

Environmental

Environmental Views on Paradise

This is a sample of what teachers work on as projects during the English Immersion Program. In June 2010 a group of participant teachers worked on a magazine related to the environment on the island with the guidance of their tutor Randy Roy Stephens. They did research on the topic by reading, interviewing inhabitants, and visiting different places and institutions that work for the environment on the island. They wrote different articles and called their magazine Environmental Views in Paradise. This magazine shows an active participation of the teachers in the program, and also an interesting reflection on environmental issues on the island. It is also evident that with this experience participant teachers value the role of projects in language learning processes. However, their experience leads to a discussion on the demands of following this approach in the immersion program.

Thinking about the environment

The Archipelago of San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina was declared by UNESCO as the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve on November 10, 2000. This Seaflower is the largest in the Caribbean and Latin American and one of the largest in the world. However, we still have many problems to solve and much to do. The extreme population density that is destroying the environment and life style of islanders is also increasing environmental degradation, poverty, hunger conflict, and social problems on the Island.

Nowadays, the environment is the most important topic around the world. Taking care of the planet is a demand for humanity, and San Andres Island is not the exception. When people cause terrible damage to the environment, they deteriorate our progress. There are also many conditions that affect life's growth and develop-

ment. We must take care of the environment not just because we live in it, but because it directly affects our lives. From our environment we get our food, a place to rest and breathe fresh air; that is why everybody needs to live under good health conditions.

Thus, we wanted to talk about different aspects of the Island and discuss how we can keep the environment clean. So, we mention the importance of recycling on the island, and the problems caused by bad use of sewer services in San Andres Island because it is usually unloaded mostly in the sea. Garbage use and garbage disposal are critical issues on the island that have called our attention as visitors. We now understand how hard it is to live on an island and the implications of garbage on it. Tourists usually come and use lots of plastic, paper, and things without realizing how much garbage they make. Although the government has come to realize that is it crucial to

work on this problem and try to implement more effective policies to garbage use and treatment, still it is an issue to reflect on. We have also realized that even though the island has so many problems related to sewer services there are governmental institutions working hard trying to solve them. Living on an island is not so easy and we as visitors sometimes never get to see this side of the island.



During 29 days on San Andres Island we visited many beautiful places and we also found out a

new way of life in this Paradise. In this project the group number 2 of the Immersion program worked together because we wanted to show different and important aspects that can be positive and negative for the Island of San Andres Island. We developed a magazine called *Environmental Views on Paradise* that was printed and distributed to most of the participant teachers. We thank everyone for their support and hard work during the research and interviews that we made and we hope you enjoy knowing about our experience.

Learning by doing



By reading lots of materials from the library at the University and by interviewing people on the island we were able to gather

important information for our magazine. To begin with, we realized that over time humanity has recognized that our planet is the only one we

have. Taking care of the water, the ozone layer, the natural resources and the environment is not only necessary but also mandatory for everybody. At the end of the 20th century, people started to be concerned about the environment due to the decreasing of our natural resources, which brought a lot of problems to our lives. A lot of these problems are caused by attitudes and actions in our daily routines, so it is necessary to think about solutions, starting from recycling in our houses, neighborhoods, and cities.



On San Andres Island, the government along with its dependencies like Coralina Sea Flowers, Trash Busters, Proactiva, and the Health Department, has been working on creating a new culture of taking care of the Island because this is a touristic and a

beautiful place. However, their attempts to solve environmental problems on this island have been insufficient due to the fact that they have not developed successful recycling programs yet.

Nevertheless, those entities are working together to clean, save and protect this island. They invite us to love and to do everything we can to take care of this beautiful land (like recycle), plant trees, grow flowers and gardens; pick up trash, produce less smoke...; everything we can do. On the other hand, they invite us to work together to have a clean San Andres; this is related to preserving natural resources and to the use of garbage on the Island.

The preservation of the environment in Colombia is a concern that began since Simon Bolivar's time, when he dispatched a decree that contained several rules protecting, supporting and making good use of the forest. It's was just until the middle of the sixteenth century that the use of garbage was taken into consideration in our

country. On the island, garbage had no control at first; it was thrown into the sea consistently. Before Coralina's Seaflower project, the garbage recollection process was very difficult and dangerous not only for the environment but also for human beings.

People used to burn garbage thinking that is it the best way of getting rid of it. But burning garbage makes the land become dry and hard. This process affected the normal path of the water during raining season. Due to this fact, land became too hard and the rain water did not filter. At the same time, the high temperature produced by burning garbage caused the death of the microorganisms that enrich the land decreasing fertility of earth. Garbage burning also increases erosion.

These processes on the island affected the environment because there was no an organization that controlled those situations with appropriate standards. Nowadays, Coralina is organizing many activities step by step in order to keep a good environment and a better quality of life for all the people that live in this beautiful place. Some of the control activities that Coralina does are related to dispatching licenses that guarantee the good use of the environment; having appropriate disposals for garbage according to the island needs; keeping a good control for enterprises that collect and transport the garbage; and doing preventive activities in order to keep and maintain a clean environment.

The recollection of garbage on the San Andrés Islands is a responsibility of the Trash Buster Company which is under the control and help of Coralina Institute and The Special Administrative Control of Public Service. Trash Buster Company is in charge of the recollection of solid waste three times a week without classifying it. Recycling material is carried to Cartagena.

The Magic Garden, where garbage is taken, has better conditions because the special Administrative Control of public Services is developing a project for restructuring and adjusting its access road (electrical lighting of the street and different forms of control in the area). It is located in the sector of Schooner Bight, approximately 675m from the *Circunvalar* avenue. It receives ordinary waste, special vegetables materials, cartons, debris and hospital waste.

On the island, the use of garbage is a problematic case in which official authorities have been working hard. They are planning how to improve the recollection of garbage taking into account new ways to collect, recycling processes, costs, frequency of collection and what is most important teaching Islanders and tourist how to recycle so that they feel the obligation of being responsible. Our magazine project invites us to be aware of how garbage is affecting the island and to start recycling so we can have the best place in the world. Let's clean San Andres; it is a commitment for everyone.

Another important part of our magazine is related to the sewer system on the island. Only 6% of the population and some hotels in San Andres are connected to public sewer. The waste water produced by people connected to this system is discharged into sewer pipes and then, carried to the west side of the island, where it is finally discharged into the sea without any further processing. Social groups that have this service belong to strata 4, 5 and 6, along with the hotels located at the northern of the island. This does not mean that all persons located within the strata mentioned have this service, but what is certain is that poor people of the archipelago have no connection to the sewer system.

The septic system is the most widely used on the islands. In neighborhoods of all social strata it is

the septic tanks, which are periodically discharged by trucks. Unfortunately, this type of waste water is not the most desirable in areas where the aquifer San Luis is located. The depth of the aquifer water is quite low, so all sewage from septic tanks infiltrate in it, causing pollution. After cleaning septic tanks, the contents of trucks are emptied in the northeast coast of the island. In the coastal area of San Andrés it is common to see pipes coming out of houses and extend to the treatment plant to continue out to the sea.

These limitations and problems are associated with the rapid growth of population and urban development that takes place on San Andres, especially in North End, with its initial development. This is so because of the distribution around the Avenue 20 de Julio, destined for processing as a center of heavy growth. Urban growth around coastal strip led to the filling of a large swampy area northeast (Bahia San Andreas). The sprawl, coupled with the air terminal building (1955) bottled at the heart of North End, blocking the natural drainage to the sea during the high rainy season resulting in flooding of large areas that were public highway In the area of Natania, north-west of the island, in the districts partly Back Road low land, Natania III, IV and V neighborhoods, Well Hill and Quarries flooding problems occur because of the obstruction or blockage in some areas of the natural drainage water system in the lowlands infiltration of the aquifer or caves.

People think that the island needs its sewage system. Promoting private sector participation and involvement of specialized operators in the provision of water and sewerage services on the Island of San Andres, is a national government's commitment to improve the living conditions of the island. The resources that are collected from fees and contributions from the Department of San Andrés are insufficient. Therefore, additional contributions are required of the Nation to achieve financial closure of project. In order to

mitigate the risk perception of investors and ensure the participation of operators, it is necessary to complement the National and appropriate resources defined to date by new future fiscal periods. Linking a specialist operator to ensure the proper utilization of existing resources for investment and the efficient operation of the systems should be considered as a project of strategic importance.

By reading a lot, interviewing leaders in the community and taking field trips to visit places where we could learn about the environmental situation on the island, we were able to decide that garbage control and the sewer system on the island were the most important topics to discuss in our magazine. We ended up learning a lot about these topics, and about the vocabulary and grammar needed to discuss about them.

Projects in the immersion program

Developing a project in a language class is a demanding task not only for the students but for the tutor as well. Teaching the language needed for the demands that students are going to face when gathering and analyzing information is not always done clearly. It is common for tutors to leave students alone in the process and just ask them for results. Students might find themselves with lots of challenges and eventually will start using their mother tongue to solve them. Planning, discussing, making decisions and gathering information become tasks usually done in their first language rather than in the target one. On the other hand, getting information and concentrating on the content might take over leaving the language practice and learning aside. The ideal situation of course is to get a balance between content and language achievement.

Attempts to manage this balance have usually been developed in bilingual education contexts where language and academic instruction are integrated.

These programs move into a continuum from language-driven to content-driven approaches. In the former, content is a vehicle to achieve language. The main goal is language learning, and there is usually non-academic content such as holidays, vacations, and imaginary situations. On the other hand, content-driven approaches consider content and language equally important. Bilingual immersion programs are an example of these.¹⁵ The English immersion program has aimed at becoming a content-driven approach by using *project work* as a method to improve teachers' language skills. The program promotes English teachers to become sensitive towards the cultural context they are immersed in. During the program, they are part of a different community; they are acquiring academic skills and also knowledge on that community. We know that a language implies a culture, and it is necessary to consider cultural factors when learning it. This is the case for the immersion program and project work has been an effective tool to achieve this understanding.

Group 2 in 2010, as we see in this experience, developed a magazine about environmental issues on the island. Other groups have worked on plays about myths and legends of the island and on radio shows about traditional music of the Caribbean. These experiences have shown us that the learning process for teachers is more meaningful when developing a project because they get to work together cooperatively and specially, they are able to get closer to the community because that is their actual source of information. Thus, the native families where they are staying are more involved with the program academically and teachers seem to be using the language more often in real situations.

Besides, teachers might realize that after experiencing this approach themselves, they are able

to apply it in their own schools and with their students. This has been one of the most important achievements of the immersion program because it can not only impact the teachers but also their schools and students. The program might be then a model to follow in regards to the effectiveness of this methodology for language learning. Research has shown benefits of content-based instruction, which also apply to task project approaches. Topics are easier to remember and learn; and there is a relationship between student motivation and student interest with their ability to process, recall and elaborate information.¹⁶

The benefits of implementing project work in the immersion program are not only related to the participant teachers, but to the tutors. They have learnt a lot from the experience of guiding these projects and from trying to balance content and language learning. They are more creative every time and they are not afraid of taking risks and trying new things. They have also become more open-minded and more sensitive towards their students' needs and interests. Tutors know that they should be a model to follow for the participant teachers, so they try to make their learning process a meaningful experience by taking the students out of the classroom and challenging them with new activities and tasks. Field trips, documentation tasks, video activities, net surfing, among others, are some of the typical dynamics of classes in the immersion program. Developing a project has also empowered tutors to be more involved with their students learning process and with their learning styles and preferences. Tutors have also worked together to help one another develop appropriate tasks for their students. It has definitely been an opportunity to become better teachers and to make the program an interesting place to learn about a language and a culture.

¹⁵ For more information on bilingual education see In T.K. Bhatia & W. Ritchie (Eds) (2004). *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. (pp 547-576).

¹⁶ To see more information on task and project based see Richards, J. (2008). *Methodology in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge