

# Integrating the Coffee Culture with the Teaching of English

## Integración de la cultura cafetera con la enseñanza del inglés

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The present article gives account of the results of a research project developed at the University of Caldas with a group of preservice teachers and advisors. The purpose of the work was to sensitize the academic community about the importance of rescuing the cultural identity of rural school students. To achieve this goal, advisors and preservice teachers innovated the school curriculum by integrating the coffee culture to the English program. The study revealed that preservice teachers became skillful at designing content-based tasks that were more meaningful for the students; likewise, they became more sensitive to the problems that affected rural students and their families. It was also found that these students became aware of the commitment they had with the region and its surroundings; furthermore, because classes were more appealing, their motivation increased significantly.

*Key words:* Cultural integration, curriculum, preservice teacher, foreign language teaching-learning process, rural school

Este artículo da cuenta de los resultados de una investigación desarrollada en la Universidad de Caldas con un grupo de educadores en formación y sus asesoras, con el fin de sensibilizar a la comunidad académica sobre la importancia de rescatar la identidad cultural de los estudiantes de las escuelas rurales. Para lograr este objetivo, las asesoras y educadores en formación realizaron innovaciones en el currículo al integrar la cultura cafetera a los contenidos de los cursos de inglés. El estudio demostró que los docentes en formación desarrollaron habilidades para diseñar actividades que integraran los contenidos de inglés con la cultura cafetera y que fueran más significativas para los estudiantes. Asimismo, se mostraron más sensibles hacia los problemas que afectaban a los estudiantes y a sus familias. Se encontró también que los estudiantes de las escuelas rurales se concientizaron acerca del compromiso que debían tener con la región y sus alrededores. Puesto que las clases fueron más atractivas, los niveles de motivación de los estudiantes incrementaron significativamente.

*Palabras clave:* Integración cultural, currículo, practicante, procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, escuela rural

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## Introduction

One of the most recent innovations in the curriculum of teacher preparation at the University of Caldas in Manizales has been the design of an educational project whose main purpose is to improve the quality of the learning and teaching process. This project is developed along the teaching practicum, and it was completed during the last academic year in different schools of the region.

The practicum model in the Modern Languages program requires the formation of small collaborative groups of 4 or 5 students and advisors with experience in doing educational research. Collaborative groups of this kind allow all the participants to learn, teach and carry out research simultaneously.

Considering the importance that B.A. programs have in state universities for the formation of highly qualified teachers, a group of practicum advisors from the Modern Language Program of the University of Caldas started questioning themselves about ways to improve preservice teachers' performance in rural institutions, where they were carrying out their teaching practicum. Thus, being aware of the fact that the curricula must respond to the social, political, economic and cultural necessities of the country and the region, advisors began to make preservice teachers aware of the importance of comprehending the relationship between the rural context and the teaching-learning processes of a foreign language. At the same time, preservice teachers were instructed to design contextualized English classes in those rural institutions in order to transform the current social, cultural and educational situation. Thus, the relationship amongst language, learning and culture was constantly enhanced.

The project "Integrating the Coffee Culture with the Teaching of English" arose from the im-

portance of rescuing rural students' roots and origin, and the need for rescuing their cultural identity. Researchers are aware that people from rural areas have adopted new patterns and lifestyles which have been imposed on them through the modernization of their society. Moreover, considering that the teaching of a language requires the learning of culture, lessons were designed including contents associated with the coffee culture.

## Context of the Research

The present study was conducted at rural schools, located in the nearby areas of Manizales. These institutions have an average of 251 students and their socioeconomic stratum is classified as middle-low and low. Students' parents have different kinds of occupations such as housewives, street vendors, farmers or factory employees. Some of the teachers hold Bachelors of Arts degrees and others hold Masters' degrees.

The methodology that the Institutional Educational Project (Proyecto Educativo Institucional: PEI) proposes for these rural institutions is "New School". This methodology takes into account the necessities and perspectives of students, teachers, parents and rural communities. The PEI's main objective is to foster the development of skills and values such as autonomy, freedom, democracy, responsibility, sincerity, respect, justice, honesty, co-operation and tolerance.

Rural schools have the mission of offering a modern and democratic education, suitable for dealing with the latest technological and scientific advances. Furthermore, these schools intend to provide students with an education for local development, aimed at recognizing their own culture. In addition, students are expected to participate in community projects. The responsibilities derived from their involvement in those projects help

them to become critical and reflective individuals so that they can make their own decisions for improving their standard of living.

One of the main characteristics of the rural curriculum is its relationship with the community and the implementation of interactive pedagogy which allows learners to incorporate their previous knowledge into their learning process. In the meantime, this approach gives them the tools to face situations that affect their communities. Consequently, “New School methodology” emerges as an alternative to solve the most common problems of remote rural schools with disperse populations and low income students. This pedagogical model helps students to undergo a significant learning process. Summarized below are some concepts given by Psacharopoulos, Rojas & Vélez (1993) which establish the difference between traditional and New School methodology.

- New School methodology attempts to integrate institutions and the community by encouraging teachers, students and parents to participate in school activities. The main objective is to actively involve parents to support their children’s learning.
- The New School curriculum is rural-oriented. The guides, developed by teachers themselves, help them adapt the national curriculum to regional and local needs, and encourage the practical application of what is learned in school about community life.
- New School methodology requires specially trained teachers in two areas. They should know both the subject matter, as well as the application of the program’s methodology.
- Teachers and administrators are taught to involve the community and use new educational materials, students’ self instructed textbooks, and the school library. The training, as well as the design of materials, is done sequentially

so that teachers can gradually apply what they learn. Training becomes an active learning process about how to implement the program.

- A curriculum component consists of guides for students and manuals for teachers and supervisors. The guides facilitate individual as well as group work.
- Rural institutions using New School methodology are multigrade, meaning that one or two teachers instruct children of different grades, who are all working in one or two classrooms.
- Students are promoted to the next grade once they have achieved the minimum educational objectives, which could take more or less than the traditional academic year.
- There is a lot of interaction in New School methodology. Peer work is very common in which the older students help younger ones.
- Schools have study corners and a small library. These study corners are established as areas for activities focusing on different subjects, such as math, science, social studies, etc. The library provides support not only for students, but also for the whole community as it is, of course, an information center.

### The Colombian Coffee Region

Located in the central part of the country and surrounded by the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda and Quindío, the **Coffee Region** is one of the most beautiful areas in the country with coffee plantations, streams, small valleys and fertile volcanic soils. It also has a pleasant climate and a landscape of gentle hills which allow or foment rich agricultural production.

Cities and towns were built along the mountains by the first settlers coming from Antioquia, and the new generations have preserved, to a large extent, their ancestors’ traditions, especially those that

deal with myths and legends, food, home remedies, and housing styles. The region's colorful landscape is characterized by coffee farms and products such as plantains, corn, bananas, cassava, sugar cane and fruits like oranges, tangerines, lemons, and passion fruit, among others. The land, however, is used not only to grow products, but also to build parks, hotels, museums, and ecological trails.

### Reasons for the Coffee Crisis

Coffee production and exports have had a significant impact on the Colombian economy and employment; however, one reason for the crisis is that most coffee growers depend mainly on the production of a single crop with no other sources of income; consequently, if there is a loss in the production or a drop in the international price, coffee growers cannot cover their expenses. Another reason is that some farmers have migrated to cities in order to search for better opportunities. This has affected both the farmers' families and the society in general because they do not have either the education or the preparation to work in anything other than agriculture. As a result, this migration has increased the unemployment level in the city.

Considering the problems mentioned above and bearing in mind that rural students are directly affected by the migration of their parents to the cities, the researchers intended through this work to sensitize the academic community and to develop awareness of the importance of rescuing the cultural identity in rural classrooms. Then, meaningful research questions were posed.

### Research Questions

- In which ways do preservice teachers and advisors incorporate the students' cultural background in the English curriculum?
- In which ways does the teaching process engaged in by preservice teachers in rural schools contribute to enhance the students' knowledge and cultural identity of the coffee culture?
- How can preservice teachers promote meaningful learning in rural schools?

### Purposes for Conducting the Study

- To encourage preservice teachers to integrate the coffee culture into the teaching of English in rural schools.
- To incorporate rural students' cultural background in the English curriculum.
- To enhance students' awareness of their cultural identity in rural schools.
- To promote meaningful learning in rural schools through the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching guides considering New School methodology.

### Previous Research Projects

Previous studies have been done by other researchers at the University of Caldas (Arenas, Cardona & Quintero, 2000; Cardona & Quintero, 1996). These studies have demonstrated that teacher-centered classes still prevail in most of the schools in Manizales. Hence, the tasks and activities designed by the teachers are frequently repetitive and meaningless; these permit neither enough student interaction nor communication. Activities are not in context, cultural aspects are rarely included, and language skills are not integrated.

Results obtained from these previous projects have suggested some modifications in which teachers should change their role as controller and provider of knowledge to that of guide or counselor; therefore, students should take a more active part in the learning process. These studies have also recommended promoting learner autonomy, so that teachers can give more responsibilities to students in such a way that they can solve problems and make decisions about what, where, when and how to learn.

### **Culture as an Essential Component of an English Program Design**

It is clear that teaching a language is not just teaching linguistics, phonetics and vocabulary. Learning a language involves more than that, it involves culture and communication. When people communicate, they share a particular system of cultural meanings such as feelings, memories, experiences, values, customs and beliefs. "Because language is the primary means for transmitting culture from one generation to the next, much of any culture is encoded in linguistic form" (Spradley, 1980, p. 12).

Back to the Latin root, "cultura" means to cultivate, and the German root "Volksgeist", refers to "the spirit of a people". Culture generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. In general, the term *culture* includes knowledge, technology, art, customs, as well as moral systems and many other practices and capacities acquired by men which are transmitted from one generation to another.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social researchers paved the way for the modern understanding of culture. Notable anthropologists began studying culture

as an object of scientific analysis. Spradley (1980, p. 6) defines culture as "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior". As a result, children are able to acquire their culture in an ongoing and endless process by observing adults, doing things and using language. They observe what people do (cultural behavior); they observe things people make and use such as clothes and tools (cultural artifacts); and they listen to what people say (speech messages).

Geertz (1973) states that culture is a coherent system of meaning. He provides educational researchers with a theoretical and methodological framework called "deep description". "Deep description" of culture has implications not only for social sciences but, in our case, for educational practices. According to Geertz, human actions and cultural meaning vary according to the patterns of life. Social actions and social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be intellectually described.

Researchers constantly make cultural inferences from what people say, from the way they act, and from the artifacts they use. Spradley (1980, p. 3), one of the most outstanding researchers, argues that ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnographers is to understand another way of life from the native point of view.

The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture; ethnography always implies a theory of culture (Spradley, 1980, p. 5).

Useful meanings concerning the relationship amongst culture, language and school practices can be summarized in the following list:

- Educators can be provided with a set of useful tools to understand school life.
- The acquisition of language accelerates the learning process.
- People use their culture to interpret experience and do things.
- The total way of life of a people is considered.
- The way of thinking, feeling, and believing affects the relationships between teachers and students.
- A deeper comprehension of the classroom offers mechanisms for the normative regulation of behavior.
- Cultural knowledge is so important in generating behavior and interpreting our experience.

The abovementioned definitions of what culture is and what culture implies for educators are coherent with Law of Education 115 (MEN, 1994) and the Colombian Political Constitution, which are the basis of the school curriculum. Thus, to orient the teaching-learning process in terms of multicultural demands, it is necessary to overcome language barriers. According to the Ministry of National Education (MEN, 1999), education should transcend political and economic differences, and should emphasize the cultural values that promote respect for cultural diversity.

In Colombia, the Curriculum Guidelines for Foreign Language Teaching, according to the Ministry of National Education (MEN, 1999), claims that a person who learns in an intercultural environment is an individual that possesses his own culture, but is open and tolerant towards other cultures. He perceives the foreign culture from his own perspective and observes the outside world by taking into consideration his self-

awareness and personal values. During the process of language learning and acquisition, learners become familiar with different cultures, are able to understand the difference between the way other people think, feel, and see life from the other people's perspective. Grabe & Stoller (1997, p. 7) point out that: "It is possible to understand other cultures without losing respect for one's own". In this way, foreign language teaching and learning become a valuable means to acquire and produce new knowledge, to have access to scientific and technological advances and to enjoy the socio-cultural integration as a whole.

### **Theories that Support the Relationship amongst Language, Learning and Culture**

Content-based instruction, according to Grabe & Stoller (1997), is a method that gives importance to the different skills associated with the language, and to meaningful learning; however, its main emphasis is on the content rather than the linguistic component of the language. As students learn the language they also learn about different cultural topics that relate to their own experiences and needs. The class atmosphere facilitates individual and social learning because students interact with each other. The activities in class are meaningful and significant as they involve other methods and techniques such as cooperative learning, which is based on experiential learning, project work, constructivism, interactive school environment, authentic material and communication.

The whole language movement (Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Goodman, 1989; Newman, 1985; Watson, 1989) has a philosophical foundation based on varied research carried out in linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and child development,

among others, with the purpose of creating a conducive classroom environment for learning. The whole language approach is based on two historical traditions: social reconstruction and student-centered classes. Students are encouraged to ask questions and answer them grounded in their own experiences, needs and expectations. The language is taught through specific contents and topics.

The sociolinguistic competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980) refers to the capacity a student has to communicate linguistically and meaningfully. The student follows the socio-cultural rules of the language as culture represents different dialects, idiomatic expressions and individual characteristics of each region. This competence is demonstrated by appropriate use of the language according to the context. From a socio-linguistic point of view, language is real, natural, interesting, comprehensible and relevant when it has social application for the students.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1964) affirms that learning takes place in social interaction. The environment where the individual lives and the social interaction determine the intellectual capacities which are crucial to the learning process. When the individual learns about the culture of the language, he changes his way of thinking and these changes allow him to successfully adapt to the values and traditions of the other culture.

## Research Methodology

This project followed the action-research model because the researchers were aware of the importance of becoming reflective, observant and transformative teachers. In addition, this was a research experience in which advisors, preservice teachers and rural school students had the opportunity to observe, describe, reflect and develop some learning and teaching strategies in order to

improve the English learning process. Likewise, action-research gives teachers and students the opportunity to be conscious of their educational practice in the classroom by dealing with the needs and the problems of the social, economical and political context that affect rural school life.

The definitions given below support the process carried out by preservice teachers and advisors during the project.

Action-research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the productivity, rationality, and justice of their own social and educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 28).

Elliott (1991, p. 69) states that "Action-research is the study of a social situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it". Likewise, Corey (1953, p. 6), one of the pioneers in action-research, claims that: "Action-research is a process in which practitioners study problems scientifically so that they can evaluate, improve and steer decision-making and practice".

This project also assimilates the features and principles of case study. This approach is used because it is compatible with action-research which demands a comprehensive moment, and because it is research on a small-scale. A case is "the bounded system or the object of study, it might be an event, a process, a program, or several people" (Stake, 1995, p. 82).

As classroom research simply tries to investigate what actually happens inside the classroom, Creswell (1998, p. 249) states that: "A qualitative case study provides an in-depth study of this system, based on a diverse array of data collection materials, and the researcher situates this system or case within its larger context or setting".

## Participants

The participants of this research project included 3 advisors from the B.A. program in Modern Languages, 5 preservice teachers, ages ranging between 20 and 25 years, 3 rural schools and an average of 175 rural school students (approximately thirty-five students per group). Their geographical origin was rural schools located in nearby zones of Manizales, and their ages ranged between 10 and 17.

## Data Gathering, Instruments and Techniques

Throughout the development of the project, the researchers used several instruments and techniques to collect classroom data such as observation, informal talks, audio, video recordings, field notes, transcripts and document reviews.

## Diagnostic Stage

The first step was to review the Institutional Educational Project–(PEI) of the rural schools involved in the research. Then some observations were carried out to get acquainted with the way English classes were taught and to find out about the type of materials used to develop lessons.

The first aspect found in the diagnosis was the difficulty rural schools had achieving the objectives stated in the institutional mission and vision, so that students could develop their awareness to value their own culture. Although rural schools have specific guidelines, they do not focus on the importance of coffee cultural, social, economical and political implications. Only the subjects of history and biology included some topics concerning coffee culture. It was also found that English teachers were unable to accomplish

the pedagogical principles proposed by the New School methodology.

Concerning students' English level, it was found that it was very low, and did not respond to the parameters established by the Ministry of National Education. The lack of motivation and interest in learning English depended on several factors such as an inadequate methodology: teacher-centered classes, use of the grammar translation approach and lack of sequential and relevant topics. In addition, it was found that resources such as videos, films, recordings or materials that could promote active participation in class were not used. Thus, the diagnosis confirmed once more the absence of a contextualized curriculum that could enhance language learning and promote intercultural communication.

## Action Stage

Once the diagnostic stage was completed, researchers planned some actions to be taken in the action stage. At this point the collaborative group –advisors and preservice teachers– developed lesson plans and designed materials to be used in the English classes. These lesson plans were intended to integrate language and content with topics related to the coffee culture, such as the farmers' lifestyle and their surroundings, housing, clothing, health, economy, and the coffee growing process. Once the class was over, preservice teachers reflected upon the effectiveness of the activities and methodology used as well as on the achievements students obtained. Finally, researchers decided on what to improve or change. In the meantime, advisors observed trainees' classes, described in detail the process and included comments and suggestions about their strengths and weaknesses.



The extracts below (Samples 1, 2, 3, and 4) give an account of the lessons developed by preservice teachers:

**Sample 1. Means of transportation**

**Topic:** Means of transportation

**Grade:** 9<sup>th</sup>

**Communicative goals:** To talk about the different means of transportation in the coffee region, describe ways of living, differentiate uses of transportation.

**Linguistic goals:** To review the simple present, to practice some adjectives, and to learn vocabulary about transportation.

**Presentation**

What are the different means of transportation in the coffee region?

How are they classified?

What means of transportation do you use?

**Practice**

Task 1. Reading comprehension

There are some different means of transportation in the coffee region which are classified by people according to their most frequent usage. For example, jeeps are commonly located in the town's square, and their main activity is to transport peasants, farmers and visitors to the country houses. Sometimes the jeeps are used to carry agricultural products like coffee, plantains, tomatoes, etc. Although most jeep drivers are very rigid about the transportation fares, people try to bargain from time to time.

Task 2. Answer the following questions according to the former reading:

1. Where do drivers usually park their jeeps?
2. Who usually travels by jeep in the coffee region?
3. What kinds of products are transported in jeeps?
4. Do jeep drivers ever bargain fares?

Task 3. Look at the vehicles below and circle the most common in your region. Draw some others you know in the empty squares.

**Production**

Choose one of the vehicles above and describe it in the same way as the former reading about jeeps. Share your description with your classmates.

**Sample 2.** Cristian Camilo can grow coffee

**Topic:** Cristian Camilo can grow coffee

**Grade:** 7<sup>th</sup>

**Communicative goal:** To ask and answer questions about what one can do or cannot do.

**Linguistic goals:** To practice the auxiliary *can* in affirmative and negative sentences.

**Presentation**

What activities can you do at the farm?

Can you milk a cow?

Can your father drive a truck?

**Practice**

Task 1. Writing activity

The teacher models some activities she can and cannot do. Ex “I can milk a cow but I cannot play the guitar”. She writes the examples on the board; then, she instructs the students to write similar sentences about what they can or cannot do.

Task 2. The students practice creating questions using the structures *can* and *can't* and then writing the answers.

Task 3. The students complete a chart about their abilities to do different activities (climb a tree, play *tejo*, grow berries, plant beans and pick coffee beans) individually. Then they get in groups and ask each other if they can do or not these activities. Finally they ask the teacher.

**Production**

The teacher introduces the use of *can* in past tense “could” Ex. “When I was five I could run but I couldn't ride a bike”. Then she asks the students to write similar sentences. (When I was seven I could climb a tree but I couldn't plant coffee).

**Sample 3. Eating at my uncle's farm**

**Topic:** Eating at my uncle's farm

**Grade:** 8<sup>th</sup>

**Communicative goal:** To express preferences, to use vocabulary related to typical food.

**Linguistic goals:** To practice simple past, likes and dislikes.

**Presentation**

What plants of the coffee region do you know about?  
What kind of food do people eat in the coffee region?  
What fruits do people eat at the coffee farm?

**Practice**

Task 1. Reading activity  
The teacher gives the students a reading.

**My Uncle's Farm**

Today I was with my family at my uncle's farm. There I could see many things I liked very much; for instance, some animals and the landscape. But best of all it was the food because I ate delicious fruits and dishes I had not eaten for a long time. My uncle offered us oranges, avocados, guavas, tangerines, papayas and plantains that he cultivated in his farm.

The students read and in groups write a list of all the fruits and plants that are mentioned in the text.

Task 2. The teacher gives the students a handout where they have to match a drawing of a fruit with the corresponding word. Then they color the drawings and talk about the fruit they like most.

**Production**

The students write a short paragraph about their own farm including the products they cultivate.

#### Sample 4. Description of the coffee plant

**Topic:** Description of the coffee plant

**Grade:** 7<sup>th</sup>

**Communicative goal:** To describe the coffee plant.

**Linguistic goals:** To practice simple present and vocabulary related to the coffee plant.

##### **Presentation**

The teacher brings a real coffee plant to the classroom. She shows the students its different parts: root, stem, leaves, grains, flowers and branches.

She then asks them the following questions:

What other plants of the coffee region do you know about?

What fruits do they produce?

Describe their parts.

##### **Practice**

Task 1. Reading activity

The teacher gives the following reading to the students:

##### **Description of the Coffee Plant**

A big coffee tree has thick foliage with dark green leaves. As it grows they change to a light green. The size and the shape of the leaves depend on the varieties and the cultivation system. In Colombian varieties the tree has oval leaves, opposite to each other. The most common varieties of coffee plants in Colombia are *Caturra* and *Arabic*. The flowers are white and small, the fruits are green when they are not mature and red when they are ripe; they are called “cherry coffee beans”. Each bean has two grains facing each other. The trunk grows vertically and may reach up to 1.5 meters.

Task 2. The students answer some reading comprehension questions and then complete some sentences with information from the text.

Task 3. The teacher distributes some handouts among the students with illustrations of the different parts of the coffee plants. They have to label the diagrams according to the information from the reading.

##### **Production**

The students choose one of the illustrations and describe it to the class.

## Findings

Once the data gathered were analyzed, a great improvement was found in both preservice teachers and their rural students. The information is summarized in the sample below:

### Sample 5. Achievements of both preservice teachers and rural school students

Preservice teachers	Rural school students
Acquired knowledge about the culture of the region (customs, economy, geography, history, health, agriculture, technology, etc.).	Became aware of the commitment they have with their region and its surroundings.
Became aware of the richness the coffee region possesses.	Developed an ecological conscience by taking better care of nature and protecting their soil, flora and fauna.
Developed a real sense of belonging due to the cultural aspects of the region.	Developed a real sense of belonging due to the cultural aspects of the region.
Contributed to the updating of the school's curriculum.	Became aware of the richness the coffee region possesses.
Learned how to integrate language and content.	Learned more about their culture in their English classes.
The English classroom became a space for reflection about the problems and limitations that the region has.	Became more motivated to learn English since they found that their classes were meaningful and included topics that were familiar to them.
Became skillful at designing appropriate materials such as guides, flashcards, posters, pamphlets, maps, games, picture dictionaries, etc.	Became less dependent on grammar learning and interacted more in class.
Became aware of the properties of coffee and its use.	Had the opportunity to create materials that contributed to their learning English.
Became sensitive to the problems that affected the students and their families.	Internalized language and content.
Promoted changes and improvements in the class processes.	Made connections between English and other subjects (math, science, social studies, etc.).
Learned how to use research tools properly (diaries, surveys, observational entries, interviews, etc.).	Became more involved and more responsible for their own learning by doing extra class activities.
Preservice teachers also became skillful at: -Becoming more reflective and critical. -Making decisions and solving problems. -Learning to accept and tolerate constructive criticism. -Designing content-based tasks that were more meaningful for the students.	Finally, the students concluded that it was important to learn English to have a better future; they were very enthusiastic to study the Coffee Region because they said that it was a new way to learn easier and to know more about the place where they live; they could enjoy the English class.

The following testimonies reflect the achievements obtained by both preservice teachers and their students:

### Preservice Teachers

We really learned new things about our region and culture; for instance, we found that the country people know when to sow and when to harvest.

I was able to understand the difficulties the students have to go through to attend school and to finish their studies.

It was very interesting to adapt the class contents to the rural students' real life situations.

The materials I designed for my classes helped me to involve the students in their own learning process since they referred to topics that were familiar to their own rural context.

I became more analytical and reflective about the class process.

The research instruments that I used helped me not only to gather data, but also to analyze and compare the results obtained.

The strategies that we as modern languages trainees are committed to are the educative ones because we have the possibility of generating solutions from the classroom to problems we all are involved in. On the other hand, students require clear goals to learn a language, goals related to their own interests and context.

### Students

What the teacher taught us was very good [interesting], specially the vocabulary and expressions.

Now I love my country and my region even more because we have many beautiful plants and animals. We get our food from the crops we grow.

I learned a lot, especially about things you can make with coffee and the benefit it gives to our families. The readings that the teacher gave us in class were very cool.

I had a lot of fun in the English classes because I learned English and also about our land, plants, and different crops such as coffee, plantains and bananas.

I learned to take care of the water, our land and animals.

## Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

Integrating language, culture and curriculum in the B.A. program through research is a clear way to demonstrate how the university can project and develop curricular proposals that contribute to problem solving in the educational community and to promote their own identity and values. Therefore, it is of vital importance to integrate the culture of the region in which the students live with learning English so that the rural students can learn in a more meaningful way.

This type of research contributes to the development of awareness about the importance of preserving the Colombian culture and the traditions of its ancestors in the Coffee Region. 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 learning English becomes more meaningful because the students constantly relate their daily experiences to the activities carried out in class. Strategies implemented in rural schools with the students such as project work, collaborative and cooperative work, contribute to a successful learning process.

On the other hand, it is important for rural school English teachers to consider the students' social background and their previous knowledge acquired in their surroundings to make learning more successful. Instead of replicating mechanical drills coming from the textbooks, teachers should assign their pupils relevant tasks, not only to develop their sense of autonomy, but to raise their enthusiasm and commitment, and thus, make the learning process more fun.

The curriculum in programs that educate teachers must include subjects in the research field which guide students toward the development of competences such as critical thinking, interpretation, context recognition, analysis, and the creation of questions. By so doing, preservice teachers can develop a descriptive research competence that allows them to solve problems or improve situations in the rural communities.

Research practices enable university professors and preservice teachers to design projects that integrate research, pedagogy and their discipline to solve problems and increase cultural knowledge. These types of projects strengthen the relationship between the University and public education, and respond to the policies stated in their Institutional Educational Project. This is a requirement of the Colombian Law of Education 115 (MEN, 1994), for basic education.

Finally, this study impacted preservice teachers, schools, students and the region since it transformed the traditional methodology previously used. It also changed the relationship between advisors and trainees, and improved the relationship between the University and rural schools. The authors hope that this research will give ideas to other teachers and encourage them to integrate culture with the teaching of English not only in the coffee region but all over Colombia.

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