After Analyzing the Survey

After the survey, we expanded the information through an interview. The answers helped us to identify three main issues that needed to be included as part of the curricular units. On the one hand, there were issues related to the students' own culture and, on the other, aspects that accounted for the development of intercultural competence as well as autonomous learning.

We realized that the main issue to be considered when designing the curricular units was related to acknowledging students' rural context. That is to say, students wanted to see their context, their way of living, thinking, and behaving, reflected in the curricular units that were to be used for English teaching.

What we teachers-as-designers adopted was an approach that fostered students' own identity and, through the process, built up their intercultural knowledge. Considering that "learning a language is related to learning a culture" (Álvarez & Bonilla, 2009, p. 151), we

decided it was necessary to focus on aspects related to intercultural knowledge so that students would be aware of how people belonging to other cultures behave.

The curricular units accounted for an intercultural component. Throughout the units we tried to explore cultural issues related to students' own lives and the culture of English speakers. The idea was for students to begin reflecting upon their own culture as well as others people's cultures and, thus, to develop intercultural competence. We attempted to cover some important aspects related to how English-speaking cultures behave in situations similar to the ones experienced by eleventh graders in this rural school.

First, we let students explore their own culture. The intercultural component consisted of a series of readings. We wrote some short articles that presented situations that were highly related to people's behaviour in Spanish as well as in English-speaking contexts. They were suitable for classroom discussions and/or debates (Appendix 2).

Second, after the analysis of the interview, which was carried out just before the survey used to collect information for the needs analysis, we noticed the need to foster autonomous learning. In order to fulfil the objectives of the curricular units, an autonomous task was presented in each unit. The students were given exercises as homework assignments. These exercises consisted of some reading comprehension exercises which had short passages with general topics in which they had to answer questions about the text using multiple choice answers or true/false exercises (Appendix 3).

Also, we noticed how important it was for students to involve their parents in their education. Based on this observation, we designed some short tasks in which parents could participate (Appendix 4).

## Findings

We collected information during a school year. In order to gather information, we used a journal, students' surveys, and a semi-structured final interview. The researchers wrote a journal every single class in order to reflect on the development of the activities proposed in the curricular units. In addition, we used a survey to gather students' perceptions regarding the curricular units. Finally, we used an interview in order to analyze students' final conclusions and personal points of view regarding the curricular units. Based on the previous instruments, we found that curricular units were a useful strategy to strengthen students' sense of cultural belonging and to move towards intercultural understanding.

### *A Step Towards Strengthening Students' Sense of Cultural Belonging*

According to Maslow (1954), belonging is one of the more basic needs of human beings. Hagerly, Lynch-Sauer, Patusk, Bouwsema, and Collier (1992) define sense of belonging as

the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that people feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment. A system can be a relationship or organization, and an environment can be natural or cultural.

As part of the initial findings, it was observed that curricular units were powerful tools to strengthen students' sense of cultural belonging. This means that, through the implementation of the curricular units, students felt valued, needed and accepted, and they felt they fit into the system in which they were living. The previous information can be corroborated by means of the survey and the interview students answered after the curricular units were carried out.

In the information gathered from the students, some mentioned that they felt they were an important component of their community. They also stated that activities they did at home, such as harvesting, were valued by the society. The question addressed in the survey, as well as in the interview, was: Do you think the topics addressed in the curricular unit were related to your own context? We observed that, even without being asked about belonging, some of the students tended to use the words "values" and "acceptance" to show a sense of belonging.

I liked the topics addressed in the curricular units because I could see how important my job at home is. During my free time, I usually collect guavas at home. According to the readings, many people consider this to be an important part of the production of guava. Not only the owners of the factories are important but also people like me who just collect the fruits. (Survey 2, Q5, Juliana)<sup>1</sup>

In the same survey, when being asked about the relationship the teaching material had with their social context, some other students mentioned that they liked the curricular units because they were related to the way they earn their income. They said it was interesting to analyze topics related to their region and to change the topic they usually study in their English classes.

Do you think the material for the English class is related to your context? Why?

Yes because our income is based on the production of guava. (Student's answer. Survey 2)

I liked the topic related to guava because it is what we do here in our region. I also liked the issue of changing the topic in our English class. (Student's answer. Survey 2)

20. The topics were related to my context.
21. I could definitely say something about the topics
22. we studied in the English class because
23. I knew about them. I really knew what the readings

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<sup>1</sup> All excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

24. were about. It was also good to see that the tasks
25. to be developed at home were easy because
26. my parents knew about the topic.
27. I just told them the correct vocabulary in English.
28. I think it was nice to see how my knowledge
29. and my parents' knowledge were valued in the units. (Student's answer. Survey 2)

In the journal, one of the curricular unit designers quoted what a student mentioned while working on an activity related to the best methods for harvesting guavas.

Students are working in groups and one of them mentioned that now he knew how to harvest in English. I like this unit because it motivates me to improve not only what I do at home but also what I do here at school.

These answers show how students felt valued because their previous knowledge was taken into account. In a study related to teenagers' identity, carried out by López (2009), the author mentions that through fostering their sense of belonging, students continuously construct and re-construct their personal identity. That re-construction is based on the kind of interaction that they have with themselves and with the world around them.

### *Moving Towards Intercultural Understanding*

One of the main parts of the curricular units we designed was an intercultural component. Due to the fact that we wanted students to explore different aspects related to the diversity of their own culture, there were readings that aimed to provide students with information related to their own culture and the foreign language culture. Additionally, we expected them to recognize how diverse people are so that they would be tolerant and respectful towards English-speaking cultures.

During the analysis of the information, we found that students began to develop an intercultural understanding. They started to become aware of the relationship their culture had with other cultures. The curricular units allowed students to compare their own reality with that of people belonging to different cultures. They were able to interpret the intercultural issues from a critical perspective.

We found that students' reactions towards the implementation of the units were characterized by transactions between their own realities and others' realities. For the students, each curricular unit was a space to reflect on their realities and to learn about the realities of those who live in English-speaking countries. The curricular units allowed students to compare their daily experiences with the situations undergone by people in the texts. They began to become aware of the fact that they had experienced similar situations to the ones presented in the texts.

In the following excerpt of an interview, a student mentions her feelings in relation to the intercultural aspects that were part of the curricular units. At the beginning, we asked the student about the intercultural readings in general. After answering that she found the readings quite interesting because she did not know how similar to native English speakers people in her hometown could be, the student mentioned that she had thought people in Colombia were the only ones who harvested sugarcane. In that sense, she further asserted that it was good to know how other people use sugarcane to produce alcoholic beverages.

37. Well I found the readings interesting because
38. through them I realized that what we do here in Guavatá
39. is not far from what people in other places do.
40. I mean, there are many customs that we share with
41. those people we considered different.
42. For example, I did not know that in Barbados
43. people cultivate sugar cane and that they develop
44. different products out of it.
45. Well, in fact, I did not even know that they spoke English. (Interview 2T 1, I 1, L37- 4, Margalida)

As part of the survey, another student mentioned that she was not aware of some aspects related to her own culture. She further mentioned that it was useful to know about her own culture and contrast it with the others.

Although I was born here in Santander, I did not know it was one of the biggest places for harvesting guavas. I did not know how important Guavatá and Santander are for guava production. Now I can feel proud of the place where I was born and where I live because it is an important place. (Survey 2, Q5, MariaJosé)

In the same way, when asked about what the best part of the curricular units was, another student mentioned that the most outstanding part was the unit related to the intercultural component. He mentioned that he really enjoyed the reflective practice carried out at the end of it. He mentioned that, after carrying out the intercultural activity proposed, the teacher allowed them to talk about it and to share their points of view regarding the exercise.

My favorite part of the curricular units was the one in which we learned about different cultures. At the end of this part we were asked to think about similarities and differences between those cultures and our own culture, and I think we learned many new things that can be important for our future. (Survey 2, Q 5, WAAP93)

Another student mentioned that she liked the curricular units because she did not know that people eat guavas in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Ecuador. Students were unaware of the fact that people in other cultures were similar to them.

I liked the topic related to the guava because I did not know people in Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador and the United States eat guava. Of course I imagine that in those countries everything is of worse quality because Colombia is the best. (Student's answer. Survey 2)

At the beginning, students' opinions were characterized by some criticism regarding other cultures. Although they found similar concepts in the texts to what they had experienced in their realities, they could not understand why people behaved in a different way from the manner in which they would have reacted. Students' opinions were based on prejudices and stereotypes. However, after the discussions the English teacher held with them, they became more aware of cultural differences and began to understand that people are diverse.

In this sense, Iglesias (1999) suggests that one of the challenges that we as educators have is to let our classrooms be a place to understand, exchange, contrast, and negotiate cultures. By the same token, Smith (2003) asserts that one way to help students reflect in depth on themselves and other cultures is by using materials related to students' cultural experiences.

## **Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

Literature related to rural education highlights the need to take into account the specificities in rural education which need to be included in the curriculum. Few research studies reveal the impact of the implementation of pedagogical actions that attempt to cope with these needs. What we attempted with this pedagogical project was to experience the effect of incorporating students' context in the English instructional materials.

We noticed that curricular units were a step towards strengthening students' sense of cultural belonging. Students reported that they felt the activities in the curricular units helped them reflect upon and value their own culture. Students also mentioned they began developing skills to understand other cultures and so developed intercultural understanding.

In terms of the design of the curricular units, we think that we created an atmosphere that helped learners enjoy their English classes because they could relate the knowledge they had acquired at home to learning English. In this sense, Zuluaga, López, and Quintero (2009, p. 40) mention that "teachers must stimulate rural students to value their customs by encouraging them to talk about their surroundings and the richness of their culture. In this way, their English learning becomes more meaningful because the students constantly relate their daily experience to the activities carried out in class."

We do agree with Canagarajah (1999), who mentions that pedagogies need to be appropriated to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities. In this sense, we think that there is still much to be learned about this community in Guavatá. Although we wanted to focus on these rural eleventh graders' needs through the exercise of a needs analysis, we still think more information needs to be gathered and analyzed. By carrying

out such an activity, we will be able to make informed decisions that account completely for the needs these students have.

We believe that this experience has helped to create an appreciation for innovation and risk taking. Most importantly, not only do we believe that educators and teachers working together in rural areas can create better conditions for students in these areas, but also the rural school students can improve their English levels and educational conditions.

In relation to the pedagogical implications, we think that educators need to broaden their views regarding their students' culture. In this sense, teachers should avoid stereotypes that may brand their students as "good" or "bad," "poor" or "rich," "gifted" or "less gifted," or any other kind of classification. By doing this, educators would encourage equality in their classes which is a first step toward promoting intercultural individuals.

Besides eluding stereotypes, teachers should see their students as individuals with specific needs and diverse backgrounds that belong to certain social groups, more than seeing students as equal members with the same characteristics, needs, and interests in society.

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## The Authors

**Bertha Ramos Holguín** is an assistant professor at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. She holds an M.A. in Applied Linguistics from Universidad Distrital. She belongs to the research group “TONGUE.” She currently teaches at the Modern Languages and Foreign Languages Licenciatura programs and in the M.A. in Language Teaching at UPTC. She has co-authored English textbooks, and published research articles related to English Language Teaching.

**Jahir Aguirre Morales** is an assistant professor at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. He holds an M.A. in English Didactics from Universidad de Caldas. He belongs to the research group “TONGUE.” He currently teaches at the Modern Languages and Foreign Languages Licenciatura programs at UPTC. He has co-authored English textbooks, and published research articles related to English Language Teaching.

**Carmen Matilde Hernández** is an English teacher at Instituto Técnico Agropecuario in Guavatá, Santander. She holds a B.A. in Modern Languages from Universidad Distrital and is currently a candidate for the M.A. in Language Teaching. She belongs to the research group “TONGUE.”

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## Appendix 1: Initial Needs Analysis

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

Please answer the following questions:

What do you think about the written material being used by your English teacher?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the material for the English class is related to your context?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which topics would you like to see reflected in the English materials?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which topics catch your attention the most in the English material that is being used by your English teacher?

\_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of activities do you like the most when learning English?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the materials being used in your English classes are interesting? Why? Why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you

**Note:** This questionnaire was given to the students and to the English teacher in their native language: Spanish.

## **Appendix 2: Reading Related to an Intercultural Component**

### **Read the following text**

#### **Some Facts About Guavas**

Guava was originally found in Central America, more specifically in Mexico. Guava was a favorite food of the Aztecs and Incas. Soldiers used guava during the Second World War for nourishment; therefore, it was an important vitamin supplier for the army. Nowadays, guava is being cultivated all around the world. Guavas are cultivated in many tropical and subtropical countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, India, the United States, South Africa, Mexico, the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, among others.

Farmers distinguish between two main kinds of guavas: white and red. The most common kind of guava is the apple guava. Guava can be eaten raw or cooked. Some of the main products related to guava are these: juices, jams, guava pulp, guava loaf, dried guava, candies and jellies, among many others. A serving of guava contains only 50 calories, and guava is the only fruit that contains 16 vitamins. Nowadays, mothers-to-be, children, and elderly people eat lots of guavas because they contain vitamin C.

In Colombia, the departments that produce guava are Antioquía, Atlántico, Bolívar, Boyacá, Caldas, Córdoba, Cundinamarca, Huila, Meta, Santander, Tolima, and Valle, among others. The departments that have the highest guava production in Colombia are Santander, with 33%; Tolima, 18%; and Boyacá, 14%. Santander, Huila, Boyacá, Tolima, and Valle produce 5.5 tons of guavas per year. In these departments, people usually collect guavas manually.

The main municipalities that produce guava in Colombia are Vélez, Guavatá, Jesús María, Barbosa, Puente Nacional (Santander), and Moniquirá (Boyacá). The guava loaf factories are located in Vélez, Barbosa, Guavatá, and Moniquirá. During May and September, guava is scarce in the Santander and Boyacá departments. About 80% of the people involved in guava loaf production learned about its harvesting through their families. In Colombia, the owner of the company where guava loaf is produced is usually the father of the family, and, generally, the wife and children work cultivating guavas and helping with their production. Usually, kids help at home and attend school as well. One of the main problems farmers face is the lack of technology for growing guava. Furthermore, the price of guava fluctuates, affecting the family's economy.

## Reading Comprehension Activity

Rewrite the following numbers with words. Then, write what those numbers refer to in the reading.

Number	Number in words	It refers to...
50	Fifty	The guava's calories
33%		
14		
5,5		

### Answer the following questions:

Who used guava for nourishment during the Second World War? \_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of guavas does the passage mention? \_\_\_\_\_

In which countries do people cultivate guavas? \_\_\_\_\_

Which is the Colombian department with the highest guava production? \_\_\_\_\_

What does the reading say about Guavatá? \_\_\_\_\_

### Get into groups of three people. Then, answer the following questions:

Does your family cultivate guavas? \_\_\_\_\_

If your answer is yes, do they cultivate guavas manually? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you work cultivating guavas? \_\_\_\_\_

What else do you do during your week? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree with the last paragraph of the reading? \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Task to Be Developed at Home

#### Do it at home: Did you know that...

Read the following statements.

- People in Hawaii eat guavas with soy sauce, vinegar, and black pepper.
- Some people in Hawaii prefer eating guavas in punch or ice sodas.
- People in Pakistan and India eat raw guava with salt and pepper.
- Guava juice is very popular in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Egypt, Mexico, and South Africa.
- In the West Indies, some people replace red tomatoes with guavas in their sauces.
- A common dessert in the West Indies is stewed guava shells (*cascos de guayaba*). They are often eaten with cream cheese.
- In the Caribbean area, one of the most popular canned products made from the guava is nectar.
- In India, some people use dehydrated guavas to flavor ice cream.
- In South Africa, guavas are mixed with cornmeal to make breakfast cereal.

Based on the previous statements, complete the following chart:

Country	Guavas product

## **Appendix 4: Task to Be Done at Home with Parents**

### **With your parents' help**

Ask your parents or your relatives about the most common guava products in your town.  
Write their answers on the lines provided.