27 MONTHS OF SOLITUDE: A PEACE CORPS STORY

By

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ABSTRACT

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In 2014, I was sent to Colombia's Caribbean coast to serve as an English teacher through the Peace Corps. I spent two years teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) with Colombian counterparts, at both the elementary and secondary levels in Colombian public school settings, which included time in both urban and rural areas. Despite many hardships and setbacks, my experience in the Peace Corps was positive. By teaching phonemic awareness and the alphabet at the elementary level, and focusing on vocabulary, test-taking strategies, and reading comprehension strategies at the secondary level, I was able to make a positive impact in public schools which had previously never hosted a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV).

This project tells the story of my experiences during the Master's International Program, beginning with my time at Humboldt State University, followed by my Pre-Service Training in Colombia. As a PCV in Colombia, I describe the four months I spent living, working, and observing English classes in a rural town, before moving to my final site placement. I then describe the remainder of my first year of service co-teaching at the primary-school level, as well as my second year of service co-teaching at the secondary-school level. I also include a description of my community English class, and my after-

school English club. More specifically, this M.A. project describes a few successful activities that worked in the classroom, as well as some challenges that I faced often due to the cultural context of teaching on the Colombian coast. Additionally, this M.A. project discusses what I now believe I would do differently after having had some time for reflection.

The final portion of my M.A. project describes my experience with different secondary projects including a photography camp, music lessons, and a skateboarding group. My aim is that readers will be inspired by my journey to join the Peace Corps, and that future Peace Corps Volunteers will learn about the rewards that come with finishing one's service.

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CHAPTER 1: A DESIRE TO VOLUNTEER

Most volunteers join the Peace Corps for a combination of both selfish and selfless reasons; my reasons were much the same. Personally, my Peace Corps service began out of a longing for adventure: I wanted to learn Spanish, and I wanted to travel, but I also wanted to help. Before joining the Peace Corps, I had felt a desire for growth on both a personal and a professional level, but I knew that I would not find what I was after solely in school or at an average job. I wanted something more. I wanted to offer assistance to a community that was requesting aid, which is what the Peace Corps is designed to do.

This M.A. project will describe my Peace Corps service, while focusing on things that worked in the classroom because of my TEFL training, as well as things that did not work in the classroom, often due to the cultural context of teaching on the Colombian coast. It will also discuss things I now believe I would do differently after having had some time for reflection. More than that, this project offers an honest portrayal of the challenges of a two-year-long commitment to service. I wish to illustrate how my training in TEFL and the cultural context of Colombia affected these challenges and successes, with the hopes that future volunteers in Colombia will learn from my experiences.

Before beginning my service, I looked at several other volunteer programs, but I applied to the Peace Corps because I believed in their mission, and I still do. I could have paid $50, taken an online course, and received a TEFL certificate. I could have moved to Latin America on my own, or I could have bought the language program Rosetta Stone,

and studied Spanish in my bedroom. But I chose the Peace Corps because it is a 27-month-long commitment, which offers volunteers a lot of time to learn, to grow, and to help. Although the Peace Corps has its flaws, as all overseas-volunteer programs do, I believed a key difference between other programs and the Peace Corps was in their three-month-long Pre-Service Training and their two-year-long commitment to service. Two years is a long time, and it takes dedication and perseverance to finish one's service.

The Peace Corps was something I had been curious about for years before making the decision to apply, and I wanted to be as prepared as I could be before I left for my service. Education is the Peace Corps largest program area, and it was the field I wanted to work in as a volunteer (Peace Corps). Instead of joining the Peace Corps right out of college, I went to California State University, Fullerton to receive my teaching credential in social science, which I completed in January 2013. I thought that having teaching experience would help me as a volunteer. As I finished the credential program, I then applied to the Master's International Program (MIP) at Humboldt State University (HSU) because I was looking to continue my education, and the program seemed to be exactly what I was looking for. At the time, the Peace Corps advertised for the Master's International Program on their website with an advertisement that read something like, "Can't decide between the Peace Corps and grad school? Why not both?" I thought that if I could apply my teaching experience to the Peace Corps and work on my Master's degree at the same time, I would be able to grow both personally and professionally. More specifically, the English program at HSU was going to add theory to my education background, as well as training on how to work with non-native speakers.

So in the Fall of 2013, I began taking English classes at HSU. The MIP was structured so that I would spend two semesters before I left for the Peace Corps studying how to teach English as a second and foreign language (TESL / TEFL). Then, I would have three months of Peace Corps training in the host country, followed by my two years of service. Finally, I would return to HSU to document my experience teaching English in the Peace Corps by writing an M.A. project. This M.A. project is a culmination of my lived experiences during my time at HSU, as well as my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Colombia.

What I discovered during my time in the Peace Corps was that, like many things in life, no amount of training could have prepared me for the obstacles I faced. Although the training I did receive left me feeling prepared, the reality of living as a PCV in Colombia was different than I had imagined it would be, based on the training I received. When reflecting on my Peace Corps service, both during and after, there was so much more I wish I had accomplished. I had a teaching credential. I had spent a year at HSU studying TESL and TEFL. I had read Colombian history books, books on the history of the Peace Corps, and Peace Corps memoirs. I had studied Spanish, and I had completed my Peace Corps training. Yet I would discover that I was still unprepared for the obstacles I faced, both in and out of the classroom.

This project is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2, Preparing to Volunteer, will discuss my experience at HSU prior to joining the Peace Corps, as well as my three months of Pre-Service Training (PST) in Colombia. Chapter 3, Teaching English in Colombia, will focus on my experiences as a volunteer co-teaching with a Colombian

counterpart in public schools at both the elementary and secondary levels, as well as in my community English classes. These two chapters aim to summarize those experiences by describing the knowledge I gained at HSU and the application of those ideas as they manifested in a Colombian public-school setting. I will also describe my experiences with the Peace Corps and with Colombian school administration, as well as highlight important aspects of co-teaching and classroom activities during both years of my Peace Corps service. Chapter 4, Finding Success through Secondary Projects, will describe my most successful secondary project, where I started a co-ed skateboarding group in my community. This chapter provides my central argument for the importance of finishing my service. Finally, Chapter 5, Close of Service, will conclude my M.A. project with my final thoughts about my experience as a PCV in Colombia.

Although the Peace Corps can be challenging, the rewards I gained from my service far outweighed any negative aspects I experienced. I believe that future volunteers can learn a lot from the wide array of obstacles I dealt with during my time in Colombia. For this reason, a major theme of my M.A. project will be overcoming my feelings of isolation, which was a challenge that I dealt with throughout my service. The Peace Corps can be an extremely lonely experience, yet as a volunteer, I was never alone. I learned to appreciate the benefits of this by relying heavily on my fellow volunteers for support, as well as my Peace Corps host families.

My hope is that readers engage with the text, and ask questions throughout the following chapters. These chapters describe many uncomfortable moments throughout my service, but I hope that each moment provides an opportunity to learn, or at the very

least encourages readers to reflect on what they would do differently if they had been in my situation. As I look back and reflect on my service, I have asked myself the following questions: “Is that how I would handle that situation again? How could I have handled it better? What would I do differently? Would that experience affect me the same way now?” These are all questions that I have had to address for myself throughout the writing of this M.A. project, and I hope that readers learn from my experiences as I describe my Peace Corps service in Colombia.

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING TO VOLUNTEER

This chapter, which describes the beginnings of my Master's International Program, is divided into two sections. The first section will describe my year of graduate studies courses in the English department at Humboldt State University during the 2013-2014 school year prior to joining the Peace Corps. I will discuss a variety of important teaching methods, concepts, and ideas that helped set a foundation for my experience as an EFL teacher. This section will discuss information from my courses at HSU as it related to my Peace Corps service by describing different readings, projects, and assignments that helped shape my experience in Colombia. My coursework at HSU, and this initial aspect of the MIP, is largely unique in that the majority of PCVs do not receive this additional year of training before becoming volunteers. The second section will examine my three months of Peace Corps training in Colombia from August to November, 2014. Together, these two sections outline my reasons for why I felt prepared as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Furthermore, these sections foreshadow how, despite my training, I often times felt overwhelmed by the obstacles I faced during my service.

Humboldt State University

My section on HSU will discuss the lesson and topics I covered mostly in my second language acquisition-focused classes, including English 635: *Issues in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL)*, English 417: *Second Language Acquisition*, and English 614: *Teaching ESL Writing*. In English 635, we learned different teaching

methods, and approaches to teaching, which included best practices for teaching listening and speaking. We also practiced working with a non-native speaker, among many other things. In English 417, we discussed how languages are learned, different myths and conceptions about learning a language, language learning strategies, and ideas involving communicative competence, among many other things. In English 614, we focused on teaching reading and writing in an ESL context. These three classes all prepared me for my Peace Corps service in Colombia.

For the first half of my fall semester at HSU, while I was taking 16 units of graduate-level classes, I was working seven days a week at two different jobs. It was a demanding introduction into the life of a graduate student, and I felt completely overwhelmed. I chose to go to school at HSU after visiting my sister who had studied there as an undergraduate from 2006-2008. The university was located 800 miles north of my friends and family, in a small town with what was initially a very small support system. My time at HSU was in many ways an isolating experience, and became a precursor for my time in Colombia. But eight weeks into the semester, I fortunately received a State University Grant, and I was able to leave one of my jobs. This allowed me to focus harder on my schoolwork, and I knew that I would be able to make it through the semester and ultimately the year. Although my main intention of going to HSU was to prepare me for teaching EFL in Colombia, I think more than anything, it instilled in me ideas of perseverance that I carried with me all the way through my Peace Corps service.

One of my first classes at HSU was with Professor Suzanne Scott, who would become my advisor throughout my entire Master's International Program. The first class

I took with her was English 635: *Issues in ESL/EFL*, where we discussed, among many other things, the proficiency levels of non-native speakers. One assignment from this class that had a lasting impact on me throughout my time in Colombia was a project called Conversation Partners. Over the course of several weeks, the project gave me the opportunity to spend eight hours conversing with a non-native speaker. For this assignment, we were to assess the proficiency level of our conversation partner at the outset and again at the end of the project, and immediately after each conversation, we were to write down exact examples of our partner's language. This helped us capture the actual language, and not make the common mistake of just recalling the overall conversation. Throughout this project, we utilized information from class lectures, as well as from the class textbook *Teaching by Principles* to reference the speech patterns of our conversation partner, which helped with our assessment of their language proficiency level. We also wrote a final summarizing entry in which, in part, we re-assessed the proficiency level of our conversation partner.

I had the opportunity to pair up with a Brazilian student, who spoke Portuguese, and was studying at HSU's English for Academic Purposes program, called the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI). In an early conversation with my partner, when I asked him if he liked rock music, he responded, "Yes. Very good." In his response to the question, my partner was missing the subject *it*, as well as verb, *to be*. It is understandable that my partner would not have included the word *it* because Portuguese is what is called a pro-drop language; because pronouns are built into the conjugation of the verb,

Portuguese allows the dropping of pronouns, while English does not (Swan and Smith 98). However, his avoidance of the verb *to be* was evidence of his low-level of English.

This Conversation Partner project taught me to ask non-native speakers if they would like me to correct their English. This was difficult to do because it was not a natural reaction to correct or even notice someone's grammar errors while having a conversation. In Colombia, I deliberately asked my counterparts, who worked alongside me in the public schools, if they would like me to correct their English. The project also taught me to ask Colombians to correct my Spanish grammar. This was something I asked my host family to do, and I believe it helped my Spanish development.

Despite my analysis in the Conversation Partner log, I was still so focused on the meaning during our conversations that I incorrectly assessed the proficiency level of my partner both times. These proficiency levels were discussed in detail in one of our main texts in English 635, *Teaching By Principles*: *An Interactive Approach to Language and Pedagogy* by Doug Brown. For clarity, these proficiency levels are explained in Appendix A where I include the chart used in *Teaching by Principles* (see Appendix A). During my original analysis, when I read the description of 2+, the intermediate-mid level, I put too much of an emphasis on the words in the description "acceptable and effective" (Brown 111). I should have focused on the fact that my partner was not "able to satisfy most work requirements" (111). I now realize that the novice-mid level, or level 1, was a more accurate description of my partner's English level. He was able to "maintain simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics." (111).

Brown's chart is from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which is the same organization and scale that the Peace Corps used for their Language Proficiency Index (LPI) tests during my service. In the Peace Corps, these LPI tests were used to determine my Spanish level as a volunteer, and to assess my progress over the course of my service. Overall, this Conversation Partner project had an impact on my time in Colombia because it showed me how important it is to pay attention to my students' grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Before I could help a learner improve their English, I needed to know where they were, so that I could take them to the next level. Once I understood how to correctly evaluate someone's language, I had a better understanding of how I could benefit their language development. That is why English 635 begins with proficiency levels, assessment, and the Conversation Partner project.

My understanding of how to benefit my students' English development was also informed by the different teaching methods we studied in English 635. In addition to *Teaching by Principles* by Doug Brown, our other main source of reading in English 635 was *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* by Diane Larsen-Freeman and Marti Anderson, which focused on eight different language teaching methods.

For my purposes in Colombia, the most important method I learned about in English 635 was Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which "aims to make communicative competence the goal of teaching" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 115). Communicative competence is, in brief, the idea of "knowing when and how to say what to whom" (115); it is the ability to navigate a variety of different social situations

fluently. “Communicative competence is the underlying knowledge and skill that allows one to form, and use, a language appropriately” (Scott ENGL 417, 6). This idea of communicative competence is something that I was aware of in Colombia from both a Spanish student’s perspective, and an English teacher’s perspective. For example, I had to learn appropriate ways to address my colleagues in a professional setting at work, and I also had to teach the students in my community English classes appropriate greetings for a variety of different settings. My community English classes that I taught in Colombia will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, but I mention them here because CLT had a strong impact on these classes.

English 635 exposed me to CLT along with the seven other methods that were discussed in *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. At HSU I had the opportunity to present a lesson on the Silent Method, as well as observe presentations on all of the other methods in a foreign language, which gave me a wide range of methods to choose from when I was in Colombia. These presentations informed my teaching practices because they got me thinking about what would potentially work and not work as a teacher. For example, I knew that after presenting a lesson on the Silent Method by using a sound-color chart to teach a phrase in Italian, that this was something I would never use in Colombia. So even though I did not agree with all of the methods, it helped me narrow down what methods could work, and CLT was one of the methods that I had success with in Colombia.

One of the most enlightening things about my time at HSU was making connections between what I was learning in different classes. Studying schema theory in

English 635 helped add insight into the education theory I was studying in English 611. Schema theory suggests that, "a text does not by itself carry meaning" (Brown 358). Brown describes schema theory as the idea that students bring "information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture" (358) to the classroom. This related to ideas I was studying in English 611: *Reading and Writing Pedagogy*, where I read both *Democracy and Education* by John Dewey, and L.S. Vygtosky's *Mind in Society*. Dewey helped me understand the importance of accessing students' prior knowledge in order to help them connect to the material that I was teaching. Dewey also explained the importance of making connections between what my students were learning and what was going on in their everyday lives. This really helped formulate my ideas for how important it was to try to connect my English lessons to what was going on in my students' lives in Colombia. Reading about this same idea from two different perspectives helped reinforce the importance of thinking about what information my students were bringing with them into the classroom.

At HSU, we addressed the difficulty of building vocabulary in English 417: *Second Language Acquisition*, which I took in the spring of 2014 with Dr. Scott. Our main textbook for SLA was *How Languages are Learned* by Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada. It was not until reading this text that I realized how much of an effort it takes for someone to build vocabulary. "Paul Nation (2001) reviews a number of studies suggesting that a learner needs to have many meaningful encounters with a new word before it becomes firmly established in memory. The estimates range as high as 16 times in some studies" (62). From a teaching perspective, this idea of multiple exposures to

words was something I was conscious of every time I taught new vocabulary in Colombia. It influenced my teaching, and I made an effort to expose students to new vocabulary words multiple times. Additionally, I kept this information in mind whenever I got frustrated with my own Spanish development. Whenever I tried learning a new word, I would use it in different sentences in order to multiply the number of meaningful exposures I had with the word. One of the biggest surprises of studying at HSU was how so much of my coursework helped my own Spanish development. Originally, I studied there to learn how to teach English as foreign language, but my coursework helped my language acquisition a lot in Colombia, and this is just one example of many.

Humboldt State University deepened my appreciation for what it means to become a life-long learner. It fostered a desire to learn more knowledge, which I am continually thankful for. To expand my learning, Dr. Scott encouraged me to attend the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) convention, held in Portland, Oregon in March 2014, which pushed me outside of my comfort zone in the best way possible. I was exposed to an entire academic world that I did not even know existed beforehand. For example, at the convention, I got to listen to British applied linguist David Graddol discuss the five megatrends that were shaping the future of TESOL (Graddol). Additionally, I was able to see a panel of TEFL teachers hold a question-and-answer session on reverse culture shock, which was really important to me because I knew it was something I would experience when I got back from Colombia. They talked about practical things like how to file my taxes while I was living in another country, and more emotional things like how a lot of people who were excited for my return to the

United States either would not really want to hear about my experiences when I got back, or would not know what kinds of questions to ask about my experience. It sounded harsh at the time, but I understood what they meant once I experienced it for myself (Schmitt, et al.).

At the TESOL convention I also got to listen to a presentation by a Peace Corps staff member who was describing a pilot program for the TEFL certificate. At the time, this was really exciting and inspiring because I knew that one of my HSU MIP peers would be joining that program in Latin America. I remember how excited everyone at the presentation was for Peace Corps to add a technical-skills certificate as a component of volunteer service (Brady). Some people even commented that this was fifty years overdue. On a personal level, I also appreciated the presentation because it gave me the opportunity to network with Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs). I was able to talk to other volunteers about their service and ask them questions before I left for Colombia, which was a really positive experience for me because everyone was so kind and reassuring. I know that if I had done the Peace Corps through a more traditional route, I would never have been exposed to the TESOL community, and I am really thankful for everything I learned in Portland.

The MIP at HSU helped put my training into practice before I even arrived in the Peace Corps. During the spring semester of 2014, I started observing classes in the International English Language Institute (IELI) program on campus at HSU. This fulfilled part of one of my course requirements, as I wrote observations of these classes. In the past, I had done observations before, while I was working on my teaching

credential at CSU, Fullerton, but my time at the IELI, combined with my time in English 635, 417, and 614, helped further teach me what to look for in a classroom. In a broader sense, these observations taught me to look at a wide variety of things, such as class size, gender make-up, the pacing of the lesson, the teacher's posture, and the teacher's word choice with their students. Additionally, I learned to critique the transitions between activities and to look for whether or not the teacher was connecting the content to the students' lives outside of the classroom.

But more specifically, and in regards to TESL, my time observing in the IELI gave me the opportunity to watch how the teacher clarified different topics. For example, in one reading assignment about space, the teacher asked the class if anyone knew what *Star Wars* was. When one student responded by saying that *Star Wars* was a movie, the teacher was able to ask follow-up questions for additional information in regards to other topics like the history of U.S. space travel, time travel, and science fiction, as well as clarify questions regarding American culture. Being able to observe the way that the teacher unpacked all of these concepts with her class was informative for me. I could not just assume that everyone knew what *Star Wars* was, and this idea of asking follow-up questions, not just to clarify, but to push the conversation further was something I later used in my community English classes in Colombia.

These experiences prepared me as best as they could for my Peace Corps service. What I would later discover was that many of the obstacles I faced in Colombia were due to the cultural norms of the country, as well as my own personality as a self-identified introvert. I think that my courses at HSU did everything they could have to prepare me to

teach English as a foreign language, but many of the challenges I faced were unpredictable, which is why I am thankful that my time at HSU gave me countless opportunities to learn, make mistakes, and grow. This was done in a nurturing but demanding environment, and I felt that as I left for Colombia I was as prepared as I could be.

Peace Corps Training

In this section, I will discuss my time during Pre-Service Training (PST). Specifically, I will focus on my Spanish language acquisition, and its influence on my approach to teaching English. Additionally, this section will discuss my first attempts at teaching English as a foreign language during my Peace Corps practicum. Finally, I will describe other aspects of Peace Corps training as they related to my service, including details about our program's goals and objectives.

In order to understand my time during PST, it is important to understand the history of the Peace Corps in Colombia. Peace Corps Colombia, which started in 1961, was one of the original Peace Corps posts. However, after a twenty-year run, the Peace Corps closed its program in Colombia in 1981 due to the political turmoil in the country. The era known as *la violencia* (the violence) ended in 1957, as David Bushnell explains in the *Making of a Modern Colombia* (222), but violence continued to plague the country "during the 1980s [when] Colombia was best known around the world for its involvement in the production of illicit drugs" (259). Even after the era of *la violencia,* "problems of severe inequality in the distribution of income" continued (283). This was

partly the reason why in 2010 Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos invited the Peace Corps to return. The Colombian government thought that a bilingual workforce would create more economic opportunities for its citizens.

During its first two years back in Colombia, the Peace Corps had two sets of response volunteers, which each served for one year (as opposed to a typical two-year service). Their job was to develop the education sector of the Peace Corps in Colombia by establishing relationships with the schools in their communities for future volunteers in the coastal Caribbean cities of Santa Marta, Barranaquilla, and Cartagena. By the time our cohort arrived in 2014, we were only the fourth group of two-year volunteers to serve in Colombia. Despite Colombia's long history of hosting Peace Corps volunteers, we were, for many intents and purposes, starting over.

The Peace Corps has three goals, which are "to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women, to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served, and to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans" (Peace Corps). These are the three main goals for every Peace Corps volunteer regardless of what country they serve in and what sector they work in. In addition to these three goals, Peace Corps Colombia also had three goals for its Teaching English for Livelihoods (TEL) volunteers, of which I was one These three goals were part of the TEL project framework and were: 1) English teacher technical training, 2) enhanced English proficiency for students through curricular and extracurricular training opportunities, and 3) support to community initiatives within the field of youth development and English. Peace Corps

three goals along with the TEL project framework goals helped inform the focus of our Pre-Service Training (PST).

I arrived in Colombia in August 2014 to begin my three-month PST. In the beginning, while I was trying my best to adapt to the Peace Corps training program, I was also trying to adapt to my new home on the Caribbean coast. Learning to deal with the unbelievable heat, and the non-stop mosquitoes took a lot of time to get used to. In fact, I never did completely adjust to the heat; I just learned to accept what it meant to always be sweating. The daily heat averaged 85 to 90 degrees, but usually felt closer to 115 because of the humidity. I had read about the heat before arriving, but I was not able to comprehend what that meant until I began living there. It would be impossible to describe my Peace Corps service without mentioning how hot it constantly was because the heat had such a detrimental effect on classroom success. It had an effect on everyone's productivity, even the Colombians who had lived there their whole lives. Yet, there was no way to get around it. At home, we lived without air conditioning. Thankfully, it was a Peace Corps requirement that every volunteer had to have a fan in their room, but on days when the power would go out, it was impossible to sleep through the night. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, I changed sites a couple of times, but even when I lived in the city, with the most amenities, we lost power at least once a week. The power outages varied in length and frequency, so part of the problem was its unpredictability. No amount of Peace Corps training could prepare me to plan around something like that, so I tried to accept it and adapt to it as best I could. These physical challenges would continue to undermine my overall success as a volunteer throughout my service.

One of the hardest aspects of Peace Corps was adapting to the idea of living with a host family. As an adult, I had lived on my own before coming to Colombia, and I was used to my independence, so it felt like a big transition to live with different host families for two whole years. Other Peace Corps countries did not require volunteers to live with host families after training, but Colombia did for safety reasons. Fortunately, my relationships with my host families became one of the best aspects of my Peace Corps service, but it took some time to become comfortable living in their homes. Eventually, living with host families helped foster new relationships and opportunities for me to do things like celebrate Christmas with Colombians when I might have otherwise spent it alone. Simple gestures like having a host family that made me a birthday cake and sang me "Happy Birthday" when I felt homesick was a huge benefit of living with host families. Host families made my whole experience better. It was nice to able to give my host mom a hug on Mother's Day, to take family pictures after my host-sister's high school graduation, to dance at my host-cousin's wedding, and to laugh and have fun at my host-nephew's first birthday party.

I also celebrated Colombian holidays like Dia de Las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles), which is the unofficial start of Christmas, as well as a national holiday in Colombia celebrated on December 7 to mark the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. These were the sort of special moments that made the Peace Corps an unforgettable experience. But at the same time, it was difficult to spend two years living in someone else's home. I grew more comfortable in these living situations throughout

my service, but it was challenging, especially in the beginning, when I was still learning Spanish.

Luckily, Peace Corps Colombia began our Spanish training as soon as we arrived. Training was divided into Spanish classes in the morning every day from 8:00 a.m. to noon, followed by what the Peace Corps called technical training from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Technical training included everything from training in TEFL, to safety and security training, medical training, resiliency training, and training in cultural integration. It was a demanding schedule, requiring waking up every day Monday through Friday at 5:45 in the morning in order to take an hour-long bus ride across the city. After an hour bus ride back home, I was always really tired by the end of the day, and as an introvert, there were many days when I just wanted time to myself, but I knew that I should be practicing my Spanish with my host family.

My first few days in Colombia were spent getting to know the other trainees in my cohort, which was made up of thirty-three people from all over the United States. We came from many different places, we were different ages, and had different professional backgrounds, but together we all shared the same goal of wanting to be Peace Corps Volunteers. The other trainees in my cohort became not only some of my best friends, but also my biggest support system during my time in Colombia. I owe a lot of my progress in Spanish to my fellow volunteers, as well as my Language and Culture Facilitators (LCFs). Our LCFs were our Spanish teachers during training, but they also taught us important cultural norms and practices that helped make our transition to living in Colombia much easier.

The Peace Corps needed to know what our Spanish level was, so that they could place us in appropriate level classes. We were tested three times during training, once at the outset, once halfway through, and once again at the end of training. These tests were conducted verbally through a series of questions. The test began with easier questions, such as “Tell me about your family,” and “What are your interests,” and ended with more difficult questions. We were never tested on our reading or writing abilities, solely on our ability to listen, comprehend, and converse.

My experience with the test began on my second day in Colombia when I took the Language Proficiency Index (LPI) test to see what level of Spanish I spoke. My test results were novice-low, which was the lowest level the Peace Corps had for its trainees. I had taken two semesters of college-level Spanish in community college in 2012 and 2013, but by the time I arrived in Colombia I could only recall a limited amount of vocabulary. Given my training at HSU, I was not surprised by my test results because I understood that language skills diminish when they are not regularly practiced. Thankfully, many of our early Spanish classes were referred to as “survival Spanish” because we had to learn basic greetings, as well as how to meet our most basic needs like how to use household appliances, how to get to the bus stop, and where to buy necessities.

My Spanish class was small, with only five students, but there were times when I wished it had been smaller because I would have liked more individual attention. In class, we practiced Spanish in a variety of ways, which included playing games, doing writing exercises, and performing plays and skits. The focus of the class was almost entirely on

speaking and listening because that was what the LPI tested us on. We were given a grammar book, *The Complete Spanish Grammar Review* by Barron's Foreign Language Guides, but none of the exercises were ever assigned as homework (Harvey). The Peace Corps believed that we needed to start speaking immediately, and that we could fix any problems with grammar by using the book on our own time. I did not use the grammar book very much until after my training had ended. Later, during my service, I eventually completed the book, and it helped clarify many of the grammatical issues I was having trouble with, especially in regards to past and future tenses. I think it was problematic that the grammar book was not required, as I learned at HSU that syntax is critical in learning a language (Brown; Lightbown and Spada; Gardner). Gardner, in fact, refers to syntax as the engine of a language, with vocabulary being seen as the fuel. It was not surprising, then, that my Spanish improved so much after I finished the grammar book.

When our class was assigned Spanish homework, it often involved memorizing vocabulary lists that we would need to know for the following day. These vocabulary lists were thematically based, and they would focus on themes such as family members, modes of transportation, or clothing. The following day, we would do speaking activities using our new vocabulary. Other homework assignments included asking our host families about cultural norms, and writing down their responses to share with the class. I wish I had had more time to do these kinds of activities because speaking more with my host family during training would have helped my Spanish development a lot. One of my complaints with the Peace Corps training program was that our schedule was too busy, and we spent the whole day away from our host families. By the time I arrived back

home at 6:00 p.m. I never felt like I had enough energy to want to study Spanish, and I was not alone in feeling this: I believe the overly busy schedule affected the language development of my entire cohort.

Peace Corps Colombia had a minimum language-level requirement for volunteers, which was intermediate-mid. Before arriving in Colombia, eleven trainees were already either advanced or superior-level Spanish speakers, with another eight trainees at the intermediate level. By the end of training, eleven of the remaining fourteen volunteers had not reached the intermediate-mid level on the LPI tests. This meant that during the eleven-weeks of training, only three trainees successfully went from novice to intermediate-mid. I believe this was a reflection of the Peace Corps training, with their lack of focus on grammar, as well as the overly busy schedule PCVs had, which kept them from having adequate time to practice Spanish, both with their host families, and in the community. Brown suggests that teaching grammar to adult learners is not only helpful, "but essential to a speedy learning process" (421). After listening to feedback and complaints from our cohort, Peace Corps Colombia spent the following year adjusting the training schedule, so that future trainees would have more time to practice Spanish with their host families outside of the classroom. However, I am not sure if they have since put any more of an emphasis on grammar in their Spanish classes.

I think that my experience studying second-language acquisition (SLA) at HSU benefited my own Spanish development. In fact, as I studied Spanish, I tested strategies on myself that I inferred from my training at HSU. For example, I know that having studied Krashen's affective filter hypothesis had a positive impact on my development. In

How Languages are Learned, Lightbown and Spada, explain that, "the 'affective filter' is a metaphorical barrier that prevents learners from acquiring language even when appropriate input is available" (106). Appropriate input is defined as input that is comprehensible to the learner (106). After having studied this concept of the affective filter, I knew that maintaining a positive attitude about my Spanish development would benefit my Spanish language acquisition. The authors further explain that, "a learner who is tense, anxious, or bored may *filter out* input, making it unavailable for acquisition" (106). Krashen's affective filter hypothesis was one reason why I made an effort to always participate in Spanish class. In my experience, class was a safe learning environment, and so my affective filter was lowered. This is why I needed to take advantage of my Spanish classes because outside of class my affective filter was heightened in a more natural environment, which, as the text explains, could affect my comprehensible input.

In addition to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, studying SLA also influenced how much I read while I was studying Spanish. Over the course of my two years in Colombia, I read six books in Spanish to help my vocabulary development, as well as my grammar. Lightbown and Spada point out that "it is difficult to infer the meaning of a new word from reading unless one already knows 95 percent or more of the other words" (64). This information influenced how I read, and what I read. As a result, I chose to read books I had already read in English, including two *Harry Potter* books, and *Las Ventajas De Ser Invisible* (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*). I understood the plot of all three of these books, so I knew that this would help my ability to infer the meaning of certain

vocabulary words. For example, I was able to infer that the Spanish word *callejon* was "an alley" because in the Spanish version of Harry Potter, *Callejón Diagon* was a proper noun known as Diagon Alley in the English version (Rowling). I also read two bilingual books, and towards end of my service, I read *El Laberinto de la Soledad y Otras Obras* by Octavio Paz, a book I had not previously read in English. The book describes themes of Mexican identity, and was much more difficult to read because of the concepts and the vocabulary, but I had studied the history of Mexico and Mexican-Americans in college, and this helped with my comprehension of the text.

In addition to reading, I also completed the Duo-lingo language application in Spanish (Duolingo). The application includes a variety of activities to help teach vocabulary, with accompanying images, as well as also some grammar points, which are described in little speech bubbles. However, many of the grammar explanations are extremely limited, which is why the application should not be the only method for studying a language. I did not start using the application until I had already been studying Spanish in Colombia for over a year, so although I would not recommend the application as a tool for beginners, I found it helpful in clarifying some grammatical issues I was having trouble with, such as the subjunctive form of Spanish. I also learned new vocabulary using the application, and it encouraged me to study Spanish when I might have otherwise been doing something else, due to its interactive nature.

Another resource for studying Spanish outside of the classroom was listening to music with Spanish lyrics. Colombia has a rich culture of dance and music, with many different genres, including vallenato, cumbia, and champeta. I made a play-list of songs

that were popular on the radio in Colombia, and I read the lyrics to these songs in Spanish. Doing this helped clarify some gender pronouns. In Spanish, “all nouns, as well as accompanying articles and adjectives, are masculine or feminine” (Swan and Smith 84). While I still confuse many masculine and feminine articles that accompany their nouns, reading lyrics and listening to music helped me memorize certain articles and nouns in Spanish.

Most of these previous examples of my Spanish study practices, including reading books and listening to music, would be considered receptive learning; I was not producing language. And while receptive learning is essential—one needs input to learn a language—producing language is argued to improve language learning even more. In 1995, noted SLA researcher Merrill Swain wrote an article outlining her Output Hypothesis, noting three key functions of output. In brief, output requires the combining of meaning and form; it requires the learner work more deeply with the language to produce grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (if the output is spoken). As we discussed in English 417, requiring output would be better than just my receptive-based study practices where I only needed to understand the meaning, and not use the language. Therefore, I would encourage future volunteers to practice output as much as possible when learning a new language.

In November 2014, at the end of Pre-Service Training, I tested at the intermediate-low level of Spanish for the second time. After training ended, I continued taking Spanish classes until early December 2014, and then for two more months, I had an additional ten hours a month of Spanish tutoring, which the Peace Corps paid for. In

these additional Spanish tutoring sessions, I focused on the differences between preterite and imperfect past-tense verb forms because this was where I was having the most trouble on my LPI. I spent a lot of time memorizing verb conjugations and working on grammar exercises to help clarify this information. Once I understood how and when to use these different verb conjugations, I was finally able to get to the intermediate-mid level when I re-tested in January 2015.

In addition to the emphasis on Spanish in PST, we also covered different TEFL methods. Many of the TEFL methods that we covered in Peace Corps training were broad overviews compared to what I learned at HSU. I was grateful for the detailed coverage I received at HSU of the language teaching methods, and of ways to teach aspects such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar. This is due to the fact that in the Peace Corps these methods were explained in a one-hour session accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Specifically, we covered the Natural Approach, the Audio-lingual Method, and Total Physical Response, but unless I had studied these methods at HSU, I would not have learned very much from the Peace Corps PowerPoint presentation. The Peace Corps unfortunately has to cover a lot of information in only eleven-weeks of training, and some topics, like safety and security, and medical information received more of an emphasis than other topics.

In regards to my M.A. project, the Peace Corps discussion on the Colombian education system, and a later presentation on the school system on the Caribbean coast were both important topics to cover before we began our practicum. The Peace Corps staff explained that Colombian students sent to private schools often received a better

education and had a better chance of attending university. But for our service, we would be working in public schools because the needs at these schools were greater. We were told that in Colombian public schools, when one student seemed to have a higher level of English than the rest of the students, it was safe to assume that they were taking supplemental English courses on the weekends. They also explained that high school ends after eleventh grade, which is when the students take their national standardized test called, Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior (ICFES) (Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education). The standardized test includes a section on English, and the results from the English portion have a large impact on whether or not students will be admitted to university.

In PST, we learned that our future co-teachers would have a wide variety of English levels, and that sometimes the teachers' English level would be lower than what they were expected to teach. This was a common issue on Colombia's Caribbean coast. We also learned that depending on the school, students received between 1 to 5 hours of English a week. Instead of taking the same six classes every day, like many students do in public schools in the U.S., Colombian students take as many as twelve courses at a time, but only have each course two or three times a week. In addition, most schools on the Caribbean coast do not have, or could not afford, substitute teachers, which meant that when a teacher was absent, the students did not have class. Peace Corps also explained how often we would be missing school due to Colombian holidays, as seen in Appendix B. From my American perspective, the number of days off from school for national holidays seemed dysfunctional. These two presentations on the education system in

Colombia, and the school system on the Caribbean coast helped frame my understanding and were beneficial.

During our fourth week of training, our practicum began, which was designed to introduce us to Colombian schools on the coast. The Peace Corps paired each trainee with another trainee so that we could co-teach lessons together, and get experience lesson planning and teaching. While there were many trainees in my group that had come with no prior teaching experience, I was fortunate to have student-taught for a year in three eleventh-grade U.S. history classes during my teaching credential program back in the United States, so I had experience with lesson planning and teaching.

During practicum, my partner and I co-taught multiple times in two eleventh-grade Colombian classrooms, which made it easier for us because we only had to prepare for one class level as opposed to writing lesson plans for different level classes. Before we began co-teaching, at the request of the Peace Corps, my partner and I spent our first three visits to the school observing these courses. We observed our Colombian counterpart teach two of his classes. During practicum, our counterpart's responsibility was to tell us what to teach a week ahead of time, so that we could lesson plan and teach the material that he requested. Additionally, our counterpart was required to observe our teaching, and remain in the classroom while we taught. My partner and I were asked to deliver three different lessons during our practicum.

At the school, there were two eleventh-grade classes, 11A and 11B, and we were responsible for teaching English lessons in both of them. The proficiency levels of our students were overwhelmingly novice-low. The students' level was obvious when they

could not respond to basic questions such as “How are you? How old are you? What is your name?” However, like we learned in training, there were a few exceptions where some students had a higher level of English because these students paid for weekend English classes. In the 11B class, there were thirty-two students, and the room was located on the second floor of the school, with open windows that looked out into the school courtyard. While we observed the 11B class, there was a P.E. class going on outside, which made it very difficult to hear what the teacher was saying. The heat was also unbearable, and sometimes it was hard to concentrate, even for me. These issues, I would learn, were common in the Colombian classrooms I was exposed to.

Unlike the 11B class, 11A was located on the first floor of the school, was not connected to the courtyard, had fewer distractions, and had only twenty-eight students. Additionally, the 11A classroom had windows that closed, which resulted in a better teaching and learning environment. This class, however, suffered because it was after break. The school break was supposed to go from 9:15 to 9:35, but our counterpart did not begin class until 10:00 a.m., and class was supposed to end at 10:20. This meant that 11B got fifty-five minutes of class, while the 11A students were supposed to do the exact same amount of work in about twenty minutes. Although I never observed the students take any tests, I imagine that these 11B and 11A classes were tested the same even though the 11A class typically received half the amount of instruction as 11B. I found my Colombian counterpart’s problems with punctuality really frustrating, but these were the kinds of cultural differences I dealt with over the next two years. This was in fact a systematic problem in every site I worked at.

The first time we observed, the teacher taught prepositions, specifically, the words *at*, *on*, *in*, and, *under*. Afterwards, as an assessment, the teacher handed out a fifteen-question cloze activity where the students had to complete the sentence by supplying the correct preposition. At first, I thought that some of the sentences were grammatically incorrect on the handout. For example, question number 12 read, "My parents moved house _____ May." When the class went over the worksheet together, the teacher said the correct answer was "My parents moved house in May." I remember wanting to correct him, but I did not say anything, and I am glad I did not. Part of my M.A. requirements for HSU included writing monthly e-mail reports to Dr. Scott throughout my time in the Peace Corps, and it was during one of these emails, when I noted what I thought was an error, that she pointed out to me that this is grammatically accurate in British English.

From my experience, most Colombian English teachers used a combination of American and British English, depending on what material they had access to. As a result, one recommendation that I have for the Peace Corps is to offer a training session on some of the differences between American English and British English. Sometimes I wonder how many similar mistakes I made because I assumed something was wrong when it was actually grammatically correct in British English. During my service, I told my counterparts that I did not know British English, and therefore sometimes I was not able to confirm the correct answer until the following class period. This was also a common issue among other volunteers in my cohort.

One of the biggest challenges of my service was the lack of effective classroom management; I was exposed to this systematic problem during practicum. One classroom management strategy that we introduced was counting down from five, and asking the students to be silent by the time we got to zero. This worked a few times, but it turned out to not be very effective overall. Classroom management continued to be difficult throughout my practicum and the rest of my service, even in later sites and grade levels, but nonetheless these first attempts of teaching English in Colombia were a positive experience for me. I had never co-taught before, and it was helpful to be able to work with another Peace Corps trainee to brainstorm ideas, practice classroom management strategies, write lesson plans, and then teach in a Colombian public school.

One of the lessons that we taught during our practicum was on comparatives and superlatives. The lesson in both classes went well, and student engagement was high, but punctuality in our 11A class continued to be a problem. Even when my partner and I tried to begin the class on time, many of the students were not yet present. In general, the emphasis of our training practicum experience seemed more on giving Peace Corps trainees exposure to the realities of teaching on the Caribbean coast, and less on how well our English lessons went. So even though I believe that the Peace Corps did their best by training us to address classroom management problems and cultural differences, their suggested ideas often did not work.

Towards the end of training, I received my site placement. I was going to stay in the city of Barranquilla, which was where I had been living for all of training, and I was excited to continue living there. After we received the information for our sites, all of the

trainees got to go on site visits, check out their schools, and meet their future counterparts. My meeting with my counterpart was a really positive experience, and I felt really lucky when she expressed such warmth and kindness towards me. In the middle of the day, on a hot and crowded bus, she went out of her way and spent an hour and a half of her time showing me which buses I needed to take to get between school and home. We rode the buses together back and forth while she explained the different bus stops and options I could take. This was the type of kindness that I want Americans to understand was a common trait among Colombians.

At my new school, I was replacing a current volunteer, as their service was about to end. During my site visit, I got to observe the volunteer conduct a teacher training on action verbs. The lesson was well attended, with ten elementary school teachers present and actively participating. This volunteer had laid an amazing foundation for future Peace Corps volunteers, and I knew that her work at the school would make it easier for me to begin my teaching.

During our final week of PST, our Peace Corps country director retired, and the new country director arrived just two days before our swear-in ceremony. The country director is the senior Peace Corps official and the legal representative in the country. Additionally, during our last week of training, we also received a Director of Programming and Training, whose job it is to develop and organize the very training that we had just completed. This was frustrating, knowing that we had just finished our entire eleven weeks of training without a Director of Programming and Training. Throughout my service, the Peace Corps Colombia staff was constantly changing, and there seemed

to be a lack of communication between staff and volunteers that escalated as my service continued. This was something I had read about in *The Bold Experiment*, a book chronicling the history of the Peace Corps, but as the book was written in the 1980s, I had expected many of these communication issues to have been resolved (Rice 224). Nonetheless, I accepted many of the staff's problems with miscommunication because the Peace Corps Colombia post was still so new. We were told that we just needed to be flexible with all of the changes, and do our best to face the obstacles that lay ahead. This proved to be a theme for the remainder of my service.

I swore-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer on Friday, November 14, 2014, taking an oath led by the United States Ambassador to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker. We then sang the national anthems of both Colombia and the United States. During our training, we had only lost one trainee, which meant that our group of thirty-three trainees was now thirty-two volunteers.

I bonded with many of my fellow trainees, and the sense of community I felt with them was strong, but after training ended, we did not see each other often. Peace Corps training felt like the one time during my service when isolation was not an issue. For three months, I spent around ten hours a day with the people in my cohort, and it was great to have so many people to share this new experience with. We consistently played soccer together every Thursday night, and on the weekends, we hung out together, practiced Spanish together, and learned to dance together. As excited as I was to begin my Peace Corps service, I was sad to be saying goodbye to so many of my fellow volunteers.

It was not goodbye for long, though. Peace Corps did a good job of bringing us all back together several times over the next two years. Our first In-Service Training (IST) was a mere two weeks later, during Thanksgiving week November 2014. The training was for the All-Volunteer Conference (AVC), which included every Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia, not just from our cohort, to discuss everything from safety and security to secondary projects. Then we had a Reconnect training scheduled in March 2015 for our cohort to discuss the emotional impact of living in our new sites. In May 2015, we had an IST where we brought a counterpart from our school to discuss classroom management and effective teaching strategies. In July 2015, we had another in-service training where we brought a community member from our town to discuss developing a sustainable community-oriented project. In September 2015, we had an IST where we again brought someone from our community to discuss sexual health and reproduction in our schools and communities. Finally, we had a close of service training in August 2016 to discuss life after Peace Corps. Additionally, the Peace Corps staff let us know that if we had any problems at site, we could always call or email to ask for help and suggestions. I felt less overwhelmed to begin my Peace Corps service knowing that the staff was there to help, and that these trainings were there to guide me along the way. With excitement and anticipation, I looked forward to beginning my Peace Corps service.

CHAPTER 3: TEACHING ENGLISH IN COLOMBIA

In November 2014, I was eager to begin teaching English, but the timing was terrible. The school year was ending, and it would not begin again until the end of January 2015 at the earliest. In reality, on the Colombian coast, the school year does not really begin until after Carnival, which celebrates the beginning of Lent in the Catholic community, marking the forty days before Easter. Barranquilla, Colombia, where I was located, has the largest Carnival celebration in the world, second only to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There is an intense sense of pride that manifests during the Carnival season. The excitement in the air is palpable, and school subjects are put on hold while costumes and decorations are made, dances and songs are learned, parades are marched, and contests are held. I was really inspired by the amount of pride Colombians had for their country. Coastal schools in Colombia could have been using this time to teach math, science, and other subjects, but instead the schools taught their students Colombian history and culture through music, dance, costume, and art. I believe that Americans could learn a lot from Colombia's dedication to tradition.

Still, it was difficult for new Peace Corps volunteers to finish training, and then wait three months for school to start. During the break, I used my time to practice Spanish, orient myself with the city of Barranquilla, visit other volunteers in their new sites, and celebrate the holidays with my new host family. This vacation time thus really helped with cultural integration, but Peace Corps Colombia has since changed its calendar so that new incoming trainees now arrive in January and finish their training in

April. This improvement has allowed volunteers to go straight into observations instead of sitting idle while waiting for the school year to begin. The following section, "Transitions," describes the events that took place during the next six months.

Transitions

During AVC, the new country director explained to our group that Peace Corps Colombia had the highest statistics in terms of thefts and robberies out of any Peace Corps country in the world, which meant that our volunteers were being robbed and experiencing thefts at startlingly high numbers. We were told that if the post wanted to stay open, some serious changes were going to have to be made.

On New Year's Eve, I received a phone call from the Director of Programming and Training explaining to me that I would be moving out of Barranquilla and into a small rural site, as the Peace Corps staff believed that transitioning volunteers from cities to rural towns would significantly lower the number of thefts and robberies, while increasing our safety. The Peace Corps then rushed the majority of us into rural towns without doing proper site development, which typically takes months. I think Peace Corps Colombia had to make a decision; do we send all of the volunteers home, and spend a year doing site development while trying to re-build the program, or do we throw these new volunteers into rural sites, and hope for the best? I am grateful that we got to stay in Colombia, but my service was much more difficult because my next site lacked proper site development.

The staff offered all of the volunteers who were moving the "Interruption of

Service" (IOS) option. This meant that we could return to the United States without having to Early Terminate (ET) from our service. I obviously decided to stay, but it left me in a frustrating limbo. I was advised against informing my host family about the move until the Peace Corps office knew where and when they were sending me. I felt really uncomfortable living in my host family's house knowing that I was going to have to move out at the same time that I was not allowed to talk to them about it. This transitional phase of moving from Barranquilla to my new site took a month and a half from the moment I was told until the moment I actually moved.

One of the bigger mistakes that the Peace Corps office made during these transitions was when they did not contact our original schools to let them know that we were moving. In January 2015, I received a Facebook message from my school counterpart in Barranquilla asking if I was ready to start school. I had to apologize and explain to her that the Peace Corps was moving us to small towns for safety reasons. I felt like this should not have been my responsibility, and that the Peace Corps office should have informed our schools. This lack of communication created a sense of animosity between the Peace Corps volunteers and the office staff. Although I do not think the Peace Corps staff ever did anything maliciously, I do believe that there were times when they were as unprepared as we were.

In early February 2015, my Peace Corps Programming and Training Specialist took me to observe my own site development meeting. The idea behind a site development meeting is to explain to the community what the Peace Corps is and what the Peace Corps goals are, as well as to find out whether or not the site is willing to host a

volunteer. For this reason, it was awkward that I was there. The Peace Corps staff usually has at least three of these meetings before the volunteer arrives at a site, but there was only one site development meeting for my school and my town.

During the visit, it became clear that this small town of 1,000 people was very isolated from surrounding areas. Geographically speaking, the town was located at the bottom of a mountain, but buses did not travel up and down the mountain to get to other towns because the hills were too steep. Yet I would need to regularly leave the site for many reasons, such as doctor's appointments, monthly breaks, official Peace Corps meetings and trainings, and accessing A.T.M. machines in order to pay rent. I was, then, quite isolated in this town.

During the site visit meeting, my supervisor asked the locals how I would be able to get up and down the mountain to the next town in order to access the buses, and all of the locals said that I could just take a motorcycle. My supervisor explained that Peace Corps had a strict rule against volunteers using motorcycles. He then explained that if I were caught riding a motorcycle, I would be sent home. My supervisor asked if there was any other way up the mountain, and everyone at the meeting said, "No. We just take motorcycles." With this information in mind, the Peace Corps still decided to send me to this rural site. The office staff believed that once I integrated into my community, I would be able to find rides in and out of my site. I do not think they were naïve in their decision to place me there; I just think that they were under a lot of pressure to find sites for everyone in my cohort. So in mid-February, 2015 I packed up my belongings and headed to a new town, but the transportation issue, I discovered, would become the least of my

worries.

The day before I moved, I got a call from my sister in the United States. She told me that my dad had had a stroke. I made sure that my family understood how to call my Peace Corps phone using Skype, but I felt helpless. A big part of me wanted to quit and go home, but my mom told me that I should stay until they understood how bad the situation was. The following day I moved to my new town knowing that the only way to leave would be to break Peace Corps policy and take a motorcycle. When my new host mom told me that I was not allowed to walk the hour and a half up the mountain because I would be robbed, I spent the next three and a half months in site completely anxious about being kicked out of the Peace Corps for fear of breaking their rules.

A few days later, I went into the Peace Corps office in Barranquilla to explain the lack of transportation. As I was speaking with one staff member about my problem, another staff member came over and said, “Peace Corps volunteers all over the world have to walk in and out of site. If you are going to complain about it, then maybe you should think about why you are here.” I was so caught off guard that I returned to site without arguing. Not saying anything about this – and other, later issues – was one of my biggest regrets of my service. If I could relive that conversation, I would have said something to the effect that “Other volunteers all over the world are not working in the most dangerous Peace Corps country, and when my host mom told me I could not walk up the mountain because I was white and I would get robbed, I figured I should address it with you.” Instead, I said nothing when I should have said something. I returned back to

my site, and spent the next three-and-a-half months trying to integrate and trying to find other options to leave town besides taking a motorcycle.

The town was in the *departamento* of Atlántico (departments are comparable to states; there are thirty-two in Colombia), which was a two-hour bus ride from Barranquilla to the nearest *municipio* (municipalities are comparable to counties; there are twenty-three in Atlántico), and then either an hour and a half-long walk down the mountain or a fifteen-minute motorcycle ride from the *municipio*. There were a little over 1,000 residents in the town, and I was the first white person who had ever lived there. I did not have internet access, there were no grocery stores, the electricity went out constantly, and running water only came once a week. The town was really isolated from the resources that existed in the city. Many of my students had never been to Barranquilla before; some of them had never even left town before.

The impact of the town's isolation could be seen in the students' level of education. Many of my students struggled with reading and writing in their first language. Soon after arriving, I started realizing this was an issue after reading one of my host sister's homework assignments. My host sister, who was in eighth grade, could not correctly spell the word "friend" in Spanish. Throughout the homework assignment she misspelled "friend" (*amiga*) by writing *hamiga* numerous times. In Spanish the "h" is silent when followed by the letter "a," so the mistake is understandable, but concerning nonetheless. Afterwards, I noticed similar, basic spelling mistakes in most of my students at school. Basic issues with spelling was systematic across all of the schools I worked at in Colombia. This seemed troublesome as Larsen-Freeman and Anderson describe how

"it is important for children to establish literacy in their native language before learning how to read and write in another language" (133). It was not that these students were completely illiterate in Spanish, but my expectations of what eighth graders should know how to do was completely challenged. I thought that learning English was the least of their worries, and that we should have been focusing on developing literacy in Spanish instead. But the reason I was there was because the Colombian government requested help with English development, and so that is what I continued to do.

At school, my students began receiving English lessons starting in the second grade, and this continued all the way through the eleventh grade. I worked closely with my secondary counterpart, who was responsible for teaching sixth through eleventh grades. At the request of the Peace Corps, I spent my first three months in site observing her teach. All of my students were novice-low-level ELLs regardless of what grade they were in. Clearly, their English language proficiency was not improving as they moved up grades; they were often relearning the same things in each grade. This was probably exacerbated by the fact that no one could see a practical application for using English in their everyday lives, so motivation to learn English was non-existent.

While observing the secondary classes, I noted that the students were only receiving two one-hour classes of English a week. I did not believe this was enough time of English exposure per week. When I factored in the common issues with punctuality alongside classroom management disturbances, we were lucky if there were ten to fifteen minutes of actual teaching in each class. It did not help, either, that students were not held accountable for homework. They were not practicing English outside of the classroom,

and most of the exposure in class involved solely translating whatever was written on the board from English to Spanish. Copying and translating directly off of the board was how the students were being taught English. These were problems I experienced in my next site as well.

I include the following example of a tenth-grade English lesson because it was representative of a problematic way English was taught at the school. I think that future volunteers could reflect on how they would begin teaching English in a community where translation is the way in which English is taught. This activity had tenth-grade students translating a dialogue from Spanish to English and then memorizing the English pronunciation. During the activity, my counterpart wanted to me to write the English dialogue phonetically in Spanish so that the students could pronounce it more easily, but I did not know how to do that. I had not memorized the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and neither had my students or my counterpart. However, my counterpart insisted on writing what she called a "phonetic translation" for the students. Her translation can be seen in Appendix C. There are errors in her original example, which is evidence of her level of English proficiency. The example also includes complex language in English, which the majority of the students did not understand. The first sentence from the dialogue activity read as follows, "Why don't you take a break tonight: Uai don't iu teik e breik tunait." There were a number of problems with this exercise. First of all, this was not teaching the students how to read in English. Second, this was teaching the students a non-existent language. Third, there was no guarantee that the teacher's translations would be consistent from activity to activity. The teacher's positive goal—correct English

pronunciation—was not being met with her method of teaching. This lesson was representative of the often-poor teaching at my school because the students were not learning English from the activity.

Another example of the failure of the school system to teach English effectively could be observed during student presentations. When one student was required to speak in English, the rest of the students were not held accountable for listening. There was never any disciplinary action against students for talking, drawing, or doing work from other classes during a speaking assignment. Additionally, there was no classroom management policy against students using cell phones in class. This was a systematic problem at all of my school sites, and it negatively affected the ability of teachers to teach. I did not have time to address these issues, however, as the Peace Corps wanted me to observe for my first three months in site, so I never had the chance to begin co-teaching.

In March, my time in the classroom was shortened because all of the volunteers in my cohort left our sites for a week to have a Peace Corps conference called "Reconnect," intended to offer volunteers both emotional and strategic support for addressing any problems in their site. The week following Reconnect was Holy Week, which meant school was on break until after Easter. Then, from April 22 until May 10, Colombia had a teacher's strike: for eighteen days, the teachers advocated for better salaries and overtime pay. They also fought against *jornada unica*, which was the expansion of the school schedule that would keep students at school from 6:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. During the strike, none of my fellow Peace Corps Volunteers or I had any class. At the end of May, I

was again taken out of site for another three days when the Peace Corps had an IST where each volunteer brought a school counterpart to discuss ways to address productivity in the classroom, classroom management strategies, and how to motivate our students. The IST was somewhat helpful, but my school counterpart only went for one-and-a-half days out of the three days because she had familial obligations. Finally, in early June, I was removed from my site for safety issues. I moved to my third and final Peace Corps site feeling defeated. I had been in Colombia for a little over nine months, and I felt that I had very little to show for it.

However, based on my observations at my second site's school, there were goals that I had set for myself before I moved to my final site. For example, I wanted to offer a variety of activities and encourage different principles like autonomy. Brown explains the principle of autonomy as "successful mastery of a foreign language will depend to a great extent on learners' autonomous ability both to take initiative in the classroom and to continue their journey to success beyond the classroom and the teacher" (70). I thought I could encourage autonomy by starting an English club so that student interest would go beyond the classroom. I wanted to improve student motivation. I wanted to improve my co-teachers' English. I wanted to create a curriculum that would scaffold activities. I wanted to watch the students' vocabulary grow, as well as introduce more group-centered activities into the classroom. There were so many things I wish I could have done at that site, but I thought I would have had more time.

Teaching Elementary School

By June of 2015, ten months into my Peace Corps service, with another seventeen months to go, I finally moved to what would become my permanent site for the remainder of my service. The town lay about an hour south of Barranquilla by bus, with a population of a little over 30,000 residents. There were a lot more amenities partly due to the fact that we were much closer to the city: I now had access to grocery stores, running water, and more reliable electricity. I had also received a smart phone from the Peace Corps, and paid a monthly service fee for three gigabytes of data, which meant that I now had some internet access. While I had spent three months observing in my last site, I was not about to spend another three months observing here. I was eager to get started, and I told my supervisor that I planned on observing for only two weeks before beginning to co-teach. I spent the remainder of my first year in site working with two different elementary schools.

I worked on two different campuses in town that were run by the same principal. One of the elementary schools had class in the morning, while the other had class in the afternoon. I had two counterparts at each school, and between the four counterparts, I co-taught in grades first through fifth. In grades first through third, the students were learning basic English vocabulary such as numbers, colors, parts of the body, and days of the week. In grades four and five, the lessons were a little more complex as the students focused on grammar topics such as the verb *to be*.

Although the academic goals of each class seemed simple enough, the reality of teaching English at the elementary level proved to be extremely difficult. Each class only had an hour of English per week, so we were really limited on time. Additionally,

classroom management was a nightmare. The students would fight, go running out of the classroom whenever they wanted, throw paper and pencils, climb on desks, scream, and cry. As soon as one situation was handled, three more situations were unfolding. There was a lack of support from the administration, which put too much responsibility on the teachers. Teachers could not just send all of these students to the principal's office, so it was their responsibility to handle classroom management issues. In elementary school, class oftentimes felt more like baby-sitting than teaching. In addition to classroom management problems, all of the environmental problems I described in the previous chapter continued, including the heat, the mosquitoes, and the noise pollution.

At first, I tried improving my four Colombian counterparts' English lessons. One lesson that my counterpart and I successfully co-taught to our first grade class was on parts of the body. Together, we broke the lesson up into two parts by first teaching them the vocabulary for head, shoulders, knees and toes, followed by eyes, ears, mouth and nose, using the popular children's song, "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes," with its matching kinesthetics.

Afterwards, we used a handout for this assignment as an assessment of the students' learning. As seen in Appendix D, the handout was a picture of Bart Simpson that asked the students to label different parts of the body, and then color the figure correctly based on a corresponding coloring code. When the assignment was accurately completed, it resulted in a multi-colored Bart Simpson. The lesson was successful because the students learned the song, and later completed the handout. Through this one activity, we reached different learning styles by singing, coloring, and practicing reading

and writing the words. Not only were the students receptive to the song, but they also loved coloring. I thought it was successful when my counterpart included the parts of the body on her first-grade final exam at the end of the year, as seen in Appendix E. One interesting item to note in this appendix is the on the test under section three where it reads “Colours Dog,” where it should read “Color the Dog.” The error is small, but it is nonetheless evidence of the level of English that my counterpart had.

After a few weeks of co-teaching, I reassessed what I could realistically teach given the time constraints of only one hour of English a week per class. Another Peace Corps volunteer had recommended teaching the alphabet after being inspired by a video they found on the internet that used corresponding hand signals with each letter of the alphabet. This in turn inspired me to teach the alphabet at my elementary school as well. I taught two of my counterparts as well as their second and third grade students how to read phonetically, which turned out to be my biggest accomplishment as an elementary school co-teacher.

After watching the same video on the internet, I broke the lesson up into three parts by teaching the letters A-J, K-S, and T-Z. After each lesson learning the names and the sounds of the letters, I would then write short, one-syllable words on the board such as “bad” and “dad” and have the students practice reading them based on the newly learned letter sounds. While I was studying at HSU, we discussed how important it is to teach phonemic awareness alongside early reading instruction. Kimberly Vasconcelos explains that “a child’s success with phonemic awareness is the best indicator of later reading success” (Vasoncelos). This is important because many students do not know that

words are made up of sounds. At HSU, Professor Scott explained that, it is estimated that up to 20% of first-grade students do not know that words are made up of sounds and letters (Scott English 417 Lecture). As we progressed through the alphabet over the course of three weeks, the students' pronunciation improved. It was so successful in the three classes that we taught the alphabet in that one of my counterparts even included the alphabet on her students' final exam, as seen in Section 8 of Appendix F, in which the teacher assessed for colors and letters simultaneously. I felt that the inclusion of the alphabet on the students' final exam was a great way to end my first year as a Peace Corps volunteer. When so many things over the course of the year had not gone my way, teaching the alphabet and phonemic awareness were some of the few things I felt successful in.

Towards the end of the year, one of the high school teachers approached me, and asked for help working with their ninth, tenth, and eleventh-grade students. After explaining to them my commitments to elementary school for the remainder of the year, I agreed to work with her the following year in high school. A key reason I switched from elementary school to secondary school was because I believed I could be more helpful at the secondary school level, as the elementary school students only had one hour of English a week, while the secondary school students had three hours of English a week.

Due to the fact that there was only one hour of English a week, my elementary school counterparts did not believe we needed to co-plan for the lessons. One counterpart even went so far as to say, "I do not need to learn English; the students do. That is why you are here: to teach the students English." I tried to explain to her Peace Corps concept

of sustainability, by telling her that she did in fact need to know how to teach English because once I left, she would still be their teacher. She said, “Well, I will just get another volunteer when you leave.” This conversation took place in a faculty meeting, which was both embarrassing and unprofessional. It should have happened in a one-on-one conversation, but she was angry that I was switching to the secondary school, and I did not blame her for being angry.

I was also upset with the Peace Corps for not doing a better job of explaining the role of PCVs during the site development meetings. The teachers should have understood that if they were not willing to co-plan with us, then we were not obligated to co-teach with them. On multiple occasions I did my best to explain this, but eventually I decided that I could have a larger impact working with the secondary-school students. I am also not sure that more site development meetings would have helped the situation. This seemed to be a cultural issue, which I experienced from counterparts at every Colombian school I worked at. However, the woman who would become my secondary school counterpart was highly motivated, and made it clear that she was willing to co-plan and co-teach. So I spent the second and final year of my service working in ninth, tenth and eleventh grade with this new, dedicated counterpart

Teaching Secondary School

This section will discuss the year I spent working in high school, as well as my goals for the year, my accomplishments, and my regrets. I thought teaching at the high school level would be more successful because the students were older, which I

wrongfully assumed would mean that they were more motivated to learn English. Unlike my previous site, this town was only a fifteen-minute bus ride south of the Barranquilla airport, and Miami was only an hour-and-a-half plane ride away. Many people in my town had relatives who lived or worked in the United States. There were Colombians in town who spoke English and traveled to the U.S. often, and English provided a clear economic opportunity for people in town, as people who knew English had better jobs and made more money. These were reasons why I thought I would have been more successful at the high school level, and some of these reasons influenced my switch from teaching primary school to teaching secondary school.

In February 2016, I began co-teaching and co-planning. Together my one counterpart and I worked in six high school classes across three grade levels, which included ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade. Each class had three hours of English a week. After I observed my counterpart for a couple of weeks, I decided that with only seven months left of my service, my goals for the year were to focus on reading comprehension and test-taking strategies.

Our eleventh graders spent most of the year preparing for the standardized test known as ICFES, which tests on a variety of subjects, including English. One of my goals was to prepare the eleventh graders as best as I could to take the English portion of the exam. In all of our classes we began a cognate chart that we updated after every reading to include examples such as *possibility* and *posibilidad*. These readings were drawn from an ICFES test-preparation book, which this school had developed before I arrived. The readings primarily included short passages followed by multiple-choice questions. I

thought expanding the students' vocabulary through cognates would help their reading comprehension when taking the standardized test, as I had learned at HSU that "these words that look alike and have shared meaning can help learners expand their vocabulary" (Lightbown and Spada 63). Each time we had a new English reading, the students added new words to our posters in the classroom and to their vocabulary lists in their notebooks. These posters became a daily, visual reminder of their growing vocabulary. By focusing on cognates, our students' vocabulary was quickly growing, and as a result, their self-esteem was also growing, which manifested in more participation.

In the past, when we had gone over questions in class, the students would give up before even trying. They would say, "I do not know what the answer is. I do not know English." After explaining to them how to identify cognates, I no longer accepted this as an excuse for not trying, and neither did my counterpart. I explained that in most questions and answers on the test, there were going to be words that the students recognized because they looked similar in Spanish. I told them that they needed to learn how to use the words that they did understand to create meaning from the text. This was going to help them on their standardized test. It probably seems like a small accomplishment, but teaching cognates was the most successful thing I did while working in secondary school. I combined this with teaching test-taking strategies like the process of elimination, which was also intended to help raise the students' test scores.

While I was pleased with the students' efforts towards learning English vocabulary, I have some regrets about my time working in secondary school. One of my regrets was that I left my textbooks from HSU in the United States. I think these texts,

especially Doug Brown's *Teaching by Principles*, could have provided me with more ideas in the classroom. Additionally, the textbook also offered suggestions for classroom management, which would have been helpful to review.

There were on average about three physical altercations a week at my school. These fights would break out in the middle of class, with students punching each other really hard. In one of my ninth-grade classes, my counterpart stepped out of the classroom to take a phone call, and she asked if I could finish the lesson. I agreed, which was against Peace Corps Colombia's policy, but I thought it would be fine. Peace Corps Colombia had a rule that we were not allowed in the rooms without our counterparts as a way of protecting us from being taken advantage of. Otherwise, volunteers would have been asked to teach their counterparts' classes on a regular basis. On this particular day, while my back was turned to the class as I was writing on the board, I had a ball thrown at me. I told my counterpart about it when she came back, and the students were not allowed to go to recess that day. In another ninth-grade class, a student urinated into a trashcan while class was in session. As a punishment, he had to wash out the trashcan, but was only suspended for one day. These are only a few examples, but every day there was another issue. After months of this, I started to mentally check out, and I was ready to go home. I got caught up in the day-to-day struggle, and stopped thinking about the bigger picture.

There were a lot of things I wish I had done better had I not been so discouraged. One of my regrets was not doing teacher trainings. This could have had a large impact on not only my school, but also my community. In some respects, teacher trainings seem

like the most useful contribution the Peace Corps could make in Colombia. Instead, I spent my whole final year of service working with one counterpart when I could have been training English teachers all over town. I knew that volunteers in other posts had been really successful with teacher trainings, but I was so burnt out from the daily classroom management issues that when Peace Corps Colombia stopped requiring teacher trainings, I was both psychologically and emotionally relieved. Interestingly, with feedback from previous volunteers, Peace Corps Colombia changed the TEL project framework during our second year of service to eliminate requiring teacher trainings. There were then the following two goals: improve English teaching, and improve English learning (as seen in Appendix G). These goals were intentionally vague so that volunteers could decide for themselves the best way to meet the objectives with respect to their communities. In hindsight, I feel it would have been more beneficial to focus on teacher trainings, but I was determined to improve my eleventh graders' ICFES test results.

The ICFES test scores had a big impact on Colombian high school students' acceptance into college. In my opinion, the English portion of the exam was economically biased because the wealthier the student was, the more likely they were able to afford private English classes on the weekends. Therefore, most of the students in public schools had low test results on the English portion of the exam because not only could they not afford private English lessons, but also many of the English teachers in public schools in Colombia spoke a low-level of English themselves. My school was no exception. I felt that by spending most of my energy trying to improve the test scores, I could help level the playing field for the students at my school.

The Colombian government, however, had unrealistic expectations of bilingualism for its country's students. While we were still in PST, we were given a copy of *Guia 22*, a curriculum guide that the Colombian government created for English teachers. When it was originally published, they had written that, "all [graduating eleventh-grade] students will be at a B-1 English level by 2019" (Velez White, 1). Colombia's scale for measuring English was influenced by the Common European Framework of References for Languages. In Appendix H, I include a copy of the scale that Peace Corps Colombia gave us during training. The overwhelming majority of my students were at or below the A-1 level, which meant that they had little to no English proficiency. The A-1 level is comparable to the ACTFL scale's novice-low level, which I learned about at HSU (as seen in Appendix A). As seen in Appendix H, the Colombian government wanted my students to improve by two whole levels in order to get to the B-1 level. This was frustrating because our work as Peace Corps Volunteers was supposed to help the country meet these goals. I felt that because the goals were unrealistic, we as PCVs were being set up to fail.

The Colombian government realized that this was an unrealistic goal because by the time we finished our Peace Corps service in 2016, the government had changed the date from 2019 to 2025. Even with the change of date, it is impossible for me to believe that all—or even most—graduating eleventh graders in the entire country will meet Colombia's goal of being at the B-1 English level by 2025 when so many public schools only offer one or two hours of English per week, and when their teachers' English levels are so low. This is partly due to problems with the test itself.

Appendix H's scale addresses all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the English portion of the ICFES was essentially just a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. There was no listening portion, no speaking portion, and no writing portion. If this test is going to continue to be used as a guide for measuring the country's level of bilingualism, it needs to change to include some of the other language skills besides just assessing the students' reading comprehension level.

I regret not spending more time addressing the other language skills, but I wanted to prepare my students for the test, which is why I focused so much of my time teaching reading comprehension skills and test-taking strategies. Due to time constraints, I felt that having a larger vocabulary would be most beneficial to improving their test scores because when we covered test preparation questions in class, the students would give up if they did not know what the majority of the words meant. I felt that if they had some basic comprehension of what the question was asking, they would be more likely to try and find the correct answer. In retrospect, I focused too much time on vocabulary development, and not enough time on grammar and other aspects of English.

Unfortunately, I was wrong, and their scores did not really improve. As much as I regret not doing more speaking and listening activities, classroom management was always an issue for me, and speaking and listening activities always escalated the classroom management problems. I wish that my choices helped improve the students' English portion of the ICFES more, but that is just not the case. I realize now that fighting harder to do more speaking and listening activities might have indirectly resulted in better test scores, but it would have been a daily struggle with the students over

classroom management. At the time, I was unprepared for how emotionally draining these classroom management issues were, so I continued focusing on vocabulary development, reading comprehension skills, and test-taking strategies until the end of my service.

I also realize now that even my teaching of vocabulary could have been greatly improved. I spent a lot of time teaching cognates when I could have been teaching vocabulary beyond the word level, as I was taught during my training at HSU. I should have taught, for example, some of the most common collocations. Collocations are words that commonly co-occur in order next to each other. Jeanette S. Decarrico uses the example of the word *butter* in her article "Vocabulary Learning and Teaching." *Butter*, she explains, co-occurs "with any number of other adjectives, such as *sweet butter, soft butter, dairy butter, unsalted butter, creamy butter, tasty butter, artificial butter*, and so on" (Celce-Murcia 292). Teaching collocations is a strategy that has potential to greatly increase student vocabulary and reading comprehension. I also could have taught more lexical phrases, or chunks, "such as *By the way; How do you do?; Give me a break*" (Celce-Murcia 295).

Additionally, it would have been helpful to teach lexico-grammatical aspects such as phrasal verbs. As seen in Appendix I, some of the most common phrasal verbs are *go on*, *carry out*, and *set up* (Gardner, Appendix B). Using these corpus-based word frequency lists would have improved the work I was doing with vocabulary. I should have exposed my counterpart and my students to high-frequency word lists because these

could have greatly increased the usefulness of students' vocabulary. This was information I was exposed to at HSU, but oftentimes in Colombia, I failed to realize long-term goals.

In July 2016, the eleventh-grade students took the official ICFES test. Appendix J is a copy of the results from my school, with an additional table underneath for clarity purposes. My eleventh-graders' test results were 67% at a level below A-1, which meant that over two-thirds of the students had no level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework. Additionally, 20% of the students were at an A-1 level, and 10% were at an A-2 level. Only 1% of the students were at a B-1 level, which is the level that the Colombian government wanted all graduating eleventh-grade students to be. None of the students at my school were above the B-1 level. As seen on the second page of Appendix J, the next year our scores only improved by 0.9% from the previous year. I hope that with continued efforts, the ninth and tenth-grade students that I worked with that year will improve their results in the upcoming years.

I did not receive the ICFES test results from my school until after my service had ended, but I could not help but ask myself, "How could I have been a more effective English teacher?" One thing I now wish is that I would have incorporated Content-Based Instruction (CBI) into my lessons**.** In *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson explain how CBI "is not exclusively a language program, but instead it integrates the learning of language with the learning of some other content" (132). CBI would have been an amazing outlet for addressing community issues in the classroom while simultaneously creating language objectives for teaching English. If I

could do my Peace Corps service over again, I would have built CBI units addressing the problems I saw in my community.

Some of these issues that I could have addressed include issues with pollution, the environment, recycling, health and exercise, as well as issues with drugs and alcohol. These were all common issues that I saw in the community. This would have activated the students' schema because these issues were part of their everyday lives. The content could have engaged students, and motivated them to learn English and address community problems simultaneously. Building a curriculum around these issues would have had a more sustainable impact on my community. I would encourage future volunteers who are working with limited resources to consider building curriculum through Content-Based Instruction. Although I struggled throughout my service to teach English in the schools, I am proud of myself for never giving up on my students, and for finishing my service. Thankfully, I was a little more successful in my community English classes, and the final section of this chapter will describe some of the work I did in my community English classes.

Teaching English in the Community

In early 2016, eighteen months into my service, I began an English class for members of my community who did not attend my school, but who had each individually asked me to offer English lessons. The class was made up of five students who were all conversational in English. Their ages ranged from thirteen to twenty-two years old, and we met once a week on Sunday nights for about an hour and a half. The community

English class lasted for the remaining eight months of my service. During the class, we played games as a way of stimulating conversation.

In my community English class, I used Communicative Language Teaching because it encouraged communication and fun. Additionally, CLT put an emphasis on authentic language. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson argue that, "whenever possible, authentic language – language as it is used in a real context – should be introduced (119)." The students in my community English class wanted to learn how to be able to navigate a variety of different social settings in English. For example, my students wanted to learn the difference between salutations like, "What's up?" which they would use in a casual setting versus "How are you?" which lends itself to a more formal setting. Additionally, we practiced other conversation starters like "How was your weekend? What did you do?" and "Where did you go?" In my community English class, I tried to push conversations further by always asking for more details from my students. My goal was to get my students to practice using as much English as they could, and I tried to make the conversations authentic.

In my community English classes one of the ways that I helped stimulate these conversations and practiced these different roles was through the use of a variety of games that aimed to stimulate conversation. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson argue that:

> Games are important because they have [features] in common with real communicative events – there is a purpose to the exchange. Also, the speaker receives immediate feedback from the listener on whether or not [they have] successfully communicated. Having students work in small groups [which

> happens in most games] maximizes the amount of communicative practice they receive (120).

It was really important for me to keep my community English classes small so that my students could maximize their practice. At the same time, playing games in order to stimulate conversation lowered the stress levels of the students in class. I received verbal feedback on multiple occasions from my students that they had a lot of fun, and that they learned a lot.

One of the games we played was called Ten Questions. During the game, someone writes a noun on a card without letting anyone else see the word. The remaining people in the circle have ten questions to guess the word correctly. Another game we played was called Taboo. The goal of the game is for a person to get their team members to guess the word on their card without using the word itself, or the additional words listed on the card. For example, someone might pick a card with the word *watch*, and underneath that word will appear five additional words like *look, time, wrist, clock* and *wears*. This forces the students to practice describing the original word *watch* without saying the word.

The goal of these community classes was to practice using authentic language in conversations. This was something I was rarely able to do in my school classes because of our problems with classroom management, which is why it felt so good to be able to practice listening and speaking in the community English classes. The two games mentioned above both largely stayed at the vocabulary word level, but these games also

stimulated conversations in English that took place around the games. This allowed me the opportunity to provide appropriate feedback and corrections to my students as the conversations unfolded. After a round or two of one of these games, my students would start to feel comfortable speaking English, which naturally led to more authentic conversations. For example, if a student said, “How is your weekend?” I was able to point out that the question should be in past tense, until the students could rephrase the question to “How was your weekend?” Using games as a way to stimulate conversation helped lower my students’ affective filter, and encouraged their participation. I would encourage future volunteers to incorporate games into their lessons because my students told me that they were less anxious to speak in front of other people when they were playing games.

In addition to my community English class, I also led an after-school English club for my students during my final year of service. Class was held for an hour every week, and focused mostly on spelling and pronunciation. The club began with five students, but only two students came consistently. Spelling and pronunciation were not highly motivating skills to learn, but they were necessary nonetheless. In English 635, Dr. Scott explained that it is estimated that 60-70% of English words are not spelt the way they are pronounced (Scott English 635). I thought that it was important to teach spelling, so I gave the students spelling words in thematic lists because that was how I learned vocabulary during Pre-Service Training.

Although teaching spelling was not something that received much of an emphasis during my training, it was still beneficial for the students because it simultaneously taught

them study skills and accountability. Each week, the students knew they were going to be tested on a set of words. Some examples of spelling lists that we covered in the after-school club included family, clothes, animals, sports, and nature. Each spelling list had a limited number of new words, usually between five and ten, and each list also included a new question-and-answer response that the students were asked to practice. For example, when we studied the vocabulary for clothes, the students were asked, “What are you wearing?” The following week, the students were expected to know how to ask and answer the question, while they were also given a traditional spelling test. An example of a student’s spelling test can be seen in Appendix K.

The two consistent attendees in my after-school club ended up becoming two of my best friends. It was a really positive experience for all of us because we ended up hanging out outside of class and practicing our English and our Spanish together more frequently. For all of the struggles of teaching English in a classroom setting, both my community English class and my after-school English club provided outlets that allowed me to feel successful regarding accomplishing my goal of teaching English as a foreign language.

This chapter has described some of my accomplishments in the classroom, as well as some of the challenges I faced, and some of the regrets I have about my service. I hope that future volunteers are inspired by the potential to affect positive change. I believe, especially in the education sector, volunteers’ contributions are more difficult to quantify because the impact might not be as noticeable as building a latrine, a bridge, or an aqueduct, which are all activities PCVs who are not in the education sector might be

asked to do. However, I believe the contribution of education volunteers has far reaching impacts for both students and community members.

CHAPTER 4: FINDING SUCCESS IN SECONDARY PROJECTS

In addition to volunteers' primary projects (such as co-teaching English, in my case), the Peace Corps requires volunteers to create or participate in sustainable secondary projects in their communities. Secondary projects were considered anything not related to our primary project. Therefore, my community English class, as well as my after-school English club, did not count as secondary projects. Instead, they were an extension of my primary project of teaching English.

Throughout my service, I participated in a few different secondary projects, the first of which was in March 2015, while I was living in my second Peace Corps site, the town of 1,000 people. During that time, I helped another volunteer conduct a three-day photography camp, which had been started by a volunteer in a previous cohort after she received digital cameras from an organization called Outside the Lens. With the donations from Outside the Lens, we were able to lead a three-day camp teaching fifteen students basic photography skills.

Each day of the camp, the students completed a new activity, which focused on learning a new photography skill. For example, one of the activities required the students to photograph a family member in or around their house while practicing the photography skill of taking a portrait. My favorite aspect of the project was that it incorporated writing. In my experience, students in Colombia were rarely encouraged to practice creative writing in school, and each of these projects asked the students to write about the photographs that they took in a creative way. The writing aspect was done in Spanish,

and it helped bring meaning to the photos. For the activity regarding family, the students had to write a poem about their family while describing some of their favorite aspects of their home, including their favorite meals and favorite traditions. At the end of the three days, we printed out a copy of each students' best photographs, and we pasted them on poster board along with the photo's respective writing piece. The students then had something to take home and share with their friends and family. This photography camp was something I only participated in once because after I moved to my final site I focused my attention on other secondary projects. But the Outside the Lens project was sustainable in the fact that Peace Corps Colombia still has the Outside the Lens cameras, and current volunteers are continuing to conduct photography camps in Peace Corps sites along Colombia's Caribbean coast.

My next time I participated in a secondary project, it was less successful. In October 2015, after I had moved to my final site placement, I tried volunteering at the *Casa de Cultura* in town. This was the name of the local cultural center where community members held dancing and music lessons. I offered to help teach guitar and piano lessons to whomever was interested. For a few weeks, I had one piano student. It was challenging for me because I had to learn a whole new set of vocabulary words and phrases in order to teach piano in Spanish, but it was a positive experience. Originally, I had hoped that after some time I would get more students, and eventually start teaching guitar too. Yet when the school year ended in November, and my student went on break, she told me that she was not interested in practicing piano again until after Carnival ended in February. Then, when Carnival was over, we did not continue with the piano

lessons because her school schedule was too busy. However, she did end up joining my community English club, which I was happy about because her enthusiasm for learning new things was inspiring.

In February 2016, I started what would become my most successful secondary project. By that point in time, I had been living in town for about seven-and-a-half months; during that time, the plaza had been under construction for the first six months. When the plaza was under construction, it was difficult to find places in town to meet people. I could not just go to the local coffee shop and read a book because there was no local coffee shop. There were a couple of parks in town, but no one hung out in them during the day because of the heat. People only really came out after the sunset, and moving to a town without a plaza limited my ability to socialize. Essentially, there was nowhere to really go to meet other people, which was why when the town finished construction on the plaza on Christmas Eve, 2015, I was so happy. The construction of the plaza was directly responsible for the success of my secondary project.

After living in town for seven-and-a-half months, I recognized a need in my community for an alternative to soccer as an after-school extracurricular activity. In Colombia, soccer is the most popular sport, and in many of the smaller, more rural areas, where volunteers were living and working, it was the only visible sport that people could watch or participate in. This meant that people who were not interested in playing soccer, were not good at playing soccer, or just did not like playing soccer had no other options available to them. I hoped to change that after meeting three teenagers whom I saw skateboarding in the plaza one day in late February.

When I saw them skateboarding, I was immediately excited, because skateboarding is, and has been, a passion of mine since I was a kid. This was something I knew I could immediately connect with, participate in, and encourage others to learn. After exchanging phone numbers, I asked if they could skateboard the following weekend, which became the beginning of our skateboard group. Together, we began skateboarding every Friday, and within a few weeks, word had spread and skateboarders from neighboring towns were coming to skateboard with us in the plaza.

The visibility of our skateboard group had positive impacts on the community that I had not expected. Due to the heat on the Colombian coast, there were a lot of people in town who never exercised. This was a topic of concern for many of my fellow volunteers. How do we encourage Colombians to exercise despite the heat? With skateboarding, it felt good to know that we were creating a space that encouraged others to come exercise with us. In the months that followed, a girls basketball club, and a girls volleyball club also began using the plaza for practice. It is hard to say whether or not the skateboard club was the catalyst for the creation of these other groups. It is possible that these groups existed before I lived there, and I just did not see them because the plaza was under construction. However, after speaking to several people in the mayor's office, I do believe that the skateboard club became a part of a growing conversation to introduce alternative sports into the community, especially for girls.

We had three girls in our skateboard club who came consistently to practice skateboarding with us, which was amazing because skateboarding is traditionally a male-dominated activity, and these girls were breaking that stereotype. Skateboarding can also

teach important life skills, including perseverance. Someone can not learn how to ride a skateboard without falling, and this taught young people the importance of getting back up and trying again. Skateboarding was something that took discipline and dedication, which was something I rarely saw in my English classes at school. It can take weeks, months, and years to learn certain tricks, and many young people in town were beginning to commit a lot of time to developing their skills on a board.

While the skaters were learning new tricks, I was also learning new Spanish vocabulary. I had to be able teach people how to balance, push, steer, and bend their knees in order to ride a skateboard. It took me a long time because so much of skateboarding vocabulary is considered slang to begin with, so certain words and phrases were unavailable in my bilingual dictionary. This was even more difficult for me when I was dealing with the skaters who were learning more advanced tricks. In those situations, I had to learn vocabulary to discuss posture, foot positioning, and technique. For me, listening became an important part of the skateboard club that I did not expect, but I was motivated to continue learning new vocabulary as the skateboard group began to grow. Within a couple months, more kids in town had bought skateboards, and our skateboard club was growing in numbers. What started out as a casual skateboarding session blossomed into a group of over twenty boys and girls ranging in ages from eight years old to twenty-seven.

To continue the group's momentum, I took the initiative to set up two documentary film showings in May and June of 2016, by going to the mayor's office and asking to use a room, a projector, and a film screen. With the support of the mayor's

office, I showed *Dogtown and Z-Boys* and *Bones Brigade: An Autobiography*, which discuss the history of skateboarding in the 1970s and 1980s. Enthusiasm for the films was high, with attendance reaching over twenty-five community members from our town and two neighboring towns.

The passion and excitement for skateboarding continued to grow after the documentary showings when skateboarders built two rails for grinding and doing tricks on. If I had had more time, money, and resources I would have liked to have arranged for the building of ramps for the skateboarders in town. There was an organization based out of Cartagena called Christian Skaters, which had worked with the city's local government to build two different skate parks in Cartagena. I could have encouraged the skateboarders in my town to organize, and get involved with local politics to advocate for a skate park. These were conversations that I began having with the older teenagers towards the end of my service, but I think I could have done more to advocate for this sooner. These are only small regrets, though. Overall, I am really happy with what I accomplished through the skateboarding group.

Skateboarding was the most positive part of my Peace Corps service because it was something that I was passionate about. It played a large role in sharing who I was with my community in a way that TEFL did not due to my introverted personality and the way I reacted to classroom management problems. Skateboarding helped fulfill goal two of the Peace Corps mission "to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served" (Rice 283). Although the work I did with my primary project was my reason for being asked to serve abroad in Colombia, I believe that the work I did

with the skateboarding group made at least an equally significant impact. I also believe that skateboarding is what I will be remembered for in my town. Gerard T. Rice explains in *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*, that "Senator Robert Kennedy suggested that [Goal 2] was perhaps the Peace Corps most enduring contribution" (Rice 289). I have only been back in the United States for six months, but I know that young people in my town continue to skateboard, as I have seen updated posts and photos on their social media accounts.

Throughout this M.A. project, I have discussed many of the difficulties that I faced in Colombia. But the skateboarding club made every hard day, every challenge, and every obstacle that I faced throughout my service worth it, and this never would have been possible if I had gone home early. I did not start skateboarding in town until I was eighteen months into service, and it took a few weeks after that for it to gain momentum, but if I had quit or gone home early, the skateboard group never would have happened. It takes a long time to integrate into a community, to recognize a community need, and then to address that need. Often times the most rewarding parts of service happen toward the end because it can take a long time to build trust with community members, which is why I believe Peace Corps is a twenty-seven month-long commitment. Peace Corps is a long process of trial-and-error, but its rewards are worth the time commitment. It feels good knowing that boys and girls in my town are excited about skateboarding, and that I got to share part of my culture with them.

CHAPTER 5: CLOSE OF SERVICE

Before returning to the United States in late November 2016, I celebrated with the Peace Corps Close of Service (COS) ceremony in late October. Ever since COS, much of my time has been spent evaluating, critiquing, and reflecting on my experiences in Colombia. Like many things in life, my Peace Corps service was something that no amount of training could have prepared me for. Although my experiences were often difficult, the lessons I learned were invaluable. Much of this M.A. project has discussed my successes, my challenges, and my regrets throughout the Master's International Program, and writing this project has given me time and space for reflection that I otherwise may not have had. This period of reflection has reiterated how thankful I am for finishing my service.

In August 2013, when I began the Master's International Program at Humboldt State University, there were five of us who started the program together. By May 2014, after our first year of graduate school, only three of us set off to serve in the Peace Corps, and only two of us finished our service. These numbers are not atypical in the MIP (Peace Corps). Similarly, when I arrived in Colombia in August 2014, I began training with a group of thirty-three hopeful volunteers, but by COS, only twenty volunteers finished their service. We lost close to forty percent of the volunteers in our cohort, which was above the normal rate of attrition. Out of the thirty-three original trainees, there had been three other MIP students in my cohort from different participating universities around the country, yet I was the only MIP student in my Peace Corps

Colombia cohort to finish service. This program proved to be an extremely difficult and demanding process, and I think it is important to note that most people struggled to complete the program. However, I hope that readers understand the rewards that came with persevering and completing my service.

In early 2016, I was notified that after thirty years, the Peace Corps was cancelling the Master's International Program. They were not too specific in their reasons for cancelling, but I think that overall the MIP was too long of a commitment for many volunteers. Asking students to commit four or more years for a Master's degree is a long time. Asking adult PCVs to live with a host family for the entirety of their twenty-seven months of service is also a challenging request, but these commitments came with real rewards. For example, one of the best relationships I had in Colombia was with my host-grandfather. Together, we watched baseball on the television all of the time. His favorite team was the Dodgers, whom he had begun following when they still played in Brooklyn. During my final year of service, he became really sick, and was constantly in and out of the hospital. It was a difficult situation to navigate, living in someone else's house with a sick family member, but even when my grandpa was ill, he was still a kind, gentle, and welcoming man. He never thought about himself, and he always offered every guest a piece of fruit, a glass of water, or a chair to sit in. Even though there were times when I felt uncomfortable, I learned a lot from his hospitality, and it is these feelings of warmth and kindness that I hope American readers can learn from Colombians. I am very fortunate to have been a part of the Master's International Program. I truly value the knowledge and experience that my time at Humboldt State University provided me both

before and after serving in Colombia, and I know that my education at HSU played a large role in my successes as a Peace Corps volunteer.

These successes, however small, took place both in school and in the community. I am proud of the work I did at the primary school level. I taught second and third graders phonemic awareness, as well as the alphabet in English, and watched as they learned how to read and correctly pronounce short, one-syllable words in English. I am also really proud of the work I did at the secondary school level. I worked with ninth, tenth, and eleventh-graders, and I taught them to correctly identify cognates, build their vocabulary, and utilize new test-taking strategies to prepare for the standardized test. Finally, I am really proud of my work with the skateboarding group, sharing a part of my culture while teaching boys and girls to develop their skills on a board. None of these things would have been possible without my full commitment to the Peace Corps. Although I faced many challenges, it is these successes that I most wish to remember from my time in Colombia.

In August 2016, at our three-day COS conference, my program manager said that she was not naïve about our role as PCVs. She did not believe we could save the education system in Colombia. She did not believe that our graduating eleventh-grade students would all become B-1 level English speakers, but she did believe that our very presence in these communities was laying a foundation for future opportunities. Her appreciation and gratitude for our service, along with the gratitude of many Colombians whom I worked with made my commitment worthwhile.

Now that I am back in the United States, and now that I have finished my service, I can still say that I believe in the Peace Corps mission. I believe that my time and service to my community meant something to the lives that I touched because I know how much those same people truly and profoundly affected my life for the better. Colombians showed me the importance of family in a way I had never seen before, and they taught me the importance of celebrating life on a daily basis through music and dance. As Cobbs Hoffman explains in *All You Need is Love*, "Perhaps training its own citizens as better servants of humanity was itself reason enough to send Americans abroad" (250). With that, I hope my experiences in Colombia both in and out of the classroom offer some guidance to other volunteers who need it when needed most.

I also hope that readers understand that volunteers' most enduring contributions take time, commitment, and perseverance. Furthermore, I hope that readers find inspiration in this M.A. project, and will consider joining the Peace Corps. Finally, I hope that the warmth and kindness that I experienced from Colombians encourages others to visit Colombia, if not to serve in the Peace Corps, and if not to teach English, then to experience a part of their rich and beautiful culture. On a personal level, there are still so many parts of Colombia that I have not seen, but I know that I will be returning in the future to visit the friends and host-family members who made my time there so special.

APPENDIX A:

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languauge (ACTFL) Levels

Level	Description
0	Unable to function in the spoken language.
0+	Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed utterances.
1	Able to satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics.
1+	Able to initiate and maintain predictable face-to-face conversations and satisfy limited social demands.
2	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.
2+	Able to satisfy most work requirements with language usage that is often, but not always, acceptable and effective.
3	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.
3+	Often able to use the language to satisfy professional needs in a wide range of sophisticated and demanding tasks.
4	Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs.
4+	Speaking proficiency is superior in all respects, usually equivalent to that of a well-educated, highly articulate native speaker.
5	Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country where the language is spoken.

(Brown 111).

One difference between ACTFL's scale and the Peace Corps scale was that the Peace used a 10-point scale where ACTFL uses an 11-point scale. The Peace Corps combines ACTFL's 0 / 0+ into the same novice-low level. In the Peace Corps, the numbers are associated with the following levels:

0 / 0+: novice-low	1: novice-mid	1+: novice-high
2: intermediate-low	2+: intermediate-mid	3: intermediate-high
3+: advanced-low	4: advanced-mid	4+:advanced-high
5: superior		

APPENDIX B:

List of Colombian Holidays and Days Off
2015 School Calendar

•January 12-16: First week of school. Teacher meetings. (No students)

•January 19: First day of school

•February 14-17: Carnival (Barranquilla-specific) (No school)

•March 24: St. Joseph's Day (No school)

•March 30-April 3: Holy Week (No school)

•May 1: Labor Day (No school)

•June 1: Ascension Day (No school)

•June 15-July 3: Semester break (No school)

•July 20: Independence Day (No school)

•August 7: Battle of Boyaca (No school)

•August 8: Fiestas del Mar (Santa Marta-specific) (No school)

•August 17: Assumption Day (No school)

•October 5-9: Semana Uribe (No school)

•October 12: Columbus Day (No school)

•November 2: All Saints Day (No school)

•November 16: Cartagena Independence Day

•November 27: Last day of school

APPENDIX C:

Tenth-Grade Dialogue Activity

Why don't you take a break tonight?

Uai don't iu teik e breik tunnait.

Why not come with me to a party?

Uai not kom uit mi tu a pardi

No thanks. Maybe some other time.

No Zenks meibi som oder taim.

Come on JT is having a party. A lot of available guys will be there.

Kamon JT is javing e pardi e lot of evelobol gays uil bider.

No Listen, I'm too busy. Go without me.

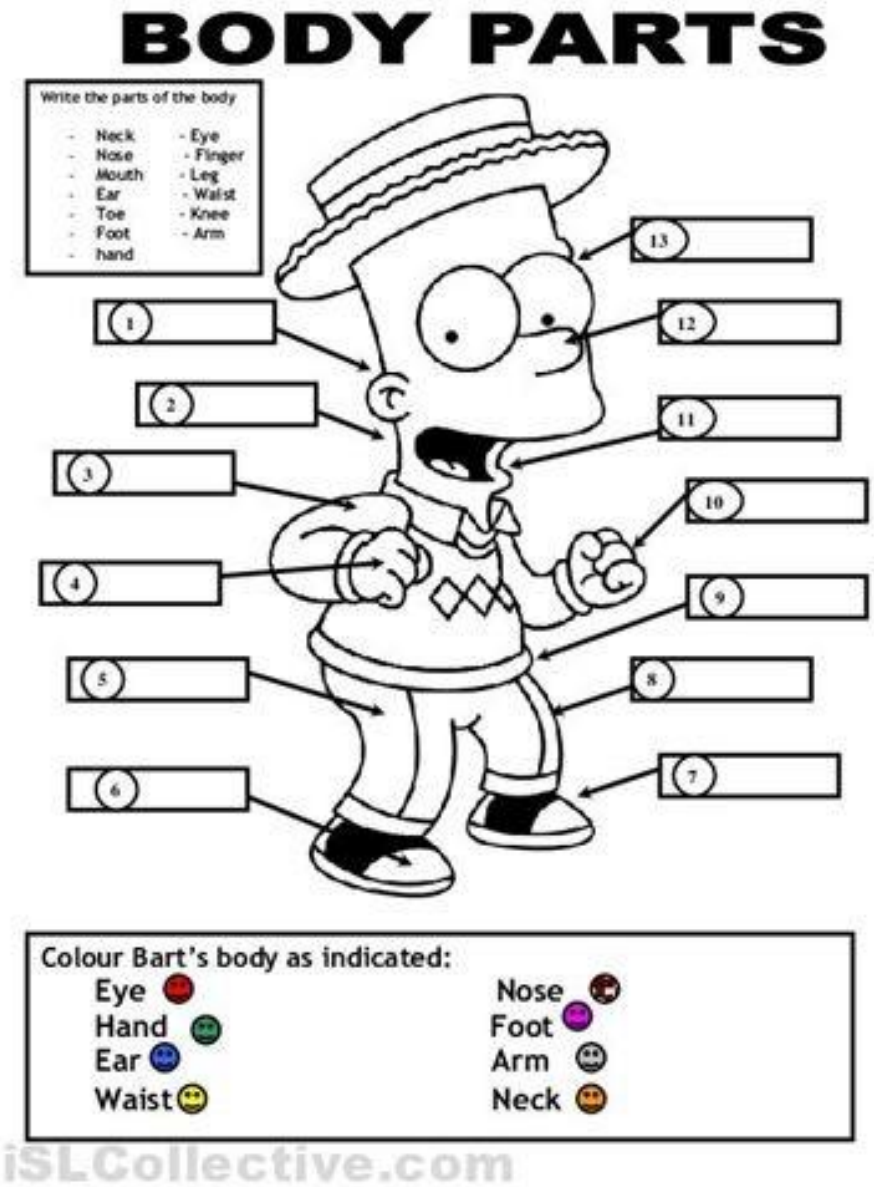
No lisen, Aim to bisi. Go uidot mi.

You're always working.

Iur alwis working.

APPENDIX D:

First-Grade Activity on Body Parts



APPENDIX E:

First-Grade Final Exam

NAME_____ PRIMERO_____

1- COLORS

red yellow blue

2- DRAW THE FACES

sad happy sleepy angry

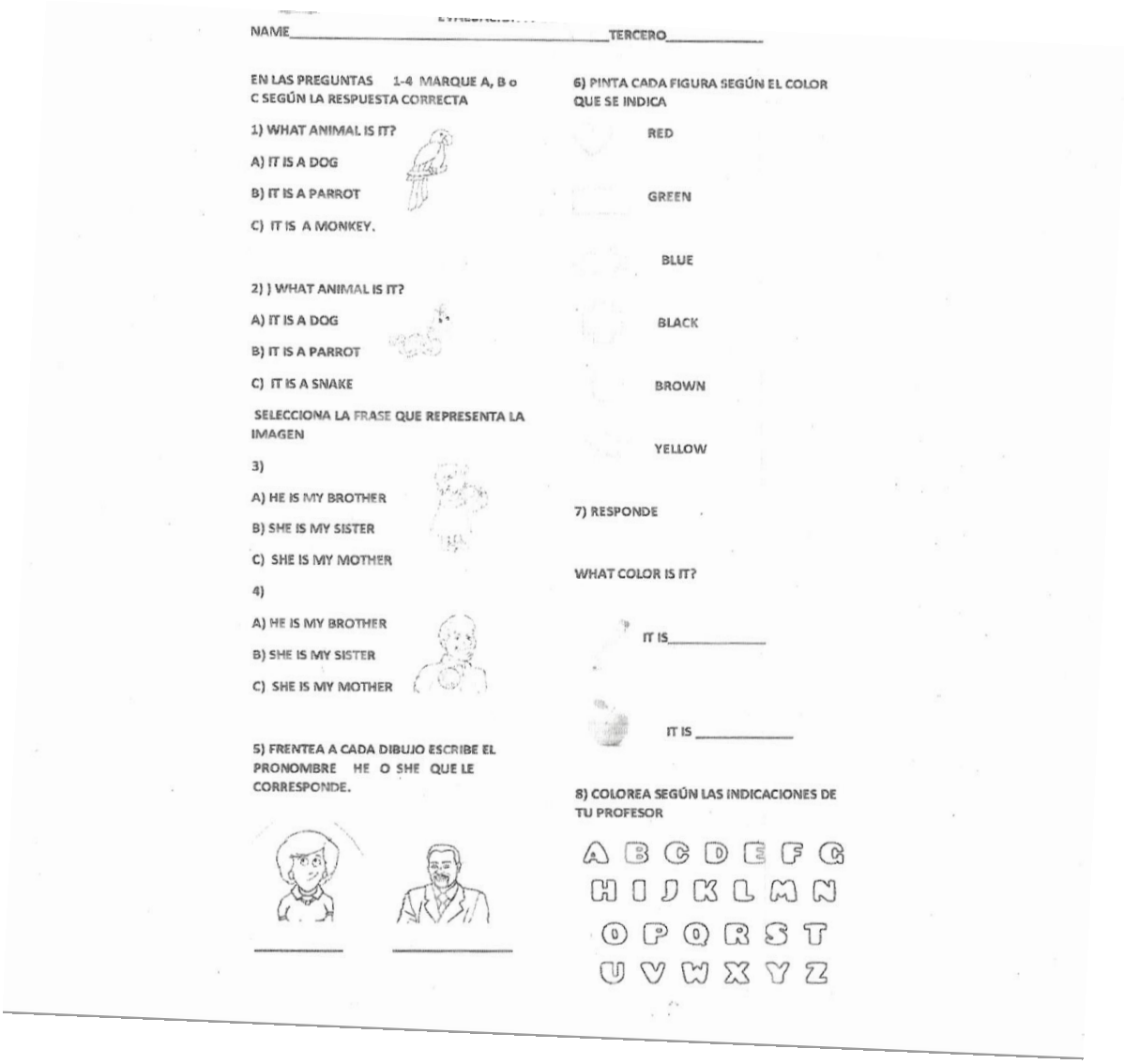
3- COLORS DOG

4-MATCH THE PICTURES WITH CORRECT WORDS.

EAR
HEAD
NOSE
MOUTH
EYE

APPENDIX F:

Third-Grade Final Exam



NAME_____TERCERO_____

EN LAS PREGUNTAS 1-4 MARQUE A, B o C SEGÚN LA RESPUESTA CORRECTA

1) WHAT ANIMAL IS IT?

A) IT IS A DOG

B) IT IS A PARROT

C) IT IS A MONKEY.

2)) WHAT ANIMAL IS IT?

A) IT IS A DOG

B) IT IS A PARROT

C) IT IS A SNAKE

SELECCIONA LA FRASE QUE REPRESENTA LA IMAGEN

3)

A) HE IS MY BROTHER

B) SHE IS MY SISTER

C) SHE IS MY MOTHER

4)

A) HE IS MY BROTHER

B) SHE IS MY SISTER

C) SHE IS MY MOTHER

5) FRENTEA A CADA DIBUJO ESCRIBE EL PRONOMBRE HE O SHE QUE LE CORRESPONDE.

_____ _____

6) PINTA CADA FIGURA SEGÚN EL COLOR QUE SE INDICA

RED

GREEN

BLUE

BLACK

BROWN

YELLOW

7) RESPONDE

WHAT COLOR IS IT?

IT IS_____

IT IS _____

8) COLOREA SEGÚN LAS INDICACIONES DE TU PROFESOR

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

Unfortunately, some of the images on the exam are difficult to see due to the quality of the photocopy.

APPENDIX G:

Peace Corps Colombia's Teaching English for Livelihoods (TEL) Project Framework

Goal 1

English Teacher Technical Training
Teachers will improve their current TEFL methodology, their teaching resources development and lesson planning skills, and will use more English in classroom settings.

Goal 2

Enhanced English Proficiency for Students through Curricular and Extracurricular Training Opportunities.
Students will develop communicative competencies in English through participating in curricular and extracurricular training to expand their academic and employment opportunities.

Goal 3

Support to Community Initiatives Within the Field of Youth Development and English.
Community members will develop life skills and English competency that will improve their livelihoods.

New TEL Project Framework

Goal 1

Improve English Teaching
Colombian male and female English teachers will improve their teaching practice and linguistic competence.

Goal 2

Improve English Learning
Colombian male and female students will improve English language proficiency in English through participating in curricular and extracurricular training to expand their academic and employment opportunities.

APPENDIX H:

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
(Provided by Peace Corps Colombia during training in 2014)

Level	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
C2	Has no difficulty understanding any kind of spoken language, delivered at fast native speed	Can understand a wide range of long complex texts	Has a good command of idiomatic expressions	Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in a logical structure
C1	Can understand enough to follow complex topics, though he/she may need to confirm details	Can understand in detail lengthy complex texts, provided he/she can reread difficult sections	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously	Can express him/herself with clarity and precision
B2	Idiomatic usage influences the ability to understand	Has a broad active reading vocabulary	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction	Can express news and views effectively in writing
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure	Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest	Can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations	Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance
A2	Can understand enough provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated	Can understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary	Can communicate simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information	Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need
A1	Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning	Can understand very short simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases	Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech	Can ask for or pass on personal details in written form

APPENDIX I:

PHRASAL VERB FREQUENCY COUNTS

Appendix B: Phrasal verb frequency counts of 20 highest frequency lexical verbs with 16 different particles

Verb	*Out*	*Up*	*On*	*Back*	*Down*	*In*	*Off*	*Over*	*Round*	*About*	*Through*	*Around*	*Along*	*Under*	*By*	*Across*	*Grand Tot*
GO	7,688	3,678	14,903	8,065	4,781	1,974	2,104	991	1,366	244	972	394	717	95	44	0	48,016
COME	5,022	5,523	4,830	8,029	3,305	4,814	518	1,004	1,107	741	567	139	1,270	2	7	0	36,878
TAKE	3,426	4,608	4,199	1,628	775	509	2,163	5,420	78	2	31	37	94	0	0	0	22,970
GET	3,545	3,936	2,696	4,552	1,538	1,127	1,086	293	365	102	533	241	163	3	42	1	20,223
SET	4,633	10,360	11	265	504	281	1,869	1	0	645	0	0	0	0	0	0	18,569
CARRY	10,798	36	3,869	172	84	32	170	131	10	29	127	107	52	0	0	0	15,617
TURN	4,284	2,710	292	1,373	1,051	149	594	975	1,146	38	1	423	0	4	0	0	13,040
BRING	1,425	2,507	390	2,200	1,022	2,505	31	129	105	2,083	11	18	88	0	0	0	12,514
LOOK	1,641	3,871	244	2,251	2,221	250	2	207	694	45	21	779	0	0	0	0	12,226
PUT	1,660	2,835	1,428	1,369	2,873	810	742	76	21	35	90	16	1	9	0	5	11,970
PICK	856	9,037	35	3	3	1	44	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,997
MAKE	1,105	5,469	25	270	65	16	277	75	16	0	40	2	8	0	0	0	7,368
POINT	6,984	104	0	7	56	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,159
SIT	191	1,158	118	834	4,478	145	1	3	34	18	4	126	1	1	0	0	7,112
FIND	6,619	33	9	128	34	57	4	5	3	3	10	29	0	0	0	0	6,934
GIVE	532	4,186	34	507	11	579	121	198	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	6,174
WORK	4,703	334	411	36	98	182	33	31	23	0	100	19	5	10	0	0	5,985
BREAK	996	1,286	3	4	2,199	220	549	2	0	0	169	0	0	0	0	0	5,428
HOLD	1,507	1,624	908	823	369	34	91	40	2	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	5,403
MOVE	573	477	1,419	566	306	790	242	201	19	178	2	340	84	0	0	0	5,197
Total	68,188	63,772	35,824	33,082	25,773	14,475	10,647	9,802	4,992	4,164	2,678	2,673	2,483	128	93	6	278,780
% of PV	13.1	12.3	6.9	6.4	5.0	2.8	2.1	1.9	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	53.7
Cum %	13.1	25.4	32.3	38.7	43.7	46.5	48.5	50.4	51.4	52.2	52.7	53.2	53.7	53.7	53.7	53.7	

Source: Gardner and Davies, 2007, pp. 350–351.

This chart can be found in Appendix B of Gardner's book *Exploring Vocabulary: Language in Action* (Gardner 163).

APPENDIX J:

ICFES Test Results

nstituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación - ICFES

Resultados por Secretarías Saber 11°

Inglés

N.D.: no hay información disponible.

Código DANE	País/ETC/Municipios	Establecimientos educativos	[illegible]meparación		[illegible]viaparación		Porcentaje de estudiantes por niveles de desempeño				
							A-	A1	A2	B1	B+
	COLOMBIA		51	Menor	8	Similar	36%	32%	19%	9%	1%
	ETC		47		8		56%	28%	10%	4%	1%
	OFICIALES URBANOS ETC		46	Similar	8	Similar	58%	29%	9%	2%	0%
	OFICIALES RURALES ETC		44	Similar	7	Similar	67%	25%	5%	0%	0%
	PRIVADOS ETC		58	Menor	10	Menor	12%	19%	21%	34%	11%
	GC 1 ETC		42	Mayor	6	Mayor	77%	20%	1%	0%	0%
	GC 2 ETC		45	Similar	7	Similar	60%	28%	8%	2%	0%
	GC 3 ETC		58	Menor	10	Menor	21%	30%	27%	18%	1%
	GC 4 ETC		69	Menor	10	Menor	3%	10%	18%	47%	20%
108634000220		[redacted]	46	Similar	8	Similar	67%	20%	10%	1%	0%

This image describes the results of my students' English levels on the ICFES exam. These results were given in regards to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which I explain in Appendix H. What I focus on in my M.A. project are my school's results of their eleventh-grade students' proficiency levels, which can be found at the bottom of the image. The name of my school has been blacked out in the image above. For clarity purposes, I have included a replica of this information below:

A-	A1	A2	B1	B2
67%	20%	10%	1%	0%

ICFES Test Results (Continued)

MUNICIPIO	PROM LECTURA CRITICA		PROM MATEMATICA		PROM SOCIALES Y CIUDADANAS		PROM CIENCIAS NATURALES		PROM INGLES	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
[redacted]	47.35	51.2	46.79	49.0	46.78	48.2	47.45	50.5	48.6	49.5

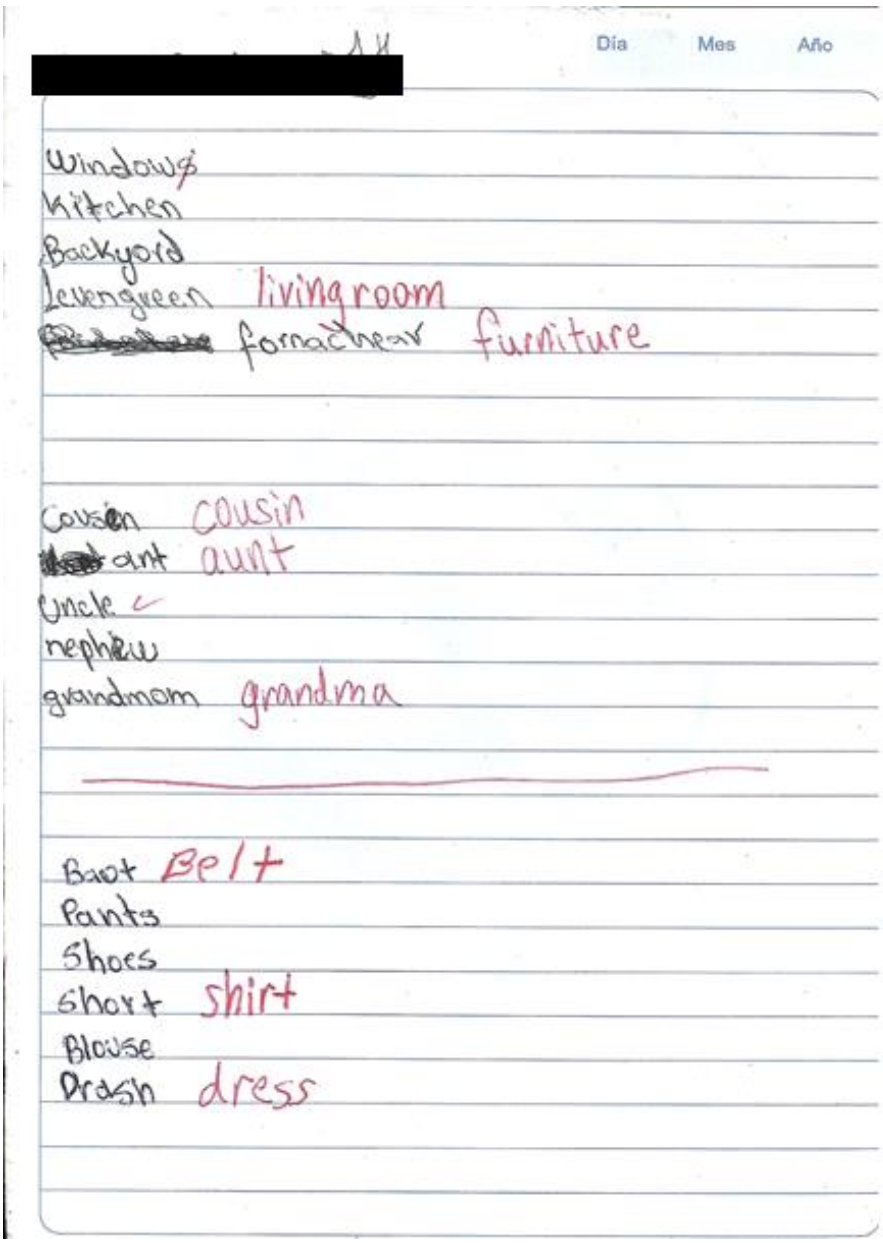
ASIGNATURA	AÑO 2015	AÑO 2016
Lectura Crítica	42.2	46.4
Matemáticas	41.08	43.1
Sociales y Ciudadanas	40.08	42.8
Ciencias Naturales	41.21	44.9
Inglés	44.51	43.8

This image provides information in regards to the ICFES test results by comparing and contrasting the scores from 2015 to 2016. In the image this information is located in the upper right-hand corner under the heading “PROM INGLES.” For clarity purposes, I have included a replica of this information below. The portion I included describes solely the English scores, which explains my school’s English scores improved by 0.9% from 2015 to 2016. The name of my school has been blacked out in the image above.

2015	2016
48.6	49.5

APPENDIX K:

Student Sample of Spelling Test



[redacted] Día Mes Año

Windows
Kitchen
Backyard
Levengreen livingroom
[redacted] fornachear furniture

Cousin cousin
[redacted] ant aunt
Uncle
nephew
grandmom grandma

Baot Belt
Pants
Shoes
Short shirt
Blouse
Drasn dress

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