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The local legend as a pedagogical resource for contextualized, critical, and transformative environmental education

La leyenda local como recurso pedagógico para una educación ambiental contextualizada, crítica y transformadora

Eduardo Antonio Jaime Muñoz[1,a]

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to design pedagogical activities based on the creation of a local legend to foster environmental awareness among schoolchildren from rural schools in the commune of Monte Patria, Coquimbo Region, Chile. The methodology followed a qualitative approach with a descriptive scope; it also included the use of a word processor for collaborative writing, field trips to the place where the story was set, photography, and consultation of specialized literature. Ten students aged 6 to 12 years from a multigrade school participated in the study. *The results included the creation of the legend The treasure under the carob tree of the mountain pass*, the capture of three photographs, and the development of six recommended pedagogical activities for working with the legend in the classroom. The conclusions of the study are linked to the generation of new innovative pedagogical proposals, in which local legends constitute a valuable educational resource for the teaching of environmental education.

Keywords: *local legends; territory; pedagogical innovations; environmental awareness; schoolchildren.*

RESUMEN

El objetivo del estudio fue diseñar actividades pedagógicas a partir de la creación de una leyenda local para fomentar la conciencia ambiental en escolares de las escuelas rurales de la comuna de Monte Patria, región de Coquimbo, Chile. La metodología fue de enfoque cualitativo y alcance descriptivo; así mismo, incluyó el uso del uso de procesador de texto para la escritura colaborativa, la realización de salidas de campo al lugar donde se ambientó la obra, la toma de fotografías y la consulta de bibliografía especializada. Participaron 10 estudiantes de entre 6 a 12 años de una escuela multigrado. Los resultados incluyeron la creación de la leyenda *El tesoro bajo el algarrobo del portezuelo,* la captura de tres fotografías, y la elaboración de seis actividades pedagógicas recomendadas para trabajar la leyenda en el aula escolar. Las conclusiones del trabajo se vinculan con la generación de nuevas propuestas pedagógicas innovadoras, en las que las leyendas locales se constituyen como un recurso educativo valioso para la enseñanza de la educación ambiental.

Palabras clave: *leyendas locales; territorio; innovaciones pedagógicas; conciencia ambiental; escolares.*

Affiliation and academic degree

[1] Universidad Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[a] Posdoctorado en Ciencias Sociales y Humanas.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental education has become one of the most significant challenges facing school systems worldwide in recent decades, particularly in light of the escalating climate crisis and the degradation of natural ecosystems. "In this context, schools become strategic spaces for educating critically thinking citizens, where children develop an understanding of their surroundings and are capable of acting responsibly in response to environmental challenges" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021, p. 57). In this regard, rural environments provide educational settings that are closely connected to nature and offer opportunities to develop innovative activities with students. Furthermore:

> Rural schools are grounded in the rural environment and culture and play a dynamic role in the territorial context as active members of a territorial institutional system, as repositories of identities and emotions, as sources of local social capital, and as elements shaping the social construction of rural life. (Rosa Aquino et al., 2025, p. 269)

However, despite the value of the natural ecosystems found in rural territories, teaching practices in rural schools continue to follow traditional approaches that hinder the connection between local identity and the development of environmental scientific knowledge aimed at protecting the natural resources found in these areas.

Within this framework, oral narratives and the use of traditional legends emerge as educational resources. Moreover:

> Oral transmission is essential for preserving a community's culture and knowledge, as words perpetuate a legacy that has endured over time across different cultures worldwide. This legacy has been preserved primarily through the contributions of elders, who, by sharing their stories with younger generations, ensure the continuity of oral heritage to the present day. (Vera and Centeno, 2025, p. 2)

Several studies have highlighted the achievement of meaningful learning through the educational potential of literature and oral tradition. However, a gap remains in the systematization of these tools, and experiences linking them to environmental education in rural schools have not received sufficient attention within school curricula.

The relevance of this study is supported by several considerations. From a social perspective, the appreciation of traditional narratives strengthens the cultural heritage and identity of rural communities. In this regard, the use of narratives related to the environment can be integrated into environmental education practices. These educational strategies require diverse methodologies that contextualize environmental issues and encourage active student participation (Vallejos and Callao, 2022).

Such practices provide teachers with a tool for promoting meaningful and contextually situated learning experiences among students, thereby encouraging processes of environmental awareness.

This study was conducted in the commune of Monte Patria, Coquimbo Region, Chile, a rural area characterized by its natural and cultural heritage, where legends form part of the collective imagination of local inhabitants. The proposal involves the creation of a legend as a teaching resource, supported by digital tools for creative writing, field visits to locations associated with the narrative, photographic documentation, and a review of specialized literature. This approach makes it possible to integrate the educational process with traditional rural knowledge, with the aim of promoting the protection of the natural environment and meaningful learning among students.

Consistent with the foregoing, the objective of this study was to design pedagogical activities based on the creation of a local legend to foster environmental awareness among students attending rural schools in Monte Patria. Moreover, the study sought to demonstrate that traditional narratives can serve as innovative educational resources capable of integrating cultural identity and environmental education into a single educational process.

a) Environmental education in the rural school context from a critical perspective

The Chilean Ministry of Education (2024) states that environmental education has progressively become established within educational systems across Latin America, particularly in rural schools, where connections with the community and the natural environment are closer. Accordingly, "education for sustainability and climate change opens up a broad range of opportunities offered by diverse educational settings" (p. 10).

In Chile, specifically in the Coquimbo Region, recent studies have highlighted the need to design contextualized and locally relevant teaching approaches. According to Zapata and Vlasic (2023), this involves "posing different problems, discussing

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different examples, using other analogies, and giving prominence to nature as a central actor and to closer social relationships" (p. 5). This perspective is essential for understanding how cultural narratives can be integrated into the development of ecologically conscious attitudes rooted in a specific territory.

Along the same lines, the guidelines issued by the Government of Chile (2025) emphasize that "environmental education should promote the development of local communities capable of identifying the causes of problems affecting their surroundings and acting collectively to address them, integrating traditional knowledge and technical expertise" (p. 23). This dialogical approach to different forms of knowledge provides the foundation for using legends as pedagogical resources to raise awareness among the population about the care and protection of the natural environment.

b) The pedagogical value of local legends

Legends and oral narratives represent an intangible cultural heritage that encompasses worldviews, behavioral norms, and symbolic relationships with nature. Contemporary authors have renewed interest in these expressions as mediating resources in teaching and learning processes. "Concerns, knowledge, and practices related to the care of the socioecological environment foster situated learning that connects what happens in the daily lives of students' families and communities with what occurs beyond their immediate surroundings" (Mendoza et al., 2022, p. 131). Considering the aspects highlighted by the authors, it is important to emphasize how pedagogical practices rooted in local territories contribute to the development of environmental awareness.

Research conducted by Martínez et al. (2025) with school communities in the Andes Mountains demonstrates that "analyses of local history play a fundamental role in providing communities with a historical character and identity, thereby strengthening the sense of connection and belonging that inhabitants feel toward their place of origin" (p. 4). This finding supports the proposal to use legends not merely as decorative teaching elements but as a central component in structuring meaningful learning experiences.

From a decolonial perspective, it has been argued that "these forms of knowledge articulate meanings within their practices, guided by the purposes of the actors involved, revealing complex worlds that offer opportunities for reflection and innovation" (Pincheira and López, 2024, p. 59). This position aligns with the perspective of a Mapuche author cited in the original document, presented here within a broader framework of epistemic pluralism concerning how ancestral knowledge can facilitate the transmission of scientific knowledge to Indigenous communities.

c) Innovative methodologies in environmental education: technology, territory, and affectivity

Pedagogical innovation in environmental education is characterized by the incorporation of active methodologies that integrate digital tools, direct experiences in local environments, and visual documentation processes. In this regard, recent developments provide updated frameworks for understanding these strategies.

Regarding the use of digital technologies in narrative creation, and contrary to perspectives that position technology and nature as opposing elements, current research highlights the potential of digital tools to foster environmental creativity. Furthermore, according to Ipiales et al. (2025):

> Digital projects promoted teamwork, the distribution of roles, and the negotiation of ideas, thereby strengthening students' communication and social skills. Learning ceased to be an individual exercise and became a shared process. (p. 6)

The use of word-processing software and image-editing applications thus becomes a valuable resource for constructing contemporary legends, allowing students to combine educational technologies with other pedagogical tools.

Field trips and photographic documentation as research practices

Direct experience in the local environment constitutes a fundamental pillar of experiential learning in science education. Research conducted in rural schools located in arid regions demonstrates that:

> Students were guided through an activity involving sensory exploration of their surroundings. They had the opportunity to touch the leaves of the peumo tree, observing their shapes, textures, and colors, which facilitated direct and experiential learning about the morphological characteristics of this species. (Labbé, 2025, p. 31)

Visual documentation not only serves to record experiences but also provides evidence for reflection and the collective memory of the classroom group. Within this educational context, students can interact directly with nature by identifying the textures of leaves from different species under study and recognizing their uses and the threats they face.

Field trips and photographic documentation as educational practices

Direct experience in the local environment constitutes a fundamental pillar of experiential learning. In line with the Pizzigoni methodology, field trips have a strong pedagogical foundation, as this approach considers direct contact with nature a central component of the educational process. In this regard, Labbé (2025) states that "in these arid regions, students were guided through an activity involving sensory exploration of their surroundings, which facilitated direct and experiential learning" (p. 31). Visual documentation not only records experiences but also serves as evidence for reflection and collective memory.

Literature review and conceptual development

Guided literature searches allow students to compare their empirical observations with conceptual frameworks. Moreover, Aravena et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of "promoting students' critical thinking and decision-making regarding environmental protection by using their scientific knowledge to communicate and raise awareness within the educational community about mine tailings deposits" (p. 9). This process of triangulation among observation, local narratives, and theory strengthens the systemic understanding of environmental problems experienced by schools in their respective territories, while promoting an interdisciplinary approach.

d) Legends as an interdisciplinary resource for ecological awareness

The interdisciplinary nature of legends allows their integration into various curricular areas, overcoming disciplinary fragmentation. Research suggests that "not only language skills but also content are integrated so that students become critical language learners. The connection between language and culture becomes more evident at this stage" (Olivarez and Altamirano, 2020, pp. 4–5).

Following this approach, the implementation of a teaching sequence based on local legends in a rural school in the Coquimbo Region revealed that:

> Regarding the understanding of Central American legends, the findings showed that children were able to develop a clear understanding of them. Furthermore, 36 students indicated that their level of reading comprehension was considerable, while 19 reported a very high level. (Palma, 2023, p. 11)

This comprehensive approach contributes to the development of citizens who are aware of and committed to sustainability, environmental care, and environmental protection through a place-based approach.

e) Pedagogical innovation and cultural relevance

The incorporation of local legends into the school curriculum represents a pedagogical innovation that responds to the need for cultural relevance in rural contexts. Regarding educational innovations in Chile's Norte Chico region, the Chilean Ministry of Education (2023) states:

> To undertake the task of revitalizing a language and strengthening the identity, self-esteem, and values of Indigenous cultures, schools need to involve families, community elders, and other traditional community authorities. As bearers of cultural knowledge, these individuals can contribute their experiences, values, advice, and knowledge from their own cultural perspectives and transmit their experiences to younger generations. (p. 9)

In this regard, innovation lies not only in the use of technologies or field trips but also in how these resources are integrated with the local identity, customs, and ways of life of rural communities. Accordingly:

> The importance of a situated approach to understanding culture and addressing culturally relevant education has also been emphasized in the Latin American context, focusing on children's lived experiences and the community practices in which they participate as a foundation for integrating their knowledge with the official curriculum. (Figueroa et al., 2023, p. 14)

Educating younger generations through the teaching of legends strengthens students' connections with their social realities while fostering respect for and appreciation of their cultural roots.

Finally, the evaluation of these educational proposals requires specific criteria. As proposed by the Chilean Ministry of Education (2025), "the rubric assesses the level of participation of the different educational stakeholders, including school leadership teams, teachers, educators, students, parents and guardians, school administrators, and educational support staff" (p. 9). This recommendation is incorporated into the proposed pedagogical activities, which teachers can assess using evaluation instruments such as rubrics that recognize and value students' participation and work during field trips.

The objective of this study was to design pedagogical activities based on the creation of a local legend to foster environmental awareness among students attending rural schools in the commune of Monte Patria, Coquimbo Region, Chile.

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METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a qualitative, descriptive approach aimed at understanding how local legends can serve as pedagogical resources for environmental education in rural contexts. This approach made it possible to incorporate students' experiences and connect them with the creation of their own narrative, situated within the territory of the commune of Monte Patria, Coquimbo Region, Chile.

a) Participants and context

Ten students aged 6 to 12 years from a multigrade school in the commune of Monte Patria, Chile, participated in the study. The school is located in an inland rainfed agricultural area, surrounded by hills, with native vegetation (algarrobo trees and endemic plants) and wildlife such as pumas, foxes, and birds. The group of students was heterogeneous in terms of learning levels, requiring differentiated planning for subgroups.

b) Design of the teaching proposal

The methodological design was structured into three main phases:

i) Planning phase: Pedagogical objectives were defined, technological tools for writing the legend were selected, and criteria for fieldwork were established.
ii) Implementation phase: Activities were conducted with the students based on a legend written by teacher Eduardo Jaime Muñoz, a native of the study area. The aim was for students to learn about the history of the area and the environmental elements featured in the narrative. In addition, field trips were conducted to the Tulahuencito mountain pass, and photographic documentation of the visited locations was collected.
iii) Systematization phase: The results obtained (the legend, photographs, and pedagogical activities) were organized, and a set of teaching proposals was developed for classroom implementation.

c) Data collection techniques and instruments

The following techniques were used to develop the proposal:

i) Direct observation: During the field trips, elements of the natural environment that served as inspiration for the narrative were recorded.
ii) Photographic documentation: Three representative photographs of the visited locations were taken (see Figures 1, 2, and 3) and subsequently used as teaching materials in the classroom.
iii) Literature review: To provide a theoretical foundation for the proposal, specialized literature on environmental education and literature teaching methodologies was consulted, primarily works by Latin American authors.

RESULTS

The original legend created by the author is presented below. This legend constitutes the narrative foundation of the teaching proposal.

1. Legend

The treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass,

Author: Eduardo Jaime Muñoz

Do you enjoy legends about treasures hidden in the countryside? I invite you to read the following story.

The Tulahuencito mountain pass, in the commune of Monte Patria, was a vast expanse of land with an extensive flat area and a long plain adjoining El Guanaco Hill, a mountain characterized by dull-colored soils displaying shades of purple, orange, black, and gray.

How beautiful it is to look at the hill! It is an imposing mountain in the Tulahuencito Valley, where native plants with a variety of fragrances grow along its slopes.

Algarrobo trees are native species that grow in the area between the slopes of El Guanaco Hill and the mountain pass, a long, flattened strip of land. This area had the most productive soils in the region. When picking up a clod of soil, one could observe gray and ashy-brown hues, reflecting the nutrients present in this type of sediment.

Algarrobo trees have large, leafy crowns and are resistant to drought. Their branches are long and thick, with sharp thorns that are black and sometimes gray. These thorns protect the trees from predators, while their branches provide shelter for birds seeking protection from kestrels, eagles, and Harris's hawks that inhabit the mountain pass.

Algarrobo wood is hard, flexible, and strong! Its bark can remain in the soil for years!

These trees are sacred to the farmers of the mountain pass. They provide shade and protect them from the sun's rays. Moreover, when farmers sow bean and corn seeds, they avoid plowing over the trees' roots, thereby protecting these remarkable plants.

In the upper part of the mountain pass stood a leafy algarrobo tree with thick branches and long thorns. This tree could be seen from the summits of the hills surrounding the pass. The farmers called this place *the refuge*, where they cooked their meals and took afternoon naps. Beneath this algarrobo tree lay an enormous stone. All the farmers were intrigued by its size, the various colors of the rock, and the sounds they could hear when approaching it.

When the farmers irrigated their bean and corn crops at night, sometime after midnight, a yellow light appeared around the rock, illuminating the silhouette of the algarrobo tree.

This phenomenon could only be observed on Tuesdays. Although it aroused fear, alarm, and suspense among the farmers, none of them dared to approach the algarrobo tree at that time.

One day, a curious farmer decided to move the stone. Using an iron crowbar, he shifted it and examined the ground beneath. To his surprise, he discovered soft, yellow-colored soil that caught his attention. As he dug into the earth with the crowbar, a chest made of algarrobo wood emerged from the ground.

Curious to discover what it contained, the farmer opened the lid of the chest, revealing a treasure of gold coins. Overcome by greed, he took the treasure and brought it to the owner of the mountain pass. Following this event, everything in the area began to deteriorate: the soils became degraded, the algarrobo tree began to dry out, water grew scarce, and the landowner started losing his profits.

Deeply concerned, the farmers gathered and went to speak with the landowner, hoping to convince him to return the treasure to its original location. One afternoon, as the sun was setting, a mythical bird with a human head, bird's wings, and a serpent's tail flew over the mountain pass, announcing that those who had taken the treasure would be punished and that an angel would come to take their souls.

Terrified, the owner of the mountain pass ordered the farmer to return the treasure beneath the stone. When the farmer placed it back in the exact spot from which he had removed it and returned the stone to its original position, a ray of sunlight sealed the stone with the hardest materials of the Earth's crust, ensuring that no person or machine could ever remove it from that place.

From that moment onward, clear waters began to flow from the ravines of El Guanaco Hill, and vegetation spread across its slopes, covering them in green. The crops that had been drying out began to sprout again, and a green strip of vegetation extended across the mountain pass. Birds, hares, and rabbits bounded with happiness.

Then, in the place where the stone containing the treasure and the algarrobo tree stood, a great, inaccessible mountain emerged, leaving the rock and the algarrobo tree at its center.

Whenever the farmers saw this formation and realized that it was impossible to reach that place, they remembered the legend of the treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass.

2. Photographs of the mountain pass

Figure 1
The mountain pass as seen from La Mostacilla.



Figure 2
The mountain pass as seen from the El Espinal area.



Figure 3
The algarrobo tree with El Guanaco Hill in the background.



3. Proposed pedagogical activities for students attending schools in the area

The implementation of the legend *The treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass* as a pedagogical resource was carried out through an educational field trip to the Tulahuencito mountain pass, in the commune of Monte Patria. This experiential activity allowed students to directly connect the literary narrative with the actual setting

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in which the story takes place, thereby promoting situated and meaningful learning.

During the field trip, students aged 6 to 12 years from a multigrade school participated in various activities focused on observation, documentation, and collective creation. With the teacher's guidance, the children explored the area, identifying landscape features described in the legend, including El Guanaco Hill, algarrobo trees, the enormous stone, and birds of prey such as kestrels, eagles, and Harris's hawks. They also engaged in collaborative writing exercises using word-processing software, took photographs of points of interest, and developed thematic maps of the landscape depicted in the narrative.

The proposal was structured around differentiated activities according to students' learning levels, respecting the multigrade nature of the school. With the teacher's assistance, first- and second-grade students wrote the names of the places, plants, and animals they observed. Third- and fourth-grade students read the legend, retold it to their classmates, and developed a thematic map indicating the location of the treasure, the cultivated areas, the place where the mythical bird appeared, and the origin of the sun's rays. Meanwhile, fifth- and sixth-grade students undertook more complex tasks: they wrote a theatrical play based on the legend, recorded a video depicting the story, and created a flip chart illustrating the different parts of the literary work.

This grade-level organization enabled all students to participate actively while developing reading, writing, oral communication, collaborative learning, and critical thinking skills. The field trip and photographic documentation served as cross-cutting components that documented the process and strengthened the group's collective memory.

The technical details of the activity documentation (school, teacher, date, grade level, number of students, materials used, activity, and objective) are presented in detail in Appendices 1 and 2. Likewise, learning outcomes were assessed using a simple assessment rubric, the format and criteria of which are provided in Appendix 3.

DISCUSSION

Legends as a pedagogical resource for environmental education from a Latin American perspective

The integration of legends as a pedagogical resource in environmental education reflects a contemporary perspective that recognizes the relevance of local knowledge and narratives as mediators in knowledge construction. "In the context of two Nahua communities in Veracruz, Mexico, the authors demonstrate that environmental education becomes relevant and meaningful when it is connected to the territory and local culture" (Mendoza et al., 2025, p. 7). In this regard, legends emerge as pedagogical tools that connect the symbolic dimension with an ecological understanding of the environment.

The relationship between narrative, territory, and education has been extensively addressed in recent research, which highlights that territory can be interpreted as a pedagogical text where ecological, cultural, and social knowledge converge. These alternative pedagogies emphasize the importance of education in defending territorial rights and promoting sustainability. Furthermore:

> By recognizing territory as a space for learning and resistance, the aim is for students to understand the power dynamics that affect their environment and thus develop the skills to critically question and challenge territorial dispossession in its broadest sense. (Briceño and Sánchez, 2024, p. 1)

The use of legends as a pedagogical resource is essential for fostering resistance to threats affecting natural environments in areas being damaged by human activities. Through these narratives, children learn to recognize their surroundings and understand the importance of protecting them.

From this decolonial perspective, thinkers such as Enrique Leff (2022) argue that Latin American environmental thought involves an alternative rationality that challenges extractivism and recovers marginalized forms of knowledge. This perspective helps explain that:

> Knowledge is neither imposed nor static; rather, it is constructed through interactions with the environment and individuals within a society, according to the conditions of their surroundings. Therefore, knowledge is not merely information deposited into individuals as though they were empty vessels, but a construction that emerges through critical and conscious interaction with reality. (Parra et al., 2025, p. 18)

The traditional knowledge held by rural communities is undoubtedly a valuable element in defending their territories, as it provides arguments supporting the importance of environmental protection.

In the Monte Patria experience, the legend is constructed from the territory and reinterpreted through direct exploration of the environment. This approach aligns with research highlighting the value of situated and experiential learning in environmental education, particularly through field trips that enable students to observe, interpret, and critically examine the landscape. From this perspective, place-based learning emerges as an approach that uses physical, natural, cultural, and historical environments as educational resources. In this regard, Bogoya and Prado (2024) suggest that "its objective is to connect thematic content, methodologies, teaching strategies, and assessment processes with the environment, making use of the conditions and opportunities offered by the territory to enhance learning" (p. 3).

Within this context, students develop scientific skills such as observation, inquiry, and critical thinking, integrating formal knowledge with lived experiences. Likewise, the Pizzigoni methodology provides a pedagogical foundation for field trips by considering direct experience with nature as the central component of learning.

In this regard, the collective construction of the legend is linked to participatory pedagogical approaches that promote collaborative learning and community engagement. Recent studies indicate that student participation in narrative creation processes strengthens knowledge appropriation and the development of socioemotional competencies. Furthermore:

> Digital narratives are not limited to the simple transmission of information; they constitute an interactive space where students can become content creators. Through them, children experiment with the construction of stories, characters, and settings that reflect their worldview. This creative process contributes to the development of critical thinking, as it allows them to analyze, reflect, and make decisions about how to present their ideas. (Marrett et al., 2025, p. 4)

Within this context, the creation of legends strengthens students' creativity, encourages them to develop environmental thinking, and helps them acquire scientific skills.

These experiences also foster dialogue between scientific and traditional knowledge, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of environmental problems. Furthermore:

> Teachers must be the first to recognize that, when considering the knowledge systems underlying traditional ecological knowledge and school scientific knowledge, certain similarities can be identified, as both are based on forms of rationality and empirical ways of understanding and producing useful knowledge. (Pineda et al., 2021, p. 3)

This interaction between different forms of knowledge enables teachers to develop learning strategies that better reach children by incorporating elements of their own educational realities.

From a critical perspective, environmental education in Latin America has been questioned for its tendency to focus on technocratic approaches that fail to critically examine the structural causes of the ecological crisis. In this regard, a perspective has been identified in which "a worldview has gradually separated human beings from nature, a form of dualism that has led to a radical disconnection between humanity and its natural environment" (Palma, 2023, p. 135). Within this framework, legends can be reinterpreted as pedagogical tools that enable critical analysis of the relationships between society and nature. For example, the narrative of "the treasure under the algarrobo tree" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the exploitation of natural resources and its socioecological consequences.

Along these lines, recent studies emphasize that environmental education should promote an ecological ethic that integrates values, attitudes, and actions aimed at environmental protection. As Suarez (2025) states, "education focused on sustainability promotes environmental awareness, fosters social equity, and empowers individuals to make responsible decisions" (p. 43). In other words, environmental education has a clear purpose: to raise awareness among individuals and encourage them to contribute to the care and protection of natural resources. However, it is essential to emphasize that those responsible for providing environmental education must have an ethical commitment to the responsibility involved in transmitting sustainable practices within schools.

By incorporating symbolic and moral elements, legends facilitate reflection on these values, contributing to the development of environmentally responsible citizens. According to Calixto and Silva (2023), "environmental education is a tool intended to activate and foster environmental awareness so that individuals act in an environmentally friendly manner" (p. 135). Consequently, it is important to emphasize that environmental education not only raises students' environmental awareness but also serves as a pedagogical tool that enables teachers to introduce innovative approaches to teaching.

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Legends generate meaningful emotional experiences that strengthen the sense of belonging and territorial identity. Furthermore:

> Oral narratives, whether real or fictional, originated from the achievements and experiences of prominent members of early communities, as well as from the need to explain supernatural phenomena in unfamiliar environments. These narratives laid the foundations for cultural identities by giving meaning to inexplicable phenomena and historical events, generating myths and legends imbued with identity-related and religious values. (García, 2025, p. 299)

A sense of belonging is an important aspect of outdoor environmental education, as it contributes to the development of environmental awareness rooted in rural life and the challenges associated with living in the countryside.

In rural contexts, this emotional connection is particularly relevant, as it contributes to the revitalization of communities and the protection of environmental heritage. Rozo and Calvache (2023) argue that "critical thinking transcends cognitive processes and is grounded in a combination of skills, values, and criteria that enable students to position themselves within a learning context from which they can address the situation or problem under study" (p. 6). Recognizing the value of outdoor teaching methodologies is essential for developing critical thinking and creativity among children when protecting their natural environment.

The incorporation of strategies such as theatrical performances and audiovisual productions based on legends has also been highlighted as a relevant methodological innovation. Indeed:

> Teaching students to interpret images is essential to providing them with the resources needed to develop critical thinking and appropriate visual literacy in a world where images have become the second most important channel and source of information after words, if not the first. (Álvarez and Nieto, 2021, p. 6)

In rural schools, drawing activities stimulate artistic creation and imagination among students. Encouraging these practices contributes to the development of scientific thinking applicable to everyday life.

The use of photographs and audiovisual recordings contributes to documenting learning processes and developing an analytical perspective on the territory.

> In this regard, the interpretation of audiovisual discourse is not based solely on the cognitive processes of comprehension and memory but is enriched by the diversity of individual experiences and contexts, generating a unique experience for each viewer. (Hernández and Paz, 2024, p. 8)

Single-teacher instruction in multigrade schools provides an opportunity to encourage this type of teaching, in which students engage in educational activities designed to explore their own territory.

From the perspective of contemporary Latin American critical pedagogy, emphasis is placed on the need to recognize the diversity of knowledge systems present within communities and promote dialogue between these systems and scientific knowledge. Recent studies also highlight that:

> Educational proposals include those that suggest using television news as a tool for reflection, as well as those that propose that education for climate change mitigation and adaptation should adopt a multidisciplinary approach, addressing all aspects of the phenomenon from different disciplinary perspectives. (Cruz and Páramo, 2020, p. 483)

Considering the authors' arguments, it is important to emphasize how interdisciplinary work plays a fundamental role in raising awareness among rural communities. In this regard, legends serve as a bridge between oral tradition and formal education.

Finally, recent scientific evidence shows that environmental education "develops successful educational strategies that focus on local environmental problems and involve other community members, use environmental education as an integrating element across different disciplines or school subjects, and include activities involving interaction with nature" (Medina and Páramo, 2024, p. 70). Within this context, the proposal to integrate legends as a pedagogical resource represents a significant innovation that contributes to more contextualized, critical, and transformative environmental education.

In summary, legends make it possible to integrate cognitive, emotional, cultural, and critical dimensions of learning, positioning them as an effective pedagogical tool for developing place-based ecological awareness. Their integration into the curriculum not only promotes meaningful learning but also strengthens territorial identity and commitment to sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The proposed teaching approach demonstrates that local legends constitute a valuable and culturally relevant pedagogical resource for environmental education in rural Latin American contexts. Through the creation and use of place-based narratives, such as the legend *The treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass*, cultural identity, ecological awareness, and meaningful learning can be integrated, creating a bridge between community knowledge and contemporary educational objectives embedded in school curricula.

This experience reinforces the idea that environmental education should be situated and critical. In this regard, local legends not only serve to transmit values related to environmental care but also provide opportunities to analyze narratives from a territorial perspective, considering the power relations and extractivist models that affect natural environments. Accordingly, the legend created in Monte Patria, with its message of restoration and balance, creates opportunities for classroom discussions on environmental justice, reciprocity, and sustainability.

From an educational development perspective, it is important to emphasize how field trips and visual documentation enhance experiential and collaborative learning. Students become active participants, creators, interpreters, and disseminators of knowledge related to the natural environment in which they live with their families. This approach promotes the development of transferable competencies, ranging from creative writing to the systematic organization of information and community participation.

Nevertheless, implementing these strategies requires overcoming structural challenges, including teacher training, access to pedagogical resources, and the ethical validation of community knowledge. Cultural relevance can only be ensured through genuine dialogue with communities while respecting their ancestral knowledge.

Ultimately, pedagogical innovation based on local legends represents more than a teaching strategy; it is an approach that recognizes the value of place-based knowledge in developing ecological awareness. Future research could further explore the learning outcomes associated with these interventions, as well as the establishment of networks of rural schools that share and adapt their own environmental narratives according to their local contexts.

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Correspondence
Eduardo Antonio Jaime Muñoz
E-mail: ejaime18@gmail.com

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Technical activity record form

Technical details	Description
School	
Teacher	
Date	
Educational level	Multigrade school
Number of students	
Materials	Hat, sunscreen, sturdy shoes, notebook, and pencils
Activity	Educational field trip to the mountain pass
Objective	To write a legend based on information about the local territory collected during the field trip.

Appendix 2
Pedagogical aspects for implementing the activity

Student roles	Description of roles
First- and second-grade students	With the teacher's assistance, students write the names of places and elements found at the mountain pass, such as the area where the algarrobo tree grows, the stone, the birds of prey, and the plants growing in the area.
Third- and fourth-grade students	Students read the legend The treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass and explain to their classmates how the story unfolds in that location. They create a thematic map indicating where the treasure was located, where the farmers cultivated their crops, where the giant bird appeared, and where the sun's rays originated.
Fifth- and sixth-grade students	Students write a theatrical play to represent the legend. They also record a video based on the story and prepare a flip chart illustrating the different parts of the literary work.
Assessment	Rubric

Appendix 3
Simple assessment rubric: analyzing the local legend in its territorial context and developing environmental awareness

Activity: *The treasure under the algarrobo tree of the mountain pass*

Grade levels: Grades 1–6 (multigrade school)

Criteria	Good (3 points)	Fair (2 points)	Needs improvement (1 point)
Identifies and recognizes elements of the landscape visited while reading the legend.	Names and writes down three or more landscape elements in the activity worksheet.	Names only one or two landscape elements.	Does not name or recognize any landscape elements from the area.
Understands the main idea when reading the legend.	Retells the story in a logical sequence, respecting its beginning, middle, and end.	Retells parts of the story but omits some events.	Is unable to retell the legend.
Identifies scenes in the legend that help raise environmental awareness.	Explains why the treasure should not be removed from the mountain pass and describes the consequences of its removal for nature.	Recognizes that there is an environmental problem but cannot explain it clearly.	Does not identify any relationship between the legend and the environment.
Participates collaboratively and effectively in all tasks undertaken by the group.	Actively collaborates, creates, participates, and contributes ideas.	Collaborates occasionally but becomes distracted during class.	Disrupts the class and does not contribute to group activities.
Produces the final product appropriate to their grade level.	Students in grades 1–4 submit a clear and well-organized map or drawing. Students in grades 5–6 submit a complete or creative video or flip chart.	Submits a completed assignment, but it is disorganized and contains errors.	Submits an incomplete, highly disorganized assignment containing several errors.

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